Fitzroy Valley Indigenous Cultural Values Study
(a preliminary assessment)

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This copy of an original painting by Alec Forrest, a Walmajarri man who lives in the Bayulu Community near Fitzroy Crossing, depicts relations to land, water and culture. *Warntarri Purlumanupurra*, the Canning Stock Route, was often the route tracked north by desert groups to the country of the 'river people'. Many Indigenous paintings and other contemporary art forms represent a range of interpretations of past, continuing and co-existent attachments to the Fitzroy Valley cultural landscape.

‘My mother in the wet time used to live round here. We used to hunt here at the three lakes all close together. [That] name is Kooljedi and there was a wallaby like a kangaroo at that place who dug big holes. There were [bilby] there too, plenty of them. We used to collect plenty of bush tucker there too. There was a grinding stone there for bush tucker. It is still there now. The bush apple grows all round that place. Plenty yam there then and still there today. This place [is] on the Canning Stock Route’, Alec Forrest.
1.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many Aboriginal people contributed their knowledge, insights and experiences on water and culture in the Fitzroy Valley to this report. Special thanks are due to the traditional owners and the Bayulu, Djugerari, Jarlmadangah, Kupungarri, Looma, Mimbi and Yakanarra communities for their participation and patience, and for direction and guidance during fieldwork. In particular, we thank Patsy Bedford, Hanson (Pampila) Boxer, Nancy Broome, Warford (Pajiman) Bujiman, Kitty Chungal, Peter Clancy, Edna Hopiga, Sally Kanyan, Billy King, Annette (Wayuwu) Kogolo, Bobby (Pinyarri) Kogolo, Lucy Marshall, Annie Milgin, Doug (Kordidi) Moor, Darby Nangkiriny, Amy Nuggett, Mamanjiya (Joy) Nuggett, Pansy Nulgit, Dora (Morgal) Sharpe, Neville Sharpe, Anthony Watson, Harry Watson, John Watson and others listed in Appendix 8.1. We would also like to thank Alec Forrest for giving permission to reproduce his 'Kunginglarah' painting, and Mangkaja Arts for permission to reproduce a number of drawings by Mangkaja artists, including Mervyn Street and Nyawanday. The Kimberley Land Council provided Sarah Yu with an additional vehicle, KLC project officers (especially David Jaggar in Fitzroy Crossing and Athleigh Sullivan in Derby) and Librarian, Jenny Bolton, provided assistance with preliminary consultation and reports. Roy Stone, Program Manager of Environmental Planning at the Water and Rivers Commission, encouraged WRC’s interest in learning about Fitzroy Valley Indigenous Cultural Values on water use, and David Trigger, Director of the Centre for Anthropological Research, advised the project from its inception. Dianne Anstey and Jill Woodman, Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, provided administrative support, and Graham Harvey from Uniprint constructed the maps.
2.0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Indigenous groups in the Fitzroy Valley conceptualise lands, waters and rivers within a cultural framework inspired by religious beliefs, practices and laws generally known as the Dreaming. Mythic beings interpreted as rainbow serpents or water snakes (variously described as *kalpurtu*, *unggud*, *yungurrungu*) are significant actors in the reproduction of water and associated species. Indigenous knowledge of place names and explanations for waters and rivers give life to the all-inclusive nature of the cultural landscape.

Indigenous men and women have a religious, legal, social and economic responsibility to ‘look after’ the lands and waters, by a combination of ritual performance, ‘talking to country’, conservation practices and daily social action. Beliefs and practices defined by the context of cultural change continue to be central to how people live their lives, albeit in an environment which has, in some places, been modified by industries such as pastoralism, agriculture, irrigation, mining, tourism and other forms of intervention.

River and desert-related groups, especially members of the Ngarinyin, Nyikina, Mangala, Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri and Wangkajunga language groups across the Fitzroy Valley, sustain various rights and responsibilities to river systems and water sources which have been reproduced throughout time for countless generations. Owing to marriage, residence and totemic affiliation, river/desert co-existence and some shared knowledge and resources are features of historical migration and contemporary social life. This interpretation should not infer that the Fitzroy Valley is culturally, linguistically and politically homogenous, or that there are no particular rights and affiliations to place.
Indigenous people constantly reaffirm that Fitzroy Valley rivers, waters and riverine resources are central to their lives. Water, in all its forms, is an enduring and integrated part of the cultural landscape. In the past, Indigenous relationships to land have tended to be more readily recognised and recorded.

Illustrations of continuing historical and present-day ideas and behaviours encompass a range of fishing activities, social etiquette attached to river use and protection, bush foods and medicines, rituals for water replenishment, and explanations for water depletion. In a region of environmental and historical contrast, interdependent, cyclical relationships to waters and rivers are also expressed by knowledge exchange and language (such as the importance of the *warramba*, or annual flood which cleans out the river system), as well as painting and film.

The rivers and waters also provide resources for Aboriginal groups who are economically marginalised and often reliant on social security entitlements. Fresh water fishing (by lines, nets, traps and digging, or by use of the *majarla* tree to poison and stun fish) enables continuation of valuable and life-sustaining practices and knowledges, as well as a nutritional addition to adult and infant diets. Smoked fish are commonly sought to accommodate food taboos [*jaminyjarti* or *jaginy*] on meat for relevant kin following the death of a loved one.

A failure to consult with Fitzroy Valley communities about water regulation and planning could result in damage to Indigenous cultural beliefs, practices, systems. Such damage may bring harm to the mythic beings, humans and other species (insects, birds, fish, animals, plants). Examples where a failure to consult with Indigenous custodians and traditional owners of lands and waters were often referred to, especially the building of the Camballin Agricultural Project and the Argyle and Ord River Dams. The ‘Dimond Gorge’ dispute was
also raised as an example where a lack of consultation resulted in a heightened level of distress and distrust which should not be repeated.

Eighteen recommendations focus on the need for regular consultation with Indigenous groups, including by way of regional and local organisations and communities, the importance of emphasising cultural analysis and work practices when focusing on waters and rivers, and rehabilitation of the area surrounding the failed Camballin Irrigation Project. A negotiated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Indigenous groups and the WRC with respect to waters and rivers in the Fitzroy Valley, and conservation measures which accord with Indigenous etiquette are also among the recommendations.

This report contains representative indicative ethnographic findings only in accordance with WRC's brief for a 'preliminary assessment' of Fitzroy Valley Cultural Values, and foreshadowed commitment to a 'second stage' research project.
3.0. INTRODUCTION

Fresh and saltwater rivers, their tributaries and general water use are central to all human lives, cultures and histories. But beliefs, practices and sentiments associated with water, especially its management and reproduction, vary. The cultural ideas and social behaviours humans have in the past and continue in the present to attribute to water is a significant subject of inquiry, and one which is increasingly acquiring attention in Australia and elsewhere.  

Enhanced cultural awareness of an ecologically interdependent resource have the potential to advantage not only human societies, but also water sources and systems.

3.1. The Fitzroy Valley Indigenous Cultural Values Study

Australian Indigenous peoples generally, and in the Fitzroy Valley (also known as the Fitzroy Basin) in particular, have thousands of years of lived experience and knowledge of land, rivers and other forms of water use embedded in oral histories and local knowledge (see e.g. Elkin 1932; Kaberry 1939; Capell 1953; Kolig 1981; Hawke and Gallagher 1989; Pedersen 1995; O'Connor 1999). These have been variously reproduced and continued within the cultural context of change through time. This report, for the Water and Rivers Commission (WRC) of Western Australia, provides a unique cultural interpretation of a number of Fitzroy Valley communities and their relationship to rivers and other water sources, such as springs, creeks, soaks, billabongs, and so on (Map 1 depicts the study area).  

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1 A recent documentary, titled *Liquid History*, on the Thames River in England (BBC 2000), and a 1984 publication, *Great Rivers of the World* (edited by Alexander Frater, and including chapters on rivers and water use in countries as diverse as China, America, Africa, Egypt and India), give examples of how different societies attribute meaning to, and regulate sources of, water. Australia’s national newspaper, *The Australian*, recently featured a major story on the Murray River (February 24-25, 2001, pp.16-21)

2 The maps included in this report are at a level appropriate to ‘preliminary assessment’ only and should not be regarded as comprehensive or conclusive. Appendix 8.7. shows geographic detail on water related sites in the Lower Fitzroy/Hann stage of the project where a longer period of fieldwork occurred, and Appendix 8.8. reproduces Indigenous maps from Raparapa Kularr Martuwarra. Further research is required to elaborate on and check ethnographic and geographic data related to the study area, including information held at the WA Department of Sites.
This report may be read in conjunction with other WRC reports, including Sarah Yu’s 2000 *Ngapa Kunangkul: Living Water* research on the La Grange (Bidyadanga) Sub-Basin in the West Kimberley, and a foreshadowed but yet to be conducted study among communities affiliated with the Ord River area in the East Kimberley.³

MAP 1 Fitzroy Valley, Kimberley, Western Australia

³At a combined Aboriginal organisations meeting at Kupartiya on 17 October 2000 where Sarah Yu spoke about the Fitzroy Valley research, East Kimberley Kija speakers Peggy Patrick and David Turner urged local communities to get involved in the research. They spoke of the construction of the Argyle Dam in their country and lamented that in the 1960s they had no opportunity to record the cultural values of the river ‘before it was too late’.
Research for this report was conducted by anthropologists Dr Sandy Toussaint (ST), Dr Patrick Sullivan (PS), and Sarah Yu (SY), and Aboriginal Field Officer, Mervyn Mularty Jnr (MM) through the Centre for Anthropological Research (CAR) at The University of Western Australia. The research aim was to provide a 'preliminary assessment' of Fitzroy Valley Indigenous cultural values as these relate to water sources, especially major rivers such as the Fitzroy, Margaret and Hann.

WRC production of allocation plans on a 'local, sub-regional and regional scale for surface and groundwater use' (WRC, tender document, 2000, p.13) state that they have an interest in acquiring cultural interpretation before plans to regulate water can proceed. This requirement seems to have emerged, in part, as a response to widespread Kimberley Indigenous and environmental concerns when in 1997 the WRC made public plans to dam the Fitzroy River at Dimond Gorge (known in Bunuba as Jijidju) to allow cotton production and irrigated agriculture without prior consultation with affected communities. Reflecting on the anxiety which developed during what came to be described as 'the dam dispute', Kupungarri Informant, Pansy Nulgit, observed that, 'We frightened longa that dam. We don't want to lose our history. I never make 'em up story myself. I get 'em from the old people'.

In CAR’s tender document (p.3), it was stated that the researchers would address the following interdependent lines of inquiry at a level of detail appropriate to 'preliminary assessment':

- interpretations of the ecosystems within the Fitzroy Valley with particular reference to Aboriginal use of certain species of bush food and medicine) and seasonal activity (e.g. influence of the wet

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4Strong Indigenous and environmental resistance to the dam eventually resulted in the WRC withdrawing from its original plan. A number of sources show the extent of these concerns, e.g. Kimberley at the Crossroads: Special Habitat Supplement 1997, The West Australian Newspaper, 14 November 1998 (p.15), Willigan’s Fitzroy: a documentary film, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2000, A conversation with Butcher Cherel: a documentary film, 1998, and a 1999 film by Mitch Torres titled Martuwarra Nulli Mili Ingun. Persons consulted during research for this report, had to be assured beforehand that the WRC was not re-activating plans to build a dam in the area. Fitzroy Valley Wangki Radio journalist, Wayuwu Kogolo, questioned WRC Program Manager for Environmental Planning, Roy Stone, on this matter during an interview conducted in Fitzroy Crossing. Mr Stone stated that the WRC no longer intended to build a dam in the area (Interview dated 10/11/2000).
season, consequences when the river becomes high, problems when the water level drops);

• cultural significance of water with respect to familial, social, ceremonial, totemic, work, educative and recreational activities;
• the relationship between local groupings distinguished as 'the river people' and 'the desert people' (e.g. cultural and economic resource exchange, including knowledge and information about the river and its history);
• relationship between water, plants, birds, animals, insects and humans;
• measures required to 'look after' or protect water resources;
• consequences of negative impact of water loss or abundance (and Aboriginal explanations for these).

In addition to the presentation of indicative ethnographic data, these lines of inquiry have been addressed in Section 5.0., 'Study Findings'. Note that not only were Indigenous attachments to the rivers of interest, but all sources of water in the study area.

3.2. Ethics, Protocol, Confidentiality

In its tender document (p.3), the Centre for Anthropological Research noted that:

The cultural material gathered by the consultants will remain the rightful property of the Aboriginal traditional owners, custodians and participants. Any matters of a restricted nature will remain confidential; these will be acknowledged but not detailed in the report. The final report will bear the names of the participants and consultants: it will be the property of the Commission but the cultural information it contains should remain under the control of the relevant Aboriginal groups and organisations.
3.3. Research Methods, Process, Places Visited

Recording and interpretation of cultural beliefs and practices associated with the relevant rivers (especially the Fitzroy, Margaret and Hann Rivers) and other sources of water occurred by each researcher adopting participant observation methods and conducting open-ended ethnographic interviews. Toussaint, Sullivan and Yu recorded substantive data on Indigenous beliefs and practices, as these related to water knowledge and use, in notebook form. A number of photographs were taken when permission was granted by participants, and taped song cycles, where appropriate. On most occasions, the researchers were known to families and communities in the area and this prior knowledge and experience facilitated the research process. Mervyn Mularty Jnr’s kin relationships with persons in the Camballin/Hann River stage of the research where he worked for ten days at the request of Nyikina and Mangala elders with Sarah Yu, was invaluable. Mularty assisted in consultations with communities and individuals about the project and was instrumental in getting support for that stage of the research.

