

BCEC Research Report No. 3/16

# COMMUNITY WELLBEING FROM THE GROUND UP A YAWURU EXAMPLE



# CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| LIST OF FIGURES                                    | 2   |
| LIST OF TABLES                                     | 3   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS                                   | 4   |
| ABOUT THE AUTHORS                                  | 7   |
| JOINT FOREWORD                                     | 8   |
| FOREWORD   | 10  |
| Senator Patrick Dodson                             |     |
| SUMMARY  | 12  |
| THE POWER OF DATA IN YAWURU HANDS                  | 14  |
| Peter Yu   |     |
| INTRODUCTION                                       | 16  |
| WHO ARE THE YAWURU?                                | 19  |
| Yawuru and the Native Title process                | 23  |
| Yawuru Knowledge Project                           | 25  |
| THE FOUNDATION OF YAWURU WELLBEING                 | 27  |
| A GROUND-UP APPROACH TO MEASURING YAWURU WELLBEING | 33  |
| Co-production of knowledge                         | 34  |
| Recognition space                                  | 35  |
| Research values and principles                     | 36  |
| Conception to operation – A bottom-up approach     | 38  |
| FINDINGS FROM THE YAWURU WELLBEING SURVEY          | 45  |
| Characteristics of survey participants             | 46  |
| Family and wellbeing                               | 48  |
| Community and wellbeing                            | 53  |
| Strong culture, strong country, strong identity    | 59  |
| Self-determination, rights and autonomy            | 72  |
| Health and wellbeing                               | 79  |
| Material wellbeing                                 | 89  |
| Subjective wellbeing                               | 94  |
| KEY LEARNINGS                                      | 97  |
| REFERENCES   | 103 |
| LIST OF IMAGES                                     | 109 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|           |   |    |
|-----------|---|----|
| FIGURE 1  | Aboriginal 'Inner Spirit' Model   | 29 |
| FIGURE 2  | Taylor's Recognition Space  | 35 |
| FIGURE 3  | Research approach and phases  | 39 |
| FIGURE 4  | Frequency of family contact by gender and age   | 48 |
| FIGURE 5  | Strength of family connection   | 49 |
| FIGURE 6  | Ability to get support from family and friends<br>all or most of the time   | 50 |
| FIGURE 7  | How is your community going?  | 54 |
| FIGURE 8  | Type of community participation by age  | 57 |
| FIGURE 9  | Type of community participation by gender   | 58 |
| FIGURE 10 | Cultural knowledge acquired as a child by age group   | 62 |
| FIGURE 11 | Felt able to access country for fishing and hunting   | 66 |
| FIGURE 12 | Felt able to access country for practising traditional culture  | 67 |
| FIGURE 13 | Felt respected and opinions valued by gender  | 73 |
| FIGURE 14 | Felt respected and opinions valued by age group   | 73 |
| FIGURE 15 | Feel vulnerable to being discriminated against by gender  | 75 |
| FIGURE 16 | Feel vulnerable to being discriminated against by gender  | 75 |
| FIGURE 17 | Sense of control across different life domains  | 77 |
| FIGURE 18 | Opportunities to have a say over management<br>of land and sea country  | 78 |
| FIGURE 19 | Self-reported health status, men and women  | 80 |
| FIGURE 20 | Has long term health condition  | 81 |
| FIGURE 21 | Positive and negative feelings - men and women  | 82 |
| FIGURE 22 | Positive feelings and Kessler (K5) components -<br>proportion of Yawuru that reported the statement is true<br>most or all of the time - age groups | 83 |
| FIGURE 23 | Feelings of belonging, connectedness, identity<br>and purpose - men and women   | 86 |
| FIGURE 24 | Feelings of belonging, connectedness, identity<br>and purpose - age groups  | 87 |
| FIGURE 25 | Overall life satisfaction by gender   | 94 |
| FIGURE 26 | Overall life satisfaction by age groups   | 95 |

## LIST OF TABLES

|         |  |    |
|---------|--|----|
| TABLE 1 | From stories to potential indicators   | 40 |
| TABLE 2 | From selected indicators to survey instrument                                      | 40 |
| TABLE 3 | Estimated compared to final sample for Yawuru Wellbeing Survey 2015                | 42 |
| TABLE 4 | Yawuru Wellbeing Survey Respondents  | 47 |
| TABLE 5 | Most pressing issues facing you and your community (per cent reported)             | 55 |
| TABLE 6 | The Social and Cultural Dimensions of fishing and hunting for Yawuru women and men | 64 |
| TABLE 7 | Language learnt during childhood by age group                                      | 69 |
| TABLE 8 | Language abilities relatively well, well and very well (per cent)                  | 71 |
| TABLE 9 | Socio-economic indicators for Yawuru by age  | 91 |

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This research would not have been possible without the support of the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Research Policy and the Kimberley Institute.

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Nyamba Buru Yawuru

Nagula Jarndu/Yawuru Jarndu

Nulungu Research Institute University of Notre Dame Broome Campus

Bottles of Australia



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### **Yawuru Wellbeing Survey Research Team**

The information presented in this report would not have been possible without the tireless effort of the Yawuru Wellbeing 2015 Survey Team. They consist of Lyn Yu-Mackay, Siobhan Ryan, Athenia Manolis, Kerstin Roe, Sheridan Jaffrey, Janice Dean, Talissa Kinley, Allana Slockee, Maria Parriman and Tina Shadforth.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This report was written by Mandy Yap and Eunice Yu.

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### Mandy Yap

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Mandy Yap is currently completing her doctoral research at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University. Mandy's research develops culture and gender sensitive indicators of well-being working with the Yawuru in Broome, Western Australia. Mandy joined CAEPR as a Research Officer in 2007 and is part of a team working on a range of issues relating to Indigenous populations and social and economic circumstance. Prior to joining ANU, she worked at the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM). As a researcher, Mandy has worked on a range of issues including social exclusion, ageing, diabetes modelling, women and fertility, income distribution and Australia's Indigenous peoples socioeconomic outcomes. Her research interest includes the role of gender equality in Indigenous development and the methodologies around constructing indicators of quality of life and wellbeing.



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## JOINT FOREWORD

Connections to family and community, to the land, to culture and traditions, are all fundamental to how Yawuru feel about themselves, and their sense of a good life. Yet all too often, the sorts of indicators of social and economic development used to inform policy-making, or to evaluate policy or community initiatives, fail to represent such values in any meaningful way.

The problem here is not just the lack of consensus on how wellbeing for Indigenous communities should be conceptualised, but – more critically – that many of the indicators most commonly used to capture Indigenous peoples' wellbeing are drawn from western concepts that fail to reflect the essential elements of a good life that resonate with Yawuru people.

This is an important and critical deficiency, one that severely limits our ability to capture the social, cultural and economic development of Yawuru people in terms that relate authentically to Yawuru conceptualisations of living well.

The report is the product of a unique partnership between the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, the ANU's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, the Kimberley Institute, and most importantly, the Yawuru community. Our motivation in supporting the research project, first and foremost, has been to ensure that the voices of Yawuru women and men are heard in conceptualising notions of indigenous wellbeing.

The title of the report – *Community Wellbeing from the Ground Up* – captures the essence of a research approach based on the co-production of knowledge, with Yawuru women and men articulating their own conceptions of wellbeing founded on the Yawuru concept of good life – or *mabu liyan*.

It is the knowledge offered by Yawuru people of what it means to live well, their articulation of *liyan*, and their reflections on aspects of wellbeing that relate directly to Yawuru culture, values, aspirations and feelings, that invest these research findings with such genuine power and authenticity.

The report takes a positive approach to the measurement of Yawuru wellbeing that reflects the strengths and capabilities of Yawuru people, informed by Yawuru culture and contextualised by the historical challenges faced by the Yawuru community.

The principle of self-determination is at the heart of the research behind this report, both in terms of process and outcomes. Self-determination provides Yawuru women and men with the right to have a say on issues that affect them, and accords respect to the values and local perspectives of indigenous

peoples when determining priorities and strategies for economic, social and cultural development.

The Yawuru Wellbeing Survey takes the first important step towards a better - and shared - understanding of what wellbeing actually means to Yawuru women and men.

These research findings should feature as essential reading for all those involved in decisions that affect the lives of indigenous Australians. The insights presented in the report provide a unique knowledge base for policy-makers, and make an invaluable contribution to the improved wellbeing of all Western Australians.

We are proud to be associated with this very special partnership, and congratulate lead researchers Mandy Yap and Eunice Yu, the research team, all research participants, and the Yawuru community for their outstanding achievement in bringing the Yawuru Wellbeing Project from conception to reality.



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## FOREWORD



### AN INDIGENOUS DOCTRINE: A NEW NARRATIVE?

As Stanner observed of the great Australian silence, the written history of this country very seldom begins with the Aboriginal perspective. The British relied upon the doctrine of terra nullius to dispossess Aboriginal peoples of their land without compensation. Aboriginal people were never given a chance to espouse any doctrine to support their own ownership, occupation, and institutional ways. There was no consent obtained and none was given by the Aboriginal people for the occupation and settlement of their lands by the British. There was certainly no dialogue between equals to arrive at an accommodation of each other's presence. While Mabo overturned the legal fiction of terra nullius, it did not deal with the issue of settlement without consent. The courts of the settler state have stated that it is beyond their scope and jurisdiction to deal with the matter of sovereignty. Nevertheless, in the hearts and minds of many Aboriginal nations, sovereignty and treaty still remain live issues. Certainly the sovereignty of the Yawuru have never been ceded.

For the Yawuru people, our history begins with the *Bugarrigarra*. The *Bugarrigarra* encompasses the time well before western philosophy, religion and laws reached our lands. The *Bugarrigarra* is associated with events that created our world, deep at the beginning of time, yet it transcends time and space, to inform and give meaning to contemporary Yawuru life. It is the spiritual force that shapes our cultural values and practices, our relationship with our country, and the responsibilities and obligations that we have to each other as Yawuru people.

The *Bugarrigarra* is the essence of Yawuru native title and informs the process of rebuilding our nation in the main areas of knowing our country, knowing our story and knowing our culture whilst building and sustaining economic prosperity for our people. All these elements are critical for Yawuru to maintain good clear *liyan* within the modern, ever changing world. In doing this, Yawuru have had to consider how to forge a middle way, that uses the benefits of modernity to underpin the ongoing cultural survival of our people. Our challenge is to balance development with our obligations to take care of our community and country, and to provide a sense of stewardship for the next generation of Yawuru people.

As I see it, there is a need for a new framework, for a new narrative, which articulates how Indigenous people intend to assert their place and sovereignties as peoples in the modern world. This narrative has to be



informed by what I term an 'Indigenous Doctrine'. Such a doctrine must be defined from local Indigenous perspectives and it must fundamentally reflect and assert the values that indigenous peoples identify and aspire to. And it must of course, be crafted and driven by indigenous peoples themselves.

This can serve to challenge the old philosophical and intellectual frameworks of assimilation and opens up a dialogue for a post-colonial response where Indigenous people contemplate the nature and substance of a decolonised existence. The challenge for Indigenous peoples and for the Yawuru will be to define, what that existence is, who we are, what we aspire to and how we are going to achieve this.

This Yawuru Knowledge Project, the Yawuru Wellbeing Project and the findings from the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey offer one of the ways for Yawuru to articulate and define what the Indigenous doctrine, a Yawuru doctrine might look like.

**Senator Patrick Dodson**

## SUMMARY

At some point in our lives, we have asked ourselves one or all of these questions. What matters most in life? What makes life worth living? What makes you happy? What makes you feel good? What makes you flourish?

Wellbeing can mean many things to many different people. For Yawuru people, *mabu liyan* is at the heart of what it is to have and to know a good life.

Using *mabu liyan* as the foundation, the Yawuru Wellbeing Project has sought to understand wellbeing in the context of Yawuru culture, the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Yawuru people and the strengths and capabilities of Yawuru.

This report outlines the development of Yawuru wellbeing indicators from the ground up, working with the Yawuru in Broome. In doing so, the report's research findings prioritise the voices and inputs of Yawuru women and men in the conception and measurement of wellbeing.

The stories of Yawuru women and men together with findings from the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey combine to paint a localised and multi-dimensional picture of wellbeing.

The report demonstrates the importance of Indigenous participation in all aspects of the knowledge process to ensure that the findings and outcomes are meaningful not only for policy makers but also for Indigenous communities like Yawuru to set their own development agenda and inform their planning needs.

The information in this report is intended to provide a baseline for Yawuru as a collective to plan and design programs around what might bring about improvements in wellbeing. It also provides a valuable tool for monitoring wellbeing over time, based on measures identified by Yawuru themselves according to their definitions of what might be considered success markers of living well.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Connectedness**

The findings in this report highlight the importance of relationships to good *liyan*. Connectedness to family, community and country are all recurrent themes throughout the report, delivered both through the stories of Yawuru men and women and from the survey findings. These connections are strong, starting early in childhood where more than 90% of Yawuru learnt to hunt and fish, and continuing on into later life where knowledge is passed down through generations and participation in such activities continues.

### **Health and material wellbeing**

Good health and having a basic standard of living were also identified as substantial elements of *liyan* for Yawuru men and women. Health for Yawuru extends beyond physical health to include, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

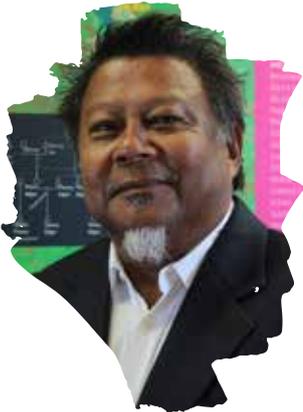
While the majority of Yawuru women and men described their health status as being good, the share of women and men who felt able to adapt to difficult situations was lower. This suggests that there is a need to understand how social, emotional, cultural and physical aspects of wellbeing come together to build resilience and strengthen one's inner spirit or *liyan*.

### **Self-Determination**

The importance of self-determination is also apparent. Self-determination is not merely having the ability to have a say on things affecting Yawuru women and men, their families, community and country, but also about feeling respected and being free from discrimination.

While the majority of Yawuru women and men reported feeling vulnerable to discrimination none of the time or little of the time, the share of Yawuru women and men reporting that they felt respected and their opinions valued all or most of the time was lower. For the most part, Yawuru women and men feel that they enjoy at least some control over their life across the domains of personal life, family life, community life and country.

## THE POWER OF DATA IN YAWURU HANDS



The recognition of native title in Australian law should never be seen simply as a symbolic act. It is profoundly an important foundation of justice to reconcile and to heal. The recognition of Yawuru people's native title in 2006 led to a wide ranging global agreement between Yawuru and the State of Western Australia.

Yawuru see that agreement as the beginning of a long journey to reconstruct our community after more than a century of domination and colonisation by western power. We do not see native title as a measure to “close the gap” or “overcome economic and social disadvantage”. Improved housing, more jobs and building capacity must be seen in terms of re-building Yawuru people's cultural and social foundation.

Central to the Yawuru development agenda is our sense of *liyan*; how we feel about ourselves and the people we are connected to as family and community. Yawuru's quest for *mabu liyan* – so eloquently described in this report – is intricately linked to our native title rights. In Yawuru's traditional world, prior to western colonisation, *mabu liyan* was at the heart of our cultural and social existence. Obligations, family and community nurturing, reconciling differences and sharing were all part of an elaborate system of connectivity to inculcate *mabu liyan* both individually and collectively.

Colonisation shattered that existence and healing the wounds from that legacy is a monumental challenge to Yawuru as it is for Indigenous people everywhere. Yawuru people, collectively and individually, are drawing on our cultural heritage to build resilience and purpose and forge a new relationship with those who once colonised us. We are part of an emerging ethos of Aboriginal modernity where our participation in the global economy is not subordinate to the established tenets of exploitation and assimilation. In the Broome regional economy and wider society Yawuru is instilling values of respect, recognition and inclusion; celebration of an extraordinary shared heritage and innovative and sustainable environmental practices.

Over many years Yawuru have worked with the Australian National University in a creative shared endeavour to collect evidence as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the Yawuru development project. In 2011 Yawuru commissioned the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken in an Australian Indigenous urban environment to determine Broome's complex socio/cultural demography. This led to other innovative shared initiatives such as geospatial mapping incorporating the human and physical geography of



Yawuru country; now a critical tool in Yawuru's commitment to free, prior and informed consent principles of engagement.

Most notably over the past few years Yawuru and ANU's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research have embarked on an ambitiously important research project concerning the economic dimension of *liyan*. Mandy Yap has led this work in her PhD research incorporating Yawuru researchers, in particular with Eunice Yu at the Kimberley Institute, and Yawuru women and men in a genuine partnership of data collection that the Yawuru community can use for our long term benefit. The partnership was further made possible through collaborating with the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, which has provided critical support to see the survey and the report come to fruition consistent with their commitment to the sustainability and wellbeing of all Western Australians. This is demonstration of the power of data in Yawuru hands.

It has been almost six years since the Yawuru native title global agreement was formally registered and investments from that agreement began flowing into the Yawuru community. Since that time Yawuru have devoted resources to the revitalisation of language, reconnection of culture, management of waters and lands, improved housing for our people, building the capacity of our youth and caring for our senior people. The findings of the Yawuru wellbeing survey will be a critical analytical tool in Yawuru decision making regarding investment for social and cultural development into the future and to determine the success of Yawuru native title rights.

---

**Peter Yu**  
CEO, Nyamba Buru Yawuru

# INTRODUCTION

At some point in our lives, we have asked ourselves one or all of these questions - What matters most in life? What makes life worth living? What makes you happy? What makes you feel good? What makes you flourish? What are important life areas? What and who should government allocate resources to? The quest to answering these questions have led to a large and growing body of literature aimed at conceptualising and measuring wellbeing - and to this research project.

For the most part of the 20th century, how well-off a country and its people were, was captured through material metrics such as Gross Domestic Product. The inadequacy of GDP as an indicator of human progress has led to a substantial body of work to better capture the quality of life of a country and its people. Some notable work in this space include the basic needs approach, the capability approach and subjective wellbeing such as life satisfaction and happiness (Streeten 1984, Stewart 1985; Maslow 1943; Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2000; Diener et al 1999; Adler and Seligman 2016).

The Human Development Reports and accompanying Human Development indices were a move towards human centred development and away from the materialistic focus of the 1990s. More recently Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fittousi rekindled an interest in how economic and social progress is measured and understood (2009). The report's well cited phrase "*What we measure affects what we do and if our measures are flawed, decisions may be distorted*" has led to further research preoccupied with understanding what wellbeing means and what brings about wellbeing. The report has also renewed an interest among researchers, governments and people around the world in interrogating how quality of life has been measured to date and how it can be better measured internationally as well as within different population groups.

What we measure affects what we do, and if our measures are flawed, decisions may be distorted (Stiglitz, Sen and Fittousi, 2009)

While no universal definition of wellbeing exists, there is a consensus that wellbeing is multidimensional, context specific and consists of both objective and subjective elements (Carey 2013; Dodge et al 2012; Seligman 2011; Stiglitz et al 2009). The Oxford Dictionary defines wellbeing as 'a state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'. But what is deemed comfortable, healthy or happy is likely to differ from person to person depending on their cultural norms, context and life circumstances, worldviews and historical experience. Depending on how we define and understand wellbeing, the type of indicators and measures used to represent and monitor wellbeing progress are also likely to differ. This is especially the case for Indigenous peoples, where there is a tendency to use orthodox models of wellbeing to represent the diverse experiences across cultures and countries.

