



Talaroo Station in north Queensland is managed as an Indigenous Protected Area by Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation, photo Diane Jarvis



**Northern Australia  
Environmental  
Resources  
Hub**

National Environmental Science Programme

# Valuing Indigenous cultural connections

Start-up factsheet

## Ecosystem accounts value the ways humans benefit from nature

Ecosystem accounts are intended to help people monitor the health of the environment, by measuring ('valuing') the ways in which humans benefit from nature. These accounts are based on the ecosystem services framework which groups benefits into three broad categories:

- provisioning services, including food, fresh water, wood, fibre and fuel
- regulating services, including natural processes that control flood and disease, purify water, reduce erosion and store carbon



The Indigenous Research Committee for Kakadu National Park is a partner in this project. Kenneth Mangiru, Ryan Barrowei, Bessie Coleman, Feach Moyle, Nick McGregor, Maria Lee, Dennis Cooper, Michael Bangalan, Michael Douglas (L-R). Photo M. Douglas.

- cultural services, where nature inspires and supports spirituality, provides aesthetic benefits, and is used for recreation, tourism and education.

In western cultures, it is common to estimate the monetary value of these services by working out how much they benefit humans. Values may be compared with each other or added together to estimate the value of an entire ecosystem.

## Overview

This project will:

- advise the federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment of how best to acknowledge Indigenous cultural values within, or alongside, their experimental ecosystem accounting system, including estimates of value (if possible)
- develop and test methods for estimating (prioritising) values and reciprocal relationships between people and Country
- assist our partners prioritise different caring for Country activities
- facilitate networking opportunities between our Indigenous partners
- provide Indigenous groups with a stronger voice in discussions about ecosystem accounting



# Do ecosystem service accounts make sense when considering Indigenous cultural values?

Indigenous cultural values, Country knowledge and management practices provide critical insights about valuing and maintaining our precious ecological resources. The federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is developing an experimental system to account for ecosystem services. Working together with our Indigenous partners, we will consider whether it is possible to include cultural connections to Country within these experimental accounts, or whether there are alternative ways of recognising Indigenous cultural values.

Ecosystem accounting approaches may not be compatible with Indigenous values, concepts and relationships with Country. First, it is not always appropriate to use money as a metric. Second, the 'western' ecosystem service categories may have little or no meaning in Indigenous contexts. Third, these approaches consider that benefits only flow from nature to people. But caring for Country is a two-way reciprocal relationship – people look after Country, and Country looks after people.

Our partners for this project are the Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation (EAC) and the Indigenous Research Committee for Kakadu National Park. Together we will explore commonalities and differences between western ecosystem accounting frameworks and Indigenous understandings of cultural connections to Country.

## Project activities

- Co-develop an approach to investigate the relationships between Indigenous connections to Country and caring for Country activities, and the relationships between those connections/activities and ecosystem accounting approaches.
- Hold a workshop with EAC to
  - explore cultural connections to Country
  - trial a decision tool that helps prioritise caring for Country and other activities
  - identify links (or not) between concepts relevant to Indigenous people and concepts used for ecosystem accounting.

- Revise approach and adapt for use with Kakadu partners, and hold similar workshop(s) with them.
- Work with partners to identify similarities and differences between 'cultural connections' (to Country) and ecosystem accounting and to develop recommendations about how cultural connections might be acknowledged (or otherwise) in accounting frameworks.

## Anticipated outputs

- Journal articles co-authored by Indigenous partners and researchers
- Project updates and fact sheets
- Final presentation and report to the Department by Indigenous partners and researchers.



Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation Board members Brian Bing, Barry Fisher, Jenny Lacey, Sharon Prior and Ken Georgetown, photo Diane Jarvis.

## Who is involved?

This project is being led by Dr Diane Jarvis from [James Cook University \(JCU\)](http://JamesCookUniversity.edu.au).

The project will be co-led by Professor Michael Douglas of [The University of Western Australia](http://TheUniversityofWesternAustralia.edu.au) and Professor Natalie Stoeckl of the [University of Tasmania](http://UniversityofTasmania.edu.au), with Indigenous scholar Dr Daniel Grainger from JCU as Chief Investigator.

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For further information and project updates, visit the project webpage at [www.nespnorthern.edu.au/projects/nesp/cultural-connections](http://www.nespnorthern.edu.au/projects/nesp/cultural-connections)



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