



School of Indigenous Australian Studies
Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences
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Subject: Ecology and Indigenous Australian Cultures

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Research Report

Research Question: *How have traditional Indigenous resource management, hunting and fishing methods changed since pre-colonial times and what are some of the causes?*

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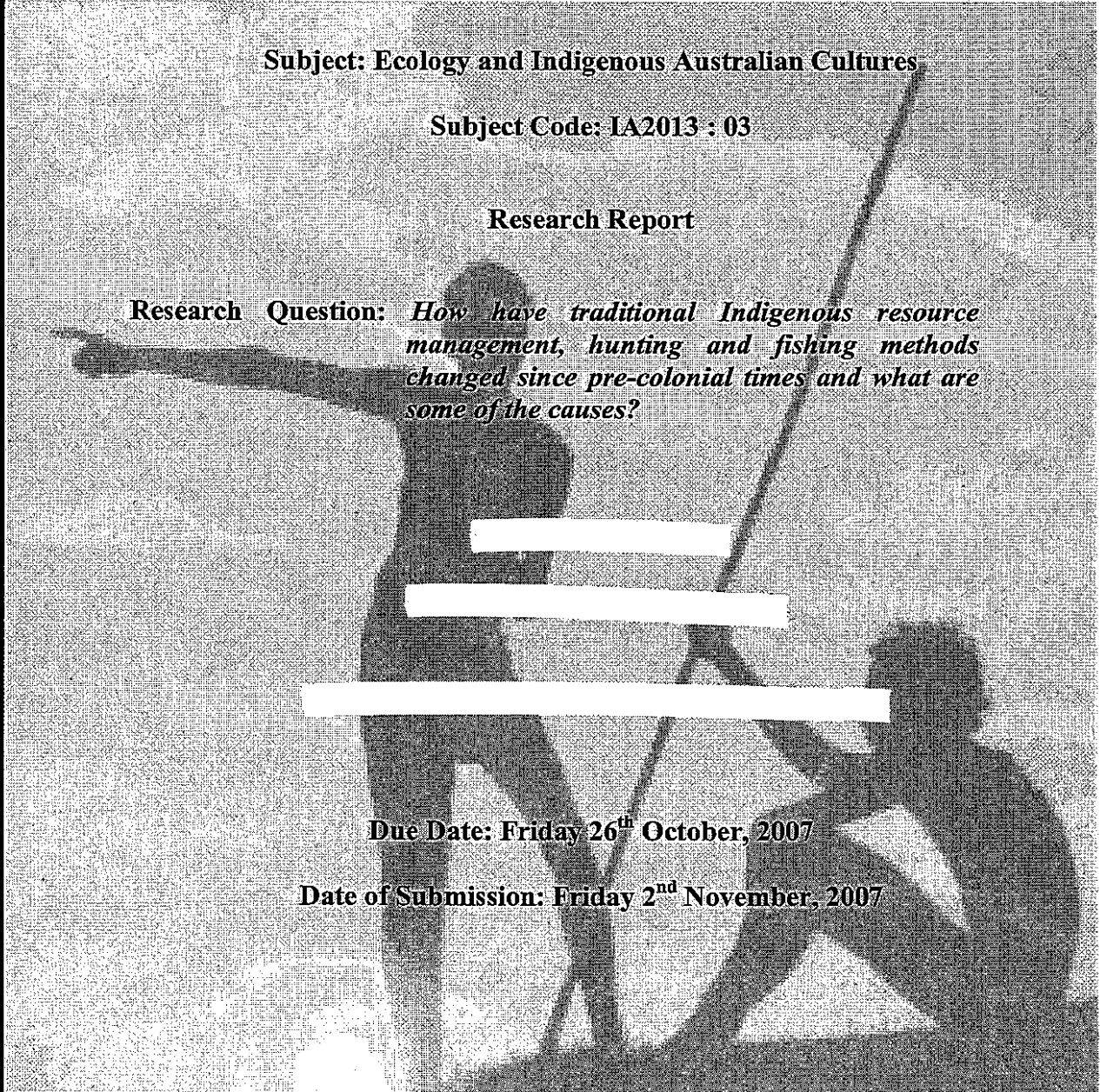


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| Very good table of contents!