Parallel to this work, is a growing body of work aimed at challenging the way in which wellbeing is understood and represented. An important and notable body of research is one that is occurring within the Indigenous space (Taylor 2008; 2011; Jordan et al 2010; Prout 2011; Durie 2006; Merino 2016).

There are approximately 370 million Indigenous people across 70 countries worldwide with their territories covering approximately 24 per cent of the land worldwide and host 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity (UN 2009). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples of Australia. In 2011, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that there were approximately 670,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, making up 3 per cent of the total Australian population.

Many Indigenous peoples continue to remain on their traditional homelands with significant threat to their continued existence stemming from development, industrialisation, tourism and mining interests. In other words, whilst the rest of the world is concerned with sustainable development, for Indigenous peoples sustainable development has to occur alongside the wellbeing of their culture, traditions, land and livelihoods and families and communities (Watene and Yap 2015; Ganesharajah 2009; Greiner et al 2005; Grieves 2007; McCubbin et al 2013; Kral et al 2011; McGregor et al 2003; Dockery 2010; Biddle 2014; Lawson-Te Aho 2010).

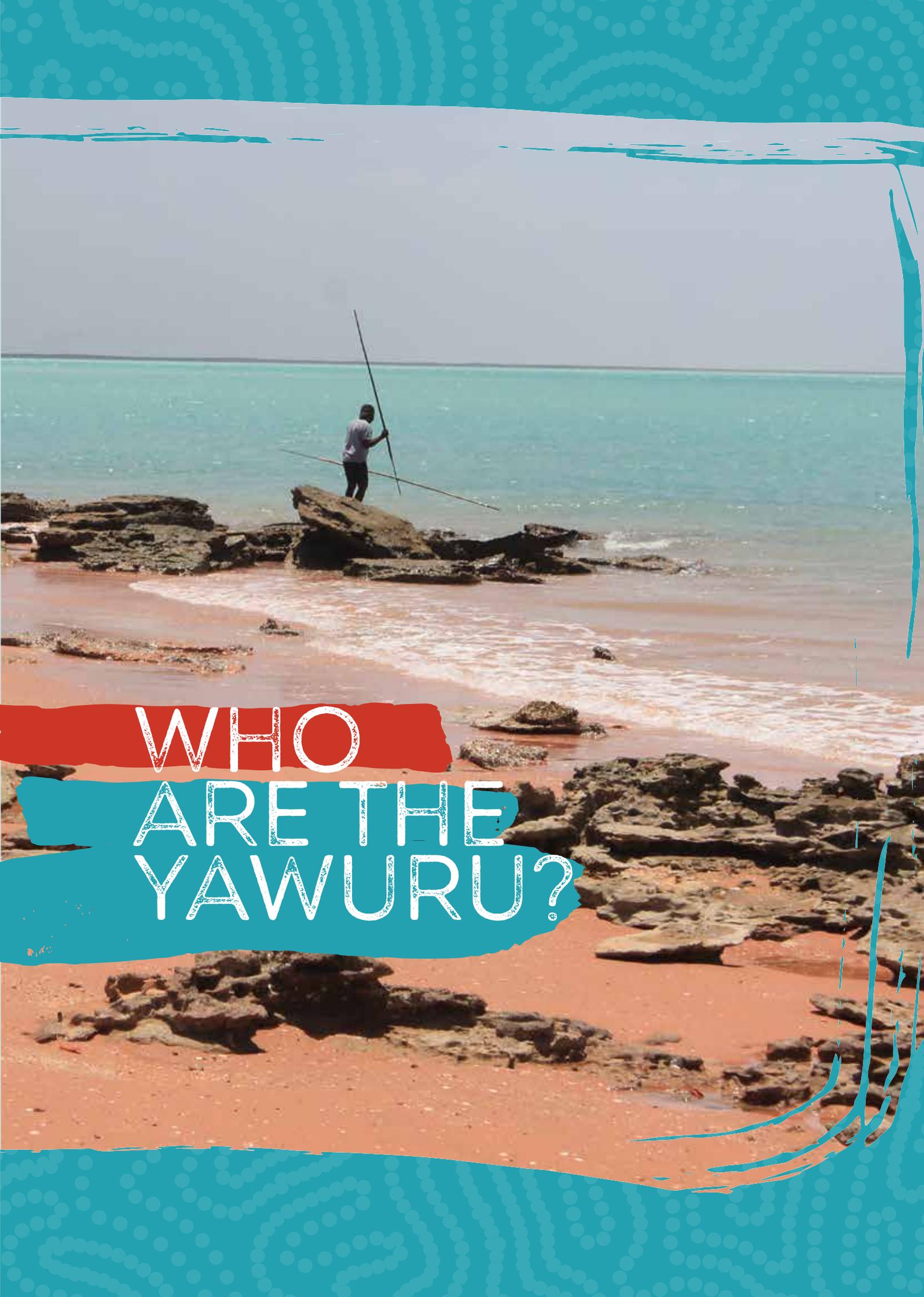
At more localised levels, Indigenous communities are setting their own wellbeing agenda and priorities (Kukutai and Taylor 2012). The Yawuru Wellbeing Project is one such example, which is Yawuru specific, understood in the context of their historical experiences and current contemporary challenges, is strengths based and has its foundation in Yawuru aspirations and values and understandings of wellbeing, *mabu liyan*.

The report outlines the development of wellbeing indicators that are from the ground up, working with the Yawuru in Broome, Western Australia, thereby prioritising the voices and inputs of Indigenous women and men in the conception and measurement of wellbeing. The report uses a mixed-methods approach to explore the wellbeing of Yawuru women and men through stories, as well as the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey, to paint a localised and multi-dimensional experience of wellbeing.



Indigenous communities are setting their own wellbeing agenda priorities.





WHO

ARE THE  
YAWURU?

## WHO ARE THE YAWURU?

The Yawuru people are the traditional owners of the lands and waters in and around Rubibi (the town of Broome) from Bangarangara to the yalimban (south) to Wirrjinmirr (Willie Creek) to the guniyan (north), and banu (east) covering Roebuck Plains and Thangoo pastoral leases, in the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia (Yawuru RNTBC 2011)



Prior to the arrival of the Europeans and other groups, Indigenous peoples including the Yawuru have occupied Broome and its surroundings for more than 10,000 years. Broome is currently home to around 3,470 Aboriginal persons, with the Yawuru making up about thirty per cent of the Aboriginal usual resident population (Taylor et al 2014).

From the late 1880s and well into the 20th century Broome was the centre of the world's pearling industry. The demand for Asian workers, mostly indentured, meant that Broome had a different history to the rest of Australia which was subject to the strict application of the Commonwealth Restricted Immigration Act under the White Australia Policy. In Broome Asian men from Japan, the Philippines, Malaya, Timor and China worked alongside Indigenous Australians in the pearling industry (Yu, Pigram and Shioji 2015; Prout and Yap 2012).

Broome today has a vibrant multicultural population and is a major tourist destination with the population tripling during the dry season. The melting pot that is Broome today is a reminder of the varied and sometimes harsh history that makes Broome the unique place that it is.

The Western Australian Aborigines Act in 1905, was a key piece of legislation that led to the removal and relocation of many Yawuru children and families to other parts of the Kimberley and sometimes further afield. It also led to the arrival of many other Indigenous families out of their country to Broome. This forcible removal has had a long-term impact still felt today by the Yawuru and other Indigenous groups in Broome and the Kimberley (Broome Future Limited 2015; Dudgeon et al 2012).



Central to the existence and identity of Yawuru women and men is their enduring connection to country and culture.

Central to the existence and identity of Yawuru women and men is their enduring connection to country and culture. This includes the landscape and how the Yawuru use and occupy their land and sea country, but it also includes the kinship systems, ceremony and lore, songs and dances and language given through the *Bugarrigarra*<sup>1</sup> (Yawuru RNTBC 2011).

Since the *Bugarrigarra* gave shape and life to the living landscape and country we now know as Broome, the Yawuru people have practiced their traditions, law and customs. As custodians of the land, Yawuru have long fished, hunted and managed their traditional ecological knowledge systems, habitats, held and passed their stories on to future generations despite the harsh colonisation practices instituted by the state. It is these stories, rituals, law handed down through the *Bugarrigarra* that Yawuru women and men continue to maintain through their responsibilities and obligations as a Yawuru person which gave rise to the recognition through the Native Title process (Yap and Yu, 2016a).



<sup>1</sup> *Bugarrigarra* is the core of Yawuru cosmology. *Bugarrigarra* is the time before time, when the creative forces shaped and gave meaning and form to the landscape, putting the languages to the people within those landscapes and creating the protocol and laws for living within this environment (Yawuru RNTBC 2011: 13).

## YAWURU AND THE NATIVE TITLE PROCESS

“History hasn’t always been kind to Yawuru People. We had no say when our land, our home was taken from us and we were pushed towards the edges. But we stayed strong and true to our culture. We can now take our rightful place in the Broome Community.”

Frank Sebastian (Gajai)

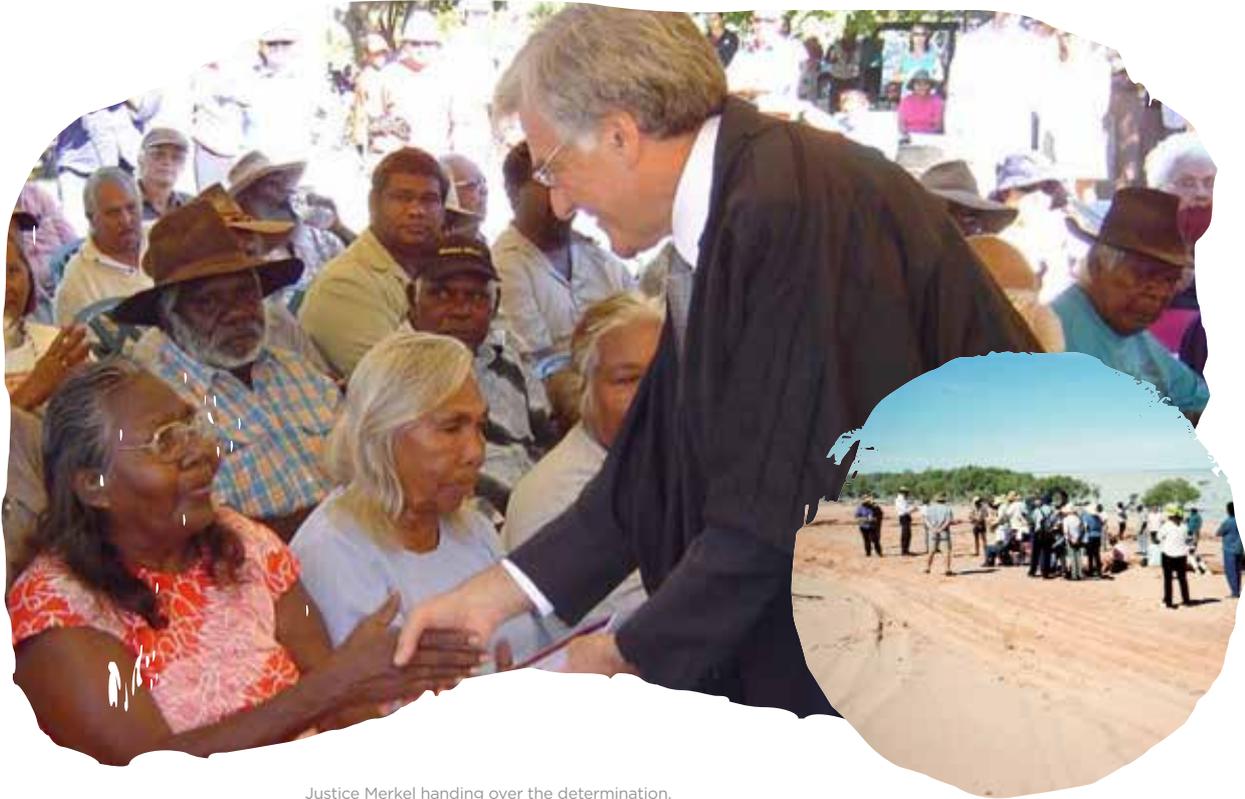
In the landmark case of *Mabo vs Queensland (No 2)* (1992), the High Court of Australia handed down its decision recognising the unique connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups to their land through their traditional laws and customs. Following that decision, the Native Title Act 1993 created the legal framework in which connection to Indigenous laws, customs and traditions are recognised to enable Native Title holders to deal with multiple interests on their land.

The Yawuru Native Title determination<sup>2</sup> in 2006, after 12 years of mediation and litigation signalled a shift in the relationship between Yawuru and other Indigenous groups living in Broome, as well as with the state of Western Australia. The Native Title determination has provided Yawuru with the opportunity to have a say over their land and its usages and to have an input into issues affecting Yawuru in local and regional settings (Yawuru RNTBC 2011).

In 2010 Yawuru negotiated a broad ranging compensation agreement with the Western Australian Government incorporating the establishment of Nyamba Buru Yawuru as the development arm of the Yawuru Native Title Holders. This has led to a range of programs and investments put in place for the benefit of Yawuru and other Aboriginal people such as the setting up of the language centre, social and affordable housing, creating a Yawuru Conservation Estate, employment and training, elders and youth support initiatives and a broad community development strategy.

There is a need to pause to reflect if these programs and measures are improving the lives of Yawuru men and women. In order to examine if the wellbeing of Yawuru women and men is being maintained and improving, there is a need to first understand how Yawuru conceptualise wellbeing and

2 Native Title comprises the rights and interests of Australian Indigenous peoples in their traditional lands and waters, which for each group derive from their own laws and customs and are recognised by the Federal Court in accordance with Australian statutory and common law, although they are subject to a judicial process of application by prospective Native Title holders. If determined to exist, this Title is held in trust by a Prescribed Body Corporate as per the requirements of the Native Title Act (1993).



Justice Merkel handing over the determination.  
Source: ABC Kimberley TBC.

what are some of the measures of wellbeing which might be relevant to monitor Yawuru’s wellbeing as a collective. The Yawuru Knowledge Project and the Yawuru Wellbeing Project are two examples of the Yawuru taking self-determination in their own hands to conceptualise, define and measure their wellbeing.

**1994**

First Native Title Claim lodged with the NNTT

**2006**

Federal Court decides that Yawuru have maintained their law and customs from the time of the Bugarrigarra

**2008**

Appeal by the State of Western Australia against the determination and finalisation of determination

**2010**

Yawuru agreements signed

## YAWURU KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

*mabu buru*, *mabu liyan* and *mabu ngarrungunil* are the aspirations and guiding principles of the journey that Yawuru has taken since time immemorial and they are critical for the rebuilding of the Yawuru nation post native title. *Mabu buru* refers to strong country and *mabu ngarrungu* refers to strong community. Together, the interconnectedness between the country, its people and culture brings about *mabu liyan* (Yawuru RNTBC 2011).

To enable Yawuru to make informed decisions on matters affecting their community, country and wellbeing, there was a recognised need to first and foremost invest in data and knowledge development for Yawuru, driven by Yawuru to inform Yawuru development and wellbeing aspirations. The three guiding principles set the foundation of the Yawuru Knowledge Project, namely Knowing Our Community, Knowing Our Stories and Knowing our Country.

Part of the increased self-determination of Yawuru has involved taking control of data collection on Yawuru by Yawuru. The Yawuru in Broome are also the first in this area to exercise local control, participation and conceptual thinking around the logistics and rationale of such an exercise through their Knowing Our Community Survey, which serves as a baseline population dataset (Taylor et al 2014). In continuing that self-determination exercise, the focus for the community now is on whether the lives of Yawuru men and women are improving over time as a result of securing Native Title. To evaluate whether the lives of Yawuru women and men are improving, there is first a need to understand what constitutes a good life for Yawuru and what aspects are important for their wellbeing. This is where this research project is situated within the broader Yawuru Knowledge and Wellbeing Project.

*mabu buru*,  
*mabu liyan* and *mabu ngarrungunil* are the guiding principles of the Yawuru people.

There is a need to understand what constitutes a good life for Yawuru and what aspects are important for their wellbeing.



Timeline process of Yawuru native title determination and subsequent actions of implementing the Knowledge and Wellbeing Project.





THE  
FOUNDATION  
OF YAWURU WELLBEING

## THE FOUNDATION OF YAWURU WELLBEING

“*liyan* is about relationships, family, community and what gives meaning to people’s lives. Yawuru people’s connection to country and joy celebrating in our culture and society is fundamental to having good *liyan*. When we feel disrespected or abused our *liyan* is bad, which can be insidious and corrosive for both the individual and the community. When our *liyan* is good our wellbeing and everything else is in a good space.” Patrick Dodson, Yawuru RNTBC 2011

In the western notion of subjective wellbeing expressions such as happiness can invoke a host of meanings and interpretation. Indigenous peoples have long explained and described wellbeing from a *relational* perspective, with the Yawuru notion of *liyan* reflecting a continuity and connection between the mind, body, spirit, culture and land.

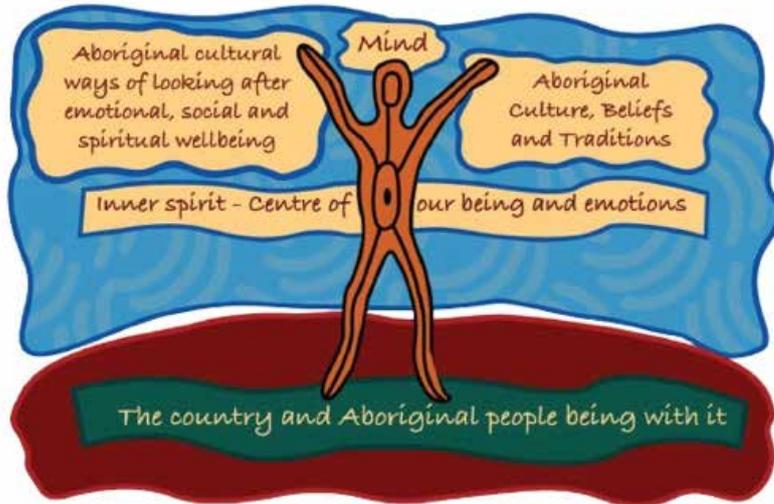
The late Uncle Joseph (Nipper) Roe, a Karajarri and Yawuru man, pioneered the cultural understanding of *ngarlu* as a driver of emotional, spiritual and physical health. In particular, the inner spirit model described by Uncle Joe emphasised the connectedness between the individual’s inner spirit and the collective group, and shows how the connectedness between the inner spirit, body and country are one and the same (Figure 1).

Uncle Joe described how the inner spirit (or *ngarlu* or *lian*) was affected by the colonisation process, requiring a process of healing in which Aboriginal peoples’ sense of self and *ngarlu/lian* would be strengthened through the return of a connection to culture and country (Roe 2000).

The Yawuru notion of *liyan* reflects continuity and connection between the mind, body, spirit, culture and land.



**FIGURE 1**  
Aboriginal 'Inner Spirit' Model



© Joe Roe 2000

Source: Joe Roe 2000; Casey 2015

Not unlike to the concept of *ngarlu* for Karajarri, the philosophy of *liyan* conjures multiple associations and meanings for Yawuru people. *mabu liyan* reflects Yawuru's sense of belonging and being, emotional strength, dignity and pride. The notion of *liyan* is expressed through relationships beyond the individual: it is a model of living well in connection with country, culture, and others as well as with oneself. According to McKenna and Anderson (2011 p4), "*liyan* is the centre of our being and emotions. It is a very important characteristic that forms our wellbeing, keeping us grounded in our identity and our connection to country, to our family, our community and it is linked to the way we care for ourselves and our emotions".