Liaison with relevant Fitzroy Valley communities and organisations commenced after the WRC formally advised CAR’s principal consultant that the tender had been successful. Advice to particular communities that research on ‘water and culture’ was to occur included letters and phone calls to relevant communities from each of the consultants. Sandy Toussaint also contacted regional organisations, such as the Kimberley Land Council, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. In addition, Sarah Yu, as noted in Footnote 3, attended an Elders Meeting in Broome on 13 October and a combined Kimberley Aboriginal organisations meeting at the Kupartiya Community on Bohemia Pastoral Station on 17 October where she was able to discuss the proposed research with those present. Appendices 8.2.-8.4. give details of the liaison and consultation process.

Fieldwork was undertaken in three separate but interrelated stages: Sarah Yu and Mervyn Mularty worked with the Jarlmadangah, Kupungarri and Looma communities in the Lower Fitzroy/Hann River area between October 30 to
November 10; Sandy Toussaint worked with communities east of Fitzroy Crossing (such as Bayulu and Mimbi, plus the townsite and Mindirardi) between November 5-12; Patrick Sullivan worked with members of the Yakanarra and Djugerari communities on the Gogo and Cherrabun Pastoral Stations between November 21-28. Research occurred at these communities as well as at places along the river systems and visiting a site or during fishing expeditions on a formal, informal and experiential basis. The Fitzroy River often served as a focal point, but, in keeping with Indigenous cultural knowledge, practice and direction, and WRC briefings, research also occurred elsewhere. Attention to water sources other than the major rivers was especially encouraged by desert-related groups, a point which is elaborated below.

MAP 2 Places Named in the Report

For a number of reasons, including WRC’s interest in a proposed dam site at Moll Gorge, more resources and fieldwork time were devoted to the Lower Fitzroy/Hann River stage of the project.

A number of the communities consulted live on excisions or near pastoral stations, e.g. the Bayulu and Yakanarra communities are on Gogo Pastoral Station, Jarlmadangah is on Mt Anderson, Mimbi is on Mt Pierre, Djugerari is on New Cherrabun, Wangkajunga is on Christmas Creek.
In addition to research associated with fieldwork activity, relevant published and unpublished literature on the relationship between waters and cultures in the Fitzroy Valley were canvassed both prior to fieldwork and during later stages of report writing. How Indigenous persons convey land/water/culture relationships through paintings and postcard production, was also considered. Reference to audiovisual recordings, such as *The Kimberley Mob* (1992), *Jila: Waters of the Great Sandy Desert* (1998), *Conversation with Butcher Cherel* (1998), *Martuwarra Nullu Mili Ingun* (1999), and *Willigan’s Story* (2000) has occurred, where appropriate.

Sarah Yu and Patrick Sullivan drafted their own reports on the fieldwork area for which they were responsible. Sandy Toussaint, as principal consultant, drew on the relevant literature plus the reports prepared by Yu and Sullivan and her own research to produce the final report. A draft was circulated among the researchers prior to WRC submission, and a final copy of the report distributed to participating communities and organisations.

### 3.4. Study Qualities and Limitations

Each researcher drew on a twenty year history of experience with Kimberley communities and extensive knowledge of the Fitzroy Valley landscape, including an understanding of Indigenous etiquette and concerns. It would have been difficult to conduct the research in the limited funding and time-frame allowed by WRC without the substantial knowledge and experience among river and desert related groups that each researcher brought to the project.

The fieldwork period was confined to just over three weeks which limited a consistently reliable depth of data with relevant water-using communities in an area as large and as culturally complex as the Fitzroy Valley. While each language group can clearly demonstrate a range of cultural affiliations with land and water, not all groups are adequately represented here. The field data interpreted in this report, therefore, provides indicative ethnographic

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7 In addition, one community reported to their local KLC project officer in Derby that they had insufficient notice of the study and the visit and expectations of the research teams.
findings only. It has been prepared on the basis of WRC’s foreshadowed commitment to a more substantial ‘second stage’ piece of work in the area.

A further concern was that, while one of the criteria in WRC’s tender document stipulated that some collaborative work between the anthropological and environmental consultants should occur, the three member environmental science team and the WRC employee who accompanied Sarah Yu and Mervyn Mularty and Sandy Toussaint during parts of their fieldwork (five and a half days out of eleven with SY and MM, and two and a half days out of seven with ST) occasionally hampered the fieldwork potential and confused the independent nature of the research. For example, MM and the anthropologists were often required to facilitate introductions to relevant persons in the focus communities, negotiate community liaison and visits, and conduct two-way cultural interpretation. That some Indigenous Informants were uncomfortable about contributing certain cultural insights, and the environmental team did not always seem interested in the information Informants wanted to provide (perhaps when the information was water-related but not river-based), also generated concern about the level of field data. In our assessment, the potential of cross-disciplinary work was sometimes disadvantaged by inconsistent attention to cultural etiquette and divergent work practices.

Sullivan’s work with members of the Yakanarra and Djugerari communities occurred without any members of the environmental team or WRC present. Having understood the purpose of the study, the fieldwork was directed by the community members themselves. In consultation with the others Pampila (Informant, Hanson Boxer) devised a programme of field visits for each day to places and areas of cultural interest and concern. The circumstances of the fieldwork were highly congenial and conducive to recording rich cultural information.

Recommendations relevant to the study’s limitations are recorded at the end of this report.
3.5.  A Note on Words and Language Use

The complex and diverse nature of linguistic, ethnographic and political affiliations across the study area resulted in the need to include a short wordlist as Appendix 8.5. Readers are cautioned against assuming that the wordlist is comprehensive or that generic terms are used by all members of the relevant communities. While words such as *jila* generally refer to a ‘living’ or permanent water source, other key words are language group specific, e.g. Aboriginal religion/law is widely known as the Dreaming, but it is referred to as *Pukarrickarra* by Mangala speakers, *Bukarrarra* by Nyikina, *Ngaranggani* by Ngarinyin,⁸ Bunuba and Gooniyandi, and *Jumungkarni* by Walmajarri. Clearly, one of our concerns is to show that the Fitzroy Valley crosses seven ethnolinguistic areas and that, while there are many common features, the study area should not be considered as culturally, linguistically or politically homogenous. In a larger ‘second stage’ research project, further time should be devoted to recording and developing linguistic data.

3.6.  Structure of the Report

Following an Executive Summary, Introduction and description of the Study, as well as its qualities and limitations, an overview of the Fitzroy Valley is provided. The three stages of field research, roughly identified as the Lower Fitzroy (including Camballin and the Hann River), Fitzroy Crossing/Bayulu/Mimbi, and Yakanarra/Djugerari are incorporated under the six headings identified in Section 3.1. and addressed in Sections 4.0. and 5.0. Included along the way are a number of annotated photographs. An emphasis has been placed on quotes, experiences, concerns and ideas recorded by the researchers from the Indigenous adults and children who participated in the research, as well as associated data from other sources (films, paintings, texts). Appendices include information on persons consulted, places visited, advice to communities and organisations. An extensive Bibliography (which includes references cited in this report) follows the appendices.

⁸Ungarinyin refers to the language spoken by Ngarinyin people.
4.0. THE FITZROY VALLEY: An Overview

4.1. Language Groups and affiliations to Land and Water

The Fitzroy Valley is a culturally complex area which includes Nyikina, Mangala, Ngarinyin, Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri and Wangkajunga speakers. These groups retain affiliations to land and water in the area, some more recently as desert migrants. Representatives from these groups have contributed to this report, as well as a number of other persons, who, for reasons of history, intermarriage or residence, also have established affiliations with the area, such as the Jaru whose traditional country lies in the East Kimberley, around Halls Creek. Map 3 depicts the main language groups in the Fitzroy Valley and Kimberley region generally.

MAP 3 Land and Water Language Affiliations

(source, Thangani Bunuba: Stories from the Bunuba Elders of the Fitzroy Valley, 1998, p.v)
From research gathered for this report, it is clearly the case that Fitzroy Valley Indigenous groups sustain extensive cultural affiliations to lands and waters. Each group can speak for, and has knowledge of, sections of the rivers and lands; Indigenous narratives, beliefs and practices show these connections in a multitude of interconnected ways. According to the Nyikina and Mangala peoples, for example, the Fitzroy River was created by a rainbow serpent or water snake speared by a mythic being known as Wunyumbu at Mijirayikan who was fishing in the same pool using poison from the *majarla* tree (freshwater mangrove, *barringtonia acutangula*). Appendix 8.6. provides a detailed account of this narrative from senior custodian, Darby Nangkiriny. Knowledge of the Wunyumbu story changes as it travels up the river toward more south-eastern groupings, such as among the Walmajarri where, unlike the Nyikina version, the story is that Wunyumbu did not become a man.⁹ Significant in Darby Nangkiriny’s version of this story, is that Wunyumbu was responsible for bringing branches of the *marjarla* tree to the river to poison fish. Capell (1953) describes Nyikina interpretations of the Wunyumbu myth, whilst also recounting its movements along the Fitzroy River eastward to Bunuba and Gooniyandi country. Several Informants narrated how there are marks on rocks near the river’s banks which show the struggle which occurred after Wunyumbu disturbed other beings (water snakes and/or men) as he made the river and planted the *majarla* trees.¹⁰

The Wunyumbu story is regularly re-enacted today in Walungarri rituals associated with river country and the initiation of young men. Songs sung during ceremonial activity recount the creation of the river and surrounding

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⁹Some Nyikina speakers make distinctions between ‘Heavy’ and ‘Light’ Nyikina, and some Walmajarri speakers refer to ‘Heavy’ Walmajarri while also making a distinction between themselves and a closely related group, Juwaliny (also spelt Djualin). These distinctions have not been elaborated in this report.

¹⁰The terms rainbow serpent and metaphysical water snake refer to mythic beings and are often used interchangeably as similar entities within religious bodies of mythology and law. Adopted as general usage only, and not always associated with rainbows as sometimes thought by outsiders, both terms are used in this report.
country, specifying particular geographic features, such as the hills near Camballin and ridges on Mt Anderson Pastoral Station, also known as Jarlmadangah. Darby Nangkiriny explains:

Walungarri Law initiation songs, all got meaning. Everytime we sing that song we teach the kids about the country, how it was made. How the fish got in the river.

In the song-cycle, Wunyumbu calls the metaphysical water snakes (yungurrungu) to create the tributaries, such as Jikarli/Geegully Creek. The songs also relate how the fish poison is used and other details of life on the river. In the course of research for this report, Nyikina Informants often sang open Walungarri songs as they passed through areas with which the songs were affiliated.11

The Ngarinyin also believe that the Hann River was created by water snakes, often referred to as unggud (also spelt as wunggurr or unggur). Pansy Nulgit, providing cultural interpretation on the cyclical nature of water production, explained: 'Unggud is for everybody...like a snake. She put the water everywhere. She make the rain, make storm get up'. At the same time, Pansy described the Wanjina as 'putting all the fish and animals, trees and sugarbag in the country'.

In Ngarinyin cosmology, the relationship between Wanjina, unggud and the river is as elemental as it is complex, and often difficult to explain to outsiders. According to Capell (1971), and based on fieldwork for this report, such an interrelationship possibly emerges from two cultural traditions: Wanjina and a belief in unggud which, when combined, are known among groups living near the south-east portions of the Fitzroy River as kalpurtu.

11This practice is graphically depicted in the film Martuwarra Nullu Mili Ingun.
Fig. 1 Wiliyalkany, a spring to the east of Jikarli/Geegully Creek

Fig. 2 Morton Moore, Mervyn Mularty Jnr, Edna Hopiga and Pansy Nulgit with Dwight Hopiga (in front) at Winjilyangarri unggud
Geikie Gorge, traditional Bunuba country, also provides strong evidence of Indigenous cultural logic and affiliations to land and water. A detailed poster for visitors to Geikie Gorge where the Fitzroy and Margaret rivers meet, displays information and maps which reveal Bunuba associations, such as the following which relates to 'Darngku' (Danggu, also known as White Rock):

The area around the large midstream rock formation [is where], in the Dreamtime,...a blind Aboriginal elder drowned, after leaving the tribe to go wandering. The old man sighed and sneezed before he sank to the bottom for the last time. If you sit quietly around the area, you can still hear the sighs of that old man.

Further examples of how Fitzroy Valley groups relate to land and water via interdependent religious and everyday associations is evident in the Gooniyandi narrative by Neville Sharpe, senior custodian of Mimbi. Notably, Neville's story traverses several ethnolinguistic divisions (Wangkajunga, Gooniyandi, Nyikina, Mangala), generally from Christmas Creek Pastoral Station through to the Looma Community near Camballin:

Longtime ago in the Dreamtime, there lived a blue tongue lizard and a mudlark. The blue tongue lizard had six babies she used to carry around on her back. One day a big flood was coming and so she asked the mudlark if she could leave her babies high up on the nest. The mudlark said, 'no, I only have room for my kids'. So the blue tongue lizard and her babies got swept away with the flood and they are found today at Looma Community south of Derby (Mimbi Goorroomba, 2000).

This account is also discussed in *Raparapa Kularr Martuwarra* (Marshall, 1988, pp.124-125).
Fig. 3 Danggu, Geikie Gorge, traditional Bunuba Country

Fig. 4 Danggu, Geikie Gorge, by Nyawanday (Casey Ross), Mangkaja Arts
Annie Milgan’s story also shows the relationship between enduring religious and everyday, or ‘living’, activity. Focusing on the metaphysical water snake/yungurrungu in Nyikina country, she observed during fieldwork at the Kunyunu-nyunu-kurtany site (near Looma):12

Just around the corner near the fence we saw that yungurrungu/unggud. He must have been sleeping outside (the water). When we arrive, the car stop. We heard a big noise as he splashed into the water. He cut the water open and a big splash which came up to us. There was a rainbow and fog above the splash.