1. Introduction

1.1 *Aim*

Indigenous people developed many resource management and exploitation methods over an extended period, the intention here is examine some of the more common methods and how colonial influences caused changes both to the methodologies and the transformation of the instrumentation and technologies employed. This is by no means an exhaustive coverage but does encompass a broad range of methods outlined in the relevant literature.

1.2 *Scope*

The main themes examined here include: changes in resource management techniques such as the use of fire to control and manage vegetation; traditional and modern instruments used for catching and killing wildlife; how colonial settlement has affected the environment by the introduction of animals and plants; laws which affect Indigenous people and their access to the land as well as restrictions on certain methods previously employed to manage and exploit natural resources.

1.3 *Sources of information*

Many library sources were researched to support this report, including books, edited books and reputable journals. Government websites were accessed for additional information, especially on the legalities of resource management as well as the policies in place which govern national parks and other areas such as marine parks where Indigenous people still seek traditional foods and live as close as possible to their natural environment.

2. Background Information

2.1 *General*

Arthur and Morphy (2005) described the Australian continental land mass as covering many latitudes and time zones with a full range of climatic conditions. Consequently the terrain, ecosystems and habitats contained within the continent vary considerably. ~~Anything~~ ranging from tropical savannas and rainforests, to alpine areas and arid desert zones. The capricious nature of the country offers a harsh and challenging existence to any animal, plant species or human inhabitants. This necessitated many different methods of subsistence evolving over extensive time periods (Flood, 1999; Kirk, 1981; Griffiths, 1996). To address the pre-colonial methods of resource management amongst Indigenous people and changes in hunting, fishing and assorted technologies, it is perhaps useful to firstly outline these common practices and then those adopted after colonial contact, in order to properly illustrate the changes which have occurred over that time in different regions of Australia.

2.2 *Environmental attachment*

The cultural and spiritual attachment to the land, sea and environment amongst the Indigenous people according to Rose (2005) is particularly strong. Over many generations they have become advanced students of the environment and skilful readers of seasonal indicators with an intense psychological connection, understanding and therefore outstanding ability to manage it both productively and efficiently. Rituals and myths surrounding their country, their ancestors and all the animal and plant life within it have abounded and been passed to successive generations. They have learnt to care for and manage their country to the extent that their health and survival is dependant upon it (Suzuki & Knudtson, 1992). Country has become a central theme in their identities, heritage, and as will be shown, their

economic future. The management of country and all the natural resources within it became a form of art, and the methods developed, timeless inventions. This was to change however, with the intensity of colonial influence and the necessity for Indigenous adaptation (Kirk, 1981).

This section is very well explained!

2.3 Traditional Resource Use

2.3.1 Use of fire

Within this harsh environment, effective and efficient management of the natural resources became paramount to survival. One the more effective means of management was the controlled use of fire. According to Flood (1999) and Russell-Smith et al. (1997), fire evolved as a way of controlling and manipulating various aspects of the environment and its natural resources which included many different species of flora and fauna depending on the environment in which they were found. Kirk (1981) pointed out that apart from the obvious uses such cooking, light and warmth, the use of fire was a useful tool in many other respects of Indigenous resource management. Graetz, Fisher, Wilson and Campbell (1992) noted the communication methods of smaller signal fires could indicate to others the direction that certain game travelled as part of a hunt, in more forested areas or in thick Spinifex, the common tracks could be kept clear by burning as well as eradicating snakes from the area and aiding in the gathering of vermin and birds nests by the women and children (Lourandos, 1997:97); scaring animals out of an area whereby they could be speared or otherwise captured; and the regrowth of plant life promoted by the ashes from fires not only attracted herbivores, who as they congregated became easy prey (Flood, 1999), but certain nutritious fruits such as the bush tomato and the wild banana could be gathered as well as the macrozamia nuts from cycads which

were eaten after processing and the grass seeds collected were later winnowed by the women (Keen, 2006).