"*liyan* has always been there. Like the soul when you are born."

Yawuru female, 56 years

"It's [*liyan*] not just a description of emotions. It is a state of being. It influences not just your day, it influences your life. *liyan* for country, strong *liyan* for country, that connectedness, the strength, the spirituality."

Yawuru male, 49 years



*liyan* is both  
instrumental to  
and an outcome  
of wellbeing.

It is important to understand that *liyan* is both instrumental to and an outcome of wellbeing. Many Yawuru individuals describe *liyan* as being connected to their interactions with others.

“What I understood about *liyan* is that it’s not just about you. You always knew it involved more than just you.”

Yawuru male, 22 years

“Absolutely *liyan* has to do with a good life. Doesn’t matter where we are, and it doesn’t matter even in the non-Indigenous context, if we are talking to people, if our *liyan* is not good, or if we don’t feel right, we explain that.”

Yawuru female, 32 years

“Bad *liyan* can spread from bad to worse. It might start with two persons and they bring more people and family get involved. Your *liyan* is connected to other people’s *liyan*. It catches and it spreads.”

Yawuru female, 70 years

Many Yawuru people express *liyan* as a *feeling*, not just in one sense but all senses. Yawuru derive good *liyan* from touching, eating, feeling, being and doing.

“I get pain in my belly then I know someone is affecting my *liyan*. I have to make that right first before communicating with others.”

Yawuru female, 56 years

“*liyan* is the connection between your emotional and spiritual centre rolled into one. That spiritual centre is linked to identity and identity is linked to kinship, family. *liyan* has many components to it such as the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements. All these elements have to be balanced in order to have a good, strong *liyan*. To many Yawuru people, it is a spiritual word.”

Yawuru female, 34 years

“My *liyan* feels good when I link in with country, when I feel the breeze, feel the fire. I find a spot and feel cleansed and I feel good. The more times I do that, the more times I feel good ... when I am getting out fishing and practising cultural things that I have learnt.”

Yawuru male, 49 years

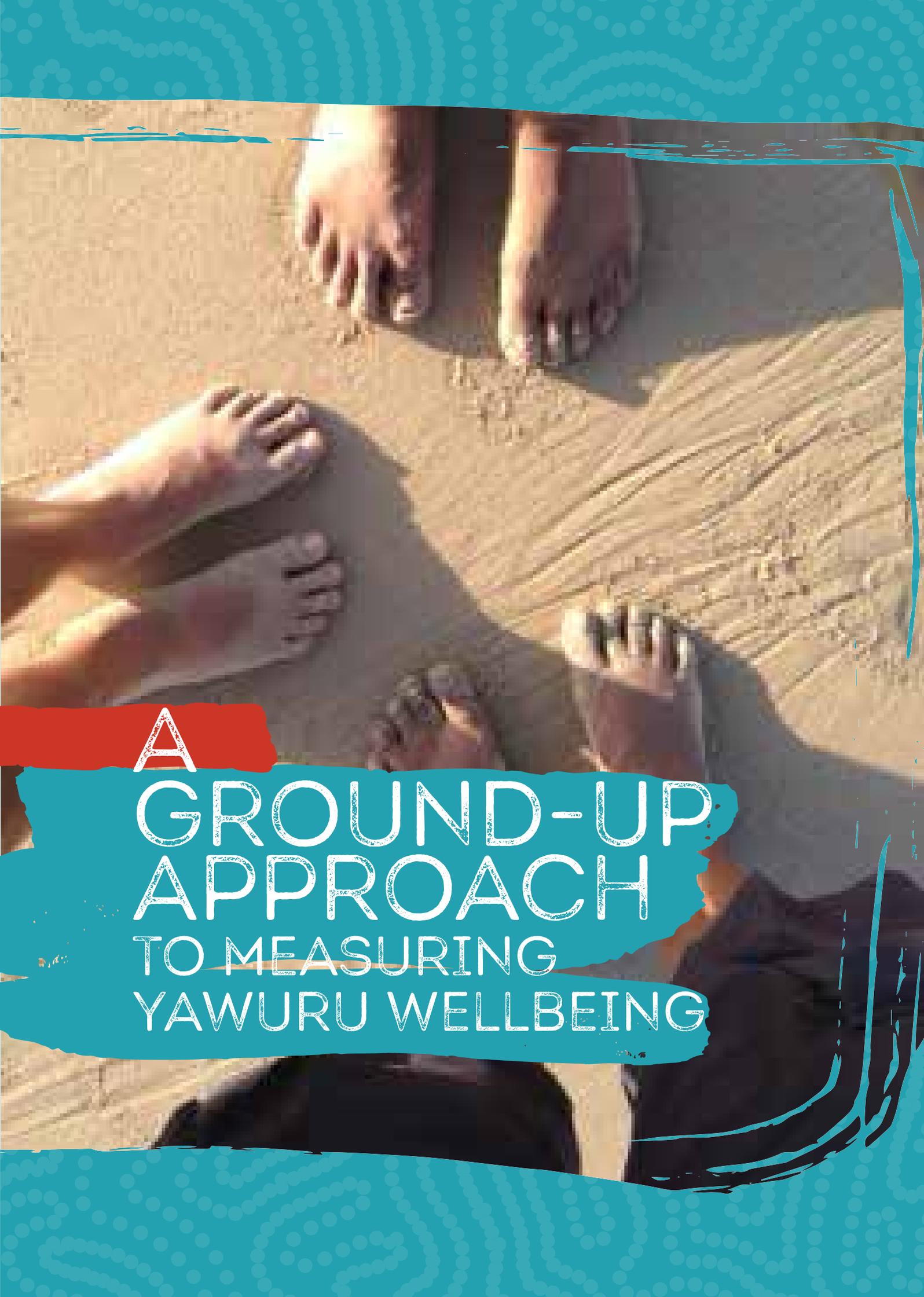


Such expressions emphasise one of the key learnings from this research: the importance of *liyan* to Yawuru wellbeing should be understood by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that Yawuru individuals interact with. An essential prerequisite to achieve this aim is to start from Yawuru worldviews and involve them throughout the coproduction of knowledge.

Learning from Yawuru voices, this research seeks to interpret and translate the notion of *liyan* as the founding conceptualisation of wellbeing for Yawuru people, and to use elements of *liyan* to inform the development of an appropriate framework for the measurement of Yawuru wellbeing.

... the importance of *liyan* to Yawuru wellbeing should be understood by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that Yawuru individuals interact with.





A  
GROUND-UP  
APPROACH  
TO MEASURING  
YAWURU WELLBEING

## CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provides an international standard to support Indigenous peoples' right for development principles that are balanced between development and sustainability. At its core, the UNDRIP enshrines an approach that is collective, inclusive and most importantly reflective. Specifically, articles 3, 43 and 44<sup>3</sup> of the UNDRIP assert that Indigenous peoples want to become agents of their own development and to determine and develop priorities and strategies for development (UN 2007).

The rights of Indigenous peoples according to UNDRIP should be represented in development goals founded on strength of culture, identity, and balance and harmony with the environment. The principles of self-determination, participation, cultural rights, land rights, ownership, and free prior and informed consent all form the basis for supporting Indigenous groups in their efforts to set an agenda for improving their wellbeing (UN 2007). Whilst achieving Indigenous wellbeing is a goal in itself, involving Indigenous peoples to achieve a better understanding of what defines "wellbeing" is also crucial to the development of frameworks used to measure progress towards wellbeing goals (Gooda 2010).

These are important elements of a development strategy in which Indigenous Australians actively participate in the processes by which decisions are made about their development, or that contribute to community wellbeing.

Participatory research methods emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a tool for producing knowledge grounded in the collaborative principle that participants should be involved in the research process from beginning to end (Chambers 1997; Conrad and Campbell 2008). Participatory research seeks to create a space where local insights and values are made visible and prioritised. This approach provides people with the freedom to define for themselves which human and social capabilities are most valuable to their development.

The approach taken in this project is founded on the co-production of knowledge. It involves Indigenous participation and decision-making through the entire research journey, recognising the diversity that lies within the Yawuru people, the importance of the principles of *liyan* and incorporating mutual capability building. The research approach is thus one that is extensively participatory by nature.

<sup>3</sup> Article 3 states that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Article 43 and 44 states the rights recognised herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world and that the rights and freedom are equally guaranteed to male and female individuals.

## RECOGNITION SPACE

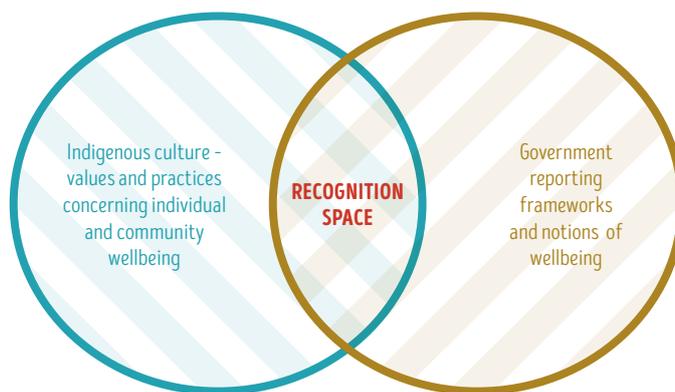
One of the key challenges in this project has been to develop a shared understanding of the degree to which Indigenous conceptualisations of wellbeing – as framed through the principles of *liyan* – overlap with ‘western’ wellbeing concepts that are more typically embedded within reporting frameworks of government and statistical agencies.

The scope and extent of this shared understanding between cultures exist in what has been termed the ‘recognition space’ (Pearson 1997; Martin and Mantziaris 2000).

Taylor (2008) conceives the ‘recognition space’ as an avenue through which Indigenous peoples and the government can begin to engage in a meaningful dialogue to conceptualise and understand Indigenous culture and its constituents, and to develop a shared appreciation of those aspects of wellbeing that resonate strongly within Indigenous cultures and experiences.

The meaningful operation of the ‘recognition space’ revolves around four key points as illustrated in Figure 2. The first relates to why we are measuring wellbeing, the second how wellbeing is conceptualised, the third by whom and finally by what process wellbeing measures are selected (Yap and Yu 2016b).

**FIGURE 2**  
Taylor’s Recognition Space



Operationalising the recognition space:  
What is the aim? (why measure?)  
How is wellbeing conceptualised? (what matters?)  
By whom? (who decides?)  
Through what process? (how to measure?)

Source: Yap and Yu (2016b)

## RESEARCH VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Kukutai and Walter (2015) identify five recognition principles that should inform the conduct of research involving Indigenous peoples – geographical diversity, cultural diversity, other ways of knowing, mutual capability building and indigenous decision making. These principles respect the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The next section outlines how these research principles are invoked to ensure that Indigenous peoples have been able to participate meaningfully in the research process as partners rather than as ‘research subjects’. This co-production of knowledge is what brings into play an effective ‘recognition space’ through which to distil Yawuru notions of wellbeing.

### **Indigenous decision making**

Ideally, the full participation of a community should extend from the initiation of a research project to research design, and through to the interpretation and dissemination of the research findings.

Yawuru’s right to participation has been exercised in this research in several ways.

- First, the collaborative partnership between report authors Mandy Yap and Eunice Yu, a Yawuru woman and colleague based at the Kimberley Institute, has been instrumental in developing the research agenda and aims as well as the dissemination of research among community stakeholders and to the broader research and policy communities.
- Second, a Yawuru Guidance and Reference committee was formed consisting of Yawuru women and men to ensure that the information generated through the research reflected local aspirations and values, and, more importantly, delivers value and function to the Yawuru community. The committee continues to provide guidance on the cultural appropriateness and relevance of the research design and output.
- Third, and most importantly, Yawuru community participation in the research has been interwoven throughout the process, from research content to survey design and collection. Specialised tools have been developed as part of the research process to ensure that Yawuru community voices are transformed appropriately into measures that reflect Indigenous decision making.

The purpose of developing indicators of wellbeing for Yawuru is to determine how Yawuru are faring according to their own benchmarks and standards.

### **Recognising diversity**

Recognising cultural and geographical diversity is critical to the construction of wellbeing measures that are useful and functional for community purposes. From a cultural perspective, this stems from the recognition of Yawuru as a distinct language group, the diversity within the group and also the connectedness they share through their history and connection to culture and country. For the Yawuru, a further distinction lies in the fact that they are Native Title holders over the land and country and have a substantial say in the development of Broome and the surrounds.

In terms of geographical diversity, the wellbeing of the Yawuru people as a language group relates to the importance that Yawuru attaches to 'place' or the country to which they have a strong and enduring connection. This connection is related not just to a physical location, but also to a dynamic and extended kinship system. Geographical diversity extends to the songlines and stories and ceremony which contributes to being Yawuru, irrespective of where they may be and live, and also regardless of whether they leave and return to Broome.

### **Mutual capability building**

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) highlights the importance of mutual capacity building.

For this research project, capacity building occurred across various stages of the research process. For example, the preparation and management of the research project itself provided for mutual capacity building between the report's principal researchers, particularly in terms of communication and relationship building in this cross-cultural space.

There was also a larger capacity building component built in at the quantitative phase of the mixed methods research. To enable this to be undertaken, additional funds were awarded through the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) Research Grants scheme. These funds enabled ten local research assistants to be employed for the purpose of community engagement and data collection. The local research assistants consisted of Yawuru women across a whole range of age groups and experience.

## CONCEPTION TO OPERATION – A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

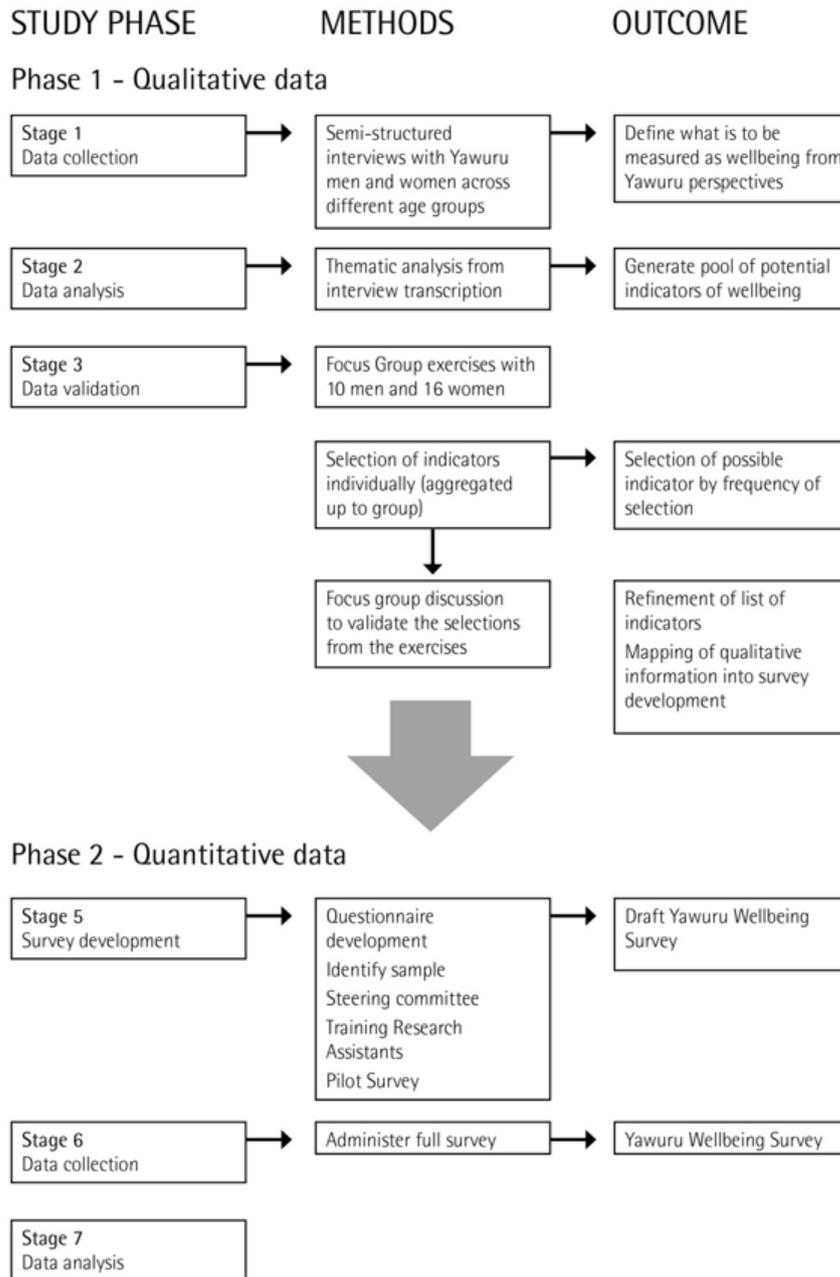
The research approach involved two interlinked phases – a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase (Figure 3). The qualitative phase aimed to explore how wellbeing is experienced and defined by Yawuru women and men. This was carried out in three distinct stages:

- Stage 1 involved face to face semi-structured interviews to conceptualise Yawuru's ideas of a good life and *mabu liyan*.
- Stage 2 involved focus group activities to select the relevant indicators of wellbeing generated from the themes arising from the interviews.
- Stage 3 presented the potential lists of indicators back to community for discussion, refinement and validation.

The qualitative research phase served to translate the stories from Yawuru women and men into measurable forms which guided the quantitative phase. Specific indicators that were developed, selected and discussed in the qualitative phase were then used to inform the development of the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey. A potential limitation to keep in mind is that the indicators developed here are based on the interviews and stories of a subset of Yawuru women and men. A different group of individuals may have resulted in a different set of wellbeing conceptions and associated indicators. However, given that the focus group exercises involved Yawuru women and men beyond just those who shared their stories through the semi-structured interviews, it is likely that the indicators and measures presented cover a range of perspectives across ages.

The survey was collected with several aims in mind. The first aim is to measure aspects of Yawuru culture, identity and life from the perspective of Yawuru alongside the objective information about Yawuru people's circumstances such as employment, health and education. The second aim is to provide a baseline set of wellbeing information for Yawuru to make informed decisions on designing programs which will strengthen their wellbeing. A final aim of the survey is to assist policy makers to better understand wellbeing from an Indigenous perspective.

**FIGURE 3**  
Research approach and phases



Source: Yap (unpublished thesis)

Table 1 and Table 2 capture the grounded research narrative through which notions of wellbeing are first derived from the stories from Yawuru women and men, and then translated into a series of potential indicators for inclusion as survey questions in the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey 2015.

**TABLE 1**  
From stories to potential indicators

| Theme                 | Interview excerpt   | Potential indicators                               | Selected/not selected                          |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| Connection to country | "If you are successful in catching fish, then you share it with your family and friends. Give both sides of your family..."   | Sharing your catch or kill with family and friends | Picked by Yawuru women<br>Picked by Yawuru men |
|                       | "Yawuru used to get blood cockle ... we are saltwater people and we hunt from the sea. The cockles have disappeared now. People feel very low from a wellbeing perspective that this cockle has gone ... our <i>liyan</i> no good when we see that" | Quality and quantity of catch and kill             | Picked by Yawuru women<br>Picked by Yawuru men |

**TABLE 2**  
From selected indicators to survey instrument

| Theme                 | Examples of interview  | Indicators selected  | Survey question  |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Connection to country | "If you are successful in catching fish, then you share it with your family and friends. Give both sides of your family, friends or relatives, split it up"  | Sharing fish and kill with family and friends                        | In the last month, did you share fish, catch or bushfood with family and other members of the community?<br>In the last month, did you receive fish, catch or bushfood from family and other members of the community? |
|                       | "I try and get back into country in the afternoons. I go back and I sit down on the rocks, get out on country and go fishing and that makes my <i>liyan</i> feel good"   | Fishing and hunting  | In the last 12 months, how often did you fish or hunt?   |
|                       | "Yawuru used to get blood cockle...we are saltwater people and we hunt from the sea. The cockles have disappeared now. People feel very low from a wellbeing perspective that this cockle has gone... our <i>liyan</i> no good when we see that" | Eating bush tucker, fish that was caught in season (being nourished) | In the last 12 months, did you eat traditional food? (Catch, kill or bushfood)   |
|                       | "Once upon a time, we used to have access to go down to our favourite fishing spots. But you can't do it anymore, it is blocked off"   | Access to fishing spots  | Do you feel able to access your land and sea country to hunt and fish?   |

### **Sampling approach**

A stratified random sample was drawn from a list of all possible Yawuru adults aged 18 years and over from the Knowing Our Community Survey (KOCS) undertaken in 2011. From the KOCS, those who identified as Yawuru in their first, second or third language group or other was chosen as part of the sampling frame.

