



Australian Sea Country Conference Report 2024



We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which our Conference was held, the Larrakia People. We recognise the enduring relationship they have with the land and water, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

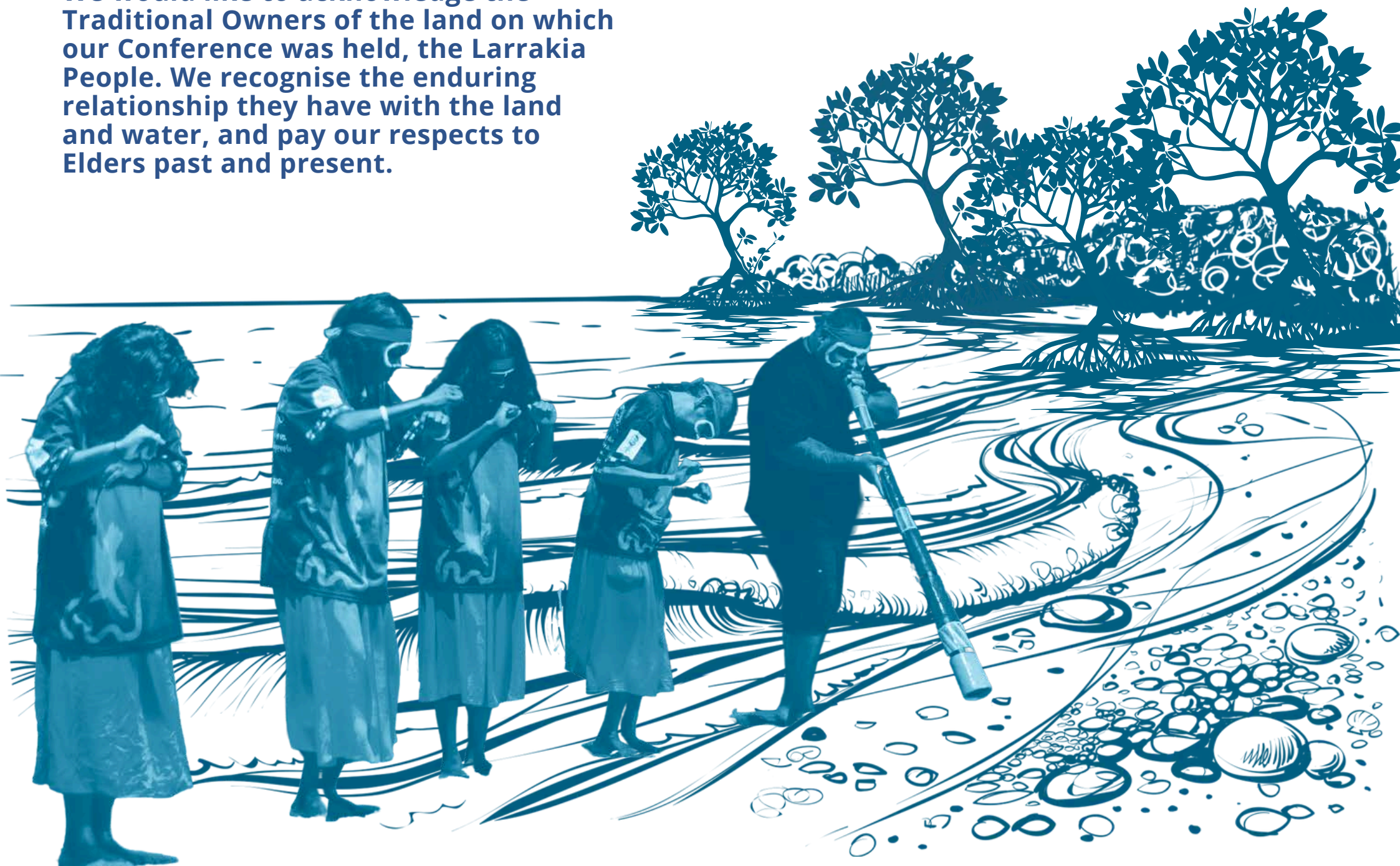


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Jared Copley, Chief Information Officer, and Jessica Sparrow, Project Coordinator. Photo: Helen Orr

INTRODUCTION

CREATING WAVES OF CHANGE

The inaugural Australian Sea Country Conference, held over two days, brought together a diverse group of over 289 delegates, including First Nations leaders, advocates, policymakers, and industry professionals, alongside more than 75 influential speakers.

This landmark event focused on the past, present, and future of Australia's precious Sea Country, with the aim of fostering collaboration and co-designing effective, inclusive policies.

Throughout the conference, participants engaged in in-depth discussions and hands-on breakout sessions that acknowledged past and present policies, identified gaps, and worked towards co-designing future legislation and regulations to better protect Sea Country.