From Indigenous perspectives, the river landscape is imbued with meanings that are continually reaffirmed, interpreted and transformed by each generation whose members sustain knowledge and practices relevant to particular language groups. These land/language/water affiliations are developed further in Section 5.0.

4.2. Geography, Ecology, History13

The Fitzroy Valley is a vast and rugged region of some 95,000 square kilometres. Characterised by towns such as Derby in the west, Halls Creek in the East, and Fitzroy Crossing in the centre, it is home to at least 30 Indigenous communities and outstations of populations ranging from 15 to 250 adults and children. As shown in Maps 1-3, the Fitzroy River and its tributaries extends from Derby to Halls Creek and many river and desert-related communities now live on or near the river.

12While it is difficult to determine how many, there is an hierarchy of yungurrungu [see also kalpurtu and unggud] and there are links between the yungurrungu of the springs and the riverine pools. For example, in the Lower Fitzroy, both the site and the being are considered ‘the big boss’ who travelled across the landscape to his final resting place near the St George Ranges. Thus the springs along Jikarli Creek are considered to be linked spiritually, if not physically, to the springs and jila further east.

13In this section and elsewhere, our primary aim is to document Indigenous interpretations of the past and present landscape, paying particular attention to water and rivers. The environmental team, led by Andrew Storey, provide substantive detail on geography and ecology in their report on the Fitzroy Valley for WRC.
The Lower Fitzroy Valley region is the traditional country of Nyikina and Mangala speakers. It includes the vast floodplains surrounding the rivers and creeks, and the sprawling mudflat plains of the mouth of the river. There are a number of named tributaries running into the Fitzroy River from here, including Manguel Creek, Geegully Creek and Nerrima Creek. The eastern boundary is Mijirayikan, Broken Wagon Pool, a site considered by many Nyikina as the origin of the Fitzroy River.

The upper reaches of the Fitzroy Valley Basin where the Hann River flows into the Fitzroy are a maze of small creeks running into the larger rivers cut in many places by deep gorges. As along the lower Fitzroy, the rivers and creeks are marked by permanent pools, which support rich vegetation of trees and pandanus palms in the drier months. In the wet, the warramba (river flood or torrent) flows in spurts of a week or so, and then the flood water drains and the cleansed pools remain. The pools, billabongs and springs are resource rich. However, large migratory fish, such as barramundi, are not found at the top of the Hann river where numerous waterfalls prevent the fish from travelling upstream. Significant in the ranges landscape are caves which provide shelter and are home to resident Wanjina, the creators and protectors of the land. As elaborated in Section 5.0., these caves are religious centres for each of the clan groupings of the Ngarinyin.

Further east along the river system, the Mimbi Caves in Gooniyandi country are located along limestone ranges rich with underground springs. Mimbi represents a key spirit centre which is also central to a distinct trading route known as wunan, and renown as a place of refuge during the last century (Mimbi Goorroomba, 2000).

Climatic conditions range from a tropical summer, usually referred to colloquially as 'the wet', to harsh dry conditions and high temperatures which range from 20 degrees to over 40 degrees celsius. In the wet season, the Fitzroy River becomes a raging torrent of muddy water which in some places can be several kilometres wide.

In the dry the water recedes and the river channel is revealed as the river winds its way to the mudflats of King Sound. Permanent pools and
billabongs remain along the river and tributary creeks. The banks of permanent water holes and main river beds are lined with fig, freshwater mangrove, eucalypts and large paperbark trees. The creeks which become dry in the summer months, for example Manguel Creek, become dry and salt-crusted supporting forests of paperbark trees. Throughout the lower Fitzroy region are areas of freshwater springs (such as Udialla Springs), both in the flood plains and rocky ranges (e.g. Honeymoon Springs in the Grant Ranges). These springs, like the permanent pools along the river, are culturally significant, inhabited by mythical water snakes (variously interpreted across the language groups as *yungurrungu, unggud, kalpurru*). At one site, Kalayanmayi on Jikarli Creek, there is a spring under the permanent pool. The springs create rich ecosystems that dramatically contrast with the surrounding landscape.

Fig. 5 Kalayanmayi pool on Jikarli/Geegully Creek
North to the gorges and east along the Fitzroy River across Plum Plain and through Fitzroy Crossing and Geikie Gorge to Bunuba and then Gooniyandi country, the red earth, low lying hills and ranges and extensive areas of cleared land reveal the extent to which the region has been affected by pastoral development. Indeed much of the Fitzroy Valley can be understood by acknowledging the impact of the pastoral industry, agriculture activity and mining (see e.g. Hawke and Gallagher 1989 and the Kimberley Land Council’s 1991 Crocodile Hole Report).

The Fitzroy Valley’s diverse terrain, and distance from the original centre of colonial government in the southwest of the State, and some 3,500 kilometres by road from Perth (formerly known as the Swan River Colony) meant that it was one of the last parts of Western Australia to be colonised by the British. It was not until the 1880s, or one hundred and twenty years ago, that graziers and their stock intruded into the area and gold was found that European settlers started to forge their presence.

Throughout the 19th and 20th century, many desert-living families migrated north to the Kimberley. This migration occurred as early as the latter part of the nineteenth century and as recently as the 1950s and 1960s. An example of this migratory process is revealed in the following account from a Wangkajunga woman (formerly a resident of the Moola Bulla Native Settlement [see below] and more recently of Mindirardi near Fitzroy Crossing) who reveals notions of family, bush lore, land-based associations and the primacy of wells and water use as she and her family travelled north along the Canning Stock Route to the traditional country of the river people:

We found some bush potato and I travelled carrying water in a coolamon on my head. I waited for my husband to come. Weeya [nothing]. I waited one night. We [my husband and I] travelled for one night to [another] well. We went digging for yams all around. We passed another well but the water was too salty. Then we came into Lake Gregory on that Bililuna [a pastoral station] side. It was water melon country all round. We didn’t want to leave that water melon country. Then we stayed at that old Bililuna station. In the new Bililuna station,
people were working for no money. Just a stick of tobacco and tea and flour and sugar and some *buliman* [bullock meat]. Then we went bush from that station. We travelled round that Christmas Creek River to a place called *Pinapo*. We came to a station the *kartiya* [Whitefells, Europeans] call Bohemia Downs. We worked nanny goats there. No money...[so]...I ran away. Then we went to Thangoo Station. We went through to Christmas Creek but I got very sick (quoted in Toussaint 1995, pp.98-99).

Aboriginal narratives on how they or their ancestors had migrated out of desert regions into the Fitzroy Valley are a common part of local history, but there are few written documentations of the first encounters that occurred between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the area. One was recorded in Alex McRae’s book, titled *Trip to the Fitzroy River from Roebuck Bay in the year 1866* (1881):

> There were a few natives on the river as we passed down, who were not a little surprised to see us, and made off in great haste when we fired at some ducks...The last 3 miles were through lightly timbered country which had been lately burnt and is now covered with fine green grass 6” high; saw 18-20 natives on the plain, they were engaged in burning the grass for pigeon's eggs which are numerous. We rode up to some of them; they were not armed and appeared very frightened of us, and tried to hide themselves in the grass (p.4).

Some Aboriginal people were forcibly relocated from their traditional lands by pastoralists and government officers and taken to the Moola Bulla Native Settlement, a government institution established in 1910 in the East Kimberley, just outside Halls Creek. When government authorities closed Moola Bulla in 1955, almost two hundred people were evicted, most of whom migrated into the Fitzroy Crossing townsite or camped on the banks of the Fitzroy River (Kimberley Language Resource Centre [1997] provides Indigenous stories related to Moola Bulla, including historical narratives associated with rivers and waters).
The Federal Pastoral Industry Award was also an important event in the region’s history. Introduced by the Commonwealth Government in 1968, and enacted in 1969, it served as a major catalyst for massive social dislocation. Countless Aboriginal people either left, or were evicted from, stations where owners and/or managers claimed that they could not afford to pay full wages to Aboriginal workers (despite the fact that White workers were being paid a full wage for the same work as that done by Aborigines). Increased mechanisation in the pastoral industry (e.g. helicopters for mustering and greater use of fencing) also drastically reduced the need for Aboriginal labour.

Department of Social Security (DSS) entitlements, such as Unemployment Benefits, the Aged Pension and Child Endowment, while not uniformly available to Aborigines, became more readily accessible throughout the 1960s. A further consequence of eviction from stations was that many workers and their dependents migrated into towns such as Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and Halls Creek in the late 1960s and early 1970s, causing increased pressure on available resources and living conditions, including fresh accessible water.

The 1960s was also a time when the Australian Land and Cattle Company (ALCCO), which had purchased Liveringa Pastoral Station and a number of other leases approximately 80 kilometres east of Derby, gained government approval to establish the Camballin Irrigation Project near the current Looma and Jarlmadangah communities off the Great Northern Highway. Over the years of the project, millions of government, industry and private dollars were spent on the infrastructure, which included the 17 mile dam, the barrage (Fitzroy Weir) and levy banks. Without consultation with Aboriginal groups, the flood plains were levelled and ploughed, and at the later stages a storage silo constructed, but never used, at Broome jetty for the export of planned crops. According to a Kimberley Land Council Newsletter titled ‘The Future of the Fitzroy Valley: Issues in Development’ (n.d.):

Three successive developers failed at Camballin and the Government sustained considerable financial losses. Traditional lands of the (Nyikina) were seriously affected by the Camballin project with
massive land degradation and erosion resulting from the water regulation.

In the course of field research for this report, a number of Jarlmadangah Informants, especially Harry and John Watson, emphasised problems related to the lack of consultation with Indigenous communities about the Camballin project (its establishment and aftermath). They expressed concern that the situation could re-occur. Ivan Watson, as recorded in Marshall (1988), encapsulates reactions to Camballin:

That whole area (around Camballin) is just scoured to the billyo, because of the levee banks that they saw fit to put in. They were trying to divert the water from Seventeen Mile Creek/Uralla Creek/Lake Jocelyn, or whatever you want to call it, back into the river. But that's ridiculous, because it's the river that throws its banks and not the creek (p.173).

It appears that the Camballin project moved through a number of disasters as developers tried to make the irrigation viable. Almost forty years later, deteriorating infrastructure and substantial debris of the failed Camballin project remain on-site. Remnants from the project, including levy banks, dam walls, barrage across the river and a variety of pump casings, culverts, roads and channels continue to exist (and to deteriorate), and no attempt has been made to rehabilitate the country. Consequently, the debris continues to have a detrimental impact on the Fitzroy River, including annual flooding of the Lower Fitzroy, the cultural life of local Indigenous communities and the ecology.

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14 See also the 1986 report by Halpern Glick Pty. Ltd. which assessed the establishment of the Mt Wynne dam in the same area without regard to Nyikina concerns, especially with respect to the Mandiwini site.

15 It is unclear why the State's environmental watchdog, the Environmental Protection Authority, has not been active at Camballin.
Fig. 6 Barrage, Fitzroy Weir, built for the Camballin Project

Fig. 7 Remaining debris from the failed Camballin Project
While the Bibliography reveals the extent to which research has been conducted on Indigenous relationships to land in the Fitzroy Valley, there has been less attention paid to documenting Indigenous relationships to water. One of the reasons for this is that most Indigenous persons experience and represent the land and the water as one entity: within the broad parameters of cultural continuities within the context of change, land and water are integral to the past in the present and future; they are physical as well as cosmological, religious as well as profane. In other words, in Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal languages, thoughts and actions, land, water, religious beliefs and humans cannot be separated. The following example, focused on the ever-present rainbow snake kalpurtu, illuminates this point:

The very first beings were the kalpurtu. They are both man and serpent. In this region, they were sent out from their centre of origin at Paliyira, a Walmajarri jila west of Yakanarra. One kalpurtu in particular defines the region of Yakanarra community and its peoples. This is Moankanambi. In his early journeys he arrived at Pelican billabong (Yakanarra) very close to the place where white people later built Old Cherrabun homestead. Here he looked for a deep water jila to settle in and drew a boomerang out of his stomach, in the manner that mabarn or 'witchdoctors' can, and threw it three times in three different directions in search of water. Each time it returned to him since the water it found was not deep enough. In the process it made the flood plains that are cut by Gap Creek (Kungurrmin), Cherrabun Creek (Mankurin) and Christmas Creek. On the fourth throw it sank into the jila called Moankanambi near Mona Bore on Gogo Station and the kalpurtu knew that this would

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16This account is from our research among a number of Walmajarri, Mangala and Nyikina Informants. Not unusually with respect to oral traditions, renditions of kalpurtu vary. In some narratives, kalpurtu is blackbird/man and mythic being (in the form of a rainbow snake with a long beard) who makes a sound like a man, in others kalpurtu remains mythic being. See also Akerman (1981) and Kolig (1981) for discussion of kalpurtu. Kalpurtu is alternatively named in some literature as kaleru, galbudu and kaleru, and as yungurrungu among Ngarinyin.
be his resting place. He journeyed there and that is where he remains. When the hot season builds up and clouds appear over the desert it is Walmajarri practice to dig out the *jila* in a ritual manner to release the water and to make rain.\(^{17}\)

Another reason for a seeming lack of direct recognition in the available literature is that the rivers and waters of the Fitzroy Valley were not colonised to the same extent as was the land. While pastoralists and graziers needed the water for cattle and sheep grazing purposes, water use and associated activity (e.g. fishing) might be regarded as staying more readily within Indigenous fields of control and activity. It is also the case that, until the 1992 High Court *Mabo v The Commonwealth (No. 2)* Decision, which focused on the land and the sea rights of the Meriam Islander group on the Island of Mer in the Torres Straits, the struggle for Australian Indigenous Land Rights had tended to focus primarily on relationships to land.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{17}\)This practice is graphically depicted in the documentary film *Jila: waters of the Great Sandy Desert*.

