Maintaining the Healthy Country–Healthy People Nexus through Sociocultural and Environmental Transformations: challenges for the Wik Aboriginal people of Aurukun, Australia

Donna Green & David Martin

To cite this article: Donna Green & David Martin (2016): Maintaining the Healthy Country–Healthy People Nexus through Sociocultural and Environmental Transformations: challenges for the Wik Aboriginal people of Aurukun, Australia, Australian Geographer, DOI: 10.1080/00049182.2016.1220898

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2016.1220898

Published online: 21 Aug 2016.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Maintaining the Healthy Country–Healthy People Nexus through Sociocultural and Environmental Transformations: challenges for the Wik Aboriginal people of Aurukun, Australia

Donna Green* and David Martin*

*Climate Change Research Centre and the Centre of Excellence for Climate Systems Science, UNSW, Sydney, Australia; *School of Anthropology and Archaeology, ANU, Canberra, Australia

ABSTRACT
This paper examines the potential for multiple co-benefits to arise through re-establishing the connection between Aboriginal people and their lands. The research project was participatory in its design and implementation, and centred on three short but intensive visits to the Kendall River over a period of 4 years. Interviews with and observations of Kendall River people on country provided qualitative information concerning their wish to reconnect with country, not only to transmit key cultural knowledge through the generations, re-socialise their lands and manage them appropriately but also to help them manage the negative consequences of Wik aggregation in the troubled community of Aurukun. Participants reported that returning to and carrying out activities on country, and the family and country planning resulting from those trips, provided a way to counter feelings of disempowerment and despondency arising from living solely in Aurukun. This paper concludes by arguing that activities that re-engage Aboriginal people with country (if not actually returning to live on country) can serve to build cultural resilience in the face of multiple economic, environmental and social challenges, including those arising from life lived largely in communities such as Aurukun, thereby also likely benefiting their physical and psychosocial health and well-being.

KEY WORDS
Wik; Aboriginal health and well-being; cultural resilience; healthy country, healthy people; returning to country

1. Introduction
For the Wik Aboriginal people of western Cape York, Queensland, who have regained legal ownership of much of their traditional lands, how to manage and maintain their distinctive cultural connections with those lands is now a matter of significant concern. As we discuss below, over the past several decades, and for a range of reasons including escalating social problems in the community of Aurukun, there has been a progressive disengagement of Wik people from regular contact with their lands. Over this same period, there have been significant ecosystem changes to these lands caused *inter alia* by the introduction of feral animals and weeds, and the cessation of the traditional Aboriginal practice of systematic seasonal use of fire to manage their lands.

CONTACT Donna Green donna.green@unsw.edu.au Climate Change Research Centre, University of New South Wales, NSW 2052, Sydney, Australia © 2016 Geographical Society of New South Wales Inc.
It would be tempting to propose that a means of addressing the social problems confronting Wik people in Aurukun would be for them to return to living largely on their traditional lands lying beyond the township, and indeed such a proposal would be consistent with the political rhetoric of many older Wik people. There is an extensive Australian and international literature arguing the benefits to the physical and psychosocial health of Indigenous people from maintaining or re-establishing physical, spiritual, and other connections to traditional lands. However, the decades-long association and research with the Wik people of Aurukun of one of the authors, borne out by the results of the research conducted for this paper, make it clear that there is neither any realistic possibility for most Aurukun Wik people to return in any substantive sense to their traditional lands nor a desire on their part to do so—most particularly for upcoming generations.

Against this background, it became increasingly apparent that a fundamental question confronting this research was how any putative benefits to Wik people’s health and psychosocial well-being from at best intermittent activities on country could be realised when, for almost all Wik, much or most of life would continue to take place in the deeply troubled township of Aurukun with its demonstrably significant levels of disadvantage (Vinson and Rawsthorne 2015). For some six generations now, it is within Aurukun itself that core Wik values and practices around identity, social relationships, cultural and spiritual norms, the nexus between land and people, and ultimately what gives meaning to life, have been produced, reproduced, and transformed (Martin 1988, 1993)—and this will most likely continue to be the case. Consideration of these factors led us to reconsider how we should frame our research objective, that is to consider the factors which could assist Wik people realise benefits of re-establishing connections with their traditional lands, given that their lives will continue to be led largely in Aurukun, and given that it is a township beset by seemingly intractable social and other problems, widespread feelings of marginality and purposelessness, and intergenerational alienation (Martin 1988, 1993; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1990; Leveridge and Lea 1993).

2. Background

2.1. The Wik people of Aurukun

Aurukun is a township on Aboriginal lands which, as recorded by the most recent 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics census, had a population of 1300 people of whom 100 were non-Aboriginal staff (ABS 2011). It is extremely remote, even by Australian standards, as can be seen in Figure 1, located as it is on western Cape York peninsula some 500 km north-west of Cairns.

Being in the tropics, the region is subject to a marked seasonal cycle with heavy monsoonal rains between January and March, and a protracted dry season. During and following the monsoon season, Aurukun is completely isolated from the rest of the Cape, apart from air and sea links.

The township itself is situated on some 7500 km² of Aboriginal lands, held under inalienable community freehold title by an Aboriginal corporation that also manages the native title rights and interests of the Wik people recognised over those lands and an extensive area beyond them. It lies on the northern side of the Archer River estuary.
The Archer marks a major environmental boundary between the sclerophyll country stretching north past Weipa (which is underlain by significant bauxite reserves) and the coastal flood plains to the south, which are dissected by rivers such as the Love, Kirke and Kendall draining the savannah woodlands further inland. The Archer also loosely marks what was to some extent a cultural and linguistic boundary between the Aboriginal groups to the north, and those to the south and inland. This paper focuses on the lands and people from south of the Archer River, an area of both high biodiversity and cultural values. A significant majority of Aurukun’s Aboriginal population is drawn from this region.
The names of the languages of the region from south of the Archer River are prefixed with Wik or (south of the Kendall River) Kugu, which translate roughly to ‘talk’ or ‘language’. Thus, in writing of the Wik people of Aurukun, this paper is adopting a term used originally by anthropologists but now also used by Aboriginal people themselves of a broad cultural domain. Within this domain, however, there is considerable local and regional differentiation. In particular, the broad divisions between people relate to those whose original homelands were in the inland sclerophyll forest, and those from the coastal floodplain zone; and regional associations based on riverine groupings continue to inform much of social and political process within Aurukun itself. Additionally, there are cross-cutting affiliations through kin networks, to traditional estates and sites, to language, totemic institutions, and regional ritual cults that render Aurukun’s social matrix highly complex and particularistic in the past, and are reflected in a highly factionalised contemporary polity.