From an initial sample of 200, a further series of selections were applied to overcome a range of sampling challenges and to ensure an appropriate age distribution of Yawuru women and men.

The local intelligence and networks of research assistants proved to be invaluable in locating respondents either at home or at work, knowing whether the timing of survey was appropriate for some members of the community and whether there were others in the community not captured through the sampling frame.

### **Pilot survey**

The Yawuru Wellbeing Survey questionnaire was tested with a convenience sample of fifteen respondents in May 2015. The sample included the local research assistants so that they could familiarise themselves with the survey exercises and content. The pilot sample also included members of the Yawuru advisory committee to ensure that the guidance and feedback given through the consultation process had been reflected in the survey instrument.



### Data collection

Data collection for the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey was facilitated through a survey instrument designed and created using Qualtrics, a survey company and software developer. The survey could be completed either online or offline depending on the level of internet connectivity. For those undertaking the survey face to face, the respondents were given the choice of either answering the questions on the tablet themselves assisted or the research assistants could ask them the question and prompt them for answers.

Data collection was completed by the research team between May 2015 and June 2015, with the following sample responses provided in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
Estimated compared to final sample for Yawuru Wellbeing Survey 2015

| Age group | Yawuru Wellbeing Survey 2015 (estimated) |       |         |       | Yawuru Wellbeing Survey 2015 (final sample) |       |         |       |
|-----------|--|-------|---------|-------|---|-------|---------|-------|
|           | Males                                    |       | Females |       | Males                                       |       | Females |       |
|           | No                                       | %     | No      | %     | No  | %     | No      | %     |
| 18 to 24  | 22                                       | 23.9  | 25      | 23.1  | 11  | 19.0  | 20      | 20.4  |
| 25 to 34  | 28                                       | 30.4  | 28      | 25.9  | 22  | 37.9  | 25      | 25.5  |
| 35 to 44  | 10                                       | 10.9  | 19      | 17.6  | 5   | 8.6   | 19      | 19.4  |
| 45 to 54  | 15                                       | 16.3  | 19      | 17.6  | 8   | 13.8  | 18      | 18.4  |
| 55 to 64  | 13                                       | 14.1  | 13      | 12.0  | 8   | 13.8  | 10      | 10.2  |
| 65 plus   | 5  | 5.4   | 5       | 4.6   | 4   | 6.9   | 6       | 6.1   |
| Total     | 92                                       | 100.0 | 108     | 100.0 | 58  | 100.0 | 98      | 100.0 |

THE RESEARCH APPROACH  
STARTS FROM THE GROUND UP,  
WITH INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS  
OF WELLBEING. FOR YAWURU,  
THAT IS MABU LIYAN.

IT INVOLVES INDIGENOUS  
PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-  
MAKING THROUGH THE ENTIRE  
RESEARCH JOURNEY.







FINDINGS

FROM THE YAWURU  
WELLBEING  
SURVEY

## INTRODUCTION

Several broad themes of wellbeing emerged from the stories of Yawuru women and men that were interviewed in the first stage of the project. The valued aspects of wellbeing for Yawuru fall broadly within the theme of family connection to country, connection to culture, community, health, standard of living, safety, respect, rights and recognition. Other themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews included the principles and values of living well and being well. It was also evident that the state of one's being and feelings were central for Yawuru wellbeing.

In this section, the findings from the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey are presented across seven broad headings – strong family, strong community, connection to culture, country and identity, self-determination, health, material and subjective wellbeing.

As outlined above section the survey is a sample of the broader Yawuru population and the results in this section should be read keeping this in mind.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

A total of 156 Yawuru women and men volunteered their time to participate in the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey between May to June 2015. Table 4 outlines the characteristics of these people. A first thing to note from Table 4 is the higher proportion of Yawuru women compared to men captured in the survey (63 per cent of women compared to 37 per cent of men).

The Yawuru Wellbeing Survey only included the Yawuru adult population. There were 48 Yawuru women and men aged between 18 to 28, 54 aged 29 to 44 and a further 54 individuals in the age group 45 years and over.

The majority of those who participated in the survey currently reside in Broome (93 per cent). However, a substantial number of Yawuru women and men reported having spent 12 months or more away from Broome (56 per cent). There are a range of reasons for spending time away from Broome including for education or for family reasons.

About 50 per cent of Yawuru women and men in the survey reported having Year 12 or higher education qualifications with 30 per cent reporting Year 12, 22 per cent reporting TAFE or degree or higher qualifications. The employment status of Yawuru women and men are also noted in Table 4. In particular, 40 per cent of Yawuru individuals reported working full time. There is a further 16 per cent who were working part-time and of these, and 11 per cent would like to work more hours. There is a small proportion of Yawuru who reported not being employed or studying. Of those who

reported other, the reasons given include being engaged in education, on maternity leave or have health conditions which prevent them from being employed.

**TABLE 4**  
Yawuru Wellbeing Survey Respondents

| Characteristic   | No  | %    |
|--|-----|------|
| <b>Age</b>   |     |      |
| 18 - 28 years  | 48  | 30.8 |
| 29 - 44 years  | 54  | 34.6 |
| 45 years and over  | 54  | 34.6 |
| <b>Gender</b>  |     |      |
| Male   | 58  | 37.2 |
| Female   | 98  | 62.8 |
| <b>Spent time away from Broome for 12 months or more</b> |     |      |
| Yes  | 87  | 55.8 |
| No   | 68  | 43.6 |
| Missing  | 1   | 0.6  |
| <b>Education attainment</b>                              |     |      |
| Degree or higher   | 17  | 10.9 |
| TAFE   | 17  | 10.9 |
| Year 12  | 47  | 30.1 |
| Less than year 12  | 64  | 41.0 |
| Other  | 11  | 7.1  |
| <b>Labour Force Status</b>                               |     |      |
| Working full-time  | 61  | 39.1 |
| Part time (Would like more hours)                        | 17  | 10.9 |
| Part time (Not looking for more hours)                   | 9   | 5.8  |
| Self-employed  | 4   | 2.6  |
| Retired  | 9   | 5.8  |
| Not in the labour force                                  | 12  | 7.7  |
| Volunteer  | 1   | 0.6  |
| Looking for work   | 34  | 21.8 |
| On leave   | 2   | 1.3  |
| Casual   | 1   | 0.6  |
| Studying   | 2   | 1.3  |
| Other  | 4   | 2.6  |
| Total  | 156 | 100  |

Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey

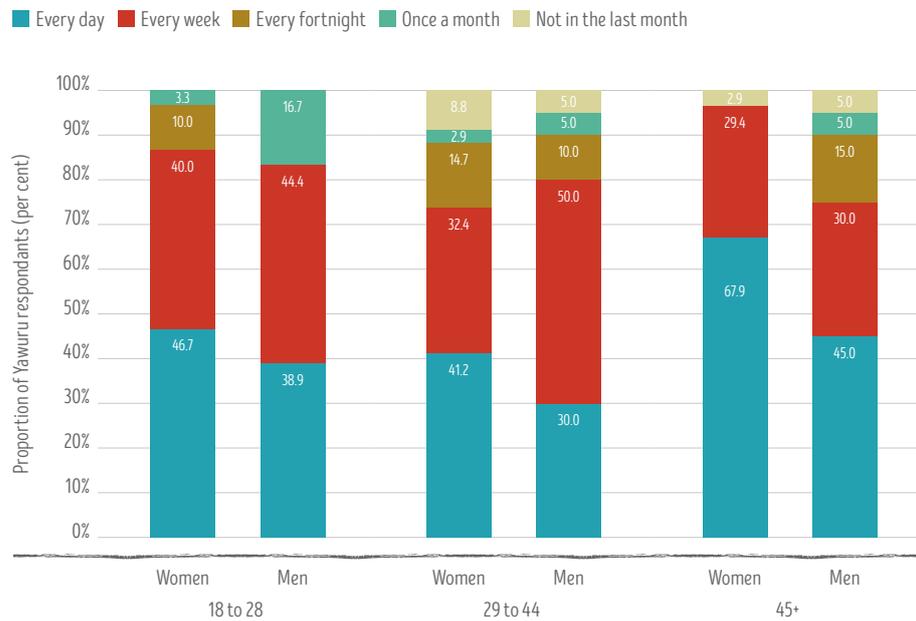
## FAMILY AND WELLBEING

A major source of attaining good *liyan* is family and relatedness. Three aspects of family were most notably evident for Yawuru women and men. Firstly, family was seen as a source of support and connectedness. Secondly, family gives a person their identity and a sense of belonging. A third aspect of family tying the first two aspects together is the kinship structures which underpin the social and cultural exchanges that serve to fulfil a person's sense of belonging and affirm their identity and place within the family.

“Usually being around family. Being at a family gathering, on country with family, at my grandmother’s house with family. Times like that make my *liyan* feel good. When it doesn’t feel good, I resort to those things to make it better.”

Yawuru female 28 years

**FIGURE 4**  
Frequency of family contact by gender and age

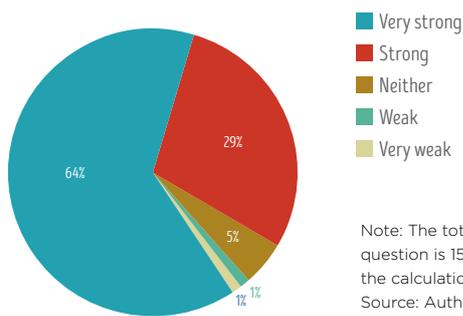


Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 154 persons. Very few people reported not seeing any family in the last month.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

The strength of family connectedness is evident in Figure 4 whereby the majority of Yawuru women and men reported visiting, seeing or keeping in touch with family not living with them at least every day or every week. In particular, among women in the age group 45 years and over, more than two-thirds reported seeing family every day.

The majority of Yawuru people surveyed consider that the connection that they have with family is either strong or very strong (Figure 5). More than two-thirds of Yawuru people have judged their connection to family as being very strong, and a further 20 per cent as 'strong'. Very few survey participants have stated that they have very weak or weak family connections (n=3).

**FIGURE 5**  
Strength of family connection



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 154 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=2).  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

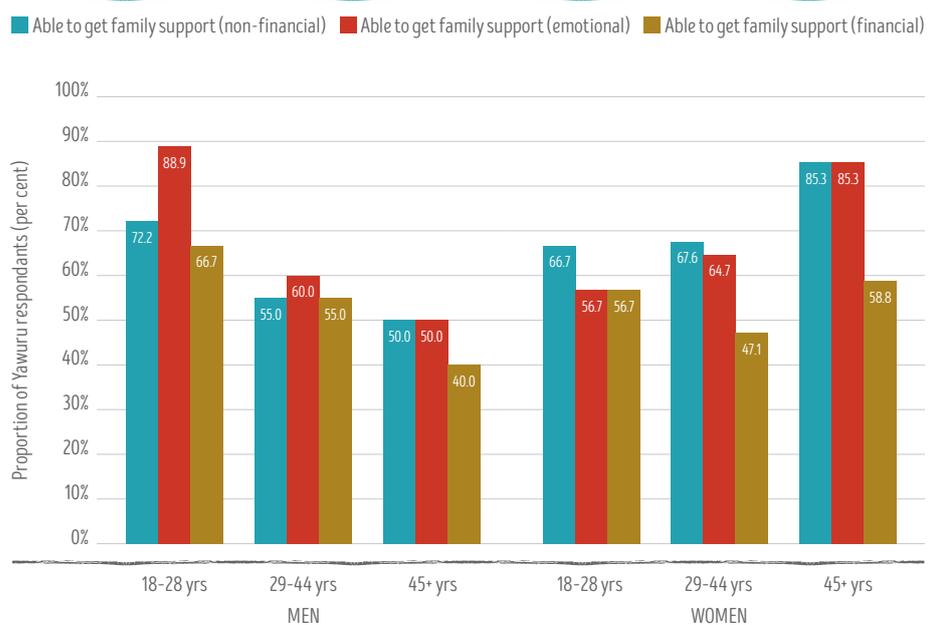
More than 93% of Yawuru men and women consider their connection to family to be 'strong' or 'very strong'.



The strength of family relationships is also demonstrated in the ability of Yawuru women and men to get support or help from family and friends when needed most or all of the time (Figure 6). The most common type of support provided either all or most of the time was emotional and non-financial support. Fewer Yawuru men and women reported being able receive financial support most or all of the time.

Yawuru women, in particular those in the age group 45 years and over were most likely to report being able to get support when needed, particularly in the form of non-financial and emotional support. However, conversely, Yawuru men in the younger age group were more likely to report that they were able to get support from family most or all of the time.

**FIGURE 6**  
Ability to get support from family and friends all or most of the time



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=2).

The capability to achieve healthy family relationships alongside a strong identity and wellbeing is influenced by the challenges that the media, technology and day-to-day pressures of sustaining a living bring.



“We didn’t grow up in a world of computer games and TV. We had to go outdoors and play and the bush was our playground. We would spend the whole school holiday in Town Beach swimming in mangroves and hunting and fishing from old jetty and new jetty. Growing up with that lifestyle has shaped me a lot. Going out with a bottle of water, box of matches and learning to build a spear and eat fish and still do.”

Yawuru male, 41 years

A significant factor impacting on family wellbeing, identity and relatedness is the historical experiences of the Stolen Generation and assimilation policies. One younger Yawuru male noted:

“My grandmother was taken away when she was about four years old. She struggled throughout her life with her identity ... The stolen generation worked on her family because I don’t know any culture from that area [Murchison area]. I can’t speak the language. Thankfully Yawuru stayed strong, connected to Yawuru, connected to land.”

Yawuru male, 30 years

Yawuru individuals demonstrate resourcefulness in their endeavours to create and continue to provide that sense of support from the family and community to ensure that members of their family and communities have the best possible chance and opportunity to achieve their valued aspirations. This is done at the family level but also outside the boundaries of the family structures.

A Yawuru father describes the importance of moving away from Broome to provide his children with better schooling opportunities. At the same time, in reflecting on his own childhood and time spent pursuing an education in Perth, he expressed the loss felt in his connection to country and culture. However, he also noted the ability to maintain that connection to country by returning to Broome as often as he could and plans to do the same while his children are at school:

“My two youngest kids go to school down there (Perth) and I want to support my kids, give them a chance whatever they choose to do... There’s always a yearning for more because we have lost a lot in between the school years when I had to go to Perth in my teens for six years. I used to come back here for holidays so I know I can do the same. Keep that connection to country.”

**Yawuru male, 49 years**

There is also support that is created outside the immediate family structure to ensure the wellbeing of others in the community are maintained. One female respondent talked about the creation of the family-like support through the Kimberley Klub down in Perth to provide a sense of home for young Yawuru people away and to ensure their wellbeing is maintained both as the receiver and the giver:

“If you want to compete at the elite level, you have to move. That can be hard for a lot of kids. There are a lot of talented people who can only go so far – the strong pull, the connection to home, the lifestyle, the family support, everything that we have grown up with, that strong pull back home [...] The Kimberley Klub was set up for that. It is an opportunity to keep them connected. We run a few programs through the year [...] cook food, supply traditional food from back home and take it to school...”

**Yawuru female, 30 years**

Family is central to the experience of wellbeing and *mabu liyan* for Yawuru women and men. This is family not only in the strict biological sense but family through kinship systems where social and cultural exchanges occur. As a result, family and relatedness is an important aspect of Yawuru identity. This section clearly demonstrates that the family is critical to wellbeing. Family is also the place where knowledge on country and culture are shared and passed down from generation to generation. The central importance of family for Yawuru women and men has persevered and stayed resilient in the face of historical oppression.

## COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING

### Meaning of community

Rather than impose a meaning of community within the survey, Yawuru men and women were asked to state which were the groups which formed part of their community when answering questions about community wellbeing. The majority of Yawuru women and men surveyed considered their community that of the Yawuru. However, slightly over half of Yawuru also considered other Indigenous groups as part of conceptualising community. One in every three Yawuru also considered other non-Indigenous groups when thinking about how their community is going. It was also common to consider all of Broome to be within their boundaries of defining community and one in particular also considered the whole of the Kimberley as their community.

Many Yawuru interviewed cited the importance of contributing to community as enhancing their wellbeing. The contribution to community more often was through employment both formally and informally but also more broadly in terms of enhancing the liveability and multicultural fabric that makes Broome.

“Your contribution also contributes to everyone’s wellbeing.”

Yawuru female, 56 years

“The community taught me that freedom and taught me what I know as culture. If I can just continue that.”

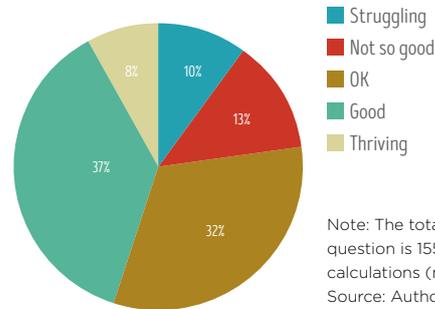
Yawuru male, 30 years

Like family, the definition of community among Yawuru transcends the physical relation or locality and place. Community is very much relationship and group based and encompasses not just the Yawuru community but the whole Broome community consisting of many other aboriginal groups and non-aboriginal family and friends.

### Community wellbeing

Taking into account the differences that Yawuru have when thinking about their community, when asked about how well their community is going, the most frequent response was ‘good’, followed by ‘OK’ (Figure 7). Around 10 per cent of survey participants thought that their community was struggling and 7 per cent thought that it was a thriving, connected and inclusive community where people could rely on each other to work together. A further 13 per cent reported that the strength of the community was ‘not so good’.

**FIGURE 7**  
How is your community going?



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 155 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=1).

Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

When asked about what is the most pressing issue facing you and your community that may impact on your wellbeing, the most frequent response for all Yawuru women and men across ages was jobs, followed by management of country and land and public safety (Table 5). The mention of jobs as a pressing issue reflects the circumstances of Yawuru women and men who participated in the survey. As noted in the earlier section of the findings, about 22 per cent of Yawuru women and men reported they were looking for work.

There are however some similarities and differences across the age groups. For all three age groups, jobs and management of country and land were amongst the top three issues facing the community. For the age group 18 to 28, the management of natural resources was also considered to be a pressing issue facing the community where as for the age group 29 to 44, health services were among the top three issues. For those in the older age groups, public safety and access to fishing and hunting sites were notable issues facing their community.