\(^{18}\)For example, the final report of the WA Aboriginal Land Inquiry, devoted few sections to river, sea and water use (Seaman 1984).
In the Fitzroy Valley, as noted above, a heightened public interest in water use was exacerbated by the tremendous concern expressed by local groups, in particular the Bunuba and Gooniyandi, to news that a dam was to be built at Dimond Gorge (Jijidju). This should not imply, however, that textual and visual attention to water and culture has not occurred.

In addition to the 'Kuninglarah' painting by Walmajarri man, Alec Forrest, which features as the preface to this report, there are countless other examples where Aboriginal people express knowledge and interests in water, including that of another Walmajarri artist, Sweeney (Janjin) Rogers, who gave the following story for his 'Bunuba water' painting (extracted from Karrayili: an exhibition 1991, painting # 41, p.21):

These two men spoke different languages. One was a Bunuba man, the other Walmajarri. The Bunuba man dug for soakwater and drank the water and the Walmajarri man drank after him. When the Bunuba man drank, he put his language in the water so that after the Walmajarri man drank, he could speak that Bunuba story.

From the same 1991 exhibition, a painting titled 'Wajanturuman' by Walmajarri woman Alice Brown, reveals further insights into the significance of water and its relationship to cultural beliefs:

These two snakes were following the river. The male snake always fights with the female snake and he hunts her away from the two billabongs where he lives. He is selfish because he doesn't want to share the waterholes with her. There is a man who always goes to one of the waterholes for water while the snakes are fighting (painting # 52, p.28).

\[19\] A report titled 'Upper Fitzroy Valley: identification of a nationally significant historical and cultural landscape', prepared by Sandra Pannell for the Kimberley Land Council in 2000, focused on the area surrounding the Dimond Gorge site. While Indigenous Informants and traditional owners gave permission to access the report for the WRC study, a lawyer representing the Bunuba in a Native Title Claim recommended that it should be treated as a restricted document on the basis of client privilege. When the Dimond Gorge report becomes a public document, it should become more widely accessible.
Kentish and von Sturmer (1995) characterise the paintings of Wangkajunga artist, Jarinyanu (the late David Downes) as expressing a time when ‘the Ngarrangarri [Dreaming] Barn Owl Piwi created the waterhole at Kunayuna, and then reincarnated eons later in the present era’ (p.4). Not unusually, Jarinyanu related stories about his family’s cultural history to particular water sites through his paintings. The book on Kimberley artists by Ryan and Akerman (1993) also emphasises how paintings by Fitzroy Valley artists have often focused on the cultural significance of the Fitzroy River.

*Thangani Bunuba: Stories from the Bunuba Elders of the Fitzroy Valley* (1998), provides an evocative rendering of stories and paintings on Bunuba relationships to the Fitzroy River and other water resources, and a 1995 series of line drawings by Gooniyandi artist, Mervyn Street, titled Ward’Birra Gamba Warag-Goo (‘They Got Water for Work’), epitomises Indigenous interpretations of water with respect to Fitzroy Valley pastoral and economic life. A painting by Mervyn Street, titled ‘Three Snakes’, also depicts the importance of rainbow serpents and water to Gooniyandi life.

Fig. 9 Ward’birra Gamba Warag-Goo, ‘They Got Water for Work’, from an exhibition of paintings by Mervyn Street, Mangkaja Arts (Cat. 3)
The Kimberley Language Resource Centre in Fitzroy Crossing is also producing CD-ROMS which emphasise the importance of the rivers and waters for local groups, especially the Bunuba and Gooniyandi. The CDs are becoming a significant education tool about language, culture and water for use in schools.

In Mowaljarlai and Malnic (1993), Wanjina paintings are explained by the late David Mowaljarlai who stressed that the Ngarinyin believe that all permanent pools, whilst being inhabited by unggud, also have Wanjina who reside in and create caves next to each unggud. The renown Wanjina paintings are also believed to have been made by each Wanjina to mark his home. Mowaljarlai, who was one of the founders of the Ngarinyin Bush University, observed that, ‘there is never a cave, a painting site without unggud water’ (p.81).

Lowe and Pike (1991, pp.10-20), showing the intrinsic relationship between water and culture from the vantage point of Walmajarri desert groups, devote ten pages to beliefs and practices associated with water holes, and the

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Mervyn Street’s story for Three Snakes: ‘These three snakes were travelling through my country in the Ngarrangkarni [Dreamtime]. They spoke different languages and made the waterholes where they stopped. These waterholes mark the boundaries for the three different groups of people who have lived in that country since the Ngarrangkarni’. 
documentary films *A conversation with Butcher Cherel* (1998), and *Willigan's Fitzroy* (2000) focus on the importance of the Fitzroy River to the Bunuba and Gooniyandi. In *Willigan's Fitzroy*, for instance, Bunuba man Kevin Oscar, said that, 'The river system is full of Aboriginal culture, paintings and so on', and Joe Ross (also known as Willigan), stressed that 'The river has provided water for thousand of Aboriginal people; now we're getting back to the river and the young people are learning more about their country'.

Gooniyandi artist, Butcher Cherel, spoke on film of his river paintings as:

> helping to keep the land and the story alive...my father and uncle told me that story...all the young people got to learn that story...my country, Gooniyandi...the river is important, stories from the old time, Ngarrangarri [Dreaming] story...it's not a good idea to stop the river running, dam the river [because it is] feeding all the Aboriginal people in this place.

A map produced by Mangkaja Arts, a resource agency for artists and art production in Fitzroy Crossing, in conjunction with the Kimberley Land Council, details the cultural landscape by showing multiple linguistic, cultural and botanical associations with wells 39 to 51 along the Canning Stock Route (*Warntarri Purlumanupurru*, n.d.). Notably, these life-sustaining wells continue to be significant to past and present Fitzroy Valley communities.

Academic literature by anthropologists, historians, and linguists complement the sorts of published Indigenous accounts and depictions mentioned above. This literature includes distant historical findings, such as Capell’s (1939) discussion of the importance of rainbow serpents to the reproduction of water, and Kaberry’s (1939) description of rainmaking ceremonies. More recent accounts include Kolig’s (1981) discussion of *kalpurtu* (as discussed earlier) and a number of other beliefs and practices associated with the Fitzroy River (for example on pages 11, 12, 17, Kolig includes the river in depictions of the landscape), and Thomas (1981, p.86) recounts the centrality of 'rain stones' at Fossil Downs Pastoral Station, where members of the
Muluja Community now reside. During the course of fieldwork for this report, a number of Gooniyandi and Walmajarri people commented on the use of rain stones stored at the Muluja Community on Fossil Downs Pastoral Station and at Moankanmbi near Yakanarra. These stones play an intricate part in rainmaking ceremonial activity.

One of the most educative texts on the Fitzroy River and Indigenous communities is a detailed account of 'stories from the Fitzroy Valley drovers’ edited by Paul Marshall (1988). Titled *Raparapa Kularr Martuwarra* ('All right, now we go longside the river') many Aboriginal workers with ties to the river system in the Valley (including Harry and John Watson, whose insights have contributed to this report), explain these in historical and present-day narrative form. *Raparapa* also includes detailed maps showing some of the Aboriginal place names associated with rivers and other forms of water in the Fitzroy Valley (e.g. while the Fitzroy River is identified as the unifying link, pages 124-125 reveal sites along the Fitzroy from Udialla to Noonkanbah, and pages 164-165 detail sites from Noonkanbah to Christmas Creek [see Appendix 8.8. for copies of these maps]).

Fig. 11 Pajiman (with Pampila) holds a *pumu* rainstone near Moankanmbi
Hawke and Gallagher (1989) describe the creation and intrinsic importance of the Fitzroy River and its tributaries (e.g. pages 28 and 30), especially to Mangala, Nyikina and Walmajarri speakers caught up in the 1980 'Noonkanbah dispute', Pederson (1995) characterises Jandamarra as a Bunuba resistance leader whose use and knowledge of the cultural landscape and river system were central to his exploits in the early part of the last century, and Bohemia and McGregor (1995) show how Fitzroy Valley lands and rivers can be seen through pioneering Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences and eyes, in particular by recounting Bohemia's experience as a Kimberley tracker.21

Apart from academic publications such as these, spiritual and everyday Indigenous associations with water are recorded in unpublished reports, such as Akerman’s (1981) report on Mt Pierre Pastoral Station in which he documented the travels of rainbow snake kalpurtu, Akerman’s (1985) report on Gogo and Christmas Creek Pastoral Stations where a number of freshwater springs, creeks, soaks and ponds were recorded, and Kolig’s (n.d.) field research report which provides ethnographic data on rainmaking ceremonies and the exploits of kalpurtu.

21Other academic literature not referred to here includes geological findings, such as Lowry’s (1967) on cave spring systems in the Kimberley, and Playford’s (n.d.) geological survey of the Windjana and Geikie Gorges.
5.0. STUDY FINDINGS

5.1. A Preliminary Assessment

From indicative ethnographic data gathered in the field, and from an assessment of the relevant literature and paintings, it is clearly the case that Indigenous relationships to rivers and other sources of water (such as freshwater springs, billabongs, creeks, soaks, rains, pools) are an integral and active part of the cultural landscape. From this vantage point, it is evident that Aboriginal people have a right and a responsibility to be consulted when plans to modify, regulate or alter water systems and sources are raised.

The Fitzroy River, its intersection with the Margaret River in Bunuba country, and the rivers many tributaries, are embodied within spiritual and everyday life, as material in this section elaborates. In it, we focus directly on the lines of inquiry outlined in Section 3.1., while also making reference to material contained in Section 4.0. That some sections overlap reveals the inclusive and holistic nature of the study population’s cultural ethos and behaviours with respect to rivers, water reproduction and use. For river and desert-related groups, water, land, religion and law cannot be treated separately.22

5.2. Cultural Beliefs and Practices

Fitzroy Valley Indigenous groups conceptualise the rivers and all water sources as being inspired by the Dreaming, and inhabited by a complex of mythic beings regarded as living rainbow serpents or water snakes, which are variously known among the different groups as kalpurtu, unggud, yungurrungu. At another level, water sources are generally categorised within generic expressions such as jila or ‘living water’, warramba, meaning a flood or torrent of water, and, among desert groups in particular, as jumu or water which dries up. Despite a universality in cultural and physical conceptual understandings of the river country, knowledge and practice related to regional variation also exists. These interpretations are explained

22 Indigenous people commonly intertwine religion and customary law within an overarching set of cultural beliefs and practices: religion and law are interdependent. In some cases, women and men have introduced aspects of Christianity into Indigenous bodies of law, and/or identify as Christian. These complex issues cannot be developed within the scope of this report.
by reference to complementary narratives which include sometimes slightly varied descriptions. It is through the recounting of narratives and social action that groups along the river system explain the origins and the enduring significance of the relationship between humans and water.

The mythological significance of Wunumbuyu, discussed earlier, illustrates regional variation. Another example is that of Parrakapan, a permanent pool site near old Cherrabun Pastoral Station. This site was favoured for spearing crocodile when many Fitzroy Valley residents lived and worked permanently on pastoral stations (see also Section 4.2.). Parrakapan has a kalpurtu, as does another related waterhole on the Forrest River in the region of the Jubilee Downs Pastoral Station. Kalpurtu related to Parrakapan were put in the river pools by Wunyumbul. According to Informants, he travelled from the Leopold Ranges, killing two snakes which he turned into rivers.

Mythological accounts related to water production and management abound among all the language groups. As another example, Gooniyandi woman Morgal Sharpe, explains the creation of the jiliyarti billabong on Gogo Pastoral Station:

Two men [were] travelling from north to south. One man/goanna, his name Purngooloo, said to the others, 'you keep going, I’ll stay here'. The others tried to pull him along but he wouldn’t come. He stayed there in the jilji [sandhill]...left his eggs there. Then the other two had to stay there. Purngooloo made the water rise and the two men drowned. They turned into stone. You can see the stones when the water drops. Purngooloo made the jiliyarti...[people] can fish there, kid can swim little bit, but not near [those] rocks in the middle.

Morgal’s caution against disturbing the rocks representing the men/spirits who drowned, was made clear when Gooniyandi pastoral station worker, Jimmy Shandley, recounted how he and two other men tried to get near the rocks on one occasion but had to turn back to the river bank when the water suddenly started to swirl and become threatening. All three men were ill for several days after this experience.
Traditionally, people fished with spears or nets, such as by using rolled up grasses as a form of drag net to herd and trap the fish in a shallow area. Plant-based fish poisons were also used. These techniques are commonly employed today, especially by way of the *majarla* tree, branches from which are used to stun fish in the permanent pools. The *majarla* tree is generally regarded as the result of Wunumbuyu’s activity; it grows along the river banks and is commonly found in the area. This continuing link between Indigenous beliefs and knowledge about Wunumbuyu and the *majarla* tree, and practices related to the catching, cooking and the consumption of fish, provides a significant example of how contemporary Fitzroy Valley life can be understood.

In the days of stone axes the *majarla* trees would be cut down and carried on the shoulders of several men to an appropriate water source. Nowadays it is possible to cut the trees into suitable logs in *situ* with a steel axe and transport these to a river pool.

The poison logs are called *limara* in Walmajarri and Wangkajunga. The *limara* are cut the day before they are needed and left overnight for use the next day. The correct name for the *limara* was given by *kalpurtu* and in their cut state they are associated with Walungrari, discussed above. Revealing the extent to which cultural narratives have diverse relevance across the study area, the Walungrari starts in the region’s north, among Ngarinyin and Nyikina speakers, then travels from Yeeda along the Fitzroy River to the Noonkanbah Community, then eastwards where it terminates at Sturt Creek in Jaru country.