A key focus was addressing the inconsistencies between Native Title Rights and recognition at both State/Territory and Commonwealth levels, with the aim of finding greater alignment and consistency.

Another important outcome explored at the conference was the potential creation of a First Nations peak body to represent and advocate for Sea Country interests, ensuring First Nations communities have a strong, unified voice in future policy discussions.

This report outlines the key findings, survey results, and contributions from the conference, highlighting the innovative discussions and forward-thinking outcomes that will shape the future of Sea Country governance in Australia.



Day One opening with Tiwi Dancers and guests. Photo by Helen Orr.

MESSAGE FROM BO CARNE, CEO



I've said it many times before: First Nations people in Australia didn't just sit on the beach watching the tide go in and out every day for 60,000 years. We have knowledge, stories, and customs deeply rooted in wisdom built over thousands of years.

First Nations people deserve a seat at the table to share their voices and contribute to decisions about the management of sea country.

What difference would a national body make? Among other things, it would:

- Empower Indigenous communities – It would provide First Nations people with a platform to actively participate in decision-making and manage their own sea country, aligning with the principle of self-determination.
- Enhance environmental stewardship – First Nations people's ecological knowledge could help Australia address environmental challenges such as resource sustainability, data collection, biodiversity loss, and climate change impacts on marine ecosystems.
- Promote cultural heritage – Sea country management isn't just about the environment - it's about preserving the cultural identity and practices of First Nations communities, which are deeply connected to the oceans.
- Foster collaboration – A national body could serve as a bridge between First Nations, government agencies, and industry stakeholders, ensuring Indigenous voices are heard in all areas of marine management.

A very heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of our inaugural Australian Sea Country Conference. I look forward to welcoming you to the 2026 Australian Sea Country Conference, with the date to be announced in the coming months.



Bo Carne with ASC Director, Jeffrey Puruntatameri Miller. Photo: Helen Orr.

2024 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Australian Sea Country Conference 2024 featured 26 presentations including panel discussions, workshops, and breakout sessions, with 75 presenters from diverse backgrounds in Indigenous governance, fisheries management and marine sustainability.

Keynote speakers included Bo Carne, CEO of the Aboriginal Sea Company; Jordan Point from the First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia (FNFC); Dr. Patrick Hone, Managing Director of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC); Mere George from the Iwi Collective Partnership, NZ; Tony McAvoy SC; and Jason Mundy from Parks Australia, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). Their presentations explored Indigenous leadership, treaty frameworks, fisheries governance, and sustainability, setting the stage for critical discussions on the future of Sea Country.

International keynote speakers shared global perspectives on Indigenous governance, cultural revitalisation, and self-determination in marine industries, highlighting collaboration models and policy frameworks that empower First Nations communities worldwide.

Beyond the plenary sessions, the program featured practical workshops and breakout discussions on topics such as Indigenous-led conservation, equitable engagement, marine parks management, and sustainable fisheries innovation. Special sessions focused on Women's Leadership in the Seafood Industry, Young People in Fisheries, and "60,000 Years of Knowledge", celebrating Indigenous expertise in marine governance.

Cultural highlights of the conference included traditional dance and smoking ceremonies that honoured the significance of Sea Country, as well as a message stick exchange that reinforced the connection between First Nations communities and marine sustainability. Jordan Point brought a message stick from British Columbia, Canada which had been presented to his organisation in 2012. The stick was created by artist Terry Dhurritjini Yumbulul and it was exchanged with a "chief's talking stick."

ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

- **289 Delegates**
- **26 Presentations**
- **75 Speakers**
- **35 Breakout Presentations**
- **9 Panel Sessions**
- **54 Bursary Recipients**
- **1 Message Stick Exchange**



Jordan Point and Terry Dhurritjini Yumbulul. Photo: Helen Orr.

PROGRAM BREAKDOWN



WELCOME EVENT

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

- Larrakia Elder Ms Yvonne Odegaard
- Dinner held on the deck at Wharf One with seafood supplied from Darwin Fish Market



OPENING CEREMONY

- Larrakia Nation

OPENING ADDRESS

- Calvin Deveraux, Aboriginal Sea Company, Chair

WELCOME ADDRESS

- Bo Carne, Aboriginal Sea Company, CEO
- Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Minister for the Environment and Water – Video address
- Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Australians

DAY ONE

PLENARY SESSIONS

- The sea has spoken
- Sustainable development, is that really achievable?

BREAKOUT SESSION'S THEME

- Diversity in sea country governance

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

- Dr Patrick Hone, Managing Director, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC)
- Jason Mundy, Head of Division, Parks Australia
- Jordan Point, Executive Advisor, First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia



Calvin Deveraux, Aboriginal Sea Company, Chair and guests on Day One.
Photo: Helen Orr.