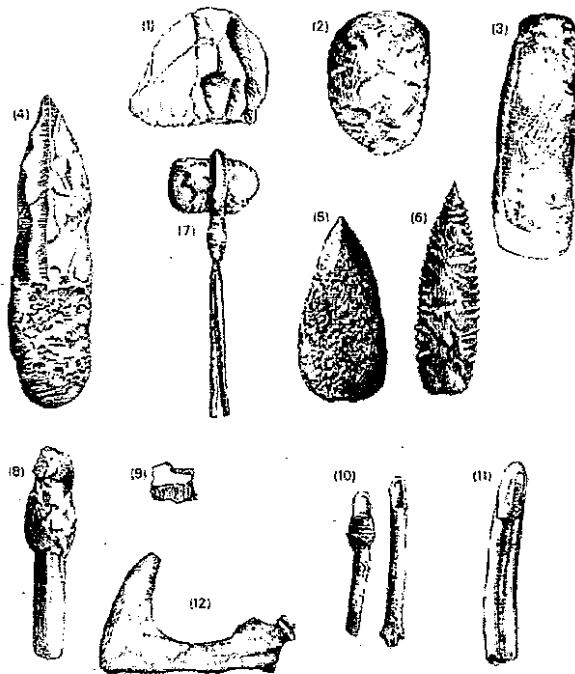
Comment [E11]: This is an extremely long sentence! It may have been useful to bullet these points.

2.3.24 *Plant cultivation/harvesting & implements*

Whilst Kirk (1981) contended that organised cultivation of plants by Indigenous people did not occur, Flood's (1999, p.242) view was that "casual cultivation" of plants was evidenced around camps where quandongs, figs and other fruit trees were loosely propagated accompanied by channels formed for water. Tubular bush yams were a good source of vegetable food and in remote areas were harvested and replanted for later cultivation or planted in special areas near campsites. These practices often coincided with the surge in plant, vegetable and fruit growth after fires.

Keen (2006) emphasised the use of digging sticks by the Indigenous women in searching for root vegetables, honey ants, and witchetty grubs in the roots or bark of trees as well as for water in dry or desert areas. Tacon (1991) and Arthur and Morphy (2005) described stone axes and bone cutting instruments which were constructed for chopping trees and branches to aid in the collection process (see figure 1), for making spears and to build shelters where required (Kirk, 1981).

Figure 1. Different types of stone and bone traditional axes and spearheads.



(Kirk, 1981)

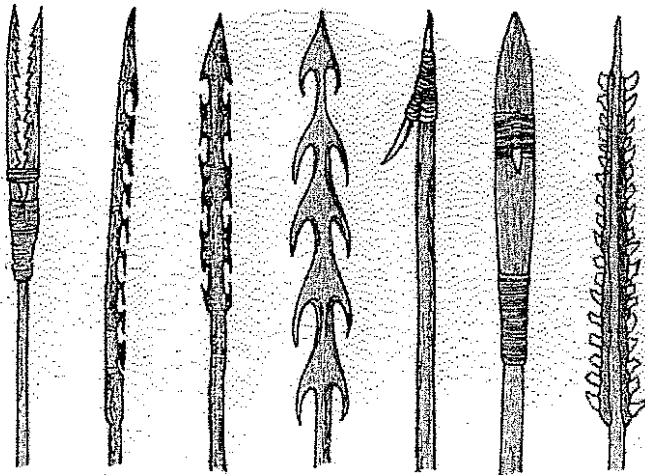
2.3.35 Food storage

Keen (2006) described storage bags made from skin or woven plant fibre which were often used to store grass seeds in the Indigenous huts, caves or specific storage areas and Flood (1999, p.240-241) mentioned large balls of ochre were often wrapped around some fruits such as figs and placed in trees for later consumption. An ingenious way of keeping a “living larder” was to bury live mussels in damp sand. They could be kept there for prolonged periods and then eaten later when food became scarce (Flood, 1999, p.240-241).