2.2. Challenges facing Wik people in contemporary Aurukun

Aurukun was one of a number of missions established in Cape York, in part as a result of public disquiet in the late nineteenth century concerning reports of violent conflict and ill-treatment of Aboriginal people on the colonial frontier, including in the western Cape York region. Aurukun mission was established in 1904 by the German Moravians as the result of requests from the Australian Presbyterian Church, which eventually appointed the Reverend William MacKenzie as Superintendent in 1923. He and his wife remained there until 1965, and had a dominant and profound influence on Aurukun and on the lives of the Aboriginal people who came to live there (Martin 1993).

Operating in accordance with, and under the ultimate authority of, State legislation of the time directed at controlling and administering Aboriginal people, MacKenzie nonetheless combined authoritarianism with what in comparison with many other Queensland missions was considerable progressiveness. In particular, the Aurukun mission administration was marked by the almost unparalleled extent, in Queensland at least, to which Aboriginal cultural forms such as language, ritual life, and ties to traditional lands were supported (Martin 1993).

In the mid-1970s, the move by a number of groups to re-establish small, decentralised settlements or ‘outstations’ on, or near, their traditional lands largely south of the Archer River gained momentum. A key driving force behind their establishment was less the desire to be self-determining vis-à-vis the wider Australian society, than that to escape the endemic inter-family conflict within Aurukun and its perceived political domination by a small number of families (Martin and Martin 2016). The seeds for this movement had been sown during the mission era through which many individuals had maintained close contact with their lands under a relatively benign mission regime. In 1978, one of the authors of this paper helped establish an independent resource centre based in Aurukun to provide advocacy and financial and logistical support for this movement. During the 1978 and 1979 dry seasons, there was a peak population of close to 300 people living on outstations (Martin and Martin 2016).

In 1978, partly as the result of the outstation movement, and also the very public campaign by Aurukun people waged against bauxite mining on lands north of Aurukun with the active support and encouragement of the church, the Queensland government
attempted a pre-emptive move to bring Aurukun under its direct control. Following the resultant national political controversy, a final compromise outcome was negotiated between the State and federal governments which established Aurukun, and the original Aboriginal reserve lands, as a Local Government Area under special-purpose legislation.

The imposition of local government in 1978 marked the beginning of profound changes in Aurukun. From a poorly funded and relatively simple organisational structure, with a limited number of staff working for agencies actually present in Aurukun, and with comparatively clearly defined policies and practices, there quickly developed a complex (although mostly very inefficient) administrative system, with a progressively increasing number of non-Aboriginal staff working for numerous agencies and organisations, and a significant increase in funding levels. The services delivered, however, did not include outstation support but focused on the town of Aurukun itself.

Concomitantly with this increasing administrative complexity, Aurukun people have been exposed ever more directly to the values and institutions of the wider State: construction of an access road through to the Peninsula Development Road that is open for all but a few months of the year; the full introduction of a cash-based (largely welfare) economy; the opening of a liquor outlet in what had been up to that point a training centre; consumer goods, telephones, televisions and the internet; and ever greater numbers of outsiders living there or passing through. All of these have meant that, while remote, Aurukun is no longer isolated. This period has been one of quite profound social, political and economic transformation in Aurukun; it has seen a progressive escalation of social problems such as very high levels of interpersonal violence, widespread alcohol and other substance abuse, increasingly troubled and often angry and alienated younger generations, and major health issues, such as high rates of diabetes and alcohol-related morbidity (Martin 1988, 1993, 2009; Sutton 2009). The increasing social dysfunction in Aurukun in turn has led to ever greater interventions by the courts and the legal system, and by other agencies and programs of the State (Leveridge and Lea 1993, Martin 1993, 2009).

The dramatic transformation of life in the township of Aurukun itself, while frequently involving high levels of episodic chaos and various forms of violence, has also provided upcoming generations of Wik residents with a new and all-pervasive focus for life and meaningful action quite radically sundered from that which had underpinned the original rationale for outstations (Martin 1993, 2010). A significant dimension of Aurukun life centred on the endemic conflict and violence amongst some of the Wik family groups. While on occasions in response to perceived external threats (such as, for example, unwanted and critical attention by the media) Wik people could assert a collective Aurukun identity, the dominant political dynamics were those of an intense localism based on ethical and political commitments to close kin, rather than of a ‘community’ sensibility.

Furthermore, while the mission administration had emphasised self-sufficiency and the development of skills relevant to local circumstances, the post-1978 period has resulted in a process of radical deskilling, both in terms of the cultural knowledge and practices associated with traditional country and the kinds of endeavours that the mission had focused on. Martin observed amongst younger men and youths, in particular, a widespread hostility both to ‘classical’ expressions of Wik culture and to what the wider society might offer. Many young Wik men in particular are angry, alienated from both
their own society and the wider one, and suffer major substance abuse issues (Martin 1988, 1993; Martin and Martin 2016).

One consequence observed was the parallel processes of progressive disengagement of Wik people, especially younger generations, from intimate connections to country on the one hand, and on the other their engagement in the rapidly deteriorating life in the Aurukun township (Martin 1993, 2010). Country has become more and more the focus of identity politicking within the Aurukun township itself, rather than of everyday lived experience, and knowledge of country has become progressively more attenuated through the generations (Martin 1993; Martin and Martin 2016).

It is against this background that a community-based organisation, Aak Puul Ngantam (APN), was established in Aurukun in 2009, following extensive consultations with Wik families who have traditional connections principally in the region south of the Archer River. A critical matter identified in those consultations was the need to build an appropriate governance structure around the aspirations expressed, ultimately articulated as establishing a framework to assist families to get back to country and to transfer knowledge to younger generations; to maintain the cultural and environmental diversity of Wik groups; and to promote economic, training and social programs to improve health and education outcomes and opportunities for Wik people.

These objectives are reflected in the constitution of APN and in the projects it has initiated (Martin and Martin 2016). A key aim of APN relevant to this paper is to create a variety of opportunities to allow Wik individuals and families, with different skill sets, abilities and aspirations, to engage in meaningful productive activities, especially those based on country (Green and Minchin 2012). One component of APN’s work has involved the removal of the significant numbers of feral cattle across this region, particularly in the environmentally sensitive peri-coastal floodplains, to reduce their impact on this region’s highly significant cultural and biodiversity characteristics. This in turn has allowed APN to establish the beginnings of an appropriately scaled beef cattle enterprise.

APN’s work can be seen as contributing towards the development for Aurukun of a mixed or ‘hybrid’ economy (Altman 2005), involving, by Altman’s account, intersections and linkages between the ‘customary’, government-funded and market sectors—although as de Rijke et al. (2016) argue, it is indefensible to portray the customary and the non-customary as distinct arenas of Aboriginal values and practices, existing as they do within an intercultural field. Aurukun now has a working-age primarily Wik Aboriginal population of some 400 people, but very low employment; only 19.6 per cent of Aurukun’s Indigenous population aged 15 and over were in employment in 2011, while 66 per cent were not in the labour force at all (ABS 2011, table I14). In such situations, livelihoods on country of the kind being instituted across northern Australia, including in the Aurukun region through the work of APN, provide an important avenue for culturally meaningful and socially productive activities.