Day Two sessions and guests at Closing Ceremony at Mindil Beach Casino. Photo: Helen Orr.

DAY TWO

PLENARY SESSIONS

- International First Nations engagement in the sea

BREAKOUT SESSIONS THEME

- Innovation into action

PANELS

- Perspectives from young people
- Participation and leadership of women
- First Nations – 60,000 years of experience, don't waste it
- Perspectives from various forums

CLOSING ADDRESS

- Calvin Deveraux, Aboriginal Sea Company, Chair

CLOSING CEREMONY

- Ngulmiya and Red Flag Dancers

GALA DINNER

- Held on the lawns of Mindil Beach Casino with seafood supplied from Darwin Fish Market Entertainment from the Andrew Gurruwiwi Band



FIELD TRIPS

DOOKY'S TRADITIONAL FISH TRAP

Donald "Dooky" Bonson has spent his entire life building fish traps around Darwin, and delegates were taken to his trap that sits in the intertidal zone of Glyde Point which is roughly 40 kilometres northeast of Darwin CBD.

Building a successful fish trap is an art, one that Dooky has perfected over the years through knowledge passed down through generations of his family. The trap must be designed carefully, low enough for fish to swim in during an incoming tide, but high enough to trap them as the tide recedes.

HUMPTY DOO BARRAMUNDI

Located near Humpty Doo on the Adelaide River, about an hour south of Darwin, Humpty Doo Barramundi is a family-run operation with sustainability at the heart of everything they do.

Since its humble beginnings in 1993 with an output of just six kilograms per week, the operation has grown dramatically to now send 130 tonnes of barramundi across the country each week.

They work closely with Traditional Landowners in the region and have established youth employment programs that bring young people into their operations, providing essential training, skill development, and a pathway to a viable career.

In addition to barramundi, they have collaborated with the Indigenous community of Wadeye to cultivate tropical rock oysters, sharing their aquaculture expertise to help the community establish its own commercial oyster operation.

"We've got about 150 people working here and there's huge diversity across the team. Nearly half of our team are under the age of 35. So, we really see investing in young people is crucial to the future of the operation," Dan Richards - Chief Executive Officer, Humpty Doo Barramundi



Dooky's Traditional Fish Trap and Humpty Doo Barramundi field trip with guests. Photo: Helen Orr.



NET FISHING DISPLAY

A safe net fishing display took place at Gunn Point Beach, located a 70-kilometre drive northeast of Darwin. Led by Klaus Jeffrey, a Senior Fishing Mentor with the Aboriginal Sea Company, delegates were introduced to a pulley system fishing technique.

This traditional and sustainable method remains in use today, with net fishing being common across the Northern Territory's Aboriginal communities. As part of the Aboriginal Sea Company's Mentor Program, mentors visit coastal communities to teach fishing skills, including the safe and responsible use of nets.

"Fishing is more than just catching fish; it's about respect - for the land, the sea, and the communities we work in. When we use nets, we do it carefully, making sure we don't take more than what's needed. Safe fishing practices are essential, not just for our safety, but to keep the balance of nature intact for generations to come." - Klaus Jeffrey, Senior Fishing Mentor, Aboriginal Sea Company.



Net fishing display with fishing mentors Klaus Jeffrey and Mohammad Corpus.
Photo: Carlito Dante Rodrigues



DAY ONE

Coming together for
IMPORTANT
conversations



Senator the Hon
Malarndirri McCarthy
Minister for Indigenous Australians

CONNECTION
to
sea-country
TRADITIONAL Knowledge
CULTURAL
authority

tangible
SOCIAL & ECONOMIC
benefits for
our communities

Investing in Indigenous
Ranger Programs and IPA's

Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for the
Environment and Water

we want to keep working in
PARTNERSHIP with
FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE
whose contributions are VITAL
CUSTODIANS of **LAND & SEA**

CALVIN DEVERAUX
Chair, Aboriginal Sea Country

OUR WAY!
COLLECTIVE
COLLABORATIVE
conversations
about SUSTAINABLE
& FIRST NATIONS
economic development

TOPICS

Australian Sea Country

CONFERENCE 2024



MC: CISSY GORE-BIRCH
(OAM)

"What's been before us to carry us to where we want to be?"

BO CARNE
CEO Aboriginal Sea Company

representation
CUSTOMARY FISHING



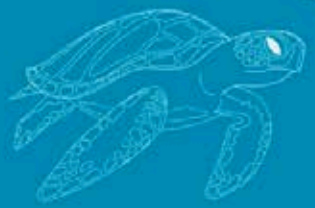
stories customs science law



What is OUR
CALL to ACTION?
Do we want a **PEAK BODY?**



What are our **ASPIRATIONS?**
We **NEED** a **UNITED VOICE**
at the table!



message stick culture to culture
thunderbird sharing stories & knowledge

Country **CULTURE** Connection

#ASCC2024 DAY 1.