2.3.46 *Hunting/spears*

The hunting of animal life was always a good way to feed a family or group, particularly if the animal was sizable (Keen, 2006). Arthur and Morphy (2005) described spears with differing designs (see figure 2) which were commonly used by Indigenous people for hunting larger animals. The shaft was often crafted from mangrove, bamboo and other appropriate woods which were slim but considerably straight and lengthy. Some spearheads were points fashioned from sharp flaked stone and adhered to the shaft with fibrous string and resin (Flood, 1999; Kirk, 1981) (see figure 1). These flakes were often found in traditional 'quarries.' Other spearheads had barbs either carved out of the wooden shaft or with an attached piece of bone, tooth, or sharpened stick. These types of spear were more commonly used for hunting fish and dugong (see figure 2). Spear propulsion was often promoted by the use of spear throwing devices which attached to the bottom of the spear shaft (Arthur & Morphy, 2005; Flood, 1999).

Figure 2. Different types of spearheads and barbs.



(Arthur & Morphy, 2005)

Lourandos' (1997) had evidence of the use of dingos as a novel and effective means of Indigenous hunting, and in different areas the dingo was used successfully

for catching goannas, wallabies and other game. Kirk (1981) also touched on this, adding that goannas and other lizards were chased into holes by dingos and then dug out by the hunters with digging sticks.

2.3.57 Boomerangs

Considered as the quintessential item of Indigenous material culture, the boomerang was outlined by Arthur and Morphy (2005) and Flood (1999) as an effective instrument in hunting. Different designs (see figure 3) were utilised for different purposes and were effective in killing animals from a distance with a high degree of accuracy (Kirk, 1981). Kangaroos were also captured with the use of boomerangs and spears but as Lourandos (1997:97) observed, they were also caught with nets made from vines or the stringy fibres found in bark, often when escaping from fires.

Figure 3. Various designs of boomerangs.

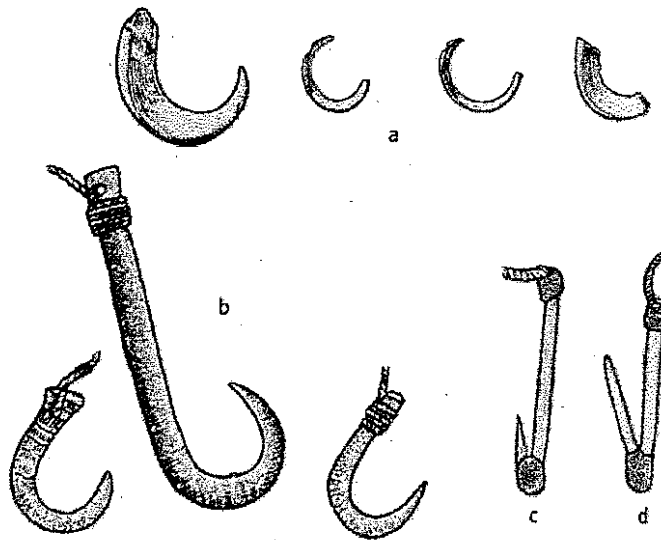


(Arthur & Morphy, 2005)

2.3.68 Fishing

Fishing in coastal areas as well as inland rivers and lakes was popular amongst the Indigenous people. Flood (1999) and Kirk (1981) discussed the use of a range of fish hooks made from bone, shell, sharpened sticks and turtle shell, some with barbs attached (see figure 4) (Arthur & Morphy, 2005; Kirk, 1981). Stringy fibres were also plaited and knotted in the form of a fishing line, and with varying thicknesses were used with either hooks or attached to spears for larger fish, small crocodiles or dugong. Keen (2006) discussed wickerwork which was useful in nets and traps made to catch eels and fish, and large stone structures formed in coastal areas taking advantage of tidal movements to entrap fish. Many of these technologies were thought to have been developed following Macassan and Melanesian influence with their regular visitations particularly to the northern regions (Flood, 1999).

Figure 4. Various shell and bone fish hooks.



(Arthur & Morphy, 2005)

2.3.79 *Watercraft*

Watercraft were not always used by Indigenous people, Flood (1999) considered that bark canoes with paddles and craft made from logs tied parallel were the early forms and later included dugout canoes and outrigger vessels they had observed being used by their northern visitors. The use of these craft in conjunction with high spear-equipped platforms (Kirk, 1981) situated in fishing grounds became very effective methods of exploiting fish, dugong and sea turtles, all of which had economic and cultural significance for Indigenous people.