**TABLE 5**  
**Most pressing issues facing you and your community (% reported)**

| Characteristic                      | 18 - 28 yrs | 29 - 44 yrs | 45 + yrs |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
|                                     | %           | %           | %        |
| Management of natural resources     | 62.5        | 42.6        | 64.8     |
| Management of country and land      | 66.7        | 64.8        | 75.9     |
| Access to fishing and hunting sites | 47.9        | 50.0        | 68.5a    |
| Health services                     | 47.9        | 63.0        | 63.0     |
| Public safety                       | 56.3        | 57.4        | 75.9     |
| Yawuru Cultural Knowledge           | 47.9        | 44.4        | 55.6     |
| Language maintenance                | 37.5        | 29.6        | 50.0     |
| Jobs                                | 64.6        | 75.9        | 70.4     |
| Changing government funding         | 35.4        | 42.6        | 61.1     |
| Over-development of Broome          | 52.1        | 42.6        | 66.7     |
| Other                               | 8.3         | 11.1        | 11.1     |

Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
 Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

In terms of other pressing issues facing communities that were noted include drugs and alcohol associated issues.

**What makes community work?**

Meaningful and secure work is seen as being instrumental to making a contribution to community as highlighted by a young Yawuru female.

“A good life to me would be that I’d also be seen as a contributor to society. The real sense of responsibility and being able to get what I want through my own means [...] Through my work I am able to make that contribution.”

Yawuru female, 28 years

Some individuals noted that through their work or participation in various activities in groups, committees or meetings, they were exercising their rights and doing what they could for their families and community. The changing nature of the institutions and norms which assist and facilitate self-determination amongst the younger Yawuru population was also evident, as noted below:

“The younger ones are acknowledged at a much younger age and the good thing that I like about it is those younger ones are not shy of talking .There would be 7 or 8 working in the Yawuru Office under the age of 21. They are actually working, taking on some responsibility. They are having a say of where it goes from here. They are encouraged to have a say.”

Yawuru male, 53 years

The importance of the collective and not just the individual is evident in the narratives around family and community. Family and community are the places in which other aspects of wellbeing important to Yawuru occurs and can be supported. For example, the transmission of knowledge and also fulfilling one’s obligation to country often occurs whilst one is spending time with family and friends fishing, hunting, camping and gathering bush tucker.

“I always sing to my young ones. I have the guitar and I practice that with the grandkids. We just sing along and that brings us together. I think that practice of culture needs to be done, bring that back again.”

Yawuru male, 63 years

“Knowledge was a big part of my upbringing especially with my grandparents, uncles and aunties. We were taught to fish. We were doing that since we were 2 years old... It’s ingrained in me, not something I have to think too hard about.”

Yawuru male, 22 years

### **Community involvement**

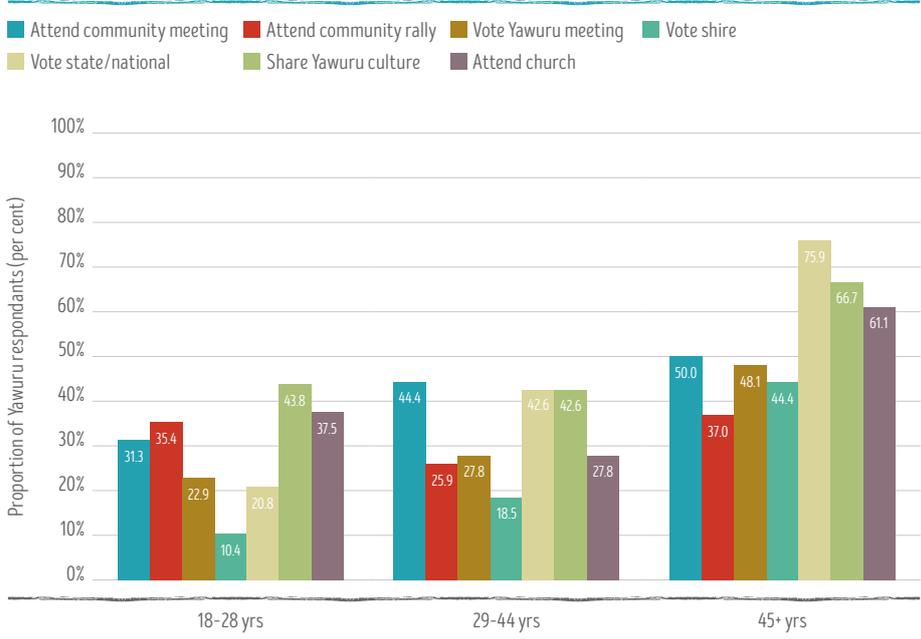
Involvement in community is important because it signals the extent of attachment of the individuals to the group and broader collective. It can be both formal and informal types of community involvement. Yawuru survey participants were asked about whether they participated in a number of different activities within the last twelve months. These activities ranged from informal activities like sharing Yawuru culture through having a yarn with others to more formal activities like voting at a community or shire meeting. Capturing this information can tell us about the type of engagement Yawuru have within their community and how that contributes to the individual wellbeing of Yawuru women and men but also collectively as a group.

Differences in the type of community participation are evident across the generations, with older Yawuru people more likely to have participated in the various types of community engagements asked about – especially the more formal participation such as voting and attending meetings (Figure 8). Older Yawuru people were also more likely to have reported attending church,

to have voted, and attended community rallies or meetings than younger generations.

Irrespective of age, one of the most common forms of community participation is sharing of Yawuru culture with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. This was done through activities such as welcome to country, country walk, through a tour or simply having a yarn.

**FIGURE 8**  
Type of community participation by age

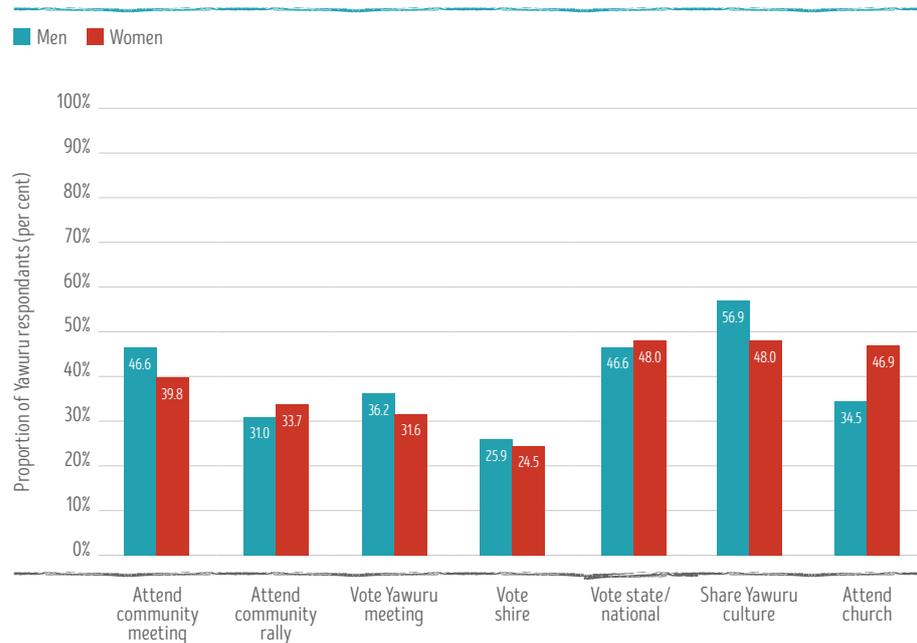


Note: The total sample size sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

There are also gendered differences in the type of community participation among Yawuru, which likely signals some of the different roles that Yawuru men and women have. Much like the patterns observed by age group, the most common forms of participation were sharing of Yawuru culture and voting (Figure 9). Around 57 per cent of Yawuru men and 48 per cent of Yawuru women surveyed reported sharing Yawuru culture with Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups in the last twelve months.

The major difference is that women were more likely than men to have attended church in the last twelve months – 46.9% compared with 34.5%, whereas Yawuru men were more likely to attend community meetings – 46.6% compared to 39.8%.

**FIGURE 9**  
Type of community participation by gender



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

The findings in this section highlight the various ways in which Yawuru women and men contribute to society and community, how well they think their community is going and what the biggest challenges are. While there are formal ways in which participation is undertaken through voting and attending meetings, an interesting and important finding here is the sharing of Yawuru culture to Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups as a way of creating better understanding of Yawuru, their rich and diverse cultures and experiences and important connection to their land and sea country. This not only goes to the sense of identity for Yawuru women and men but it also serves to inform the wider community about the rich and unique history of Australia's First Peoples and Broome's First Peoples, the Yawuru.

## STRONG CULTURE, STRONG COUNTRY, STRONG IDENTITY

Yawuru's connection to culture and country through the *Bugarrigarra* is pivotal to their enduring wellbeing and central to the maintenance of *mabu liyan*. The practices and beliefs of Yawuru's connection to culture and country are grounded in the *Bugarrigarra* and guides how people live in balance with the environment and the land. The maintenance of traditional practices and language not only fulfils a cultural obligation, but it is also part of Yawuru identity and that sense of belonging to the land.

Not dissimilar with other Indigenous groups around the world, the Yawuru people describe a deep physical, cultural and spiritual connection to their country in which they live but also identify with. Knowing about land and sea, the flora and fauna, hunting and fishing, eating bush tucker and seasonal catch, spending time with elders, camping and singing are all examples of this connection to culture and connection to country for Yawuru women and men.





A person's connection to culture and country is described by Yawuru people as encompassing the following:

“The stories of connection to country are so rich. These are stories that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Everything has a name – plants, animals, the weather, the landmarks etc. Connection to land is at a deeper level with the many spiritual stories that are ingrained in the land. So being on country is so important for being closer to nature but also your ancestors that have gone before you.”

Yawuru female, 34 years

“Part of that connection to country that contributes to *liyan* is actually being physically here, not just about speaking the language. Mind you, if I am away from Broome and I am finding it difficult, if I see family or see something that resembles Broome, that makes me connect... reminds me... it is still a sense.”

Yawuru female, 28 years

“It is hard being away... Every time I come home, every holidays, I go fishing and when you are away, you even dream about going fishing, you miss it. Just having that feeling makes you feel connected.”

Yawuru male, 22 years

“We had the best part of the bargain growing up. Mainly we lived off the land. We’d go fishing whenever we want to. Make sure it is the right time for fishing... You know when you go fishing. [...] When we go fishing, we fish until the fish stops biting. The amount we catch, it doesn’t go to waste.”

Yawuru male, 74 years

“Coming back to Broome is very good for me. I know the fishing spot, I know the beaches, I know the people. This for me is the best place.. Learning about the land, making sure we look after it.”

Yawuru female, 67 years

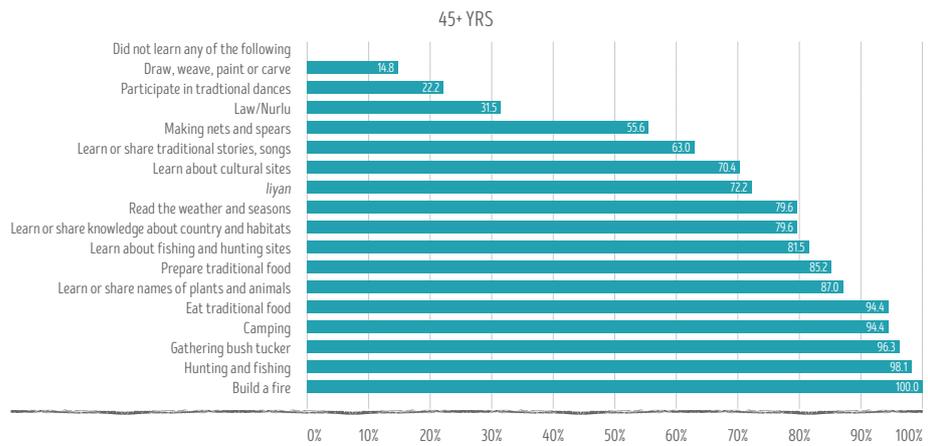
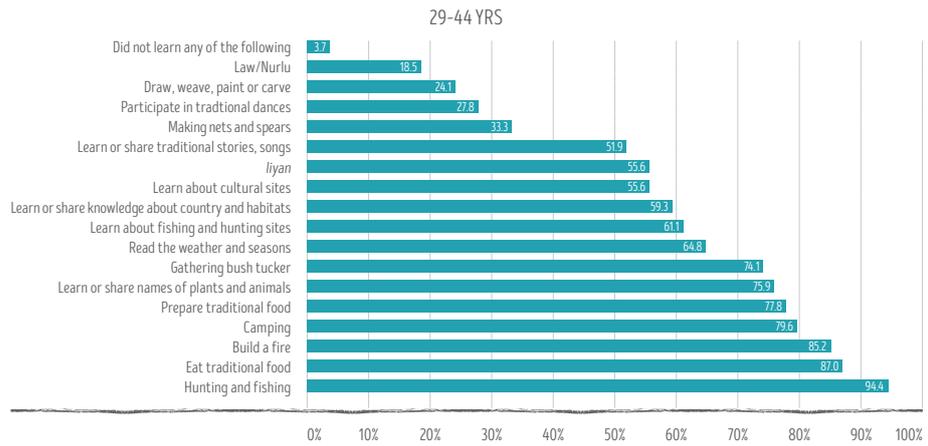
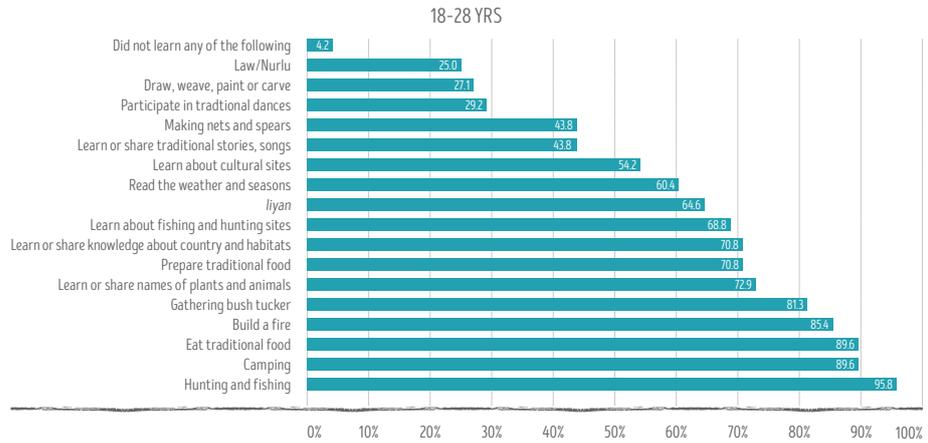
“I try and get back into country in the afternoons. With my *liyan* I go back and I sit down on the rocks, get out on country and go fishing and that makes my *liyan* good.”

Yawuru female, 52 years old

Yawuru’s connection to country and culture is multi-layered; from knowledge learnt as a child to the continuous practice of hunting and fishing today – and from that the reciprocity of sharing and receiving, which is part of Yawuru’s sense of self and cultural obligation to each other and to country. All these various components contribute to *mabu liyan* for the individual Yawuru person but also collectively as Yawuru peoples. There are also so many dimensions to cultural knowledge as described in the narratives – knowing about country and culture, knowing the seasons and habitats, painting and drawing as well preparing and eating traditional food.

It is evident from the survey results that Yawuru’s enduring connection to country and culture begins in childhood. Almost all Yawuru women and men learnt how to hunt and fish as a child (Figure 10). There are some similarities and differences in the top five cultural knowledge learnt during childhood across the age groups. Across the three age groups, hunting and fishing, camping, building a fire and eating traditional foods were amongst the most common cultural knowledge learnt. For the younger age group, gathering bush tucker and learning and sharing the names of plants and animals were also some of the cultural knowledge reported. For the middle age group, preparing traditional food, was amongst the top knowledge acquired which were not present in the other age groups.

**FIGURE 10**  
Cultural knowledge acquired as a child by age group



Participating in fishing and hunting in turn leads to other valuable activities such as sharing one's catch and kill and spending time with family and friends:

“My daughter and her partner went fishing the other day and they got about 13-14 salmon. And then we say, how do we distribute them? It is a cultural thing to catch fish this time of the year and if you are successful and you get a few fish, you share it with family and friends. So that is an indicator of what I would think is wellbeing. Fishing is not just fishing for recreational purposes; it is fishing because it has a social, cultural and obligatory dimension to it.”

Yawuru male, 58 years

The knowledge acquired during childhood and over the life course is evident in the description of the level of cultural knowledge as an adult and also the frequency of participating in cultural activities on country.

The multifaceted social and cultural dimensions of participating in hunting and fishing as part of Yawuru's enduring connection to country is evident in Table 6. This occurs from childhood through to adulthood. Table 6 illustrates that intergenerational transmission of knowledge is strong with the majority of Yawuru women and men stating that they learnt how to hunt and fish as a child. Yawuru women and men continue to practice what they learn as adults. In particular, over 60 per cent of Yawuru women and men across the



three age groups reported that they participated in fishing and hunting in the last three months at least some, most or all of the time. As a result of that knowledge taught as a child, Yawuru women and men also described their knowledge of hunting and fishing as well or very well. In particular, Yawuru men in the age group 18–28 and the 45 plus were most likely to report their knowledge as well and very well.

A key aspect of the social and cultural dimensions of fishing and hunting is reciprocity or sharing and receiving of one’s catch or kill. At least four in every five Yawuru person receives catch or kill from family and friends. They also share their catch and kill with family and friends. Those in the older age group were more likely to report having received catch and kill.

**TABLE 6**  
The social and cultural dimensions of fishing and hunting for Yawuru women and men

|   | 18 - 28 yrs |      | 29 - 44 yrs |      | 45 + yrs |      |
|---|-------------|------|-------------|------|----------|------|
|   | M           | F    | M           | F    | M        | F    |
| Learnt how to hunt and fish                 | 100.0       | 93.3 | 100.0       | 91.2 | 100.0    | 97.1 |
| Access country                              | 77.8        | 70.0 | 85.0        | 82.4 | 75.0     | 88.2 |
| Knowing about hunting and fishing           | 72.2        | 66.7 | 75.0        | 47.1 | 90.0     | 79.4 |
| Fished and hunted at least some of the time | 88.9        | 66.7 | 75.0        | 79.4 | 80.0     | 79.4 |
| Receive catch and kill from family/friends  | 88.9        | 86.7 | 80.0        | 76.5 | 90.0     | 94.1 |
| Share catch and kill with family/friends    | 75.0        | 86.7 | 84.2        | 67.6 | 85.0     | 94.1 |
| Satisfaction with catch and kill quality    | 70.6        | 63.3 | 85.0        | 67.6 | 95.0     | 85.3 |

The ability to practice one’s traditional culture is dependent on a range of factors including your health, your knowledge but also access to land and sea country. The majority of Yawuru women and men reported being able to access country to hunt and fish. Yawuru men were also more likely to report being satisfied with the quality of their catch and kill compared to Yawuru women. In particular those in the older age group.

The capability of maintaining good connection to culture and to country was affected by a broad range of factors, which in turn can affect one’s *liyan*:

“To see the landscape cleared from what it previously was...a lot of Yawuru people feel...we feel...our *liyan* no good. Yawuru people and the land are intrinsically connected. Anything done to the land, it’s like hurting them because of that connection to the land.”

Yawuru male, 41 years old



The most prominent factor limiting the ability to maintaining connection to country and culture was the access and restrictions resulting from the development of Broome. The growth of Broome town has seen the zoning off of particular areas where activities related to country and culture are carried out. This has resulted in restrictions placed on access to areas of fishing, hunting and for practising traditional culture. This was a common theme often narrated by the older participants in the community, reflecting on how things used to be and how the restrictions on their capabilities impact on their feelings of *liyan*:

“In and around Broome, there are a lot of restrictions and that makes me have not really good feelings about what’s happening. All the different zonings and rules in and around Broome, we can’t practise our way of doing things.”