Graphic Recorded on the land of the
Larrakia (saltwater) people
by SarahCookCreative.com

DAY ONE

WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Australian Sea Country Conference opened with a Welcome to Country and Traditional Dance Ceremony, honouring the deep connection between First Nations peoples and the sea.

The first plenary session featured a welcome from Calvin Deveraux, Chair of the Aboriginal Sea Company, followed by a video address from the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP on Indigenous leadership in environmental management. Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy spoke on Indigenous governance in marine industries, and Bo Carne, CEO of the Aboriginal Sea Company, delivered the keynote on Indigenous-led governance and sustainable fisheries.

Under the theme "The Sea Has Spoken", plenary sessions explored fisheries science, marine governance, and conservation, with insights from Dr Patrick Hone (FRDC), Joe Morrison Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC), Rhett Hoskins (Sea Country Alliance), Tony McAvoy SC, and Jason Mundy (Parks Australia, DCCEEW). A panel discussion, facilitated by Bo Carne, addressed challenges, policy gaps, and future pathways.

The afternoon focused on sustainable development, with speakers Bo Carne (ASC), Clayton Nelson (Austral Fisheries), Jordan Point (First Nations Fisheries Council of BC), and Tiahni Adamson (CH4 Global) discussing Indigenous-led fisheries, environmental impacts, and sustainable aquaculture. A panel, led by Stan Lui (Five Cubed Environmental), explored Indigenous leadership in sustainability.

Breakout sessions covered key topics, including:

- Equitable engagement in Sea Country governance
- Western and First Nations science collaboration
- Indigenous land and sea management (ILSC Workshop)
- Fisheries research and innovation (FRDC Forum)
- Marine parks review

With insightful discussions and collaborative sessions, the Australian Sea Country Conference opened with a strong foundation for the days ahead.



Day One guests and sponsors enjoying the activities. Photo: Helen Orr.

DAY TWO

TOPICS

OUR VOICE OUR STRENGTH!

Perspectives FROM young People

FUTURE
engaging with our **ELDERS**
A SEAT AT THE TABLE

SLOW DOWN & LISTEN to COUNTRY

CLIMATE CHANGE

taking ACTION!

Leadership Opportunities

JUST DO the RIGHT THING!



REVAMP EDUCATION

Being part of the conversation!

PANEL SESSION
FACILITATED BY DANTE RODRIGUES
TONI HEDDITCH, TYA DYNEVOR & LUKE MEAD



*weaving our stories
sharing our knowledge*

Participation & Leadership of

WOMEN

empowering our COMMUNITY

multiple ways of BEING & KNOWING

BELIEVE in HER!

strength-based approach
intergenerational HEALING!



DADIRRI
Listening

60 000 years of EXPERIENCE

DON'T WASTE IT!

PANEL SESSION
FACILITATED BY STAN LUI,
CALVIN DEVERAUX, TERRY YUMBULLU,
RITCHIE AH MAT, DR CASS HUNTER



CHANGE MAKERS
innovators

COURAGE = CONTAGIOUS

SHOW UP!
STAND UP!

the TIME is NOW!

REPRESENTATIVE CULTURAL SAFETY

MORE EQUITABLE SYSTEMS
for INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SAFETY SUPPORT ALLIES



intersectional DISCRIMINATION

PEOPLE CENTRED

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Cultural Obligation

Cultural AUTHORITY

VALUING

OUR WAY OUR LORE

PANEL SESSION
FACILITATED BY DR CASS HUNTER,
KIRSTEN ABERNETHY, VERONICA PAPACOSTA,
SUZANNE THOMPSON & TIAHNI ADAMSON



Australian Sea Country
CONFERENCE 2024

DAY 2.
#ASCC2024



Graphic Recorded on the land of the Larrakia (saltwater) people by SarahCookCreative.com



DAY TWO

THURSDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2024

The second day of the Australian Sea Country Conference centred on Indigenous leadership in fisheries, governance, and industry representation. The day began with an address by MC Cissy Gore-Birch, setting the tone for discussions on community-driven and international fisheries insights.

The Plenary Session featured key perspectives from Mere George (Iwi Collective Partnership) on Māori fisheries, Jordan Point (FNFC, BC) on Indigenous representation in industry advisory boards, and Tony McAvoy SC on treaty elements in fisheries governance. Patrick Hone (FRDC) facilitated a panel discussion, delving into Indigenous leadership, policy, and treaty frameworks.

A breakout session, Innovation into Action, encouraged practical collaboration, focusing on empowerment, equitable engagement, community education, economic development, fisheries innovation, and marine parks management. These discussions generated valuable insights into advancing Indigenous-led initiatives.