2.3.810 *The role of women and children*

Collection of shellfish was a family affair with many kilos of different species dug from the sand at beaches by indigenous people either with their hands or digging sticks (Keen, 2006; Kirk, 1981). Wild honey was popular amongst Indigenous children who also ate nectar from various flowering trees and some fern fronds were quite edible and nutritious. Women and children, whilst the men were hunting, would often search for various eggs from either crocodile's nests on the edge of an estuary or river, or water fowl or other bird's nests. Numerous species of birds were caught either by children stoning them, trapping them in nets or with small nooses set in trees (Kirk, 1981). Women often searched for and caught freshwater turtles and non-venomous snakes, particularly the file snake which they could find underneath river banks. Many of the eggs, plants and other catch were placed in woven dilly bags they carried with them (Keen, 2006).

Many hours of manual labour were undertaken by the Indigenous women winnowing grass seeds and grinding them on stones into paste. The same was done with water lilies which were a delicacy, and the production of damper style breads from cycad (*macrozamia*) nuts was quite involved with the poison leaching process

taking place in flowing water (Flood, 1999; Keen, 2006; Kirk, 1981). Children often assisted their mothers in gathering yams which were a nutritious staple for many Indigenous tribes (Kirk, 1981).

2.13.9 *Overview of resource management practices*

Kirk (1981) emphasised that a generally observed practice in Indigenous hunting, gathering, and fishing right around the continent was to harvest or catch enough of the resource they were seeking to feed their people at the time and to leave enough for the next time they returned. This would include allowing mammals carrying young to run free and replanting roots or leaving part of a vegetable crop to enhance growth until the following season, increasing the yield as Kirk (1981) outlined.

There is also little wastage in Indigenous food preparation and eating practices, and this aids in the management of resources and prevents over-exploitation. For example, when a turtle is caught, its meat, intestines, organs, fat and flippers are eaten, and its shell is then used as a bowl or pot to make a soup (GBRMPA, 2007).

2.142 *The effects of colonisation*

By the time the white colonists arrived, Indigenous people were quite content in their lifestyle on the continent (Flood, 1999). The immediate changes to the environment and the ability of the Indigenous people to manage it were addressed by Wilson, McNee and Platts (1992) as well as Davies, Higginbottom, Noack, Ross and Young (1999). Caused largely by the introduction of certain species intended as food for the settlers; rabbits, goats and pigs increased to plague proportions in many areas, devouring the vegetation and new growth at an incredible rate. Feral cats, foxes and other vermin began killing many native birds and small animals (Rolls, 2003; Storrs & Cooke, 2001) and later, camels and buffalos were established and their numbers

grew once they either escaped or were released. The destruction of the plant life, erosion of soils and certain pastoral practices also allowed other plant species and weeds (many introduced) to proliferate (Rolls, 2003; Storrs & Cooke, 2001).

2.134.1 *Political changes*

The control of these problems by the Indigenous people was later made even more difficult when they were dispossessed of their land and natural environments. They were forced to live on stations, reserves, and missions with little or no say or control over proper resource management which was effectively taken over by pastoralists and the newly formed governments (Wilson et al., 1992).

With progressive political changes, Indigenous people were slowly released back into areas they formerly inhabited. Many found, however, that their previous subsistence lifestyle was now very difficult to achieve, their earlier methods either disallowed or ineffective (spears, use of fire) and many of the species of wildlife they had known were dwindling (Kirk, 1981; Wilson et al., 1992).

Kirk (1981) examined further changes which then took place whereby the Indigenous people began to acquire income for work they did and for the sale or trade of various commodities. This gave them economic power and access to many new technologies and methods of managing their country.

2.14.2 *Modern technology*

Obviously the ability to both guarantee and also increase their catch was an attractive strategy with the advent of new technologies, and firearms were a popular item (Davies et al., 1999; Wilson et al., 1992). They appear to have now totally superseded spears, nets and other technologies previously employed by Indigenous people to hunt larger game such as kangaroos, and give the Indigenous people the opportunity to hunt buffalo, pig and goat which contain more meat and with the

Comment [E12]: I'm slightly dubious about this sentence without further explanation. Only a very few Indigenous people regained rights or access to their homelands.