The fish poisoning technique is most effective when there is a good sized group of people who sit around the edges of the pool, half-submerged, and pound the bark of the logs in the pool, eventually stripping it from the log and throwing it into the water until the pool is evenly covered.
Fig. 12 Pampila cuts the *majarla* tree logs near Yakanarra

Fig. 13 Pajiman with the *limara* fish poisoning logs ready for use
Fig. 14 *Jangarla* water, the soapy substance which emerges after the *limara* are pounded.

Fig. 15 *Lagarr* fish poisoned by the *jangarla* water.
The bark produces a soapy substance and the frothy water that results from this activity is called jangarla in Walmajarri country. The degree of saturation of the pool and the even coverage of the poison is judged by a red stain that spreads from the bark. When this is sufficient the fishers retire to wait. After an hour or two the fish rise to the surface, first jumping to escape the pool, then expiring and floating on the surface where they are easily gathered. Barramundi and bream are gathered in this way, but during the course of fieldwork for this report, only the bony lagarr (European name not identified) fish surfaced. While the lagarr flesh provides a good food source, the hundreds of tiny hair-like bones make eating the fish difficult. The technique that many Walmajarri and Wangkajunga people have developed to deal with this problem and make use of the food source is to cook the fish in the usual way over coals, then leave it to dry in the sun for one or two days. The dried fish are then pounded with a rock, mixed with water into a paste, and consumed.

The interdependent nature of cultural life is also evident in the use of riverine resources for medicine. Among Nyikina, Mangala and Ngarinyin peoples it was reported that the bark of the kiliwal [red bloodwood] tree can be boiled and used to remedy colds and flu. The bark of the birral-birral [emu bush] is also sometimes used for sores and ringworm, and wilkara [snake vine] bound around the head for curing headaches and arthritis. The bark of bandirral [cadjubut paperbark, Maleleuca argentina] can be stripped to make containers for cooking and carrying, and the leaves of the libirrarra [white eucalypt, Eucalyptus comaldulensis] are often used to flavour fish and meat. A number of Gooniyandi and Walmajarri women reiterated this information and also described how river mussels cooked slowly in a pot over a coal fire produced a milky liquid helpful for 'cold sick' symptoms. Plants which grow along the river, such as the majarla tree and the leaves and branches of the 'konkerberry bush' [Carissa lanceolata] which are fired to create smoke for rituals associated with health and ritual healing, were commonly referred to by members of all river and desert groupings.
Fig. 16 Cissy Nuggett repairs a fishing net

Fig. 17 Kordidi drinks fresh water from a spring in the St George Ranges
During the course of field research, Informants regularly reported the language names for a variety of species of birds, fish, plants, trees, animals and insects, and some of these have been recounted in Appendix 8.5. The broad range of language groups under discussion here prevents extensive recording of these names, however. If further research along these lines is undertaken, it was suggested by Informants that the linguistic name of the country in which a certain species was recorded should be given priority, e.g. a yam found in Walmajarri country should be identified as karnti, a yam found in Gooniyandi country should be identified as bila.

5.3. Social and Economic Issues

The presence of adequate water is a present-day pre-condition for the establishment of Indigenous communities and outstations. In a sense, similarly to earlier circumstances on the colonial frontier, some communities have found themselves in competition with the pastoral industry for water sources, since many excision applications have been rejected or modified because they required existing stock watering places, including bores. For example, the original Yakanarra group first established themselves at old Cherrabun Station where a number of community members had lived and worked, but which is now abandoned. They moved to Mona Bore [Moankanambi], but were persuaded in the late 1980s by local community welfare staff to move back to Fitzroy Crossing because their presence was thought to be interfering with stock. They returned to their Moankanambi in 1989, initially carting water from a local bore but later by erecting their own bore and a small water tank. Recently, a tank of much larger proportions was installed and a solar power pump erected. The provision of power, water and housing enables Yakanarra to run a well-established community on their traditional homelands. This co-existent example of combined past and present beliefs and practices associated with water is a common history for many established communities and one that that emergent Fitzroy Valley communities often aspire to.
Fig. 18 Pampila uses a throw net to catch bait

Fig. 19 A barramundi is gutted (note the paperbark in which the fish was later wrapped, tied and then cooked slowly in a stone earth oven covered by coals and sand)
Field research showed that all along the rivers, adults and children go fishing whenever possible. In our assessment, if school, work and other responsibilities did not prevent it, many people who live in the focus communities and towns would go fishing on a daily basis. Riverine resources such as fish (bream, barramundi, catfish, swordfish), freshwater eels, turtle, mussels and cherrabun (freshwater prawns) are a vital part of the Aboriginal diet, especially for those trying to live on social security (DSS) entitlements and Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) money, which is diverted from DSS payments (and sometimes referred to as 'working for the dole'). On the weekends, most community and family vehicles set off for the river or a billabong, often to stay and fish all day and/or to camp overnight. Some 'moonlight' fishing also takes place, especially on weekends where nets are dragged for cherrabun.

It is rarely the case that people take more than a bag of flour, tea, sugar, milk, matches and salt on fishing trips; most indicated they were assured of catching enough fish to feed their needs and take some of the catch back to their community for extended kin. Fish are caught by lines trapped by nets, or poisoned by use of the majarla tree and then taken from the water. Attention is commonly paid to securing the right bait, activity for which often occurs at different locations. For example, a billabong such as jiliyarti on Gogo Station provides small fish, such as 'rifle fish', which are then used for bait to catch the more prized fish such as barramundi at the river; similarly, frogs are dug from sandbanks for river fishing elsewhere. Mamanjiya Nuggett put it this way, 'chook pellets are good for cherrabun, raw meat and frogs for bream, and barramundi and catfish like live fish (such as small perch)...'.

The river is also a site where children learn about cultural life from adults. During the course of fieldwork, children commonly accompanied adults on travelling and fishing expeditions, activity which provided the circumstances for learning about the cultural landscape, including religious associations, varieties of fish, fishing techniques, place names, consequences of the seasons and family relationships.
Fig. 20 Nannan and Lyall Shandley at *pawpawjarti* on the Fitzroy River

Fig. 21 Morgal Sharpe, Patrick Green, Leonie Nuggett and Amy Nuggett fishing at *jiliyarti* billabong
Fig. 22 A typical dinner camp of fish, damper and tea at Kunyun-nyunu-kurtany

Fig. 23 Hunting trip with Harry Watson and family at Manguel Creek
Some sites have become important recreation areas known to be places where children can learn about the place, while also have some fun. For instance, Bulany is a spring-fed rock hole near Yakanarra where local children learn to swim and community school teachers like to camp. It is also a popular fishing spot where eels can be found. The presence of water means that lush vegetation produces a micro-climate among the rocks and a source of food and shade to animals and birds.

It is evident from field research for this report and other documentation that the river represents cultural meaning and various forms of economic support, such as with respect to providing additional food resources to a group whose main income derives from minimal social security entitlements (Crough and Christophersen [1993] detail an economic profile of Kimberley communities). But it is also sometimes the case, especially with respect to water sources near towns, that the river system is thoughtlessly treated. For instance, several Informants lamented the fact that parts of the river were littered by tourists and by local people with rubbish (old food containers, empty cigarette packets, disused cans). As a Wangkajunga woman put it, 'they forgot about looking after it (the river and sandbank)'. That tourism is on the increase and that social problems exist is a harsh reality, but that the outcome can sometimes impact negatively on the river (and therefore on associated human activity) in locations such as Bullock Crossing near the Fitzroy Crossing townsite, is cause for wide concern. In our assessment, this matter and the environmental and cultural damage done at Camballin requires urgent attention, perhaps to be taken up with local Indigenous communities and environmental organisations (e.g. Fitzroy Valley Cultural Health), as well as the Water and Rivers Commission and tourism authorities. It is also the case that, despite the Fitzroy Valley being a water-rich resource along the river frontage, some communities are without accessible fresh water. Members of the Mimbi Community, for example, cart water from nearby springs because of operational and maintenance difficulties with the community’s bore.

But note that some water sources are restricted on the basis of age, gender and ritual status. One of the outcomes of a young man’s transition to manhood, for instance, is that he is no longer able to swim in areas he did as a child.
Fig. 24 Deep water spring, Mimbi Caves

Fig. 25 Rubbish dumped at Bullock Crossing, Fitzroy River
5.4. 'River' and 'Desert' Cultures

Among groups in the Fitzroy Valley, distinctions are often made between 'river' and 'desert'. Within these groupings, members of those groups who most recently migrated from the desert (as discussed above), such as Mangala, Walmajarri and Wangkajunga identify as 'desert people' or 'desert mob', and the Ngarinyin to the north of the river and the Gooniyandi and Bunuba to the east most commonly identify as 'river people'. These ecological distinctions have parallels with other Indigenous groupings throughout the Australian continent.24

Members of river and desert Fitzroy Valley groups today regularly exploit the river and its resources. Some desert groups comment that the river people taught them knowledge and practices associated with the river, such as learning how to fish with nets and bait. Around the Camballin/Mt Hann area in the Lower Fitzroy, the desert people started working on pastoral stations such as Yeeda, Mt Anderson, Luluigi, Liveringa, Myroodah and Nerrima. When Udialla was disbanded after the Second World War, many Mangala people were transferred to the La Grange Mission, south of Broome. Elsewhere, on the eastern portion of the Fitzroy River, Walmajarri and Wangkajunga desert groups migrated north up the Canning Stock Route where they worked and resided on stations such as Gogo, Fossil Downs, Mt Pierre and Bohemia, places with which Gooniyandi have traditional land-tenure affiliation.

In contemporary settings, river and desert groups share cultural responsibility for the river, whilst acknowledging the requirements of Customary Law, through connections such as birth, death, burial and totemic affiliations, including conception sites, or jarriny (see below; also spelt djarin). Some Informants, such as Pimalo, a Wangkajunga speaker, recalled how she and her family were 'frightened of that snake, kalpurtu... he didn't know us'

24Anthropologist WEH Stanner (1965), for instance, wrote over thirty years ago about how the 'forest' and 'river' people in the Northern Territory organised territorial alliances and resources around these distinctions. A similar distinction around desert and river can be made in the Fitzroy Valley today. Along the Kimberley coast, further distinctions are made among saltwater, river and desert groups. Morgal Sharpe reported that when she visited Port Hedland in the Pilbara recently, she was unable to 'fish properly in the saltwater country'. Morgal is renown as being an excellent fisherwoman in the river country of the Gooniyandi.
when she and her family migrated from the southern desert regions to the northern Kimberley. On the other hand, Pimalo described the desert rainmaking ceremony, *kurtal*, as one with which she was familiar, and as a desert-inspired ritual which was a 'good one for rain'.

![Fig. 26 Kurtal Dance, Spider Snell, Mangkaja Arts](image)

*Djarin* (*jarriny*), generally and publicly known as conception sites, or *rayi*, places with which individuals have totemic affiliations, is one of the ways in which river and desert Fitzroy Valley groups link humans, land, water and culture. In addition to marriage alliances (e.g. marriages between Walmajarri or Wangkajunga women and men with non-desert women and men, such as Bunuba or Gooniyandi), it is also one of the ways in which desert migrants have developed ties to the river which are acknowledged by all.\(^{25}\)

\(^{25}\)Kaberry (1939), Capell (1952), Kolig (1981) and Toussaint (1995) all write about the social and cultural significance of *jarriny* among groups in the Fitzroy Valley.
Anthropologist, Erich Kolig, wrote about the relationship between one’s rayi, as conceptualised through jarriny:

the rai (rayi) as spirit child ’lives in water’ having been placed there by the Rainbow Serpent (which) leads to pregnancy...it may (also) appear in a dream vision...all these things are thought to contain the life giving essences that eventually produce a particular human being. The person then calls this item (either food, water, or a specific dream vision) his [or her] djarin (Kolig 1981, pp.33-34).

Walmajarri woman and desert migrant, Amy Nuggett, explains Fitzroy River jarriny associations for her now adult children:

Walmajarri kid got jarriny all along the river and billabong too, like Gooniyandi and Bunuba...my daughter got that catfish jarriny...big mob jarriny all along the river.

Ngarinyinin people reported that the spirits of children are made by unggud, often found by the child’s father in the dambun of the father. The site of a person’s unggud is a crucial element of Ngarinyinin land tenure law.

5.5. Environmental Interpretations

While the study area is culturally complex, rich and diverse, so too is its environment: one of the most consistent points made to each researcher was that the environment is cultural. The people, land, rivers and all flora and fauna are intricately interconnected. In the area of Moll Gorge, for example, the Wanjina Manggirdi-girdi (ta-ta lizards) reside in Wiyawanti (the name for Moll Gorge and a round hill above the gorge). In a cave under the water lives an unggud, considered to be an extremely ‘cheeky snake’ with the potential to ‘drown the whole country’. People reported that she could often be heard making a droning sound, moving around, hitting the water with her tail and shifting rocks so that the floods would come.
Ways in which each language group describes how Fitzroy Valley rivers and waters are created by particular mythic beings (such as Parrakapan, Wuyunumbul, Purngooloo) whose essence lives on in the present has already been shown. Cultural explanations for water include reference to permanent rivers, creeks, billabongs and so on, and these have a relationship to vital needs and resources, such as water for drinking and bathing\textsuperscript{26}, the growth of seeds, bush foods (including yams, the black stems inside lilies, berries) and medicines (discussed below), and ceremonial activity, such as the rainmaking ritual, \textit{kurtal}. Everyday examples include relied on driftwood for fuel after flood waters have subsided, a belief that an abundant rainfall leads to plentiful insect life for the production of ‘fat goannas’ ready for hunting, cooking, sharing and eating, and the local Gooniyandi-named ‘gooragoora’ bird, which sings to indicate that rain is on its way: one thing or event is inevitably and logically connected to another.