As the conference drew to a close, Bo Carne provided a summary of key takeaways and outlined future directions for Indigenous-led marine governance.

The event concluded with a Closing Ceremony at Mindil Beach Casino, where attendees celebrated with traditional dances, live music, and a dinner event honouring the cultural strength and unity of Sea Country communities.

Day 2 reinforced the vital role of Indigenous leadership in shaping the future of fisheries, laying the foundation for continued progress in Sea Country management.



CULTURAL ARTWORK

MAICIE LALARA – DILYIMBIYABA DESIGNS

The event showcased the incredible work of Maicie Lalara, an artist from Groote Eylandt and creator of Dilyimbiyaba Designs. Her art, rooted in Anindilyakwa culture, includes weaving, bush dyeing, and jewellery-making preserving traditional stories of land and sea.

THE BUSH DYE STORY

Maicie's bush dye art, created with natural colours, leaves, and fire ashes, represents the 14 clans of Groote Eylandt. Inspired by her great-great-grandmother, she carries on the tradition of using art to connect culture and community.

"I grew up watching my elders create beautiful artwork. Now, I follow in their footsteps, using my art to tell our stories." – Maicie Lalara

THE YILKWA MONSTER FISH – TELLING THE STORY OF GHOST NETS

Maicie's Yilkwa Monster Fish sculpture highlights the impact of ghost nets - abandoned fishing nets that harm marine life as they drift through the ocean. Made from wire and textiles, the piece reflects the waste collected by ghost nets before washing ashore.

"Ghost nets travel for months, picking up rubbish and killing sea animals. My art tells their journey to show why we must protect our waters." – Maicie Lalara

PRESERVING CULTURE & PROTECTING SEA COUNTRY

Maicie's work embodies sustainability, cultural storytelling, and environmental responsibility. Her display served as a powerful reminder of the need to protect Sea Country, honour Indigenous traditions, and safeguard future generations.



Maicie's Yilkwa Monster Fish sculpture. Photo: Helen Orr.

CULTURAL ENTERTAINMENT

The Australian Sea Country Conference was enriched by a series of powerful cultural performances that celebrated First Nations music, dance, and storytelling.

LARRAKIA NATION – OPENING CEREMONY

The Conference began with a Welcome to Country and traditional dance by Larrakia Nation, the Traditional Owners of the Darwin region. Their performance set the tone for the event, paying respect to the land and highlighting the role of Larrakia people in protecting Sea Country.

TIWI DANCERS – TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE

An impromptu performance by the Tiwi Dancers during Thursday's lunch break added a vibrant cultural touch. Aboriginal Sea Company Directors Jeffrey Miller and Andrew Bush joined the dance, deepening the connection. Their rhythmic movements, chants, and storytelling showcased the rich traditions of the Tiwi Islands.

RED FLAG DANCERS WITH NGULMIYA – CLOSING PERFORMANCE

The Red Flag Dancers, led by Ngulmiya, delivered a powerful closing performance on Thursday afternoon. Their ceremonial dance and song cycles reflect the strength and depth of Yolŋu cultural traditions, blending ancient knowledge with contemporary expression.

ANDREW GURRUWIWI BAND – LIVE MUSIC AT THE GALA DINNER

The Conference wrapped up with a high-energy live performance by the Andrew Gurruwiwi Band at the Thursday night Gala Dinner. Their infused Yolŋu music brought a contemporary edge to traditional Indigenous sounds, getting attendees up and dancing to close out the event in style.