However, the APN experience demonstrates that only a small proportion of the Aboriginal working-age population in remote communities such as Aurukun—probably less than 10 per cent—can be directly involved in working on country, for example as rangers providing environmental services, or those working in the cattle enterprise. This suggests that if sole reliance on welfare payments is to be avoided, there needs also to be a substantial parallel move for many Wik to engage with the market and State-subsidised economic sectors (Martin and Martin 2016; cf. Davies et al. 2008). This has proved
an increasingly intractable problem over the past two decades, because of factors such as
the social turmoil and disengagement outlined above.

3. Conceptual framework

Despite the extensive Australian and international literature arguing the benefits to the
physical and psychosocial health of Indigenous people from maintaining or re-establishing
physical, spiritual, and other connections to traditional lands, the decades-long association
and research with the Wik people of Aurukun of one of the authors make it clear that there
is neither any realistic possibility for most Aurukun Wik people to return in any substan-
tive sense to their traditional lands, nor a desire on their part to do so—most particularly
for upcoming generations.

In the circumstances outlined above, we have come to the view that the concept of ‘cul-
tural resilience’ or ‘community resilience’ offers a useful rubric to examine these questions.
Resilience studies originating in psychology and psychiatry were gradually extended from
the arena of mental health to health in general, and were initially concerned with the
capacity of individuals to manage stress and adversity and adapt to or even thrive despite them (Luthar
2006; Fleming and Ledogar 2008; Kirmayer et al. 2009). Kirmayer et al. observe that there has been an increasing recognition in psychiatry and psychology
that the focus on the individual in resilience studies is problematic, because it abstracts the
individual from the social and cultural contexts in which he or she is embedded. They note
a move to expand the focus on individuals’ resilience to that of resilience as a community
and cultural process in which people manage life challenges ‘by drawing from the social
and cultural networks and practices that constitute communities’ (Kirmayer et al. 2009,
63). They argue that while much work on what they term ‘community resilience’ has
been focused on responses to environmental disasters, the concept has important impli-
cations for efforts to promote mental health in Canadian Aboriginal communities,
although they recognise that the adversities Aboriginal people face are not like those of
natural disasters but arise from dramatic transformations over generations arising from
colonisation and ongoing marginalisation and disempowerment. Community resilience,
then, can be understood for the purposes of this paper as a concept applying to the
capacity of families, communities and larger aggregations of people to thrive in conditions
of significant adversity, and is argued to be significant for health and well-being.

There are caveats, however, to the legitimacy of any attempt to reproduce North Amer-
ican research as necessarily relevant to the situations of Australian Aboriginal people in
general, or to that of the Wik people of Aurukun in particular. For one thing, as Kirmayer
et al. explicitly recognise (Kirmayer et al. 2009, 78), while there may be particular widely
shared elements of (North American) Aboriginal worldviews and values there is also con-
siderable cultural, historical and situational diversity across communities and indeed
within them, and each approach to enhance resilience would need evaluation in terms
of its relevance and applicability to ‘diverse Aboriginal realities’ (Kirmayer et al. 2009,
63). The reality of Aboriginal diversity, in our view, would necessarily need to be taken
into account as between North American and Australian contexts, as well as within Aus-
tralia itself—the mere sharing of Indigeneity does not of itself mean that details of the cul-
tural, historical, or situational factors relevant to resilience are also shared. More generally,
generalised statements of factors risk essentialising the contemporary values and practices
of Aboriginal people by focusing on accounts of what are often normative statements of how things should be, or were, rather than how things actually are. Finally, Kirmayer et al. (2009, 85–86) warn us that pathways from Aboriginal cultural identity and knowledge to resilience and well-being are complex, and refer to a study of south-western American Indian youth living either on reservations or in urban settings which found that participation in traditional activities actually correlated with less successful outcomes, including high levels of substance abuse. In our view, this is a particularly apposite caution of direct relevance to Aurukun, where Wik people have long prided themselves as being the pre-eminent keepers of Aboriginal traditions and language maintenance in the Queensland context, but where social conditions have deteriorated to the point where it has amongst the worst indices of social well-being of any Aboriginal community in that State (Vinson and Rawsthorne2015).

In the Australian context, improved health outcomes have been shown to arise from Aboriginal people’s involvement in managing their traditional lands (Burgess et al. 2009). It has been argued that these physical health gains can interact synergistically with psychosocial benefits that develop through the strengthening of people’s sense of cultural identity, and control over their lands, that is associated with re-engaging with culturally significant sites and landscapes through working on country (Burgess, Johnston, and Phillips 2005; Altman and Kerins2012). This is reflected in the widely used Aboriginal concept of ‘healthy country, healthy people’ and in the very notion of ‘country’ itself, a term encompassing not just the land and its geographic and ecological systems but a complex nexus between landscape as a cultural artefact, its people, and their culture and religion, as we discuss in Section 5.1.

That there can be benefits to Aboriginal health and well-being from strengthening cultural connection to country suggests that an extension is possible to respond to the impacts of degraded ecosystems, such as those exacerbated by climate change (Kingsley et al. 2013). This research explores whether cultural-resilience-building activities on country could serve as a foundation to provide similar physical and psychosocial benefits to Aboriginal people. These could occur through a range of mechanisms, some of which have already been trialled to a limited degree in Australia, such as early experiences with fire management through the practice of early dry-season mosaic burning in Arnhem Land in recent years (Whitehead et al. 2008). These carbon-abatement activities are now being carried out as part of national climate policies, and some of these activities have drawn on Aboriginal people’s traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to manage country, and in so doing have simultaneously provided meaningful employment opportunities for Aboriginal people on their country (Green and Minchin2012). Associated benefits from these burning activities can also indirectly accrue from the increased control of feral animals and impacts on regional biodiversity that result from burning activity (Leonard et al. 2013; Comberti et al. 2015).

Climate change is likely to negatively impact Aboriginal activities on country. For example, for the last decade, documented sea-level rise has caused saltwater intrusion into the freshwater waterways around Yellow Waters, Kakadu, Northern Territory, where the tourist income from regular dry-season boat rides provides a significant contribution to the local economy (Boustead2009). In northern Australia, extreme weather events are projected to increase under climate change (Green, Jackson, and Morrison2009), and the impacts of more intense rain or longer dry seasons can serve to impact
internationally recognised World Heritage art sites, either directly or through the risks associated with the changing environment in which they are located (Albert et al. 2012). It has been argued by some that the increasing uncertainty surrounding these changes is amplifying Aboriginal people’s sense of insecurity about how climate change would negatively impact their health and well-being through unexplained changes on country (Petheram et al. 2010).