\textbf{Fig. 27} Sally Kanyan and Annie Milgin collecting mussels on the banks of Kunyun-nyunu-kurtany

\textsuperscript{26} Maureen Carter, Cultural Health in Fitzroy Crossing, emphasised the part the river often played in enabling local people to ‘have a bogey’ [wash] in high temperature conditions when community ablution facilities were not operating or accessible.
Clouds are also central to understanding the cyclical nature of Indigenous cultural values and water. Among Walmajarri people, for instance, there are several kinds of clouds: *mayilbu* is low and near the ground and signals the need to commence rainmaking ritual; *nangkali* clouds hold *kalpurru*; and *kudukudu* clouds contain the seeds of food species that will wash into the ground with the rain and multiply. When clouds are close to the earth, men gather rain stones (*pumu*; see also above) which are usually found near *jila*. Secret ritual is performed by senior men who dig while singing to the *kalpurru*. Women also sing the relevant song-cycle but do so separately from the men. When lightning starts to crack in the sky, a switch is made to the song-cycle associated with lightning. This way the lightning knows that people are singing to make rain and will avoid striking them. Sometimes men cover themselves with clay from the *jila*, and after a few days the rain comes. Women beat the air and the ground with bushes and cry out to the *kalpurru* to give them plenty of food in the coming season.
Clouds, rain and ritual practice assure a good wet season and as many Informants explained, when there is a 'good wet' life will also be good. A flood occurring as a result of a long and solid downpour during the wet season was unanimously described as a natural way to 'clean' the river and wash out all the debris. Our research showed that most people were prepared to live with extensive flooding and the possibility of being isolated from towns such as Fitzroy Crossing during certain times of the year because the end result was so positive: clean water, and a hoped for increase in plants and wildlife, including fish. As noted earlier, when the river floods, it is generally referred referred to as *warramba*. Informant Darby Nangkiriny explains the importance of a seasonal cycle which relies on flooding:

Big *warramba* is good for the country. When he running...he get down *raparapa*, 'side of the river', gets all the dry leaves and old water in the river and some in the creek. Have all the water living in the billabong...Billabongs get their water from the *warramba*. *Bakarrarra* [Dreamtime] story about the big flood because some bad people cause the flood
to come. In the marduwarra [river] he [warramba] finish coming in the cold weather time.

Pansy Nulgit expressed similar sentiments with respect to the Hann River:

The floodwater clean up all the country, gumalanga waladba-mangga, like raking up all the rubbish. Cleans the pools out, get rid of all the jalgu [weed]. This water is last year’s rain. Next year the flood will bring fresh, clean water. Fill up all the malnganbudu [billabongs] for the turtles and lilies.

Wayuwu Kogolo made the point that, at the present time, the old bridges which cross the Fitzroy and Margaret Rivers (and various tributaries) serve as fish traps where fish get caught in the annual floods. A common sight is people waiting at the bridges and other crossings when this seasonal change occurs. A good wet season also means that station dams will be filled and water will be plentiful for the cattle industry.27

Rain which contains invisible seeds that enter the ground and produce animal species associated with water (e.g. goanna, frogs, landcrabs, freshwater eels, turtle, fish, ducks) was also commonly raised. As well as food resources such as these, non-food birds such as panjur, a type of seagull which arrives in the desert during the early wet season, was mentioned by Hanson Boxer and Warford Pajiman in the Yakanarra and Djugerari study. With the crabs, eels and turtles, the panjur was described as being like a dissonant echo of the sea in a land usually seen as its antithesis. This echo can be seen also in the presence of the remains of large sea shells, conch and baler, often found on the ground near jila. These are said to have been left by the mythic beings but can also be the result of trading routes (or wunan) from the coast into the country of the desert people. Ground stone axe heads of black granite (not from the region) were commonly found in the vicinity of jila. The deep, cool underground water which is animated by the rainbow serpent thus gives birth to the cycle of water, beginning with the clouds, then the rain that bears the seeds of food species, and necessarily the running creeks, billabongs,

27Several pastoral stations in the area are now owned and run by Aboriginal pastoralists, including Noonkanbah, Mt Anderson and Mt Pierre. Notably, Aboriginal people commonly expressed concern about non-Aboriginal needs for water too.
claypans and rockpools. These various water sources all have their particular water qualities and uses, many of them seasonally dependent.

Much more could be known about Indigenous views of underground water sources. Matters that could be usefully investigated in the future might include how the waters are related below the ground and what relationship they may have to surface waters.28

5.6. Cultural Responsibilities and Aspirations

Indigenous groups with affiliations to Fitzroy Valley lands, rivers and waters believe that it is their responsibility to look after 'country' to ensure the replenishment of seasonal resources on which they are ultimately interdependent. This is primarily achieved through a range of beliefs and behaviours, including ritual and song and 'talking to', or 'singing for', country'. Jarlmadangah man, Harry Watson, put it this way:

We [used to] live under the permit. We had to have ways to look after the country. That's how we did it—we sing the country, we pass on the stories about the country. We keep the country alive with these stories.

Conservationist practices also exist, such as never wasting fish, leaving excess bait for crocodiles, and only taking enough to satisfy immediate needs and/or assisting kin with special food during periods of grieving, ritual taboos on the consumption of beef, and sickness.

Along the Fitzroy River, certain rocks and pools are associated with the increase of natural phenomena. For instance, one aspect of Wanjina associated with the permanent pools (unggud) is the increase of all natural species of the river country. Ngarinyin elder, David Mowaljarlai, explains the importance of increase stones and their relationship to Wanjina, including the role of dambun [land-related religious clans] to ensure the efficacy of the

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28In the 1980 dispute at Noonkanbah, the traditional owners expressed distress about surface and deep drilling for oil. They argued that extensive underground activity could harm the spirits related to an important fertility site (Hawke and Gallagher 1989). It is likely that a similar water surface/depth association exists.
increase stones. Mowaljarlai’s account also shows the importance of Indigenous beliefs that rivers must run free so that the spiritual force of the river is not interfered with or blocked (for example, by damming the river) so that the increase of all species is maintained.

Each *dambun* [has] different and very special increase stones which are important for hunting, for ceremony, and as signal markers for travellers. These stones must be constantly maintained...[at the end of] the wet season...we see those clouds...and they tell us this year will be good...then we have plenty of kangaroo....this man represents the kangaroo, this man the berries, this man will represent the fish of all the Wanjina...We got to increase storm, storm there standing up...this Wanjina know where is the fish and this where prayer place where they supply fish (Mowaljarlai 1992, p.186).

Water sources visited with custodians during the course of this study inevitably showed how humans have a responsibility to look after the cultural environment. For instance, water connected to the creation of claypans, or *pirnti* (also spelt *pindi*), are regarded as having dried out. As the *pirnti* are said to belong to the *kalpurtu* as part of the *jila* complex, when the main *jila* is dug out by its traditional owners or senior custodians, special song-cycles for the *pirnti* are sung. These have been given by *kalpurtu* from the Dreaming. *Kalpurtu* is called upon to make the *pirnti* rich and deep with food. The songs are again sung when the *pirnti* are re-visited to make the *kalpurtu* happy, even in the dry season when no water or apparent life remains. Leaving the *pirnti*, people go on to rely on the rockholes (such as Bulany) and the *jila*.

Knowledge about water sources has usually been passed down through generations of men and women, but knowledge about the location of soak waters can also be divined in dreams, or more practically by listening to bird song and seeking where certain birds congregate. Because all the *jila*, rockholes and fishing places are used cyclically by local people as seasons

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29 The terms ‘traditional owners’ and ‘senior custodians’ are used interchangeably in accordance with Informants’ desire to explain various relationships and responsibilities to land and water. In a more detailed and substantive piece of research, these terms would be developed and clarified.
change, they are also sites of shared memory and history. Visiting these places is not just a practical issue of finding water, but also an occasion for remembering birth places, significant life activities and the death of previous generations: Fitzroy Valley communities, like Indigenous peoples elsewhere, have a responsibility to visit and to remember.

Fig. 30 Salt encrusted dry creek that runs into Jikarli Creek in the wet

Fig. 31 Walkawalka, a permanent spring in the Manguel Creek area
A particular etiquette is also required when 'looking after' or approaching a water source, either to assist its renewal or to introduce a new person. For example, *jila* holding *kalpurtu* are normally dangerous to approach. They are not like any other Dreamtime snake that may also be a known species, for instance a King Brown or a Carpet snake. Similarly to other mythic beings, *kalpurtu* retain benevolent and malevolent qualities; a *kalpurtu* can bring misfortune or death if it is disturbed. For this reason, it is important to approach the *kalpurtu* singing the correct song for the particular *kalpurtu* and his *jila*. Walmajarri, Wangkajunga, Nyikina, Ngarinyin and Mangala speakers emphasise that it cannot be just any song, nor can it be a made up song or a 'dreamed' song that may be appropriate in other contexts. It is the song given to the people from the Dreamtime, and it makes the mythic being in the form of a rainbow serpent happy to hear because he knows he has not been forgotten.

That Indigenous persons have a responsibility to introduce outsiders or visitors to water sources, or let the water source know if a change in social relations has occurred, including death, is also evident. Amy Nuggett reported that a deceased's mother or father should attend the river, drink some of the water, then blow it out and back into the river as part of a grieving ritual. The river also provides fish for bereaved relatives, especially for those kin who will not be permitted to eat meat products for varying periods of time following a death. Known as *jaminyjarti* or *jaginy*, food taboos on the consumption of meat clearly means that successful fishing is not only central to religious laws, respect for the deceased and grieving kin, but also to diet and nutrition. Tinned fish is sometimes used in circumstances surrounding death, but freshly caught and smoked fish, or fished cooked on coals, is usually preferred. It is the task of certain kin to ensure a steady supply of freshly cooked fish for consumption by grieving relatives.
Fig. 32 Pindi at Moankanambi

Fig. 33 Site where the *yungurrungu* (mythic snake) nearly drowned someone (Kunyun-nyun-kurtany pool)
In Bunuba country, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal visitors are required to follow a certain etiquette when near the Darngku site at Geikie Gorge. A sign near the site advises:

This area holds great significance for Aboriginal people. Visiting Aboriginal people, not from the Bunuba tribe, must splash water over their heads from the area. This cleanses them and clears their presence in the area. They must talk to the spirits in and around the rock asking for permission to use the area and be protected while there.

When in Ngarinyin country during the course of fieldwork for this report, a Karajarri woman expressed concern for her accompanying grandson whenever he was out of sight, constantly calling him and warning him to ‘watch out for that snake’. Edna Hopiga stated that she was worried she and her grandson had not been properly introduced to Ngarinyin waters and that the yungurrunga (water serpents) were responsible for a number of drownings and injuries people sustained after visiting water sites.

Significant in the context of possibilities related to damming the river, and relevant to the distress which emerged over Dimond Gorge, is that the rivers must run free. Indigenous responsibilities and aspirations are embedded within a belief that the spiritual force of the river should never be blocked so that the increase of all species, including humans, is ensured.

5.7. Consequences of Water Change over Time

Fitzroy Valley groups link environmental degradation to a lack of proper cultural maintenance of water sources, as well as consequences of pastoral and touristic activity. Some custodians today transmit less detailed knowledge of significant rituals, and young people familiar with their own languages and the topography of their traditional environment, are not always prepared to learn about the rituals. While cultural practices survive

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30 The word kartiya is a common Indigenous Kimberley term for non-Aboriginal people or Europeans.
31 Sarah Yu broke her ankle not long after finishing fieldwork on the Hann River. Pansy Nulgit concluded that the unggud had ‘got’ Sarah because she had not been correctly introduced to the pools.
and continue, as illustrated in this report and elsewhere, there is a danger that some water related-stories, activities and song-cycles may disappear. In conjunction with this possibility, the area has suffered from pastoralism and other forms of expansion, and many Informants observed that the type and amount of bush food and fish were less abundant: some also attributed this to the neglect of *kalpurtu/unggud/yungurrungu*. Walmajarri Informants such as Pampila, for instance, hope to dig out the *jila* of Moankanambi at Yakanarra on a more regular basis, performing the correct (restricted) ritual, and singing the song-cycle associated with *kalpurtu* to ensure rain and replenishment of the lands, waters and all other species.

Jarlmadangah Community representatives, John and Harry Watson, spoke of the Fitzroy River as getting wider and shallower, and as flood water moving much faster than it used to. Harry Watson described the river as travelling 'like an arrow, going straight ahead instead of curving like a snake'. From insights built on countless generations of knowledge about the river system, Watson lamented the devastation of erosion:

> The river is not travelling in its own channel anymore. Plus the loss of native grasses, cattle and roads compacting the ground and mining activities. This causes faster run-off and further erosion. The trees growing on the floodplains. It used to be clear. The country around Lake Alma [on the flood plain southeast of Willare Bridge] That used to be clear. The *warramba* change that. Trees all over. The flood doesn't stay in its channel anymore. Erosion is causing the *warramba* to be stronger and more destructive. In some places the river has been scoured out like at Mijirayikan then gets filled up with silt.
Lucy Marshall, like others who contributed to this study, has lived in the river country all her life. She explained that the mouth of the river is getting bigger and wider. Remarking that it is often impossible to travel over some of the mudflats to get to fishing places, and that the saltwater inundation is increasing, Lucy’s alarm is apparent: 'sometimes we can’t even find the living water [permanent pools] any more'.

East of Fitzroy Crossing, a number of persons consulted said that there the river seems to be getting higher and wider. As Gooniyandi woman, Morgal Sharpe (now in her late fifties), put it, 'When we were young girls, the river wasn’t so high...we used to walk across the river, but we couldn’t do that now...it is too high'.