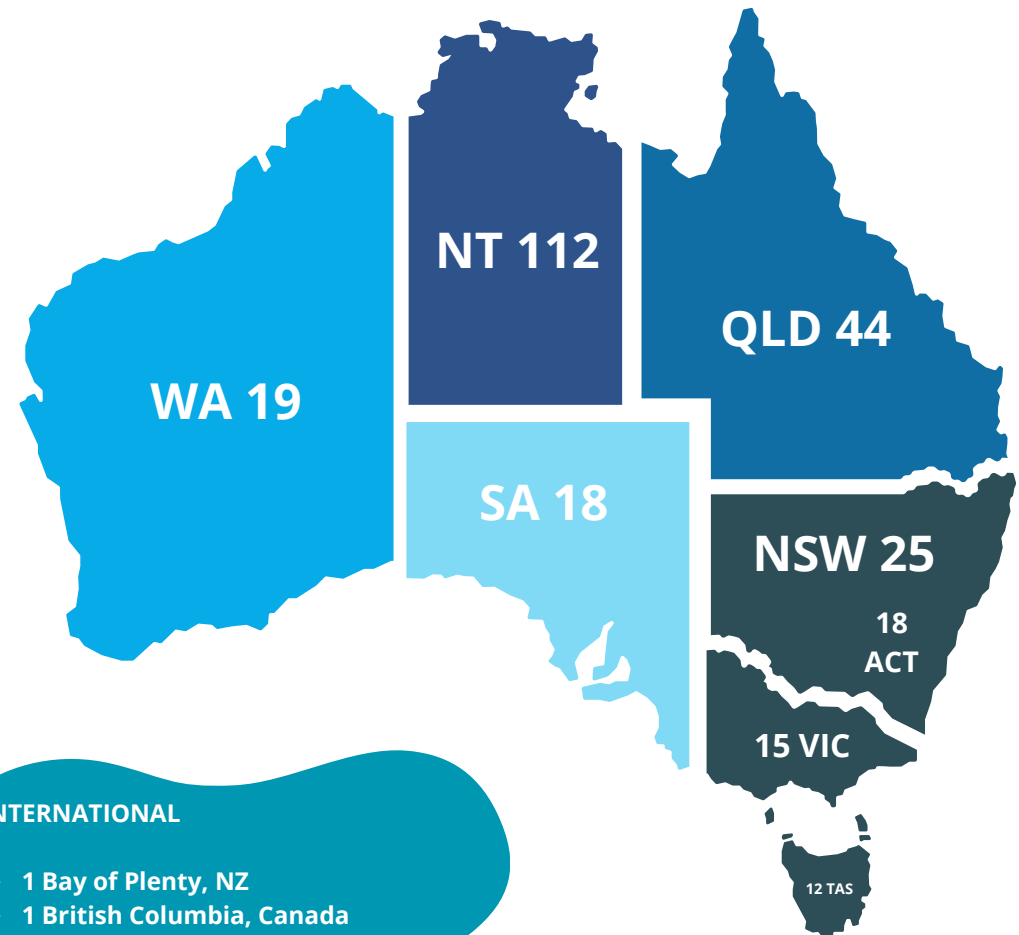


Larrakia Dancers, Red Flag Dancers and Tiwi Dancers. Photo: Helen Orr.



Plenary and presentation sessions. Photo: Helen Orr.

ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS



INTERNATIONAL

- 1 Bay of Plenty, NZ
- 1 British Columbia, Canada
- 1 Mt Wellington, NZ
- 23 Unsure

TOTAL 289

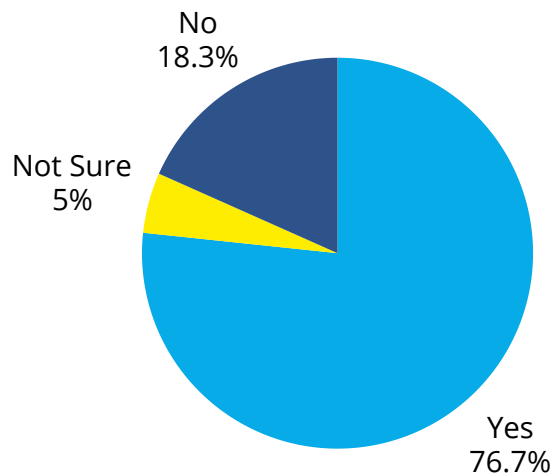
FEEDBACK FROM THE DELEGATE SURVEY

Sixty delegates completed the post-event survey, emailed to all 289 attendees. Their feedback covered key topics including:

- The need for a First Nations national body for Sea Country management
- The event's impact on their perception of Australian Sea Country
- Overall enjoyment and session satisfaction
- Key insights and takeaways
- Suggestions for future events

These insights will help shape the 2026 conference to better meet attendees' needs (Communique, pp. 21-23).

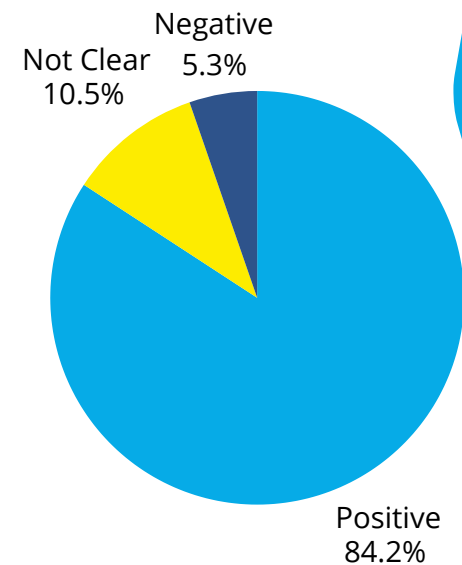
DO YOU THINK AUSTRALIA NEEDS A FIRST NATIONS NATIONAL BODY FOR SEA COUNTRY MANAGEMENT?



"Maybe, we definitely need to implement established strategies around protocols on what the National Body for Sea Country management will look like and for it to be single handedly run by First Nations People."