Countering this concern is a suggestion to reconceptualise climate change as an opportunity to promote mental health in Indigenous Australians (Berry, Bowen, and Kjellstrom 2009). The literature is equivocal about this approach, with a number of studies pointing out that their existing vulnerability is likely to further disproportionately impact already disadvantaged communities and that climate impacts are likely to exacerbate a number of existing psychosocial conditions (Fritze et al. 2008; Hunter 2009). Green and Minchin (2014) argue that focusing directly on Indigenous definitions of health, which connect individual and community health to the health of country, can facilitate effective climate-adaptation policies to be developed in tandem with physical and psychosocial health strategies. This sentiment is echoed in a number of other reviews of this literature, for example Addison (2013), which provides a comprehensive review of the impact of climate-adaptation options on health and well-being in remote communities. Studies have shown that there is a potential primary healthcare saving for chronic disease care associated with Aboriginal involvement in land management (Campbell et al. 2011), although establishing quantitative assessments of psychosocial links may prove to be extremely difficult. Notwithstanding this difficulty, at least one international study shows climate change has negatively impacted mental health (Cunsolo Willox et al. 2011, 2013; Petrasek et al. 2015), and several others have noted its effects on physical well-being, suggesting that this is an area that warrants further investigation.

4. Methods

This research project used a qualitative research approach, including formal and semi-formal individual and focus group interviews with Wik people, and participant observation centred on on-country activities, interviews and conversations at Kendall River with Wik people. The initial research project was instigated at the request of a senior Wik individual in 2009, after the lead researcher met a number of community members and discussed options to work with them. Once funding was obtained, the project was then further shaped, with significant Wik input, to ensure that it would be of value to Aurukun people—as well as for the wider academic and policy audience. We initially employed narrative enquiry during the first semi-structured interviews on areas of TEK, in order not to predetermine the full research focus at the outset. It is this more open-ended and participatory approach which has led us to change the emphasis of the project away from Wik people’s perceptions of (and responses to) climate change and the potential benefits to psychosocial and physical health of maintaining connections to traditional lands, to the potential significance of maintaining such connections to Wik people’s social and cultural resilience in dealing with the multiple challenges of their lives which for most will continue to be lived largely in Aurukun.

The proposal sought to ascertain whether there were ways to re-engage senior Wik people and younger generations with land management practices in ways that would
promote the health and well-being of families and country. Through informal meetings, via the APN community newsletter *Yuk Maak*, requests for specific community participation were sought. As a result, four Wik extended family groups who shared responsibility for country around the Kendall River identified themselves as wanting to participate in the project. After discussions with the project team, it was agreed to carry out a series of trips that would return at least some Kendall River people to their country, and to record their responses, aspirations and memories by video to enable sharing of these experiences with the wider family group on their return to Aurukun.

This multi-media research approach has international precedence (Cunsolo Willox et al. 2013; LaRiviere and Crawford 2013). It has provided opportunities for informal discussions and, most importantly, an opportunity for participants to respond while on their country, which allowed unexpected insights and research directions and unplanned activities to occur (Bardsley and Wiseman 2012; Leonard et al. 2013) which could not have been anticipated if we had remained in Aurukun. Many of the informal discussions occurred while carrying out activities at Kendall River; for example, discussions about previous times living in the old outstation were triggered when the old well dug by hand in 1978 was cleaned out, and discussions about harvesting bushfoods were initiated on the final boat trip when the Kendall people saw—and harvested—water lilies.

For the first trip it was necessary to use a helicopter, due to the impassability of the bush track from the barge landing south of Aurukun. This trip comprised three senior Wik people and two support individuals, and was undertaken over a week in the dry season of 2012. The second trip was conducted during the dry season of 2013, and included senior Kendall people additional to those who participated in the first trip, along with around a total of a dozen men and women about 20–40 years old, as well as teenagers and younger children. This second trip enabled one senior Kendall man to return by helicopter to his birthplace south of the Kendall River for the first time. Another significant outcome of this trip for Kendall people was flying three senior individuals up the Kendall River, and enabling them to have an aerial view of their country—something they had not previously been able to do at this low altitude and speed. The final trip, which occurred in the dry season in 2015, was also carried out by helicopter. At the request of those participating in this trip, we spent 3 days camped out at the old outstation site at Kuchenteypenh on the north bank of the Kendall River, rather than as had previously been the case at nearby Bullyard outstation (see Figure 1). On the final day of this trip, we used a boat to travel 15 km upstream to explore more riparian areas of their own and neighbouring country. Three additional informal discussions were held with senior Kendall River individuals in Aurukun to provide context to the on-country work immediately prior to these field trips.

On each trip, Kendall River people discussed in English and in Wik Mungkan the changes they had seen in the landscape, their feelings about living in Aurukun and about spending time on country, and their aspirations concerning what they wanted to happen on country. In order to provide records of the trips and of the discussions useful to Kendall people themselves, and with their permission, these interviews were video recorded. Interviewees were given copies of these recordings after the trip, which has proved useful for them and for prompting discussions about the issues raised amongst Kendall River people more generally, and it is intended as a record for preserving this information for future generations. Another key element, based on the hallmark
‘participant observation’ of social anthropology, was involvement by researchers in the range of activities involved in assisting Kendall River people to access country and in activities on country. Interpretation for the purposes of this research of both what people said and what they did was greatly assisted by the deep connections and familiarity of the anthropologist co-researchers with Aurukun Wik people in general, and Kendall River people in particular.

At the request of research participants, some short videos were made publicly available online, and a large poster-sized map detailing several significant sites visited, including photographs of locations and of Kendall people and a short dot-point outline about the research, was created and sent back to the Kendall River families in order to enable them to discuss with other family members about what occurred during this research and how they could plan future trips.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Healthy country, healthy people

The widely used Aboriginal term ‘country’ encompasses not just the land and its geographical and ecological systems but also a complex nexus between landscape as a cultural artefact, its people, and their culture and religion. Most Wik people do not use the term ‘country’ as such, and its nearest equivalent in Wik Mungkan is the polysemous term aak, referring to both time and place and used also in compounds referring to ways of being and doing things. Nonetheless, a constant theme in the three field trips concerned Kendall people’s perceptions of deleterious changes to the landscape because of the absence of the people from that area, and conversely that people have been healthier and happier when they lived at Kuchenteypenh outstation. As detailed in Appendix Table A1, and discussed immediately below, several interrelated themes were drawn from concerns raised in discussions by Kendall River people, from researchers’ summary observations of what Kendall River people said and did, and from the personal knowledge of the anthropologist co-researchers.