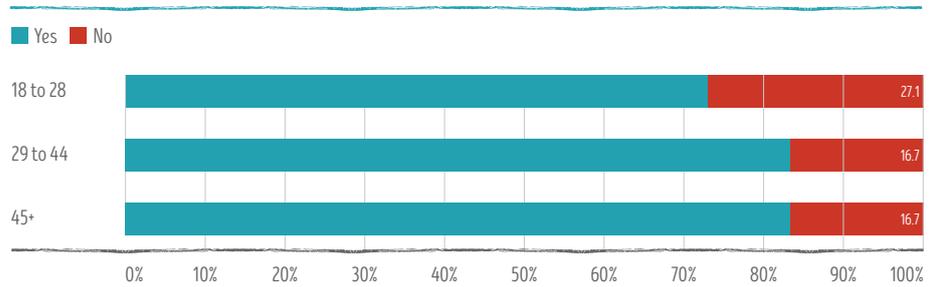
Yawuru male, 63 years old

“Once upon a time we used to have access to go down to the beach to our favourite fishing grounds or camping grounds. But you can’t do it anymore. It is blocked off. We are Yawuru people, saltwater people. We have fished in this area for hundreds of years. They come along and tell you that you are not allowed to throw your net there...”

Yawuru female, 70 years old

While the majority of Yawuru women and men stated that they felt able to access country to hunt and fish, younger generations were more likely to report that they did not feel able to – 27.1 per cent of 18 to 28 year olds (Figure 11). The main reasons mentioned for the inability to access country for hunting and fishing included restrictions by development occurring locally, overuse and misuse as well as a lack of knowledge.

**FIGURE 11**  
Felt able to access country for fishing and hunting



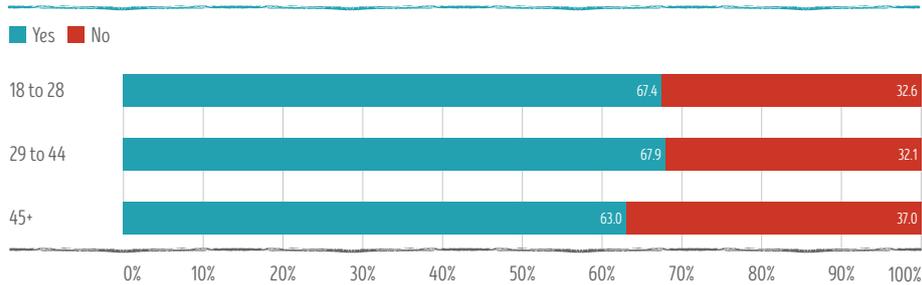
Note: The total sample size sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.





A lower percentage of Yawuru stated that they felt able to access country to practice traditional culture – around two-thirds of the survey respondents (Figure 12). Younger generations were slightly more likely to report not feeling able to access country for practising traditional culture than older generations. For those who felt unable to access country to practise traditional culture, the main reasons included access to transportation, lack of knowledge and other reasons.

**FIGURE 12**  
Felt able to access country for practising traditional culture



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 153 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=3).

Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.



One in every four respondents aged 45 years and over described having learnt Yawuru language as their first language during their childhood.

An important aspect of Yawuru's wellbeing which ties together culture, country and identity is language. The role of language in facilitating self-confidence and esteem in identity and in turn one's *mabu liyan* is captured in the narrative by this Yawuru elder:

“Language is the basis of identity, the basis of confidence and culture. Language is the singular most important starting point in developing resilience.”

Yawuru male, 58 years

“Strong identity means knowing your language, knowing where you belong, knowing who you come from, knowing your family connections and knowing what's valuable to you.”

Yawuru female, 52 years

One in every four respondents aged 45 years and over described having learnt Yawuru language as their first language during their childhood (Table 7). For those in the age group 29 to 44, about one in every five and for those in the age group 18 to 28, about 15 per cent learnt Yawuru as a child. This partly reflects the institutions that were not always encouraging the maintenance of traditional Indigenous language.

“It’s to keep our language strong and reinvigorate it for us who were not able to learn it properly as kids for whatever reason. We shouldn’t feel ashamed of that. We need to say to our people that – it is okay that we didn’t learn to speak our language properly. It was a time when we were not allowed to speak our language, where it was great pressure on us to not speak our language. That shouldn’t stop us from learning our language or teaching our children language.”

Yawuru male, 58 years old

**TABLE 7**  
Language learnt during childhood by age group

| Languages learnt                              | 18 - 28 yrs | 29 - 44 yrs | 45 + yrs |
|---|-------------|-------------|----------|
|   | %           | %           | %        |
| Learnt Yawuru as a child                      | 14.6        | 20.4        | 25.9     |
| <b>How many languages learned as a child?</b> |             |             |          |
| 1   | 72.9        | 74.1        | 64.2     |
| 2 -3  | 22.9        | 24.1        | 20.8     |
| 4 or more languages                           | 4.2         | 1.9         | 15.1     |

Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 155 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=1).

Source: Authors’ calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

Between 20–30 per cent of Yawuru women and men also noted having learnt two or more languages as a child. Some of the common languages stated include Bardi, Karrajari, Nyikina Mangala and Jabirr Jabirr demonstrating the strong links across different aboriginal language groups. Several Yawuru women and men also noted learning Indonesia, Japanese, Latin and Malay, a product of the multicultural history of Broome.

However, the social norms and institutions within which many Yawuru individuals now live facilitate the maintenance and growth of the Yawuru native language, as narrated by this Yawuru male:

“My kids are more knowledgeable about Yawuru than I am because they were given the opportunity... They are learning the language, something I didn’t do and I have always regretted.”

Yawuru male, 53 years old

As a result, for those who have children or grandchildren, over 60 per cent stated that the children or grandchildren were learning Yawuru at school and/

or outside of school. The majority reported having children or grandchildren learning Yawuru at school. Being able to access the Yawuru language in a formal setting has significant positive implications for the growth and maintenance of Yawuru language in the future.

The establishment of the Yawuru Language Centre and use of the internet and newsletters in providing materials for distance learning has meant that Yawuru individuals who choose to live off-country need not be limited in their opportunities to pursue knowledge of Yawuru language:

“My kids are learning (Yawuru) already, the material and resources that has been produced. Even though we are living away from home, they can still learn and gather all that information.”

Yawuru female, 32 years old

As Table 8 indicates, the share of Yawuru women and men who describe their language abilities as relatively well, well or very well varies both across age groups and by gender. Yawuru women and men were more likely to report having strong language skills in listening compared to reading, writing or speaking. Those in the age group 29 to 44 had the highest proportion of both males and females who rated their language skills across the four domains as relatively well, well and very well.





**TABLE 8**  
Language abilities relatively well, well and very well (per cent)

|           | 18 - 28 yrs |      | 29 - 44 yrs |      | 45 + yrs |      |
|-----------|-------------|------|-------------|------|----------|------|
|           | M           | F    | M           | F    | M        | F    |
| Listening | 38.9        | 23.3 | 65.0        | 26.5 | 35.0     | 23.5 |
| Reading   | 23.5        | 20.0 | 36.8        | 21.2 | 23.5     | 18.2 |
| Writing   | 23.5        | 13.3 | 36.8        | 18.2 | 23.5     | 15.2 |
| Speaking  | 23.5        | 20.0 | 35.0        | 21.2 | 27.8     | 15.2 |

Note: The total sample size sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations and range between 5 to 7 depending on the domain of language analysed.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

## SELF-DETERMINATION, RIGHTS AND AUTONOMY

The ability to be self-determining is not only an important aspect of wellbeing but it is an important pathway towards achieving wellbeing. This is true for the Yawuru and other Indigenous groups around the world. The importance in self-determination is evident in the perseverance and patience in securing native title over an a 12 year period.

The stories from Yawuru women and men highlighted several dimensions to having self-determination. This includes feeling respected, enjoying basic human rights afforded to all citizens and autonomy or control over one's life. These are the rights outlined in the UNDRIP and echoed in the voices of Yawuru women and men.

Respect is a common theme that emerged from the conceptions of wellbeing from Yawuru women and men. This is both showing respect towards others and also being respected by others. As a Yawuru female describes, respect is important for self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

“Being respected by other people, aboriginal and non- aboriginal is a part of self-determination. Getting rid of racism is part of self-determination.”

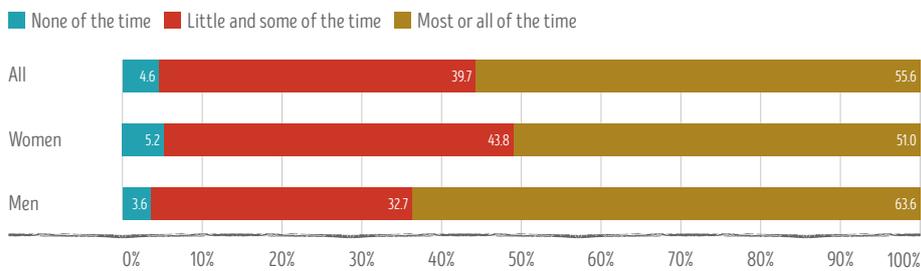
**Yawuru female, 34 years**

“You must respect your elders. It is not negotiable. If you have that value, other things fall into place. You have to earn respect. It is not given.”

**Yawuru male, 53 years**

Within the survey Yawuru men and women were asked how often in the last six months that they felt respected and their opinions valued by others. Overall, 55.6 per cent of Yawuru individuals stated that they felt respected by others and their opinions valued by others most or all of the time (Figure 13.) A further 39.7 per cent felt respected a little or some of the time and 4.6 per cent felt respected none of the time. As noted in Figure 13, on a whole, Yawuru males were more likely to report they were respected most or all of the time whereas Yawuru females tended to state that they felt respected little or some of the time and none of the time.

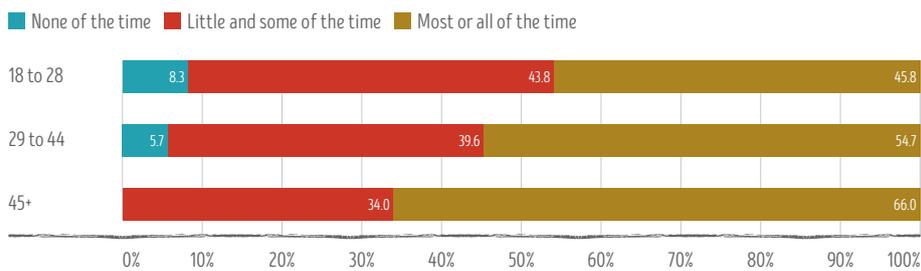
**FIGURE 13**  
Felt respected and opinions valued by gender



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 51 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=5).  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those in the older age group were more likely to state that they felt respected and had their opinions valued most or all of the time, whilst those in the younger age group were more likely to state they felt respected and their opinions valued little or some of the time (Figure 14). Younger Yawuru people were also more likely to report that they felt respected none of the time, 8.3% of those aged 18-28 years and 5.7% for those aged 29-44 years.

**FIGURE 14**  
Felt respected and opinions valued by age group



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 151 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=5).  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.



On the opposite spectrum of feeling respected are feelings of vulnerability and being discriminated against.

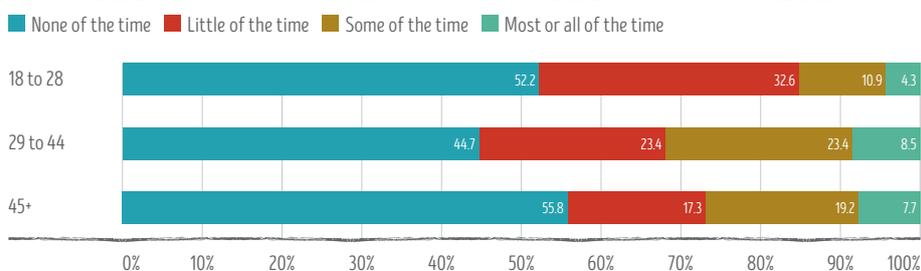
“When we feel disrespected or abused our *liyan* is bad, which can be insidious and corrosive for both the individual and the community. When our *liyan* is good our wellbeing and everything else is in a good space.”

Patrick Dodson, Yawuru RNTBC 2011

Yawure survey participants were asked about how often they felt vulnerable to being discriminated against, treated unfairly or being harmed and threatened either at home, at work or in public places. The majority of Yawuru women and men reported feeling vulnerable to discrimination none of the time or a little of the time (Figure 15).

There are some noticeable differences across the generations. Those in the age group 29 to 44 were more likely to report feeling vulnerable to being discriminated against some, most or all of the time (31.9%) compared to those in the younger age group (15.2%). Those aged 45 years and above were also more likely to report feeling discriminated or vulnerable more frequently than the younger generation. A potential reason for this could be due to being in environments where exposure to being discriminated against may be higher such as in the workplace or accessing services (Biddle et al 2013).

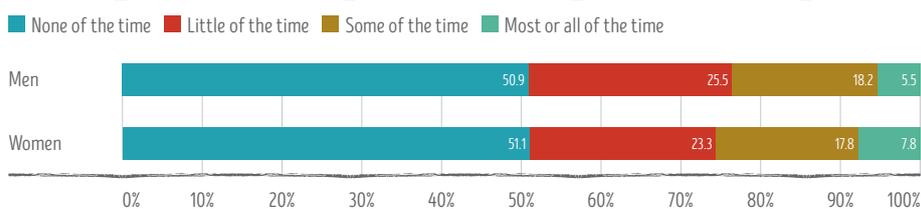
**FIGURE 15**  
Feel vulnerable to being discriminated against by age group



Note: The total sample size sample size for respondents to this question is 145 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=11).  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

Similar proportions of Yawuru men and women reported feeling vulnerable none or most of the time – around 50 per cent (Figure 16). A slightly higher proportion of men reported feeling vulnerable to being discriminated against a little of the time and some of the time than women. A higher proportion of Yawuru women reported feeling vulnerable to being discriminated against most or all of the time – 7.8 per cent of women compared with 5.5 per cent of men.

**FIGURE 16**  
Feel vulnerable to being discriminated against by gender



Note: The total sample size sample size for respondents to this question is 145 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=11).  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

The importance of being traditional owners and the responsibility over traditional country implies that respect for territory, respect for country and respect for other Indigenous group's connection to their land and for others to respect Yawuru country was evident in the narratives below:

“Respect should be handed down and respect is involved with culture, family and kinship. The land provides for you, so you respect the land because it looks after you. Country will look after you if you look after country. I am not just talking about Yawuru country, I am talking about every part of Australia. Where ever I go to someone else’s country, I will respect the land because one, it is not mine and two because it’s the black fella way.”

Yawuru male, 30 years

A component of respect, rights and autonomy also stems from having self-determination. This can be autonomy over what happens to a person at the individual level, but also at the collective as traditional owners having a say over what happens on land and sea country. Survey participants were asked how much control or influence they felt over matters concerning their own lives, their family, community, country and land and on a whole.

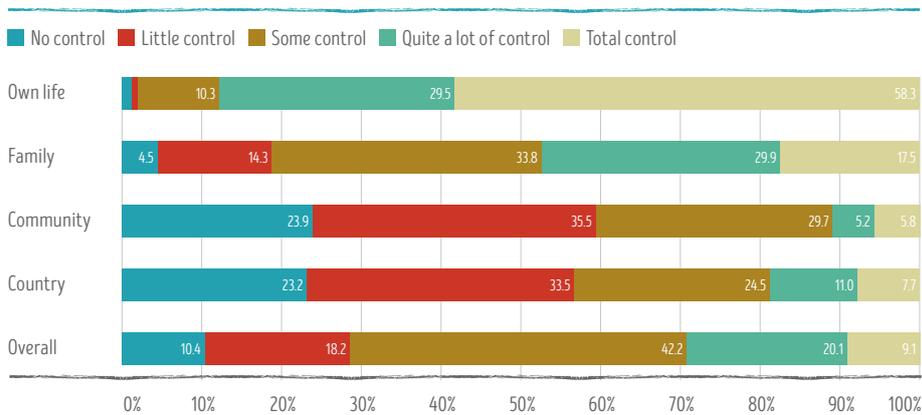
For the most part, Yawuru women and men feel that they enjoy at least some control or more over the life across the domains of own life, family life, community life and country (Figure 17). For Yawuru, the ability to have autonomy over one’s life was more likely in comparison to having control over other aspect of one’s life such as what happens to your family, community or country. Around 88 per cent of Yawuru reported having total control or quite a lot of control over their own life. Very few reported having little or no control. A higher proportion of Yawuru reported having no or little control

Around 88% of Yawuru reported having total control or quite a lot of control over their own life.



over community and country – around 60 per cent. This is likely driven by a number of elements, including the distance of the relationship, where the closer the relational status the greater the sense of control (self-efficacy) felt by survey participants, starting with their own life, followed by family, country and community.

**FIGURE 17**  
Sense of control across different life domains



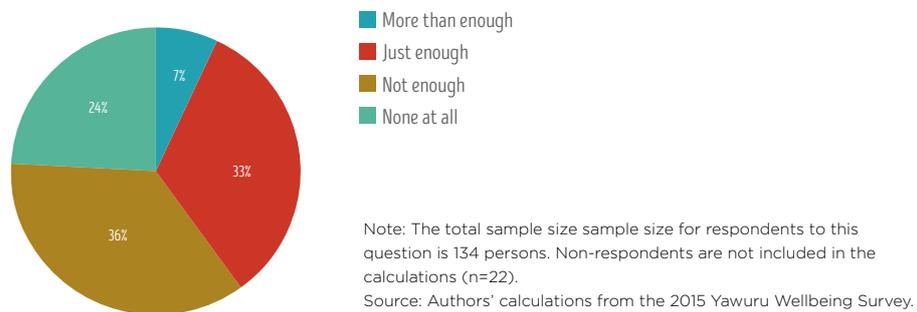
Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 151 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=5).

Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

In terms of having opportunities to have a say over management of land and sea country, around 40 per cent of Yawuru women and men stated they had more than enough or just enough opportunities (Figure 18). At the other end of the spectrum, one in five also said they had no opportunities at all to have a say on what happens over management of land and sea country and just over one-third reported having not enough opportunity.



**FIGURE 18**  
**Opportunities to have a say over management of land and sea country**



The importance of autonomy and agency is especially relevant when definitions and priorities of wellbeing are placed against the backdrop of colonisation which undermined the autonomy of many Indigenous groups around the world and continues to form part of their lived realities today.

How self-determination is exercised and experienced ranges from very personal experiences of feeling respected and having your opinions valued to having opportunities to provide input into management of land and sea country.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1948). The National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989) definition of aboriginal health is the most cited definition in Australia. Health is defined as “Not just the physical well-being of the individual but the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the whole community. This is a whole-of-life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life”. The analysis from the survey captures the holistic understanding of health for Yawuru women and men. In particular, five aspects of health will be presented – self assessed health or physical health, social and emotional wellbeing/ health and spiritual or cultural wellbeing

Not surprisingly, the term wellbeing therefore is often used in conjunction with health or complementarily with notions of health in a holistic sense. Not dissimilar, having good health is a key component of a good life for Yawuru. For Yawuru, the association and connection between physical, mental and spiritual health was often noted by Yawuru men and women. In the interviews, Yawuru men and women linked the different aspects of health together and also linked health to the broader sense of wellbeing.