Other changes can be seen in the traditional country of the Nyikina and Mangala known as the Lower Fitzroy region, when in the annual wet season, the river becomes a raging torrent of muddy water which can be several kilometres wide in some places. In the dry season, as noted above, the water
recedes and the actual channel of the river is revealed as the river winds its way to the mudflats of King Sound.

There is a marked contrast between the environmental state of the Upper Fitzroy and Hann River Region compared to that of the lower Fitzroy which has suffered from the development of the pastoral and agricultural industries. The Hann River, despite a presence of cattle, has remained relatively pristine, though there are some instances of increased erosion due to the impact of cattle, road building and mining exploration. Most significant in the degradation of the Lower Fitzroy is the impact of sheep and cattle and poor management of the industry, the Camballin irrigated agriculture project, and the building up of the Derby-Broome Road around Willare Bridge.

Fig. 35 One of the levy banks constructed for the Camballin Project (note that the bank has never been rehabilitated or removed)
Kimberley stockmen, a number of whom feature in the book *Raparapa Kularr Martuwarra*, have lived in the area all their lives and witnessed changes to the river over time. Ivan Watson, the deceased brother of Harry and John Watson of Jarlmadangah, recounted his concerns about the lower Fitzroy River in *Raparapa*. An extract follows:

The present river frontage isn’t the river frontage that I used to know; it has really been cut to pieces today…What with all the washaways and the formation of new channels, the change has been unreal. However, I would say that the 1986 flood resulted in the biggest damage ever. Until recently, overstocking was the biggest cause of the soil erosion problem. It’s something that the whitefellas never seemed to think about in the past. Basically it comes down to bad management…

From Marr right down to Yukala [pools on the river front of Mt Anderson station] used to be beautiful open country. Now it’s not only scoured out, but its got this prickly weed growing there, this Noogoora Burr. That stuff is starting to travel down the river now. It’s very dangerous to stock, it gets in their intestine and does
internal damage. Then there’s Pukaponius\textsuperscript{32} stuff; I’ve noticed it has spread from Marr right down to Yukal a in places now.

Whitefellas have been bringing in plants from all over the country and overseas. They introduced the Kapok bush too and that’s really gone wild up here.... Native grasses such as Birdwood and Spinifex still make up the majority of the grasses around here, but I’m very concerned about our native grasses disappearing. We don’t see much Pigweed, or *parrang parrang*,\textsuperscript{33} around here anymore.

The new all weather road across the Fitzroy River at Willare is a case in point. I reckon that new bit of highway is like a second Argyle Dam. It held back so much water during the 1986 wet, it was astonishing. I had to be boated out of Mt Anderson!... When the water receded it uprooted trees and washed out all the fences we had just finished putting up. It left debris clinging to everything.

It should never have been built as it was... That first section, from where the run-through was and right up to the first levee bank, should never have been touched. In my eyes that was the release path, because in full flood that section never held any more than nine inches of water. So, if they hadn’t built that section up, it would have released the river.

I predicted last year that I would see the Cockatoo Bridge out on it’s own, and I did...Millions and millions of dollars went down the river because some bright blokes designed this in Sydney...

They don’t know anything about the environment up here, nor did they bother to ask any old hands around town. I’d like to know how much more river frontage they’re going to damage. ...

\textsuperscript{32} Damage caused by the weed *parkinsonia* has been extensive. The Department of Agriculture has attempted to eradicate the weed without success.
\textsuperscript{33} *Parrang parrang* also provided seed for grinding to make damper.
After the water got so high they couldn’t control it, some bright spark hit on the idea that they should release the river by dynamiting a section of the new road. So that’s what they did. But that didn’t just release the built-up water, it siphoned out everything upstream. It siphoned out big waterholes that generally hold water after a big flood. They just weren’t there after the ’86 flood. It drained almost everything. It was a corruption of the whole river frontage! It gouged out many, many parts of our country…. (Ivan Watson in Marshall, 1988, pp.173-181).

The impact of abundant water supplies in bores and waterholes results in the possibility of over-stocking the country with cattle, and subsequent environmental degradation. There are signs that this is a problem in parts of the Fitzroy catchment. Stock often wander into creeks in search of water, destroying river banks which subsequently wash away in the wet season. Over-pasturing leads to bare, dry, dusty plains. Lack of bore maintenance allows the waste of huge quantities of underground water annually. Some of the running bores in the vicinity of Yakanarra have been in operation since the earliest days of the stock enterprise. They have often been placed in the vicinity of jila. It seems very likely that the water that runs off and sinks into the surface does not replenish the underground source. While this is probably very large, it is not an inexhaustible resource and such a waste could be easily rectified.

As noted in Section 4.0. and in our Recommendations, the most dramatic changes to the river system in the study area occurred at Camballin as a consequence of failed attempts to develop large-scale irrigated agriculture. Nyikina woman Margaret Kunjuka expressed her continuing interest in, and responsibility for, vital water resources. Her comments typify the concerns and sentiments recounted by others who contributed to this study.

The river, that’s our life. That’s the main one for everyone. It’s there for our young people. They [have got to] take over.
Fig. 37 Winjilyangarri *unggud* lined with paperbark, figs and freshwater mangroves
6.0. CONCLUSIONS

This report has shown how and why the Fitzroy River, and other regional rivers and sources of water, are central to Indigenous cultural values in the Fitzroy Valley. As noted at the outset, while water is intrinsic to all human cultures, it is the beliefs, practices and sentiments associated with water use and its reproduction that require investigation, acknowledgement and application. It is also the case that Australian Indigenous interpretations and uses of water have tended to be ignored in the past.

Of the seven major language groups—Ngarinyin, Nyikina, Mangala, Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri and Wangkajunga—with cultural affiliation in the area, meanings and place names attributed to water creation begin and continue with Aboriginal religion and law, generally known as the Dreaming (variously identified across the cultural landscape as Ngarrangarri, Jumungkarni, Pukarrikarra, Bukarrarra). Some cultural, linguistic and political variation exists, but there is strong evidence of a shared cultural logic and practice. The ever-present mythic beings in the form of rainbow serpents (variously referred to as kalpurru, unggud, yungurrungu) represent a universal theme modified by local interpretation and practice.

River and desert related groups conceptualise lands, waters and rivers as interdependent. While there are distinctive rights to tracts of water and land, these groups now co-exist in the Fitzroy Valley following a history of desert migration, residence, certain totemic affiliations, marriage and some ritual trading and song-cycle complementarity. Bush foods, medicines and resources are sought by all groups, with a range of fishing activities often occurring on a daily basis. Fishing (by nets, lines, traps, bush poison) is also an important source for rituals associated with death and mourning, such as food taboos, or jaminyjarti/jaginy, on the consumption of beef by grieving family members. Children often learn about seasonal changes, bird, plant, fish and animal life, when on fishing trips with family, and a variety of riverine resources (such as freshwater fish, eels, prawns, mussels) provide extra nutrition to Aboriginal diets. This is crucial for a population often reliant on social security entitlements.
The need to 'look after', protect and remember lands and waters are central to Indigenous aspirations and responsibilities for past and future generations, including the maintenance or increase of various species via ritual and conservation practices. Where the river system is not being looked after in the way that people believe it should, attention is required to address environmental and social concerns. This is most evident with respect to the failed Camballin Project, the area around which is in urgent need of rehabilitation. Camballin also stands as a striking example of the damage which can emerge when Indigenous groups with responsibilities to, and knowledge of, the area are not consulted.

It was clear from fieldwork conducted for this research, and other material referred to throughout, that Indigenous women and men sustain a multitude of religious, legal, social and economic responsibilities and understandings about water. Beliefs and behaviours within the cultural context of change endure and find expression in daily practice and spiritual beliefs, as well as through art production, films and music. These continue to inform how and why lives are lived in the way that they are, albeit in an environment affected by industries such as pastoralism and mining. Cultural continuity and an emphasis on environmental responsibility was commonly reported, for example by the emphasis placed on the river system being allowed to run its natural course to ensure clean water and replenishment of vital resources, and by the need to ritually manage sources of 'living water', or *jila*.

This preliminary assessment has provided some indicative ethnographic data on Indigenous cultural values of the Fitzroy Valley. The report concludes by suggesting that a further 'second stage' piece of work foreshadowed by the WRC would enable detailed research with more communities. Such cross-cultural and possibly cross-disciplinary research has the potential to produce useful and innovative results for Indigenous and non-Indigenous users of land and water.
7.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of this Report, it is recommended that:

1. WRC undertake to negotiate fully and widely with Indigenous communities in the Fitzroy Valley before initiating plans which may impact on local rivers, tributaries and other sources of water;

2. WRC ensure that cultural material in this report is acknowledged as belonging to the Fitzroy Valley communities from whom the material was collected (as foreshadowed in CAR's tender document);

3. there should be no more dams built on the Fitzroy River or its tributaries;

4. the river country of the Fitzroy Valley River Basin must have environmental and cultural heritage protection. Rivers and waters should be considered as intrinsic to the entire cultural landscape, vital to the Indigenous people who live near and are culturally responsible for the area;

5. the Camballin Barrage to be cleared of all waste material left in the 1960s as a result of the State's interest in establishing an agricultural irrigation plant there. The WRC to organise a clearance program as a matter of urgency with the aim of ensuring the site is restored;

6. advice on WRC work programs to be channelled through local Indigenous organisations, including local radio, health and art centres, in addition to regional representative, land councils, focus communities and government agencies;

7. any future study to have inbuilt lead and research time to ensure wide and substantial consultation with relevant communities which may be affected by the WRC's work;

8. cultural distinctions between river, saltwater and desert using groups to be recognised in consultations by WRC employees to ensure that the Fitzroy Valley is not assumed to be an homogenous cultural bloc;

9. the names of all water sources (rivers, billabongs, creeks, and so on) in the Fitzroy Valley to be recorded in Indigenous languages. Where several languages exist, efforts should be made to ensure the language with which the place is most closely affiliated is recorded first, e.g. a Bunuba name in Bunuba country. Linguists and language workers with the Kimberley...
Language Resource Centres in Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek may be able to assist with this recommendation;

10. WRC to commit to a more substantial 'second stage' of cultural research on water among Indigenous communities in the Fitzroy Valley;

11. WRC employees to undertake cultural awareness training before commencing work in the region as outlined in the WA government's booklet titled 'Working with Aboriginal Communities' (n.d. Department of Resources Development). Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture and Karrayili Education in Fitzroy Crossing may be able to assist with advice on the provision of this training;

12. a process of culturally-observant consultation to become a necessary part of water-related WRC work practices in the Kimberley and other places where there is an Indigenous population;

13. a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the WRC and local Fitzroy Valley Indigenous organisations and communities on cultural relationships to water use to be formally discussed among relevant parties (such as Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture and the Kimberley Land Council);

14. local communities and organisations, such as Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture, Karrayili Adult Education and Cultural Health in Fitzroy Crossing, to discuss development of a campaign to ensure that the river and other water sources are cleaned up, where necessary (e.g. sections of Bullock Crossing), and education provided to protect against the river becoming a dump for waste (e.g. disused boxes, food containers, drink cans);

15. conservation measures for rivers and other water sources to be identified and made available to local communities;

16. a cross-cultural research project involving local communities, paying particular attention to young adults, in water conservation and management to be initiated;

17. an audit of pastoral station water sources to be undertaken with communities to ensure inclusion of local knowledge.

The following recommendation was also made at a meeting in Looma during the course of fieldwork for this report:
18. The Bandaralngarri Committee should be funded to continue to act as a negotiating body between Indigenous groups of the Fitzroy River Basin and government and potential developers. Ngarinyin people should also be represented on this Committee.
APPENDICES

8.1. PERSONS CONSULTED

The list below includes representatives from the primary ethnolinguistic divisions in the Fitzroy Valley, i.e. Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Mangala, Ngarinyin, Nyikina, Walmajarri, Wangkajunga.

Patsy Bedford [Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Fitzroy Crossing]
Hanson [Pamilya] Boxer, Yakanarra
Nancy Broome, Looma
Warford [Pajiman] Bujiman, Djugerari
Maureen Carter [Cultural Health, Fitzroy Crossing]
Kitty Chungal, Kupungarri
Peter Clancy, Looma
Wayne Cox, Mimbi
Biddy Dale, Derby
Jack Dale, Derby
Phillip Duckhole, Kupungarri
Alec Forrest, Bayulu
Wiji Henry, Jarlmadangah
Sally Kanyak, Looma
Billy King, Kupungarri
Wayuwu [Annette] Kogolo, Bayulu
Bobby (Pinyarri) Kogolo, Bayulu
Margaret Kunjuka, Looma
Lucy Marshall, Derby/Pandanus Park
Anne Milgin, Jarlmadangah
Doug [Kordidi] Moor
Darby Nangkiriny, Jarlmadangah
Amy Nuggett, Bayulu/Puluwala
Mamanjiya [Joy] Nuggett, Morgoomorgoowidi
Chloe Nulgit, Kupungarri
Pansy Nulgit, Kupungarri
Thelma Rogers, Looma
Dora [Morgal] Sharpe, Mimbi/Bayulu
Neville Sharpe, Mimbi/Bayulu
Karen Skinner, Looma
Nita Skinner, Looma
Dorothy Surprise, Mimbi
Peter Thompson, Kupungarri
Ruby Unoberry, Kupungarri
Dolly [Pimalo] Wally, Mindirardi
Anthony Watson, Jarlmadangah
John Watson, Jarlmadangah
Harry Watson, Jarlmadangah
Wayne Watson, Jarlmadangah
Sally Wawajartu, Looma
Deborah Wilson, Kupungarri
Mandy Wungudiny, Kupungarri

