

A holistic view to monitoring Indigenous land and sea management programs

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This policy note focuses on the monitoring of socio-economic benefits and stated objectives of Indigenous land and sea management programs (ILSMPs). It is one component of a broader project examining the multiple benefits and knowledge systems of ILSMPs.

ILSMP monitoring could better measure benefits & progress towards objectives

FINDINGS

Based on our examination^a of ILSMP socio-economic objectives, benefits and data currently collected by ILSM monitoring programs, we make the following observations:

► **FIRST**, objectives relating to building capacity, employment, Indigenous enterprise, knowledge transfer/integration and community participation/engagement were most commonly identified in relevant documents by our partnered case study groups in WA and Qld (Table 1). Data relating to these objectives is commonly collected and monitored to track an ILSMP's progress.

However, despite several programs explicitly mentioning 'empowerment' and (support of cultural) 'governance' as objectives, we could not find publicly available data that could be used to track progress towards those objectives (Table 1). To track progress towards these, and other socio-economic objectives and benefits that this research has demonstrated, additional data could be collected (Table 2).

► **SECOND**, federally and state funded programs generally make most monitoring data publicly available. Other programs may collect data, but not all of it is freely available (some for legitimate cultural reasons).

► **THIRD**, ideally, indicator selection and monitoring would be done in a participatory manner with indicators co-developed with each community, and with monitoring being undertaken by, or at minimum with, each community.

► **FOURTH**, most of the data collected describes the impact of ILSMPs on individuals who are directly involved in the program (e.g. rangers). Relatively few consider the wider impacts on family, community, or society more broadly. As such, there is little information on the depth/outreach to which programs are fully able to achieve many stated objectives.

Summary

ILSMPs could better measure program benefits and progress towards stated objectives. Current monitoring often uses indicators that focus on individuals rather than the community, and on activities rather than outcomes. Indicators could also be more closely developed with communities.

Data to track progress towards objectives relating to employment, training, community participation and enterprise development is collected and monitored, however there is little monitoring of indicators relating to regional economic development, closing the income gap, Indigenous business development, community empowerment and wellbeing – which this research has shown ILSMPs directly contribute to and that communities care about.

Without adequate monitoring and evaluation, it is difficult for communities and funders to determine if ILSMPs are delivering what was intended or if they are generating other outcomes. Effective ILSMP monitoring requires a long-term commitment and a good understanding of the broad range of benefits provided by ILSMPs.

► **FIFTH**, most data collected describes activities (participatory indicators), with relatively few programs collecting data relating to outcomes (impact indicators). Many indicators focus on 'inputs' (e.g. number of participants attending training & skills development activities) but information is not generally provided on outcomes (e.g. self-reported learning or on the confidence gained to partake in other activities such as public speaking at conferences).

► **SIXTH**, some of the socio-economic outcomes and benefits of ILSMPs identified by this research are only likely to be discernable some years after investment in an ILSMP. As such, monitoring systems must be funded and structured with that in mind. Funders need to be prepared to 'wait' before being able to properly assess the extent to which programs have (or have not) achieved stated objectives.

Table 1. Explicitly stated socio-economic objectives of ILSMPs (by broad theme): number of programs mentioning and programs about which associated data are publicly available.

Broad objectives identified	# programs including this as an objective	# programs with publicly available info on assoc'd variables
Indigenous employment	13	9
Indigenous enterprise	11	9
Training skills development	12	10
Knowledge integration & transfer	12	9
Community participation & engagement	11	9
Tourism management	8	4
Resources, infrastructure & asset condition	4	2
Empowerment	3	0
Governance & program management	2	0

Table 2. Monitoring that could be undertaken if wishing to assess progress towards benefits as found by this research.

If an ILSMP has as one of its objectives to achieve...	Then monitoring activities should include the collection of data relating to...
Generating regional economic benefit ^b	Program spend, disaggregated by the region in which spending takes place, ideally further disaggregated according to (i) wages & other staff related payments, (ii) number of employees by type of work, and (iii) training provided.
Closing the (income) gap ^c	Program spend, disaggregated by the Indigenous status of person or business with whom the money is spent. Ideally, one would also encourage other data collection agencies to include an 'Indigenous flag' on data routinely collected, thus allowing one to distinguish between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people or organisations.
Enhancing wellbeing ^d	The wellbeing-impact evaluation method developed by this project is potentially appropriate, has been tested in our case study areas, and allows for the long-term monitoring of changes in wellbeing, but requires (i) primary data collection, (ii) expert evaluations, and (iii) survey participation by all, or as many as possible, potential beneficiaries from the communities that programs operate within.
Empowerment within an ILSMP ^e	Relationships & communications between partners.
Empowerment with respect to ILSMP decision-making, representation and process ^e	Community satisfaction with (i) the extent to which (community-defined) community goals are captured in ILSMP design, (ii) joint design conduct & monitoring of ILSMPs, (iii) frequency of formal communication between the funding agency and community.
Empowerment between communities and the broader (regional) socio-economic community ^e	(i) the level of community participation in local, regional & national institutions & initiatives, (ii) organisational growth, (iii) financial independence, (iv) community influence on other non-project initiatives, and (v) access to political power.



Yakanarra community in WA's Fitzroy River catchment contributed to this research, photo Laurel Sutcliffe.

BACKGROUND & METHOD

There is much interest in assessing the effectiveness of ILSMP, given limited resources and increased calls for transparency. The public and donors want to see value for money. Monitoring can help answer the question 'Did we deliver what we promised?' We considered the adequacy of monitoring activities associated with ILSMPs by:

1. examining documents associated with ILSMPs that were relevant to five Indigenous groups with whom we worked, checking if existing data collection activities were sufficient to assess the extent to which ILSMPs are meeting stated socio-economic objectives. This involved:
 - a. identifying (stated) socio-economic objectives of ILSMPs
 - b. looking at the socio-economic data currently collected as part of ILSM monitoring programs
 - c. comparing (a) with (b) to check alignment.



Talaroo Station Indigenous Protected Area in north Qld provides access and opportunities for Ewamian people to connect to country, photo Lyndal Scobell.

2. using insights from the broader literature and findings from the overarching project, to suggest additional socio-economic variables that could be monitored to track progress towards other socio-economic outcomes that have been linked to ILSMPs.

REFERENCES

- a. Esparon M. et al. 2019. Can monitoring activities document progress towards ILSMP socio-economic objectives and/or other socio-economic benefits associated with ILSMPs? In Stoeckl et al. In review. Multiple co-benefits of Indigenous land and sea management programs across northern Australia. James Cook University, Townsville.
- b. Jarvis D. et al. doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.44
- c. Jarvis D. et al. doi.org/10.1071/RJ18051
- d. Larson S. et al. doi.org/10.1007/s13280-018-1058-3
- e. Addison, J. et al. In review.

In WA, this project is partnering with Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri and Nyikina-Mangala Traditional Owners. In Qld, this project partners with Ewamian Traditional Owners.

Further information

Please see the project page on the Hub website. Outputs from the project can be found under the 'Resources' tab.

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