“If you are emotionally and spiritually not right, that has an impact on your physical health which includes your immune system. If you have chronic stress, that has an impact on your blood sugar levels and your body’s ability to fight infections. One’s health is not just the physical wellbeing but also must include one’s mental and spiritual wellbeing. You can’t treat one part without treating the ‘whole person’ i.e. holistic health.”

**Yawuru female, 34 years**

“Being healthy and understanding what being healthy means and how you are actually healthy – conscious of your environment and the nature of your interaction with your environment.”

**Yawuru male, 58 years**

The capacity to achieve good health was enhanced by the presence of connection to culture and country. Country was often described being the source medicine, nutrition and learning. For example, a Yawuru female noted the following:

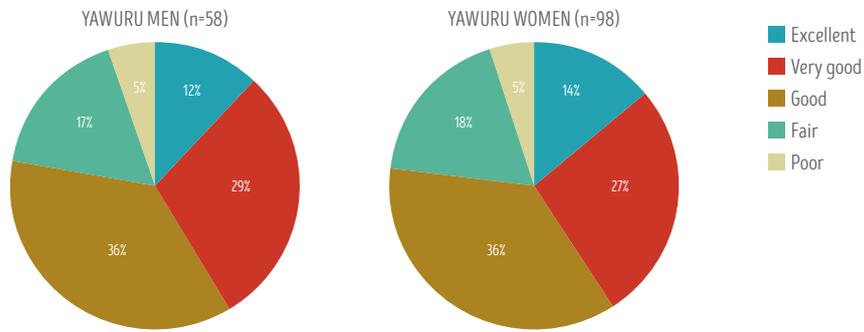
“Your mother earth provides for you...with education, they give you medicine and they give you food.”

**Yawuru female, 52 years**

### Self-assessed health

The self-reported health status of Yawuru women and men is shown in Figure 19. A large proportion of Yawuru women and men describe their health status as good, very good or excellent – 77 per cent. The most common health status reported was ‘good’ – 36 per cent of Yawuru men and women. Similar proportions of men and women reported having ‘fair’ or a ‘poor’ health status.

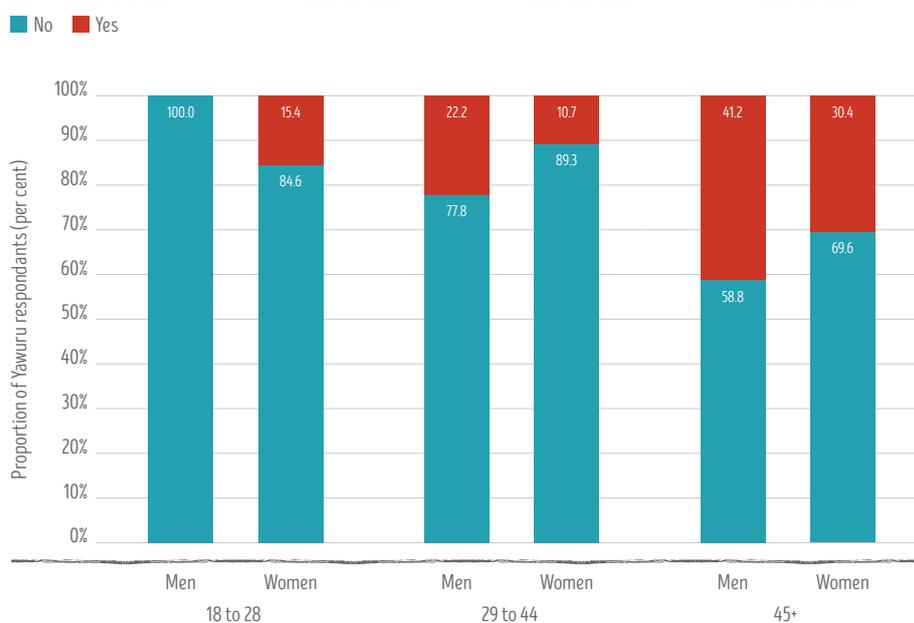
**FIGURE 19**  
Self-reported health status, men and women



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

As expected, those in the older age group were more likely to report having a long term health condition than younger age groups (Figure 20). Yawuru men were more likely to report having a long term health condition within the older age groups than Yawuru women. More than 40 per cent of Yawuru men aged over 45 years reported having a long-term health condition and 22 per cent of Yawuru men aged 29-44 years. For the younger generation, however, Yawuru women were more likely to report having a long term health condition – 15 per cent compared to zero. Having a long term health condition can impact on one's wellbeing and *liyan* but more importantly, it also limits the ability to participate in other activities which leads to and maintains *mabu liyan*.

**FIGURE 20**  
Has long term health condition



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 134 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=17).

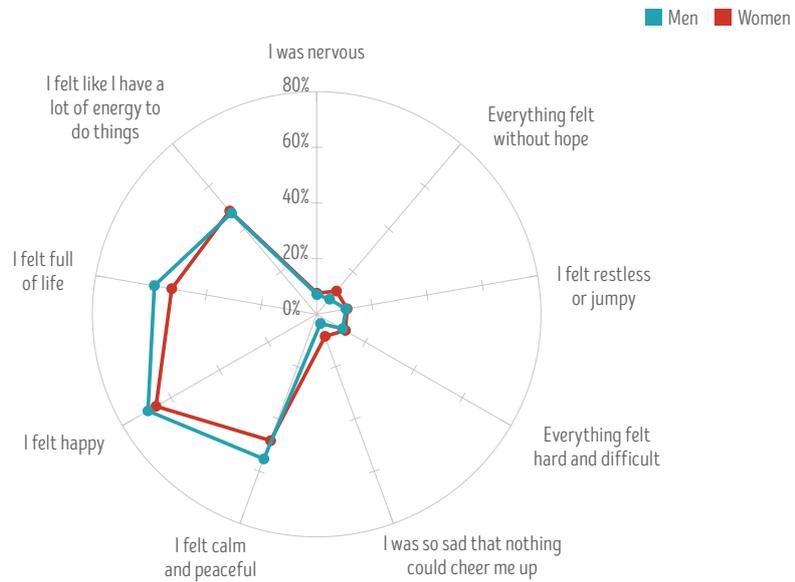
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

### Social-emotional wellbeing

There are several commonly used tools to assess the social and emotional wellbeing of the population as a whole. The Mental Health Index (MH15) which is a five item measure from the Medical Outcome Study 36-item (SF 36) Survey and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K5) are two examples which were captured in the survey. In particular, the K5, was used given the adjustment that has been made for ensuring cultural appropriateness in its use and measure (Form et al 2012).

Yawuru women and men were asked how often they reported positive and negative feelings in the last four weeks. Positive feelings included feeling calm and peaceful, full of life, feeling happy and full of energy. On the converse, the negative feelings related to reporting of things feeling hard and difficult, feeling sad, feeling nervous, feeling restless and jumpy and feeling without hope. Figure 21 shows the proportion of Yawuru women and men who reported the following statements were true all or most of the time.

**FIGURE 21**  
Positive and negative feelings - men and women



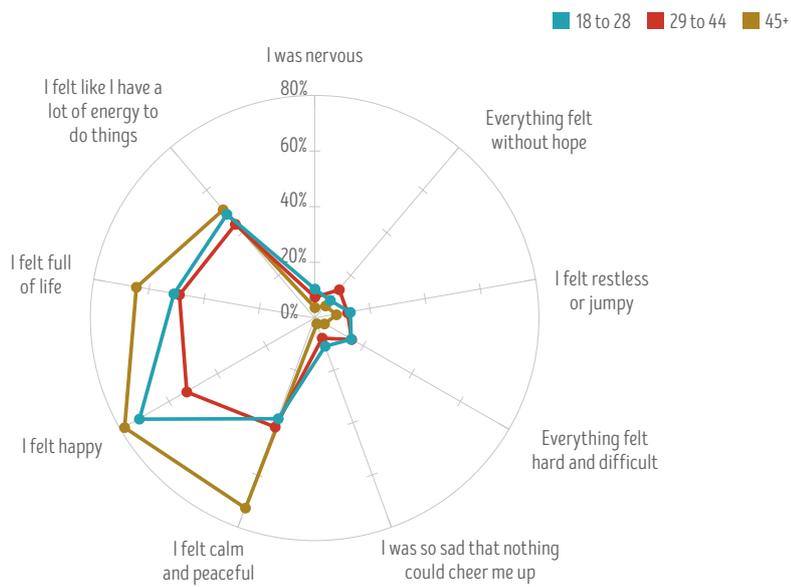
Note: Proportion that report the statement is true most or all of the time. Kessler five (K5) components.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

On a whole, men were more likely to report having experienced the positive feelings in the last four weeks with the exception of having the energy to do things where the proportion of Yawuru women and men who reported the statement was true all or most of the time was similar. In terms of the negative feelings, there were no major differences between males and females. The only exception to this was reporting that everything felt without hope, where 10.8 per cent of Yawuru women reported this to be true all or most of the time, compared to 7 per cent of Yawuru men.

Comparing these feelings by age group, a number of differences are revealed (Figure 22). Firstly, Yawuru women and men in the 45 years and over age group were more likely to report positive feelings and less likely to report negative feelings were true all or most of the time, compared to those in the other two age groups. The findings suggest that those in the middle age group (29 to 44 years) are most likely to report feeling that everything was without hope, that everything felt difficult and also less likely to report feeling happy and full of life all or most of the time.



**FIGURE 22**  
Positive and negative feelings - age groups



Note: Proportion that report the statement is true most or all of the time. Kessler five (K5) components.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

Whilst the previous section on social and emotional wellbeing covers the set of indicators commonly used to paint a holistic view of health and wellbeing within the broader population; within the Indigenous space, social and emotional wellbeing also encompasses cultural and spiritual health. This captures the collective sense of wellbeing, the interconnectedness between body, spirit and the mind, the strength of family and kinship relations and Indigenous peoples' unique connection to country and land (Gee et al 2014) . This is true for Yawuru and other Indigenous groups in Australia.

“...not only the trees provide us with the tools, medicine, food, but the connection to that biodiversity, the birds everything that utilises the area ... lizards ... when you start to draw the picture people start to see it's not just a piece of rubbish, desolate savannah ... these are the animals, reptiles and things that reside here ... and when you give it cultural significance, you give it a living landscape ... Yawuru people and the land are intrinsically connected ... and wellbeing is intrinsically connected. Anything done to the land, it's like hurting them because of the connection to land.”

Yawuru male, 41 years



“A good life would be about that and that is including my job, my home life and my cultural side of things. In a safe place, I know things are not going to be removed from me as such. Safe place meaning I have the freedom to be myself, to be comfortable in my surroundings and my environment. To know my inner mind and inner self is comfortable.”

Yawuru female, 54 years

In an attempt to capture the broader aspects of social and emotional wellbeing which is tied in with Yawuru's sense of *mabu liyan*, a series of statements drawing on the stories from Yawuru women and men were developed. Figure 23 and Figure 24 show the proportion of Yawuru women and men who reported that social and emotional wellbeing statements were true most or all of the time for them. Figure 23 shows the disaggregation by age groups.

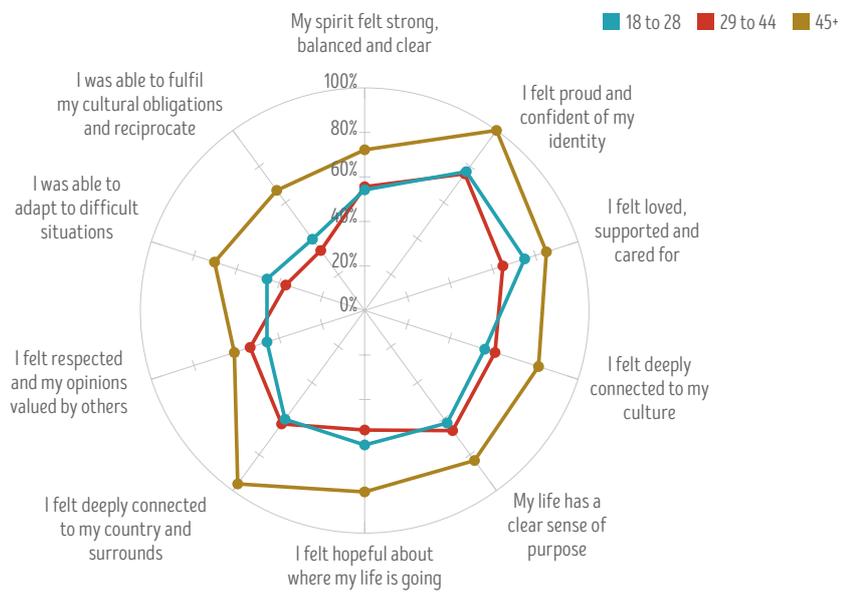
Overwhelming, four in every five Yawuru women and men reported feeling proud and confident of their identity. This is important given the narratives captured in this report which signals to the importance of identity in one's sense of *liyan* and wellbeing. As noted in the section of *mabu liyan*, the inner spirit is one of the key components of Yawuru and other Indigenous groups' wellbeing. Yawuru women were more likely than Yawuru men to report that their inner spirit felt strong, balanced and clear all or most of the time (64 per cent compared to 55 per cent).

Only one in every two Yawuru women felt they were respected and that their opinions were valued by others. This share was lower than that of Yawuru men. A substantial proportion of Yawuru women and men reported feeling deeply connected to their culture and their country and surrounds all or most of the time (more than 60 per cent).

The ability to be resilient and adapt to difficult situations is critical in managing one's challenges and the external factors which may impact on one's wellbeing. Approximately 50 per cent of Yawuru women and men reported that they were able to adapt to difficult situations. A critical aspect to follow up on for those who reported the statements to be true is to examine what are some of the factors which enable and facilitate the ability to adapt to difficult situations and develop resilience.



**FIGURE 23**  
Feelings of belonging, connectedness, identity and purpose - age groups

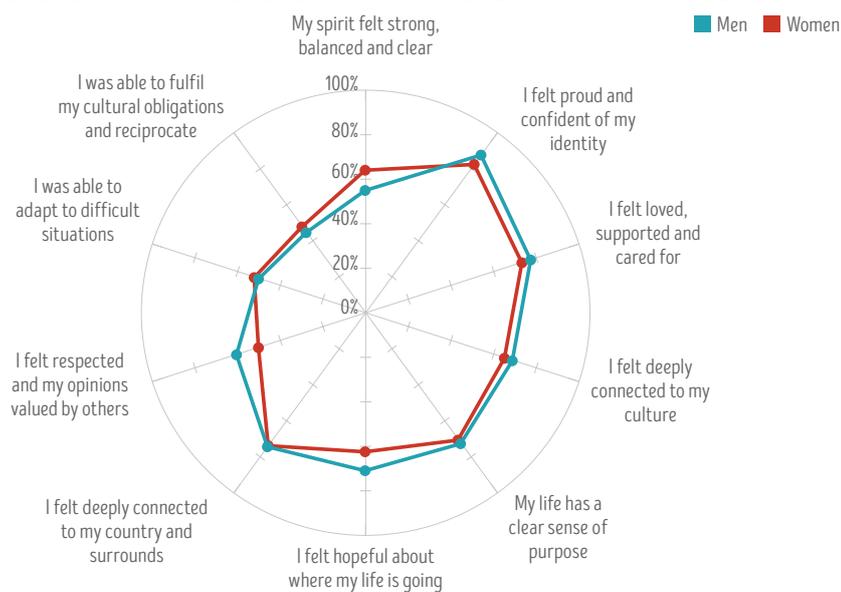


Note: Proportion that report the statement is true most or all of the time.  
The total sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey

There are differences across the three age groups in terms of reporting the feelings of belonging, connectedness and sense of purpose all or most of the time. In particular, those in the older age groups are more likely to report a strong sense of connectedness, belonging and purpose compared to the two younger age groups.

All Yawuru women and men aged 45 years and over were proud and confident in their identity. In the younger age groups, that share is about 75 per cent. Those in the age group 29 to 44 were less likely to report that they felt hopeful about where their life is going, that they were able to adapt to difficult situations and that they felt loved, supported and cared for all or most of the time. One of the possible reasons for this for Yawuru men could be the lower share of men in the age group 45 years and over who reported being able to get support from family and friends all or most of the time.

**FIGURE 24**  
Feelings of belonging, connectedness, identity and purpose - men and women



Note: Proportion that report the statement is true most or all of the time.  
The total sample size for respondents to this question is 156 persons.  
Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey

The findings in this section highlight the holistic manner in which health is conceptualised for Yawuru. In particular, the interconnectedness between the physical body, the mind and the spirit cannot be meaningfully disentangled. Whilst the majority of Yawuru women and men described their health status as being good, the share of women and men noting that they felt able to adapt to difficult situations were lower. This in part suggests that there is a need to understand how the social, emotional, cultural and physical wellbeing come together to build resilience and strengthen one's inner spirit or *liyan*.



## MATERIAL WELLBEING

Many Yawuru women and men noted the importance of having security in basic living standards alongside maintaining your connections to country and culture as Yawuru. The challenge to live comfortably across two worlds was evident in the narrative by Yawuru women and men suggesting that Yawuru's notions of wellbeing is not static, instead changing and adapting to the circumstances and context.

“We need to redefine the contemporary settings of our sense of wellbeing. It also has to have the normal material kind of issues like health, like income, like housing.”

Yawuru male, 58 years

“There should be room for economic, culture and social.”

Yawuru female, 67 years

The economic aspects of wellbeing ensures that Yawuru maintains a standard of living which is a basic human right afforded to all citizens but also is a means to which other aspects of wellbeing is achieved. Having the basic necessities as a means of stability and capability to enjoy a good life was often noted by Yawuru men and women. This includes having an education, both Western and cultural, having secure and meaningful work, and having a constant stream of income to not only ensure stability but also being instrumental in achieving other valued aspects of wellbeing such as autonomy. One example is below:

“Others have their own ideas of how to live and we need to enforce our way and through education, get into good government areas so that they can push those issues and make it balanced.”

Yawuru male, 63 years

The difficult balancing act of trying to thrive and survive in both worlds was highlighted in the following quote:

“In this day and age, you've got that pressure to sustain your culture and work. You've got to live in two worlds. One now has to survive in Western culture to make sure you financially survive, working 40-hour weeks and then fitting cultural activities on weekends. This is hard.”

Yawuru female, 34 years



For the younger Yawuru individuals, the importance of having the necessities like education, owning your own home, having access to transportation and having sufficient income was stated.

“Having a good life, I would have all my necessities – I’d have clothing, money, a car, probably own my own house.”

Yawuru female, 28 years

“I have ambitions and dreams. Just ticking my milestones – finishing school and going to university.”

Yawuru male, 22 years

Table 9 outlines a number of socio-economic indicators for Yawuru by the different age groups. In particular, type of housing circumstances, income sufficiency for basic necessities, access to transport and employment status are provided given its important for maintaining a basic standard of living, but also for its importance in other dimensions of wellbeing for Yawuru.

Not surprisingly, the probability of owning your own home increases with the different age groups. Of Yawuru aged 45 years and over, 37 per cent are paying off a mortgage or own their own home. Conversely, about 4 per cent of Yawuru aged 18 to 28 reported having their own home or paying off a mortgage.