Major issues brought up included senior Kendall people discussing how their country had become ‘wild’. This had several dimensions. Being ‘wild’ did refer to what had been for Kuchenteypenh in the past a place managed through human occupation so that it was open and almost manicured, but now at the end of the dry season it was covered with overgrown grass, and with the rapidly encroaching vine thickets—aak wuthan ngul—it had become overgrown. People noted that pigs and other feral animals had destroyed or seriously damaged the springs and swamps, that the river bank at the Kuchenteypenh landing had eroded, and that there were changes in the shape, size and location of sand dunes and bars at the mouth of the river.

However, there were also explicit connections made between wildness and the absence of those whose country it is and who have the responsibility to look after the country. Before people moved to Kuchenteypenh in 1997, we were told, ‘it was wild, no one around’ and conversely that once it was established they had kept the place ‘alive’ by getting more families to come out from Aurukun. The traditional practice of dry-season burning of country, which served to remove the rank longer grasses and replace them with new growth following the first rains, was seen as a key mechanism by which they managed
their country, and both a right and obligation of senior owners of the country—‘Before I leave, I burn this ground because it is my country. I am leaving shortly and it is good to burn’, said the senior man for this area. Burning the country has to be done properly, we were told, and that means at the right time of year, with the right wind direction, and by the right people.

Looking after country was not just a matter of managing its environmental features either; we were told that because Kendall people had not been able to get out onto their country, the significant places such as the Story Places (sites of religious and mythological significance and often spiritual power) and the graves were not being looked after as they should be, and that there were too many strangers coming to the area who did not respect the country or the Kendall people as owners of that country. Senior Kendall people conducted a short customary rite to each of those from younger generations who had not been to the area before in order to safeguard them from potential ritual dangers. They spoke with the researchers of their obligation to show younger generations the country—not just the landscape, but the Story Places including the poison places (the sacred, dangerous sites) which had to be avoided, how to use country and its resources properly, and eating the right foods, the bush foods.

The three visits to country also provided an occasion for Kendall people to remember those who had lived there at the outstation but were no longer alive, to talk about and valorise the collective labour put into establishing Kuchenteypenh, sinking a well, clearing—by hand—a 2000-foot bush airstrip 40 minutes’ walk away, and building the basic structures that had (more or less) protected them through a wet season and a cyclone. Stories were exchanged, of the old men singing piithal duels through half the night, the children playing in the shade of a fig tree, of the graves of the old people all through the area. We were told that back when people lived at Kuchenteypenh, people were healthier and happier because they were hunting, and they were looking after the Story Places and burning of country the proper way, and the country was healthy.

It was clear that such memories could be both a source of great pleasure and of considerable emotional moment; the first helicopter flight of the 2013 field trip brought down the two senior Kendall River men and one researcher, who had worked with them in establishing Kuchenteypenh and lived there for a year (Martin and Martin 2016). Left there while the helicopter returned for more passengers, they wept in the customary manner for those who had lived there and were no longer alive, for the country which had been for so long without its rightful people, and for the wildness of a space which had been one of such intense sociality.

5.2. Maintaining connections to country

It was obvious from the field trips that people highly valued being on country for productive activities through such means as hunting and gathering, collecting materials for making traditional handcrafts and artefacts, collecting seeds for sale, and (for one woman with a national reputation as an artist) initiating a painting of country. On the trips to Kuchenteypenh itself, almost the first activities were to go line-fishing in the river, to clear a space in the shade to sit, socialise, and sleep, and to collect firewood for cooking and boiling water for tea.
The experience with the Wik people of the researchers, reinforced by discussions with senior people on the field trips, indicates that maintaining connections to country does not simply involve an individual’s deciding to visit his or her country. As discussed above, country itself is not simply a landscape but involves complex interconnections between people, their culture and religion, and that landscape. In this framework, people’s connections to country do not simply derive from visiting it, or watching films about it, or hearing about it while living in Aurukun, but (at least customarily) through a structured process of learning its cultural geography and meanings from senior and knowledgeable people, through observation and listening and learning on country, and through participation in activities on country like hunting and gathering, and ritual observances.

Thus, during the field trips senior Kendall people talked of how they had learned about the cultural and social geography of country from their old people, of being shown how to hunt and gather, and of their responsibility to teach upcoming generations how to come out to Kendall and live on country, not just in Aurukun. Younger people expressed happiness that they were able to get out to see their country, and to learn about special places including the ‘poison’ or sacred and dangerous country. One young woman, visiting her mother’s country at Kendall River for the first time, told the planning meeting in 2013 that they needed to have heard the stories about country and had it explained to them before they came out, but that everybody had been too busy doing their own thing in Aurukun to have this knowledge passed on. She also said that it was essential that the last singer of the Puch ritual corpus from that region be recorded, so that knowledge of it could be passed down.

At the 2013 planning meeting, and in many conversations on the field trips, both older and younger generations expressed heartfelt reasons for wanting to spend time on country. People were deeply concerned about the problems of life in Aurukun and their own marginality there, and the involvement of young men in particular in drugs and alcohol consumption and their high imprisonment rates; Aurukun was seen as a place with no law. We were told that people wanted young men to come out to country so that they could get away from those things, and so gain knowledge of and familiarity with their country. It was recognised that while customarily knowledge was passed through the generations orally, in today’s world it was necessary to use technology such as photography and video recording to pass on cultural information. It was also recognised that while in the past outstation support had focused primarily on enabling people to get back to country, and to undertake activities such as hunting and gathering, it would now be necessary for people to have a broader economic base for a sustainable future.

Spending time on country would enable people to collect bush tucker, fish and hunt, to get away from alcohol and fighting in Aurukun, and to become healthier than they could be in Aurukun. Being on country would create a context where senior Kendall people could pass on culture to younger generations, especially knowledge about country, and younger generations could learn about the old people who used to live there and who are buried there. Upcoming generations could learn about burning country at the right time of year, and about their responsibility for looking after country into the future, and managing the changes to country such as those from feral animals and weeds, and erosion.

Crucially, both older and younger generations made it clear that they did not want to live long term at Kendall River, but they wished to be able to access it and spend time there.
during the dry season. In order for this to be feasible, people emphasised their need for basic infrastructure—development of a track from Ti-tree Outstation to the north to allow overland access during the dry season, digging out and cleaning the well to ensure an adequate water supply, and building a basic shelter for shade and for cooking and other facilities such as a pit toilet.

5.3. Transformations to country and environment

Older Kendall River people who had lived at Kuchenteypenh in the late 1970s, and who in some cases had spent time there earlier in their lives, were well aware of the very significant environmental changes that have occurred over that period. They were especially concerned about the profound damage caused to freshwater springs and swamps by the dramatically increased feral pig population, and they were very aware of the damage caused by weed infestations, and the reduced numbers of fish because of the decades-long presence of commercial fishermen based at a camp a little upstream of Kuchenteypenh.