HOW DID THIS EVENT IMPACT YOUR PERCEPTION OF AUSTRALIAN SEA COUNTRY?

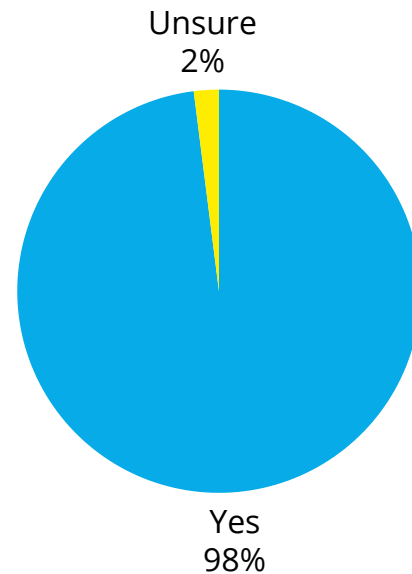
"It gave me a better understanding of the strong cultural connection First Nations people have with Sea Country and helped me appreciate that it's about much more than just catching fish."





Sponsor stalls, plenary and breakout sessions. Photo: Helen Orr.

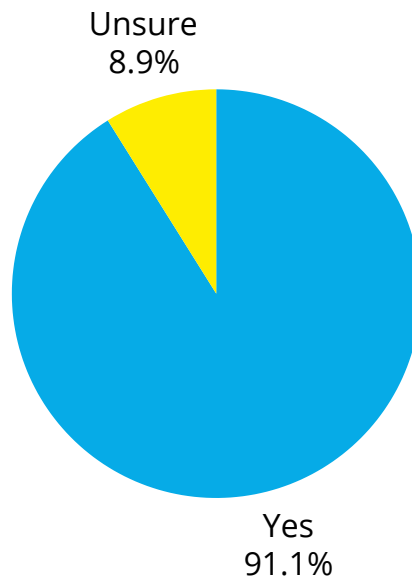
DID YOU ENJOY THE CONFERENCE?



“International experiences, the gala dinner, and tangible examples from other nations stood out. Engaging with diverse Traditional Custodians, marine scientists, policymakers, and environmental advocates, united by a shared passion for protecting and managing sea country, was truly inspiring.”

“For a first conference, I think it was an outstanding success - exceeded my expectations.”

WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE AMOUNT OF CONFERENCE SESSIONS AND ACTIVITIES



“Enjoyed the field trips and the excellent gala dinner.”

“Run the event for an extra day so we have more availability to listen to more speakers”

“The plenary sessions were great for bringing everyone together, with a good variety of breakout sessions and themes.”

“There was lots going on.”

WHAT WERE YOUR BIGGEST INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAY FROM THE EVENT?



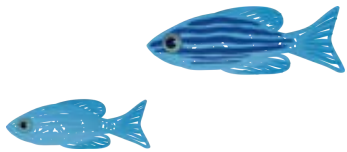
"Lack of National leadership in sea country space is evident, but the energy from this conference leaves me motivated and hopeful."

"Stop expecting youth to always have the answers to complex global problems and to be the sole source of innovative solutions. Instead, encourage the older generation to take more on-the-ground and political action, accept greater accountability for their decisions, and develop a stronger awareness of their actions and their consequences."

"Telling positive stories is powerful – it motivates us all to continue our work and vision."

"The wonderful diversity of Youth and Women stepping up and voicing their thoughts was truly inspiring."

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE AUSTRALIAN SEA COUNTRY EVENTS?



"We need a National Oceans Office – this could be the next step forward in sea country management."

"It was the best conference I have ever attended, and I'm already looking forward to the next one!"

"This is just the beginning – the setup is fantastic, and it will only grow bigger, offering great opportunities for our mob."



"The Aboriginal Sea Company has a real chance to play a leadership role in the future of sea country management."

"A great inaugural conference, full of valuable insights, and it has created some clear options to move forward."

"Congratulations for putting on such a successful event, and for the great work the Aboriginal Sea Company is doing."



BUSINESS VIEW

- Add more stalls to showcase Aboriginal businesses including artwork to provide a platform for artists to gain exposure, sell their goods and network with potential customers, partners and collaborators.
- Extend the conference by an additional day to allow time for more presentations.
- Shift the catering outside for a more relaxed atmosphere during meal times.
- Condense breakout sessions and shift focus to more plenary sessions.
- Make the conference more accessible for those who can't afford to attend.
- Include more local perspectives in the discussions.
- Provide opportunities for lesser-known speakers while inviting a broader, more diverse user group.



Plenary and breakout sessions. Photo: Helen Orr.

TRAVEL BURSARY SPONSORS

Travel bursaries were made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

Bursaries meant that we were able to remove financial barriers that might prevent individuals from attending the conference, and provided them with an opportunity to join the conversation. Bursary recipients were each provided with full conference registration, including the social events as well as flights and accommodation.