In addition to the above participants, the following persons attended the combined organisations meeting at Kupartiya on 17 October and provided relevant commentary for this report to Sarah Yu: Bob Beharrel (Junjuwa), George Brooking (Junjuwa), Stan Brumby (Halls Creek) and Ivan McPhee (Junjuwa/Noonkanbah). Joe Ross, Chairman of the Bunuba Aboriginal Corporation at Junjuwa, was contacted on several occasions about the research but was unavailable due to other commitments at the time.
While discussions occurred at sites along the Fitzroy and Hann Rivers, their tributaries and other settings related to water, the list below indicates places where research generally took place:

Bayulu Community
Camballin
Derby townsite
Djugerari Community
Fitzroy Crossing townsite
Geikie Gorge
Jarlmadangah Community
Jiliyarti Billabong
Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Fitzroy Crossing
Kupungarri Community
Looma Community
Mimbi Community
Morgoomorgoowidi, Gogo Station
Pawpawjarti, Fitzroy River
Bullock Crossing, Fitzroy River
Yakanarra Community
8.3. ADVICE TO COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS

The list below indicates how a number of persons, communities and organisations were advised of the research. The limited time-frame and period available for consultation was a constant concern, as documented in Section 3.0. Letters advising relevant communities and organisations about the research were sent as follows (Appendix 8.4. gives examples of letters sent):

Bunuba Aboriginal Corporation and Junjuwa Community
Jarlmadangah Community
Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture (Fitzroy Crossing)
Kimberley Land Council (Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing)
Kimberley Language Resource Centre (Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek)
Kupungarri Community
Looma Community
Mimbi Community
Ngalankadji Community
Yakanarra Community

As noted in Section 3.1., Sarah Yu spoke about the research at an Elders Meeting in Broome on 13 October and at a combined Indigenous organisations meeting (where representatives from the Kimberley Land Council, the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, and Kimberley Law and Culture were present) at the Kupartiya Community on Bohemia Station on 17 October. In addition to letters of advice and attendance at the Broome and Kupartiya meetings, a radio interview about the research was conducted and broadcast to local communities by Wayuwu Kogolo on Wangki Radio in Fitzroy Crossing on 10 November. 'Follow-up' telephone calls were made and letters sent to the relevant communities and representative organisations.
8.4. SAMPLE LETTERS

Joe Brown
Chairman
Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture
Post Office
Fitzroy Crossing
WA 6765

6 October 2000

Dear Joe,

FITZROY VALLEY COMMUNITIES: WATER AND CULTURE

This is to let you know that Patrick Sullivan, Sarah Yu and I will be doing some work along the Fitzroy River in November. It will be a small study on water and culture for the Water and Rivers Commission (WRC). We are contacting the relevant communities and organisations to let them know.

The Fitzroy River is very long and so in the short time we have we will be working with just a few of the communities to show the cultural importance of water resources to Aboriginal people. We will send a copy of the final report and recommendations by the end of February. A copy will be sent to KALAC.

We have told the Commission in a letter that “the cultural material gathered by the consultants will remain the rightful property of the Aboriginal traditional owners, custodians and participants... The final report will bear the names of participants and consultants: it will be the property of the Commission but the cultural information it contains should remain under the control of the relevant Aboriginal groups and organisations.”

We will get in touch with the relevant communities but I thought that KALAC would also like to know about the ‘water and culture’ work.

If anyone needs to get in touch with me, they can telephone on 08.9380.3884 or send a fax 08.9380.1062. Sarah Yu can be contacted in Broome on 091.923.173.

Thank you, Joe. I send my regards to you and the family.

SANDY TOUSSAINT (Dr)
Senior Consultant
Dear Joe,

WATER AND CULTURE

This letter is to let you know that Patrick Sullivan, Sarah Yu and I will be doing some work with communities along the Fitzroy River in November. It will be a preliminary study on water and culture for the Water and Rivers Commission (WRC).

The Fitzroy River is very long and so in the short time we have we will be working with just a few of the communities, especially the Bunuba and Gooniyandi, to show the importance of water use. A copy of the report will be sent to relevant communities and organisations, such as Darlنغunya.

We have told the Commission in a letter that “the cultural material gathered by the consultants will remain the rightful property of the Aboriginal traditional owners, custodians and participants...The final report will bear the names of participants and consultants: it will be the property of the Commission but the cultural information it contains should remain under the control of the relevant Aboriginal groups and organisations.”

We are contacting the relevant communities and organisations to let them know about the work. If anyone needs to get in touch with me, they can telephone on 09.9380.3884 or send a fax 08.9380.1062. Sarah Yu can be contacted in Broome on 091.923.173.

At this stage, we hope to be in the Fitzroy Crossing area during the first week in November. I will get back to you on this. Three environmentalists will also be doing some work in the area on the environmental importance of water.

Thank you and best regards,

SANDY TOUSSAINT (Dr)
Senior Consultant
8.5 WORD LIST RELATING TO WATER USE

The list below gives a few words related to water use in English and the relevant Indigenous language(s). In accordance with the 'preliminary assessment' status of this report, this information is by no means comprehensive. The Bibliography shows the availability of relevant Indigenous dictionaries and 'wordbooks' (see e.g. Richards and Hudson's 1990 Walmajarri Dictionary). Assessment of these texts reveal that the same word can be used in two language groups, although this is not always the case. Our aim is to stress the variety of Indigenous words constructed around water use. Many of these remain in common usage and/or are being taught to youngsters at school.

The nature of the audience for this report means that a word is shown in English first, then followed by a translation. The bracketed initial indicates language group, viz. B = Bunuba, G = Gooniyandi, J = Jaru, M = Mangala, Ngn = Ngarinyn, N = Nyikina, W = Walmajarri, Wng = Wangkajunga.

**Billabong**
pirra (W)

**Claypan**
pirnti (W)

**Cloud (rain bearing)**
janginy (W)

**Creek**
jarlangga (G), kiliki (Wng), palma (W)

**Dreaming**
Pukarrikarra (M), Bukarrarra (N), Ngarranggani (Ngn), Jumungkarni (W), Ngarranggani (B, G)

**Fishing Line**
wirliwirli (W)

**Rain**
yiwindi (G), warapa (Wng), yipi, kuluwa (W)

**Rainbow**
mirtiny (W), mirrilhini (B)
Rainbow Serpent
Kalpurtu (W, Wng), Galurru (B), Unggud (Ngn)

River
martuwarra (W), marduwarra (M, N), walibirri (G), karru (Wng)
River torrent/rushing water
warramba (W, G, M, N, Ngn, Wng)

River Fig (various species of)
jamartany (W), joorloo (G)

Rockhole
bulany (W, Wng)

Saliva/spit
jala (Wng), jamartnta (W)

Sweat
jirrmilpa (Wng)

Thirsty
marrku (Wng)

Tree (generic)
warta (Wng)
Fresh water mangrove species used for medicine and trapping fish
majarla (W, Wng, M, N)

Wash
lukurrpungu (W), bogey (Kriol)

Water
gamba (G), ngapa (W), kalyu (Wng)
Living [permanent] water source
jila (W, Wng, M, N)
Non-permanent water source, e.g. waterhole
jumu (W, Wng)
Running Water
warlangin (W)
Some of the water animals, birds, fish found in the Fitzroy Valley

barramundi  
  balga (B, G), parklka (W)

bird (generic)  
  jiriki (W)

bush turkey  
  pinkirrjarti (Wng), pinkirrjarti (W)

catfish  
  mulurru (B), kurlumajarti (W)

crocodile  
  kuwarniya (freshwater, W), linykurra (saltwater, W)

duck (generic)  
  jibilyugu (B), jipilyuk (W)

fish (generic)  
  gawi (G), kapi (W)

green frog  
  barlingawoorndoo (G)

ibis  
  jaala (G), purlungpurlung (W)

stingray  
  baya (G)

swordfish  
  galwanyi (G)

turtle (short-neck)  
  janggurru (B), jangkurr (W)

Wet  
  nyumuriny (Wng), nyurnmi (W)
8.6 DARBY NANGKIRINY’S STORY

Wunyumbu Narrative by Darby Nangkariny

Wunyumbu was kneeling down here [Mijirayikan]. There was a rock with his hands. Put a print in the rock. Can’t find the rock anymore. It’s under the sand.

This is the story from my father – barrjarri. Barrjarri – banaka. This is a story for Nyikina and Mangala, and Karajarri. Walmajarri is different. We are from the riverside.

Wunyumbu - is Bukarrikarra. A blackfella standing up. A snake make that river from Murrumurru. Its a bugarrigarra story. Before bugarrigarra there were no tribes, nothing marked out.

Wunyumbu is a human being, might be barrjarri.. All his sons and daughters are banaka, but the other people with him might be burrungu, karimba... yeah..

He was living in Murrumurru, Bukarrikarra. He live there. He was looking for a feed. From Murrumurru, he had a long way to walk from here [to Mijirayikan]. There was no river, just a billabong with all kinds of fish. He went there looking for a drink. It had all kind of fish — catfish, swordfish. He went back to Murrumurru, told them, “I find a better place. Plenty of animals, fish. I’ll take you there. We walk, find that majarla tree [fresh water mangrove]. We’ll get the poison, and poison the fish.”

He went to near Murrumurru, near Lanji, outside from the river. Tell them to cut that tree. Carry ‘em all the way. They drop one majarla from his shoulder, and he grow there near a billabong. Alright. He keep coming, walking to Lipirriny-pirriyin [Liverina]. He walk along, coming up. He dropped one in Bindinyan, near billabong at Liverina. He travel all along and make a camp. Show them the billabong to poison. We’ll do the job in the morning, put the majarla tree all around.

Get up in the morning. We gunna poison ‘em. He put all the rock to make jarti-jarti [wall] to block the poison water from the drinking water. Start work from morning time. Hit ‘em like this. That water go a little bit red colour. All the little fish go silly in the head and die. They bin take the big fish away, spear ‘em. They went to the rocky places, to cook it. There’s a barramundi rock. Some big fish where we cross the creek.

Wunyumbu still watching this water. Late in the evening, he find that snake. He was kneeling down on his hands and knees in the rock. Soon as he look, just about dark, this head and his ngurlktu (beard) come out. He had spear — majiribil. All his sons and daughters here. He never move. Getting dark. He start singing that song for the majiribil. He singing out. He was watching that snake come out. Soon as he come. He spear ‘im in the head. He twisting around.. He make the river. The others looking for wurlayi (daddy), where he is? He go that way - banu (east)
Here him, snake, cut the ground, water coming out. He come up from Murrumurrul. You can still see that majarla tree. Only one Wunyumbu.

All the way he travelled through naming the places. We call them all the way up to Noonkanbah. We know. eg Myroodah Crossing Wangkakurdany

He [Wunyumbu] come right through to Mijirrayigan - calling all the names of the country. Big story again.

In initiation time, I only sing up to jardijardi. I stop this side (west) - light Nyigina. Other side - Kurrukurrubayi is heavy Nyigina, Noonkanbah side
I put this story only Light Nyigina

That Walungarri - kids initiation time, we sing raparapa.. This is an open ceremony. We sing before we take the boys away. It’s a good fun one.. stay up all night...morning time take ‘em in the bush

[speaking of Mijirrayigan]. You used to be able to see them [handprints] in the rock. I saw them with my father. His (Wunyumbu’s) handprint/knee print and where he sat.with his ngura..breaking up the majarla.

(Recorded by Sarah Yu at Mijirrayikan, on Paradise station on the Fitzroy River, 11.9.97.)
### 8.7 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS OF WATER SITES IN LOWER FITZROY/HANN AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Other Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mowla Bluff</td>
<td>Homestead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunaljany</td>
<td>Roebuck Yard</td>
<td>Permanent pool</td>
<td>Pool on Geegully Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yawurungkan</td>
<td>Red Point</td>
<td>Permanent pool</td>
<td>Pool on Geegully Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiliyalkany</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring nr Geegully, connected to Baliyirra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalayanmayi</td>
<td>Clanmyra Pool</td>
<td>Spring and pool</td>
<td>Spring undert the permanent pool in Geegully Cr Important site – connected to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babakanany</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring in tree in Manguel Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lirrama</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring used as cattle trap, nr Manguel Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babakanany</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring – mounded</td>
<td>Mounded spring nr Manguel Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manykurl</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring nr mounded spring, Manguel Cr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walka-walka</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Large spring, running into creek; barramundi &amp; crocodiles in spring – gets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangkarrka</td>
<td>Lake Alma</td>
<td>Billabong</td>
<td>Billabong on Fitzroy R flood plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangkarrka</td>
<td>Fitzroy Weir</td>
<td>Billabong</td>
<td>Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangkarrka</td>
<td></td>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangkarrka</td>
<td></td>
<td>Siphon</td>
<td>Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurrumurru</td>
<td>Snake Creek</td>
<td>Creek – levy bank</td>
<td>The site from where the levy bank begins Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurrumurru</td>
<td></td>
<td>Levy bank</td>
<td>Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurrumurru</td>
<td></td>
<td>Siphon</td>
<td>Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayarda</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pool</td>
<td>Old pumping set up – part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Hill</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hill</td>
<td>Hill in flood plain, old shed - Part of Camballin project on Fitzroy River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bajany-kurtany</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police camp</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent pool</td>
<td>Pool on creek running in to Fitzroy R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunyununynunukurtany</td>
<td>Permanent pool</td>
<td>Pool on Urala Creek/fishing place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumbuyin</td>
<td>Permanent pool</td>
<td>Pool on Urala Creek, nr Liveringa homestead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarlmadangah Community</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngarrbany</td>
<td>Permanent Pool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winjilyangarri</td>
<td>Permanent Pool</td>
<td>Pool on Hann River</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tingkany</td>
<td>Permanent Pool</td>
<td>Pool on Hann River – water gauging stn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kupungarri Community</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Site of community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kartpulwaningarri Manning Gorge</td>
<td>Permanent pool</td>
<td>Camping ground on gorge</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8.8 MAPS FROM RAPARAPA KULLARR MARTUWARRA
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