However, the customary connections of Kendall River people to their country (like those of other Wik across the broader Wik estate) involve, amongst others, religious and spiritual factors. While it is true that there has been a significant attenuation of Wik people’s knowledge of the original cultural geography of country, and of the mythological and religious underpinnings of life, there is still a significant spiritual element to the ways in which Kendall people operate on country, understand the forces which create environmental changes, and attribute causality.

The researchers witnessed numerous instances of this. For example, senior Kendall River people performed a short rite (which they termed ‘baptism’ in English, awalang thee’an in Wik Mungkan) on those who had not previously been to Kuchenteypenh, to familiarise them to the spirits of that country who might otherwise cause them illness or harm. A young girl was reprimanded by her grandmother for throwing lumps of shell aggregate into the river near the mouth, in case it caused a storm. People remarked on cloud formations, and expressed relief that a long, thin rolling formation (associated with the yooman or women’s yamstick and a principal totem of the clan from this area) had not appeared on the 2013 or 2015 field trips as it had in the past, because it would have foretold a misfortune befalling a Kendall River person.

More broadly, then, while Kendall River people were very much aware of monsoon seasons becoming shorter and of decreasing rainfalls, as they were of the impacts of feral pigs on their country, they interpreted environmental changes and potential ways of managing them from within a framework in which they could either seek to intervene ritually—as in entreating the spirits of ancestors to intervene and ameliorate a threatening cyclone or thunderstorm—or undertake ‘practical’ action—for instance in the case of feral animals and weeds, working with APN’s Wik and Kugu Ranger service on its control and eradication programs, and expressing keen interest in setting up a system for controlling damaging illicit access to their country by hunting and fishing tourists.

Either way, from within Kendall River people’s worldview it is necessary for the health of country, including the management of various levels of impact on it, that the right people—those whose country it is, who know it and are known by its spiritual forces—are there. Our interpretation of what we observed of and heard from Kendall River people was that the fundamental change to country of significance to them was that for
several decades there had been a significant attenuation of the connection between people and country which they saw as necessary for the health of both.

5.4. Sociocultural transformations

Kendall River people’s views on living in Aurukun were overwhelmingly negative. They spoke to us of such factors as its crowding and of people being ‘jammed together’, of the tension, conflict and fighting because of all the different clan groups and families being crowded in together, of the endemic drug and alcohol problems, and of the numbers of young men being sent to prison. Theirs was a personalised set of snapshots of Aurukun concerning what has been long reported (e.g. Martin 1988, 1993; Sutton 2009; Vinson and Rawsthorne 2015).

It was precisely when such issues were beginning to emerge on a large scale in Aurukun itself in the early to mid-1970s that the impetus by many groups to move away from the township and re-establish on their traditional lands arose (Martin and Martin 2016), and then as now concerns raised by senior Wik men and women were not only about deteriorating life in the township but also the increasing difficulties in transmitting what they saw as core cultural knowledge, especially that concerning country, to upcoming generations (Martin 1993). A senior Kendall River man spoke with emotion on the 2013 field trip concerning what he saw young men’s lack of interest in learning his knowledge of traditional ritual singing from that region because (as he saw it) they were only interested in modern singing; ‘There is no one to carry this on. There is no one to look after country.’

6. Conclusion

A consistently recurring theme of the conversations was that of the impact on country that occurred due to the absence of its people, arising from the particular ways in which Wik people understood the nexus between landscape as a cultural artefact and its rightful people. Many discussions were situated in this context, from which concerns were raised about the loss of detailed connection to, and knowledge of, country, and the difficulty of re-engaging younger generations back into understanding their relationship to country due to the fact that they have lived all their lives in Aurukun and have little, or no, experience of spending any time elsewhere. The impacts of this depopulation were recognised both in the visible impacts of feral weeds—Parkinsonia especially, feral pigs and horses. The ecosystem damage caused by the feral pigs around the important water holes was especially identified.

In this paper, we have outlined a situation in which the Wik people of Aurukun are confronted with multiple challenges to the sustainability of their society, and the reproduction of their distinctive cultural values and practices, including those through which they are connected to their ancestral lands. Drawing on ethnographic observations since the imposition of local government in 1978, and the increasing opening up of this hitherto remote and inaccessible community to the values and institutions of the wider Australian society, this period has been characterised as one of significant transformation, including an escalation in social problems within the township of Aurukun itself, and, for a complex of reasons, the withdrawal of most Wik people from regular contact with their traditional lands. For many Wik people, most particularly younger generations, it is the
township of Aurukun itself, with all its social problems, which provides the dominant location for the production and reproduction of social and cultural values. This imposes a fundamental challenge to the nexus between Wik people and their country, and therefore also to the possibilities for realising any concomitant benefits to physical and psychosocial health.

Against this background, then, how are we to understand the implications of what north Kendall River people told us, concerning their heartfelt desire to be able to visit their country, and regularly spend some time on it albeit only during dry seasons? There continue to be compelling but largely pragmatic arguments—pragmatic in the sense of not having to rely on arguments for Aboriginal rights, important though these are—to support them and other Wik people maintaining close connections to traditional lands.

The first argument concerns the involvement of Wik people themselves in the management and enhancement of a landscape which is of considerable national significance in terms of its biodiversity, through the provision of environmental services, carbon farming and the like. However, while the philanthropic and private sectors are investing in this arena, its sustainability is heavily dependent upon government funding, and current political and economic circumstances suggest that this will be increasingly under threat.

The second concerns the imperative for the development of a mixed or ‘hybrid’ economy for Aurukun, as outlined above, where working on country can provide an important avenue for socially and culturally meaningful and productive livelihoods, albeit for a relatively small proportion of the working-age population. While only a handful of north Kendall River people are able to actually gain formal employment through working on country (e.g. as rangers), experience to date has shown that there is a synergy between APN’s Wik and Kugu Rangers working on country and other Wik people, including family members, spending time on outstations.

The third argument centres on the significance of country to the transmission of central elements of distinctive Wik culture to future generations—and thereby also to the management and transmission of elements of a locally and nationally significant cultural landscape. For this culture to involve more than increasingly essentialised forms which are divorced from the realities of people’s everyday experience (see de Rijke et al. 2016), it is critical that there is a core of Wik people actively involved in gaining livelihoods on country, as well as those (visiting kin and so on) who orbit between Aurukun and outstations, as would be the case with north Kendall River families.