54 people from across Australia received funding to attend the conference thanks to the support of our travel bursary sponsors.



PEOPLE. COUNTRY. OPPORTUNITY.



AIATSIS



Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development



Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry



Government of South Australia
Department of Primary Industries and Regions

Sponsors from ILSC Group, AIATSIS and NIAA. Photo: Helen Orr.

SPONSORS

PLATINUM SPONSORS



PEOPLE. COUNTRY. OPPORTUNITY.

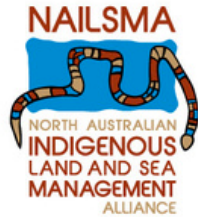


Australian Government
National Indigenous
Australians Agency



NIAA

GOLD SPONSOR



SILVER SPONSORS



AIATSIS

BRONZE SPONSOR



DINNER SPONSOR



COFFEE CART SPONSOR



CHILL OUT ROOM SPONSOR



THANK YOU

The inaugural Australian Sea Country Conference was a powerful step toward better Sea Country governance. Over three days we shared ideas, built connections, and worked together to create a stronger, more sustainable future for Sea Country.

This event showed how collaboration between First Nations leaders, policymakers and industry professionals can lead to real change. The discussions and insights gained have laid the foundation for ongoing progress.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this incredible event. Your passion and commitment made it a success.

We look forward to seeing you at the next Australian Sea Country Conference in 2026 to continue this important work.

To view the photos from the Australian Sea Country Conference, please scan the QR code below:



Scan me



Gala Dinner guests and plenary sessions. Kylie Fadelli, ASC Executive Assistant, with Rangers from ASRAC. Photo: Helen Orr.

APPENDIX

AUSTRALIAN SEA COUNTRY CONFERENCE 2024 COMMUNIQUE

We, the delegates of the Australian Sea Country Conference 2024, gathered on the traditional lands and waters of the Larrakia people pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge the profound connection between Indigenous communities and the marine environment and recognise the vital role that First Nations Sea Country interests play in the sustainable management and cultural preservation of Australia's marine resources.

The Australian Sea Country Conference highlighted several innovative initiatives in research, economic development, advocacy management and partnerships. There were, however, two key findings that resonated with several discussions and responses to the post conference survey.

KEY FINDING ONE

In light of the discussions and insights shared during this conference, we collectively support a call for the establishment of a national body (Council) with delegates to inform First Nations Sea Country interests across Australia. This body will ensure that the voices of our First Nation Australians are heard and respected in all matters concerning the seafood industry and sea country management.

PROPOSED APPROACH

Undertake an Expression of Interest process across the regions below to establish a Steering Group to begin drafting a governance model.

1. Representation: Membership of the steering group in the establishment of the national body is to ensure there is a diverse range of skills, First Nations Delegates and marine bioregions to ensure diversity and effectiveness. Marine bioregions may include:

- North Marine Region
- North-west Marine Region
- Temperate East Marine Region
- South-east Marine Region
- South-west Marine Region

2. Business Diversity: Represent the diverse range of business opportunities

3. Advocacy: National Body Delegates to advocate for the rights and interests of First Nations fishers in policy-making processes at local, state and national levels.

4. Sustainability: Promote sustainable fishing practices that integrate traditional knowledge and modern science to ensure the health of marine ecosystems.

5. Economic Development: Support economic opportunities for First Nations fishers through access to resources, training, and market development.

6. Cultural Heritage: Protect and promote the cultural heritage and traditional practices of First Nations Australians.

7. Collaboration: Foster partnerships with government agencies, non-governmental organisations (including existing Indigenous committees, alliances and statutory bodies, and industry stakeholders to achieve shared goals.

Further details of this National Body would be refined during consultations.

KEY FINDING TWO

The Conference highlighted the number of sectoral interests and activities impacting on the Australian sea country with complex governance frameworks and multiple government portfolios lacking coordination. In recognition of this, we collectively support a call for greater national leadership over sea country management which needs to happen at the highest level of government. This is a call for the establishment of an Australian National Oceans Office. This office would make decisions on species management, habitat protection, resource sharing frameworks, spatial management and management of all impacts on our ocean environment without borders.

COMMITMENT

We, the delegates of the Australian Sea Country Conference 2024, commit to convening again in two years and urge all relevant stakeholders to support the establishment of the First Nations National Body, and an Australian National Oceans Office. By doing so, we can ensure that the rich traditions and sustainable practices of all Australian fishers, sea country managers and scientists, and our pristine environment are preserved and promoted for future generations.

This does not reflect the views of 100% of the delegates that attended the Conference, noting there were several Government representatives who could not commit to this proposal, however, generally supported to concept.

OUR PROCESS