Comment [E13]: This claim is exaggerate - there is still extensive use of spears etc in many places.

assistance of off-road vehicles these animals are easy targets (Griffiths, 1996, p.132–133).

Other tools and methods that modern Indigenous people found they had access to were axes and chainsaws for tree cutting (Kirk, 1981); fishing hooks and nylon lines; fishing nets, steel harpoons and to assist with the gathering of fish and sea life - motorised boats (Franklin, 2003). In effect, they now had the means to travel wider and faster, to kill more animals and collect more food and fish than they ever had before (Keen, 2006). It was clear however to the Indigenous people that these extra measures would have a devastating effect on the environment if not properly controlled (Griffiths, 1996).

Comment [E14]: What are the implications? This is a controversial and much debated issue.

2.154.3 *Commercial interests*

Arthur and Morphy (2005) outlined mining activity which became widespread in many regions affecting land formerly owned and managed by Indigenous people, disrupting the ecological processes and geographical atmosphere. Much of this activity was legally sanctioned and the Indigenous people had little power or energy to deal with it effectively, so the desecration of their land and destruction of ecosystems continued.

More recent years however, have seen the passing of legislation (ALII, 2007) which gives certain Indigenous groups freehold title over certain areas and the management rights that go with that entitlement. From this has stemmed commercial enterprises whereby Indigenous groups:

- generate income (royalties) by permitting mining operations to continue (Davies et al., 1999);
- allow commercial fishing in coastal areas for similar rewards (GBRMPPA, 2007);

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- set up their own cultural tourism ventures demonstrating traditional practices within those areas (Wilson et al., 1992);
- -or guiding tourists on hunting, fishing and camping expeditions (Davies et al., 1999).

This, as Kirk (1981) indicates, gives the local Indigenous groups control over the management of natural resources within their territory, simultaneously allowing for the maintenance of traditional rituals, practices and spiritual connection with their country.

2.165 Co-existence

Modern natural resource management legislation effectively banned all persons including Indigenous people from taking wildlife or collecting food or fish in National Parks and other regulated zones (ALII, 2007; Storrs & Cooke, 2001). This impacted on the Indigenous people who through processes of negotiation as well as legislative amendments have obtained dispensation allowing them to continue with traditional hunting, fishing and collecting practices (Davies, et al., 1999; Franklin, 2003; Graetz et al., 1992). Part of the negotiation process is the acceptance of modern hunting methods which can often mean practices such as the use of firearms and four wheel drive vehicles (Griffiths, 1996), but the ancient Indigenous knowledge of their land, natural resources and the environment generally has been invaluable to park managers and government agencies, making for a positive co-existence (Arthur & Morphy, 2005; Davies, et al., 1999).

3. Conclusions

Given the information available to date which outlines many ancient traditional practices and methods amongst the Indigenous people around the Australian continent, it seems reasonable to conclude that these practices and methods

have now changed quite considerably. New techniques and technologies introduced following the arrival of colonial powers appear to have been one of the main causative factors in the methodological changes observed amongst the Indigenous people. The takeover of their traditional lands and wide ranging hunter/gatherer subsistence, as well as modern laws and regulations governing customary practices has forced them to concentrate their efforts in smaller areas. However, Indigenous people have demonstrated quite soundly over many generations their innate adaptive abilities, and to this end have adjusted well to the new world which has been imposed upon them. Whilst in some instances they have retained their age old methods, supplemented by their environmental knowledge and connection with their country, many have changed with the times and begun utilising new western-style technologies to manage the areas of land and natural resources they have access to or authority over. Unless there is increased consultation between Indigenous people, other land owners and government agencies, these practices could have a significant impact on the environment and all the natural resources which the Indigenous people managed so intimately prior to colonial arrival.

4.