Finally, like many other Aboriginal communities in remote Australia, the township of Aurukun is beset by significant social problems, not least of all the alienation of many young people from both classical Wik culture and values and those of the wider society. It is largely within Aurukun itself that the values and practices of upcoming Wik generations will be established, and its history over the past four decades suggests that this will entail escalating social problems, including those arising from inter-family conflicts. In these circumstances, we propose, the reinvigoration of connections to traditional country for at least a substantial core group of Wik people has the potential to rebuild Wik cultural resilience to deal with the multiple economic, environmental and social challenges they face, including those within Aurukun itself.
Notes

1. This process is consistent with an Indigenous Research Methods framework (Putt 2013), which ensures that research responds to the community’s needs and interests, involves relevant community members in all stages of the research work, and makes sure that feedback and ongoing participation in the research outcomes are integrated into the project’s methodology and conduct. The research proposal that incorporated feedback from community members was approved by the APN steering committee in August 2012 after ethics approval was obtained from the ethics panel of the University of New South Wales (#HREC12/1750).
2. The planned final return trip in 2014 was postponed as a result of the area being closed in accordance with Wik custom after the death of a senior Kendall River man.
3. At the request of Kendall River people, two anthropologists who had decades-long connections with these families from the 1970s also participated in discussions in Aurukun and in the trips to country (John von Sturmer in 2012, and David Martin in 2013 and 2015—see Martin and Martin 2016). These researchers also assisted with translation where necessary, and facilitated the in-depth discussions, observations and interpretations necessary to develop meaningful results for the purposes of this research.

Acknowledgements

The authors owe a debt of gratitude to the Kendall River Wik people of Aurukun for their participation in the research, assistance and insights, particularly those of Stewart Korkaktain and the late Mr T. Koonutta.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research was funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council [grant number 1011599].