**TABLE 9**  
Socio-economic indicators for Yawuru by age

| Indicators                             | 18 - 28 yrs<br>% | 29 - 44 yrs<br>% | 45 + yrs<br>% |
|--|------------------|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Housing</b>                         |                  |                  |               |
| Home owner                             | 4.2              | 7.4              | 29.6          |
| Paying off home                        | 0.0              | 14.8             | 7.4           |
| Private rental                         | 18.8             | 16.7             | 5.6           |
| Government rental                      | 2.1              | 5.6              | 14.8          |
| Public housing                         | 18.8             | 29.6             | 27.8          |
| Yawuru                                 | 12.5             | 5.6              | 0.0           |
| Living rent free with family           | 10.4             | 3.7              | 7.4           |
| Moving around                          | 2.1              | 1.9              | 1.9           |
| No place to live                       | 2.1              | 1.9              | 1.9           |
| Renting from family                    | 18.8             | 7.4              | 1.9           |
| Other                                  | 10.4             | 5.6              | 1.9           |
| <b>Access to transportation</b>        |                  |                  |               |
| Own vehicle                            | 39.6             | 50.0             | 66.7          |
| Can get a lift                         | 45.8             | 38.0             | 14.8          |
| Public transport                       | 4.2              | 6.0              | 7.4           |
| Bicycle                                | 4.2              | 0.0              | 0.0           |
| No access                              | 4.2              | 4.0              | 7.4           |
| Other                                  | 2.1              | 2.0              | 3.7           |
| <b>Employment status</b>               |                  |                  |               |
| Working full-time                      | 33.3             | 46.3             | 37.0          |
| Part time (would like more hours)      | 10.4             | 9.3              | 13.0          |
| Part time (Not looking for more hours) | 0.0              | 3.7              | 11.1          |
| Self-employed                          | 0.0              | 5.6              | 1.9           |
| Retired                                | 0.0              | 0.0              | 16.7          |
| Not in the labour force                | 6.3              | 5.6              | 5.6           |
| Volunteer                              | 0.0              | 0.0              | 1.9           |
| Looking for work                       | 33.3             | 20.4             | 7.4           |
| Other                                  | 16.7             | 9.3              | 5.6           |
| <b>Education attainment</b>            |                  |                  |               |
| <Year 12                               | 35.4             | 33.3             | 53.7          |
| Year 12                                | 47.9             | 27.8             | 16.7          |
| TAFE                                   | 6.3              | 20.4             | 5.6           |
| Degree or higher                       | 10.4             | 14.8             | 7.4           |
| Other                                  | 0.0              | 3.7              | 16.7          |
| <b>Income sufficiency</b>              |                  |                  |               |
| Not enough                             | 16.7             | 29.6             | 22.2          |
| Just Enough                            | 41.7             | 25.9             | 37.0          |
| Enough                                 | 16.7             | 31.5             | 31.5          |
| More than enough                       | 2.1              | 7.4              | 7.4           |
| Prefer not to answer                   | 18.8             | 3.7              | 1.9           |
| Other                                  | 4.2              | 1.9              | 0.0           |
| <b>Main source of income</b>           |                  |                  |               |
| Wages                                  | 50.0             | 61.2             | 57.4          |
| Self-employment                        | 7.1              | 4.1              | 3.7           |
| Pensions                               | 26.2             | 24.5             | 31.5          |
| From family                            | 2.4              | 2.0              | 1.9           |
| No source of income                    | 7.1              | 0.0              | 3.7           |
| Other sources                          | 7.1              | 8.2              | 1.9           |

The majority of Yawuru own a vehicle to get around or are able to get access to a lift from others. This is important for getting on to country and practicing culture, but also more importantly for accessing health services or getting to the local shops to purchase necessities. As noted earlier on in the report, a large proportion of Yawuru women and men reported working full-time or part-time.

Having sufficient income is essential for a range of things including paying for necessities, purchasing food and other essential items. On a whole, those in the age group 18 to 28 are most likely to report having just enough income to meet basic living standards. Those in the older age groups are more likely to report having enough or more than enough income to meet their basic living standards. Across all the age groups, the primary source of income is wages, in particular those in the age group 29 to 44 years. Between 20 to 30 per cent of Yawuru women and men depend on pensions as their source of income. Approximately 7 per cent of those aged between 18 to 29 reported that they had no source of income but at the same time, that age group also had the highest share of Yawuru individuals noting that their primary source of income was from self-employment.

In situations where income is not necessarily sufficient, there are different coping mechanisms to keep expenses down. Yawuru women and men were asked if they kept their expenses down by going without essentials or luxuries, or asking for help from family and friends or community or charitable organisations in the last 6 months. Around 31 per cent of Yawuru women and men stated that they did not have to resort to any of the following to keep their expenses down. About 39 per cent spent less on items such as clothes, movies or hobbies to keep expenses down and 20 per cent postponed a holiday or visit to family. About 13 per cent of Yawuru women and men noted that they went without fresh fruit or vegetables to keep expenses down. Around 27 per cent of Yawuru asked family and friends for help and about 9 per cent noted that they also asked help from community or charitable organisations.

Whilst having access to income is one way in which basic living standards are meeting met, one thing to bear in mind is the role of the non-market economy, that is, the contribution that hunting and fishing activities make to the overall nutritional intake of Yawuru women and men. About 51 per cent of Yawuru women and men stated that in the last month, half or all of the fish and meat that they ate were either given to them or caught by them. Only 8 per cent reported that none of the fish and meat that they ate in the last month was not caught by them or given to them by family and friends. It is this reciprocity and cultural exchange which helps smooth the consumption needs of Yawuru men and women complements the contribution that the market or government sector makes to sustain a decent standard of living.

There was also an overwhelming consensus that there is a need to balance one's *liyan* by negotiating pressures from surviving in modern society and traditional society, coexisting across multiple identities and multiple pressures and influences from external factors.

“You have to be western society driven otherwise you get left behind. That is a fact. But that also has to go hand in hand with keeping your own culture. [...] There's always got to be a balance in everything. Not just indigenous culture. Every culture has that balance thing. If you don't have balance of our culture, heritage, and identity with western society, jobs, money, education, we will get behind, culture will fade out.”

Yawuru male, 30 years

“Knowing your language, knowing where you belong, knowing who you come from, knowing who your family connections are and knowing what's valuable to you.. Maintaining that connection although you have to have money to survive in urban society.”

Yawuru female, 52 years

It is clear from the stories from Yawuru women and men, wellbeing is about maintaining a balance. In particular, it is about negotiating a balance between surviving day to day in the modern world and sustaining one's enduring connection to country and culture. This requires not only resources in terms of time but also resources in the material sense. For Yawuru, it is not necessarily about giving up one at the expense of the other, but it is about having the security on both fronts to thrive and maintain their distinct identity as Yawuru people.

The findings in this section also demonstrates the importance of the objective measures of wellbeing such as having affordable and comfortable housing and living conditions or having a meaningful job and education. They can also represent a pathway through which other outcomes are achieved such as giving back to community.

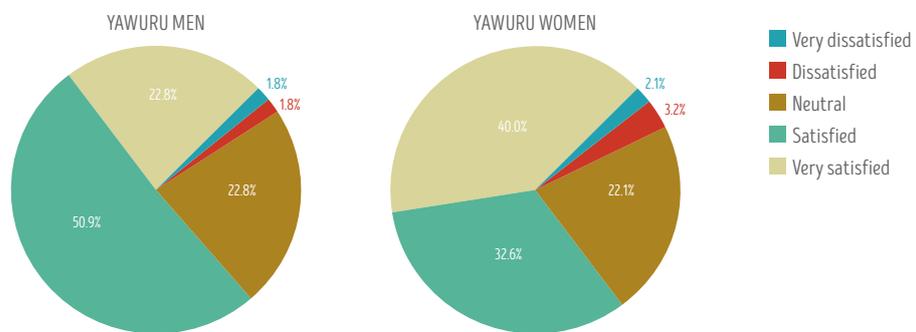
## SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

How a person perceives their life is going can be as important as objectively measuring how one's life is going through their employment status, income, housing conditions for example. There are several ways that subjective wellbeing is represented and captured in the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey. The most common way that subjective wellbeing is captured is through asking survey participants about their overall life satisfaction. Within the Yawuru wellbeing survey, participants were asked the following question: 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?'

The majority of Yawuru men and women report feeling satisfied or very satisfied with their life overall.

Yawuru women were twice as likely to report being very satisfied with their life overall than Yawuru men – 44 per cent compared to 23 per cent (Figure 25). The most common response from Yawuru men was feeling 'satisfied' with life overall – 50 per cent of Yawuru men gave this response. Similar proportions of men and women reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied – around one in five. Very few men and women reported feeling very dissatisfied or dissatisfied.

**FIGURE 25**  
Overall life satisfaction by gender



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 134 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=22).

Source: Authors' calculations from the 2015 Yawuru Wellbeing Survey.

Differences in overall life satisfaction are evident when looking across age groups (Figure 26). Yawuru in the mid ages (29-44 years) are less likely to report feeling very satisfied than both the younger and older age group. This may be driven by the greater pressure or work and family that people within this age group are likely to experience. Yawuru aged 45 years and above are more likely to report being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their life overall than younger generations – around 90 per cent.

Around 90% of Yawuru people aged 45 years and above report being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their life overall.

**FIGURE 26**  
Overall life satisfaction by age groups



Note: The total sample size for respondents to this question is 152 persons. Non-respondents are not included in the calculations (n=4).





KEY  
LEARNINGS

The Yawuru Wellbeing Survey is an innovative example of how wellbeing conceptions can be centred on Indigenous worldviews and understanding. In particular the survey was informed by Yawuru's ways of knowing, being and doing, and foundation of wellbeing, *mabu liyan*. The information collected and presented provides a baseline for Yawuru as a collective to plan and design programs around what might bring about improvements in wellbeing. The Yawuru Wellbeing Survey is an important tool for monitoring their wellbeing over time, based on measures identified by Yawuru people themselves according to their definitions of what might be considered success markers of living well.

There are several key learnings in this research project – the importance of process and methods, findings and implications for Indigenous communities and policy makers.

## PROCESS

Whilst achieving Indigenous wellbeing is an important outcome in its own right, a critical factor often overlooked is that Indigenous participation and decision making in the process of determining what wellbeing means for them is an essential and fundamental aspect of Indigenous wellbeing. This goes to the heart of self-determination over one's life and respects the principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The information and statistics collected and presented are not value free and are influenced by a number of factors including the intended purpose of data collection, the process of determining the scope of the data collection and the ways in which the data are gathered.

This project has challenged the “business as usual” treatment of wellbeing measurement by developing indicators of wellbeing for Yawuru through a co-production of knowledge model, built on principles of respect, Indigenous participation and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and living.

The starting point of understanding Yawuru wellbeing through *mabu liyan* is intended to approach the research respectfully, and from Yawuru's worldviews and aspirations. It is strength-based, privileging Yawuru culture and values. In doing so, the project celebrates what is unique and positive about being Yawuru, about being Indigenous through the voices and diversity in perspectives of Yawuru women and men, young and old. This means that the usual measures that policy-makers are concerned with is only one piece of the larger picture of Yawuru Wellbeing.

This participatory process has the advantage of letting individuals and collectives define identity and select aspects of wellbeing they value and brings everyone on a journey where a sense of ownership over process and data is realised.

## FINDINGS

Wellbeing for Yawuru starts from a relational perspective and encompasses not only relatedness to family and the community but also relatedness to country and culture. For Yawuru, the interconnectedness between *mabu liyan*, *mabu buru* and *mabu ngarrungunil* is part of what defines Yawuru, and following from that Yawuru's responsibilities that arise as traditional owners of Broome.

### Family

There are many dimensions and factors which contribute to achieving and maintaining *mabu liyan* for Yawuru. In particular, the strength of family connectedness, the extent of good family relations and the support that is given and received are all important aspects of Yawuru's sense of wellbeing. This is evident in the three findings. Firstly, the majority of Yawuru women reported visiting, seeing or keeping touch with family not living with them at least every day or every week. Secondly, more than two-thirds of Yawuru women and men reported the strength of family connection as being very strong or strong. Thirdly, the strength of family relationships is demonstrated in the ability to get support or help when needed most or all of the time, in particular emotional and non-financial support.

### Community

The wellbeing of the individual is very much linked with the wellbeing of the broader community. This includes making contributions to the broader community through their work and informally in their day to day lives to enhance the lives of those living in the community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. In particular, sharing of Yawuru culture to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples was one of the most predominant form of community engagement, exceeding attending community meetings or voting at meetings.

Almost 40 per cent described their community wellbeing as 'good' when asked how community is going. A further 32 per cent described how community is faring as 'OK'. Some of the pressing issues noted by Yawuru women and men as possibly impacting on their personal and community wellbeing are jobs, management of country and land and public safety in the community.

### **Country, culture and identity**

Yawuru's connection to culture and country through the *Bugarrigarra* is pivotal to their enduring wellbeing and identity, and central to the maintenance of *mabu liyan*. The connection to country and culture is multi-dimensional and multi-layered, occurring as a child through to adulthood. The intergenerational transmission of knowledge, the description of knowledge around flora and fauna, fishing and hunting, preparing and eating traditional food and language skills all form part of Yawuru's identity and *mabu liyan*.

Over 90 per cent of Yawuru women and men reported learning how to hunt and fish as a child. As a result of that knowledge learnt, between 65 to 90 per cent of Yawuru women across the three age groups described their knowledge as well or very well. This strong connection to country and culture is evident today in the frequency with which Yawuru women and men participate in fishing and hunting and other traditional cultural activities. The impact of colonisation on some of the ways of practising culture is also evident in the report. In particular, across all age groups, about 30 per cent of Yawuru women and men reported learning traditional dances and nurlu and practising these dances and nurlu as adults. The setting up of Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre in 2011 and the Nurlu program in 2015 set the journey towards increasing the knowledge base of Yawuru and ensuring that connection to country and culture remains and strengthens long into the future.

### **Self-determination, rights and autonomy**

The ability to be self-determining is important for Indigenous wellbeing. This is evident in the perseverance and resilience in securing Native Title over a 12 year period. Self-determination is not merely having the ability to have a say on things affecting Yawuru women and men, their families and community, and country, but it is also about feeling respected and being free from discrimination.

The majority of Yawuru women and men reported feeling vulnerable to discrimination none of the time or little of the time. However, the share of Yawuru women and men reporting that they felt respected and their opinions valued all or most of the time was lower. For the most part, Yawuru women and men feel that they enjoy at least some control over their life across the domains of personal life, family life, community life and country.

### **Health and material wellbeing**

A substantial component of wellbeing for Yawuru women and men is having a basic standard of living which includes good health and having the basic necessities of living a good life. Health for Yawuru and many other Indigenous peoples extends beyond the physical health to include, social and emotional wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing.

Whilst the majority of Yawuru women and men described their health status as being good, the share of women and men noting that they felt able to adapt to difficult situations was lower. This in part suggests that there is a need to understand how social, emotional, cultural and physical wellbeing come together to build resilience and strengthen one's inner spirit or *liyan*.

Having an education, having a meaningful job and being financially sufficient are all important aspects of wellbeing for Yawuru. These dimensions of wellbeing, whilst important in their own right, are instrumental in the pathway towards achieving wellbeing in other aspects of life for Yawuru. Having the necessities helps maintain strong family connections helps maintain Yawuru's connection to culture and country and is a critical factor in Yawuru's self-determination agenda.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, GOVERNMENT AND POLICY MAKERS

There are several implications arising from this report for policy makers and for other researchers, but most importantly, for Indigenous peoples and communities. This report demonstrates the importance of Indigenous participation in all aspects of the process to ensure that the findings and outcomes are meaningful not only for policy makers but also for Indigenous communities like Yawuru to set their own development agenda and inform their planning needs.

This report contributes to a better understanding of wellbeing for Yawuru, by Yawuru so that policies can be better informed by local aspirations, sensitive to contextual and historical particularities which makes the experience of wellbeing unique for the community involved.

The meaningful engagement of the 'recognition space' is not only about making visible indigenous worldviews, but making visible things that matter to Yawuru in a manner or language that government and policy makers also understand. This has the benefit of enhancing the cross-cultural engagements by the people who know their lives and their world best, thereby transforming the way information and data are represented and collected.





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## LIST OF IMAGES

We would like to acknowledge and thank Sarah Yu and Suzanne Jess from Nyamba Buru Yawuru for their generous time and assistance in making available some of the beautiful pictures for use in this report.

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|  |    |
|--|----|
| Rubibi Native Title Determination Town Beach<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 11 |
| Spearing For Fish Roebuck Bay (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 19 |
| Yawuru children from St Mary's College getting ready for the Shinju Parade (Photo: Sarah Yu and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan) | 20 |
| Yawuru Reception for Adrian Dodson-Shaw, pictured with Francis Djiagween, Chairman YPBC (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)                  | 20 |
| Mrs Joyce Fong (née Lee) (Photo: Melanie Howard)   | 20 |
| Mabu Yawuru Ngan-Ga displaying their work<br>(Photo: Sandra Harris and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan)                          | 20 |
| Michael Manolis Mavromatis Roebuck Plains Station Handover<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru and Leon Mead)                              | 20 |
| Celebrations at Roebuck Plains Station Handover<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru and Leon Mead)   | 21 |
| Proud moment at Roebuck Plains Station Handover<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru and Leon Mead)   | 22 |
| Minmin flower (Photo: Sarah Yu and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan)  | 22 |
| Justice Merkel handing over the Yawuru Determination to Cissy Djiagween (Source: ABC Kimberley)                                      | 24 |
| Rubibi Native title hearings on country<br>(Photo: Phillip Dolby and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan)                            | 24 |
| Yawuru Country Managers (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 28 |
| Casting a throw net (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 31 |
| Footprints from three generations (Photo: Kim Isaacs)  | 33 |
| Research assistants undergoing tablet training (Photo: Mandy Yap)  | 41 |
| Noreen Edgar with Maarli Pigram (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 45 |
| The Edgar family (Photo: Kim Isaacs)   | 49 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Joyce Fong and some of her extended family (Photo: Melanie Howard)   | 51  |
| Bart Pigram showing the marul mayi (blackberry fruit)<br>(Photo: Narlijia Cultural Tours)  | 59  |
| Cissy Djiagween picking fruit at Minyirr Park<br>(Photo: Kate Golson and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan)                                  | 59  |
| Puertollano family on country (Photo: John and Stella Puertollano)   | 60  |
| NBY family outing at Broome Deadly Fun Run<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 60  |
| Yawuru Community Meeting (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)   | 63  |
| Jimmy Edgar and granddaughters<br>(Photo: Sandra Harris and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan)   | 65  |
| Bush Medicine Project (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 66  |
| Aunty Teresa Isaacs with family on country (Photo: Kim Isaacs)   | 67  |
| Yawuru Community Meeting (Bart Pigram, Doris Mathews<br>and Darren Puertollano) (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)                                    | 68  |
| Sourcing walbirriny for nurlu (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 70  |
| Celebrations at Roebuck Plains Station Handover 2<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru and Leon Mead)   | 71  |
| Patrick Dodson, Francis Djiagween and Cissy Djiagween at the signing<br>ceremony (Photo: Peter Docker and the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan) | 74  |
| Elizika Puertollano with her successful catch surrounded by family<br>(Photo: John and Stella Puertollano)                                     | 76  |
| Yawuru Country Managers on the job (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)   | 78  |
| Nagula Jarndu artists (Photo: Nagula Jarndu)   | 83  |
| Broome IMF Deadly Fun Run (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)  | 84  |
| Young Yawuru runner Broome IMF Deadly Fun Run<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)   | 84  |
| McKenna-Tamwoy family gathering (Photo: McKenna-Tamwoy family)   | 86  |
| Proud moment at Roebuck Plains Station Handover 2<br>(Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru and Leon Mead)   | 88  |
| Yawuru families, happy smiles all around (Photo: McKenna-Tamwoy)   | 90  |
| Bush honey sugar bag (Photo: Nyamba Buru Yawuru)   | 103 |





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