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IA2013 Ecology and Indigenous Australian Cultures
Assessment 3 - RESEARCH REPORT

Student Name			
Date		Mark	High Distinction

Addressed research topic with strong and logical supporting arguments						(30%)
Title (Research Topic) provides an accurate description of the report's scope / contents	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Title (research topic) lacks detail or does not provide an accurate description of the content
The content demonstrates an understanding of material presented in this subject	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	The content does not address the material presented in the course or has misunderstood the material and core concepts
An inviting introduction draws the reader in and clearly articulates the main purpose and scope	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	The introduction does not present a clear purpose and does not set up what follows
Structure and sequence of ideas is logical and effective.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	There is no identifiable internal structure or sequence.
Discussion shows independent synthesis and critical evaluation of all available information	5	4	<u>3</u>	2	1	Simple restatement of the findings / sources; little or no evidence of independent thinking
Appropriate use of examples to illustrate ideas	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Lack of examples, or incorrect application of examples.
Findings and analysis is balanced and based on facts rather than opinions	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Discussion is heavily opinionated and biased
A satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of closure.	5	<u>4</u>	3	2	1	No real conclusion to wrap things up.
Recommendations flow logically from all that is contained in the report	5	4	3	2	1	Recommendations show a poor connection with the content of the report
Include sufficiently researched and clearly presented information						(20%)
The background information covers extensive and relevant literature sources	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Little or no evidence of having read relevant sources
Literature is well integrated and every point is clearly supported by strong evidence.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Literature is not well integrated with the general discussion
Accurate, and independent synthesis and critical evaluation of key points from the literature	5	<u>4</u>	3	2	1	Simple restatement of the sources with little or no evidence of independent thinking or critical evaluation
Overall, relevant & up-to-date content that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.	5	4	<u>3</u>	2	1	Content is dated, limited or unclear, with irrelevant information
Organisation of information into a standard report structure						(20%)
Contents page provides an accurate reflection of structure and pagination	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Contents page has pagination errors and missing information
Headings and titles are accurate and follow numbering conventions	5	<u>4</u>	3	2	1	Headings do not reflect content or do not follow numbering conventions
Title page is attractive and the report is professionally presented	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Title page is dull and uninspiring, presentation is not of an acceptable business standard
Appropriate use of pagination, fonts (style / size) margins and line spacing.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Page numbering incorrect or poor choice in fonts and line spacing are a major distraction.
Any Figures, tables, graphs are labelled, accurate and add to understanding of the topic.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Figures and tables are not accurate, labelled or do not add to the understanding of the topic.
The length is within the parameters established	5	4	<u>3</u>	2	1	The report is too short or too long.
Quality of written English						(15%)
The report demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (i.e. spelling, punctuation, grammar).	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar are distracting and make the text difficult to read.
Words are specific and accurate. It is easy to understand just what the author means.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Poor word choice and/or spelling errors that distract from the content
Sentences and paragraphs are well constructed, with natural flow/ rhythm, and expressive, varied structure.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Sentences and paragraphs are choppy, incomplete, rambling or awkward.
Correct citation of references						(15%)
APA conventions are diligently followed when citing sources in text	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	Sources not identified in text or are not presented using APA style
The reference list is presented alphabetically, using correct APA syntax	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	The reference list is incomplete, references are poorly constructed or are not sorted alphabetically
All in text references are included in the reference list and all references in the list have been cited in text.	<u>5</u>	4	3	2	1	In text references are not included in the reference list and references in the list have not been cited in text.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

This is an outstanding report! It was extremely well written and researched and was a pleasure to read. I appreciate the thought, work, research and sensitivity you have applied to it. As such there are not extensive comments to add to your text.

You demonstrated extensive well researched and articulated knowledge in the bulk of the report about traditional resource management and exploitation, however I felt it was largely descriptive. When you started addressing the more complex and controversial issues it became quite brief and safe. I was disappointed that you shied away from exploring the 'juicier' issues that this topic raises.

However, this assessment piece demonstrated outstanding academic skills and understanding of the subject material, so your mark should reflect this.

Thankyou and I wish you the best in your future studies and career.

For further comments, see also:

- ① Track Changes shown on the document by a vertical line in the lefthand margin.
- ② Comment Boxes - relating to shaded text.