References


### Table A1. Representative quotes from Kendall River people and researcher summaries and observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Representative quotes and observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy country, healthy people</td>
<td>Kendall people said that the country has become wild, because it is not being looked after by the right people. [Summary of observations and statements, 2012, 2013, 2015 field trips.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘… when I see the place when I go out there it looks a lot different. When we were there in 1977 the children used to play under the fig trees, and down the beach. But today the grass is long, it’s all grown.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘There was no one around [when people moved in 1977 to Kuchenteypenh]. It was wild, there was no one around. We went out from Aurukun to here. We kept this place alive by getting more and more families to come out from Aurukun. Some stayed this side [of the river], some on the other side.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Summary of concerns expressed by Kendall people about their country becoming ‘wild’] Older Kendall people saw many changes in their country from when people were last living there nearly 40 years ago. Pigs and other feral animals have destroyed the springs and swamps. The river banks have washed away in some places, like at the old Kuchenteypenh outstation where the Milkwood tree on the river bank has gone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They talked about how at Kuchenteypenh outstation there are now different trees and bushy areas because people have not been living there and burning has not been done properly. They can see changes in the shape, size and location of sand dune areas and sand bars at the Kendall River mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Before I leave, I burn this ground because it is my country. I’m leaving shortly and it is good to burn.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘They say the country is not being burned properly, and the special places like Story Places and graves are not being looked after. They are worried that there are too many strangers coming to the area, who do not respect country or the Kendall people who are the owners of the country.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Continued]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right people on country keeping country healthy</td>
<td>‘When we went out from [Aurukun] to here, we sort of kept this place alive. We got more and more families from Aurukun to come out here during that time.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This place here, my mum, my dad and my family and my brother here, we all lived in this place. We grew up here, my daughter, my son, we had a house over there and we used to come and sit here. Water down there.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I like to see everyone come out, especially our families, and we can show them the places, all the trees. Don’t touch that tree—it’s poison, and eat the right foods the bush foods, no other foods, just the right foods.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘We always like to be here—that’s why my mother and my uncle showed us how to hunt and collect and feed the children … It’s for us to learn and teach the children how to come out here and use this place, not just living in town and learning about outstation which is not right.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I’m glad that I’m out here to see my own country. To show brothers, well they know, but to show them, and to know the poison places … the sacred, dangerous country. If you go through that area you are finished. You be foot cut off—poison is poison, they eat your bones and that.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Representative quotes and observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Remembering people and places                   | ’When I see the place when I go out there it looks a lot different. When we were there in 1977 the children used to play under the fig trees, and down the beach. But today the grass is long, it’s all grown.’  
 ’We [DM and I] went down to clear the airstrip every morning. No chainsaw, just an axe. I hope we build this place up again. That will be good for the new generations.’  
 ’The kids used to play under [the tree] here, Steve and that. They used to play under the same tree when it was small. It’s a big tree now, with lots of fruits. There are a lot of memories here, [we] think about our old people.’  
 ’It’s exciting for me to come here because this is my place. I rather to be out here. Last year when I was here, there was a really large bushfire burning. Then after that when I got back to town, I did do the painting about when I was here. It went for exhibition.’  
 ’The two senior Kendall River men wept when they returned to Kuchenteypenh by helicopter, along with researcher David Martin who had lived there with them as a young man in 1978. They wept for those who had lived there and were now deceased, and for the changes to country since that time. ’ |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Well-being                                      | ’Back then [when people lived at Kuchenteypenh] all the children were well off. They played games under the trees, they came out from Aurukun.’  
 [Summary of statements by Kendall people, planning meeting, 2013] Back in those days people were healthier [when Kuchenteypenh was occupied], people were hunting, people were looking after Story Places, people were burning that country the proper way, and the country was healthy. ’ |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Maintaining connections to country              | Using the resources of country—hunting and gathering; paintings, handcrafts and artefacts, etc.  
 ’Going back on country reminds people of the bush skills that they still remember. ’ | ’We call them may maak. Them children love this one, they eat this one. White people call them black fruit.’  
 ’This is like out in the bush, looking for wild yam. After that, we get to the shade. I’ll probably ask my granddaughter to get some fire for us. Then she [is] collecting some wood for me, so we can make a fire and cook wild yam. ‘On the way to the shady tree, they used to sing a song, a love song.’  
 ’Then we can dig yams and that. That’ll be good anyways. Or take the boys down the beach spear fish or stingray.’  
 ’I’m collecting these seeds to sell to the mining company for them to replant.’  
 [Question to senior man: who taught you about country?] ’Mother and Father, old Mulloch, about poison ground, sacred areas—can’t even go near. In the old days we used to cremate bodies—not bury them.’  
 [Question to senior owner of Kuchenteypenh area: who taught you about this area?]’My uncle Mulloch, he showed me all the areas names, all the north side places, all wells, old poisons, I know. He told me and [my brother], I won’t get lost.’                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Reinstating the ‘right’ way of doing things, transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
Table A1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Representative quotes and observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning about country</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘I like to see everyone come out, especially our families, and we can show them the places, all the trees. Don’t touch that tree—it’s poison, and eat the right foods the bush foods, no other foods, just the right foods.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘We always like to be here—that’s why my mother and my uncle showed us how to hunt and collect and feed the children … It’s for us to learn and teach the children how to come out here and use this place, not just living in town and learning about outstation which is not right.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’m glad that I’m out here to see my own country. To show brothers, well they know, but to show them, and to know the poison places … the sacred, dangerous country. If you go through that area you are finished. You be foot cut off—poison is poison, they eat your bones and that.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘We’d like to hear stories before we come out [from Aurukun] as we don’t know stuff. Everyone was too busy and they were doing their own thing, too busy to have the opportunity to pass on knowledge. They didn’t tell us about Kendall, they didn’t explain to us—I would have liked to know about the Story Places, before I came out. So who’s going to tell us the Stories? It needs to be done very soon as people might die.’ [Young woman at Kendall planning meeting, 2013]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Recording [an older man who subsequently died] singing Puch [ritual cult from that particular area with which Kendall people are affiliated] is very important. He can sing the song for Yooman, where the Man and the Woman went down, the place where the current spun them around and they went down and the Yooman yam stick pierced their chest.’ [Young woman at Kendall planning meeting, 2013]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘We want that land back, so old people can go out and take young people out. We are too crowded in the community, too much fighting because people are jammed together. I’ve seen lots of places where they have done different things with their homelands. The young people are out there in those places.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘We want to fight back for our land—if we don’t we very badly need our place, and we need to look after that country, too many tourists, if they see the country with no people then they come in, and then more come behind them that’s what my thinking is.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
### Table A1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Representative quotes and observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining connections to country</td>
<td>Thinking about the future</td>
<td>‘My dream is to get people back on their country to pass on knowledge.’ ’It’s good for us to stay here, you know, I don’t know how many times I’ve asked in the years for us to come back here. Well in those days, old people used to walk here and there camping areas but now we stuck up in town—[shakes head] especially for us.’ ‘We should take tourists to see our country as it would make a business for us (talks about economic opportunities on country). How are we going share that one river, how can we work together on this economic side. What about the future?’ ‘That [when Kuchenteypenh was occupied in 1977 and 1978] was a good happy time. But I wonder what [senior man] and others are thinking—we all agree we want to live in bush.’ ‘We really want to go back. Young people are getting involved in these things. They need two educations, Western and traditional culture, knowledge. I think the elders mucked it up, because they were only looking at hunting and gathering but government was looking at economic things.’ [Contributions to discussions at Kendall group planning meeting, 2013] Our old people never been to a good school, but I’m glad they brought old people in [to the mission] to have a little education so they can put a plan in place. There’s no law there [in Aurukun]. Everyone depends on white police. This is wrong way around. Now. It should be a council of elders. We can learn from mistakes of the past from Kendall outstation where there was no support. We need to change our ways. When young people go to prison, then they get on drugs, alcohol, we need to take them back with us so they don’t get back into trouble. This is what I’d like to see. [Contributions to discussions at Kendall group planning meeting, 2013] Maybe they should choose young men, tell them about things, show them the places. We don’t write things down, we do things orally—but they [the young men] forget so we should write things down. We have technology, you can easily sit with us, we can photograph, we can record. This is so we can know, understand … ’ [Young woman addressing older classificatory grandfather at Kendall planning meeting, 2013] People can collect bush tucker, fish and hunt, get away from grog and fighting, and become more healthy than in Aurukun. Senior Kendall people can pass on culture to younger generations, especially knowledge about country, including about plants and animals and about important places like hunting and fishing and camping places, wells, and Story Places and graves. Younger generations can learn about the old people who used to live here and who are buried here. Burning country at the right time of year, by the right people for that country. Passing on this knowledge about country to younger generations of Kendall people, to make sure it will be looked after into the future. Both older and younger generations said that they do not want to live at North Kendall all the time—but they want to be able to spend time there in the dry season. They said that this will keep culture strong through the generations, and help Kendall families look after their country and manage the changes that are happening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Representative quotes and observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations/wishes for support</td>
<td>'Some of those outstations, they got good homes, but for us we are struggling you know because we haven’t got decent house. Before this place was full of people'.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'It's good for us to stay here, you know, I don’t know how many times I've asked in the years for us to come back here. Well in those days, old people used to walk here and there camping areas but now we stuck up in town—(shakes head) especially for us.'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'As long as good road coming in we can bring the children in the holidays'.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'If we had boats alright, we can show people the country.'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each family needs a vehicle, motor and dingy for the old people to use, this is how they learnt the places and pass on the culture.'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kendall families said they want to work with Aak Puul Ngantam (APN) to achieve their wish to keep connections to their country through the generations. The summary issues they saw as important steps they could contribute to were:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digging out and cleaning the well at Kuchenteypenh, so that there is usually good water there even in bad seasons.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clearing the track down from Ti-tree Outstation to make it easier to come down overland.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building a basic shelter for shade and for cooking, and basic facilities like a pit toilet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Removing the worst of the rubbish near the outstation, mostly left by the fishermen [Kendall planning meeting, 2013]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Transformations to country    | Ecosystem changes, and impacts of feral animals                           | ‘The island [at the mouth of the Kendall River] wasn’t like that before, it was clean, pure white. But today lots of mangroves growing. And them mangroves growing all the way on the other side of the beach right along the hill.’ |
|                              | [At old well site now dried and mud churned up by feral animals] ‘It not like this before. It was really level … and there were big ti-trees standing. This was our water all year round, really clean water. This damage done by pigs.’ |
|                              | ‘Early days not much pigs, our country was really good, not even boats in the river, just only the families were at the river. They used to challenge strangers with spears, keep white people out. If people talked back people would be speared straight away, they were strong people. The swamp? It is getting worse, because of the pigs.’ |

(Continued)
Table A1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Representative quotes and observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural transformations</td>
<td>Problems in Aurukun township</td>
<td>‘We are too crowded in the community, too much fighting because people are jammed together.’ ‘For younger generations, Aurukun is ok to stay, but when families fight and there is tension in the air, because of all the clan groups in the place, it is not good, big fights infect everywhere, the fight spreads.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[In answer to question about how people feel about living in Aurukun] ‘We don’t get involved in other people’s problems. They are stupid, they can’t control themselves. They get into alcohol and it’s stupid. I been like that too as a young fella, but when you come to realise when you get a bit older what you’ve done—you can change, you can see life on country is more better.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of traditional knowledge</td>
<td>[Question to senior man about passing on his knowledge of traditional ritual singing from this area] ‘I don’t think there is someone, they got no good voice for that, they are not interested in that, they are only interested in modern singing. There is no one to carry this on. There is no one to look after country. You come out here, you can have everything free here. You don’t need to spend money. All sorts of food, vegetable and meat foods. Young fellas just go backwards and forwards to jail all the time. You need to think, not just do damage to things like those young people. You use your brains for thinking, that’s important.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>