The Oil of the Dugong:
Towards a Cross-Cultural History
of an Indigenous Medicine

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Dedicated to my family for their love and support.
Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma to any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Veronika Folkmanova
Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and Australian settler perceptions of medicinal practice by examining the manufacturing and use of dugong oil. It tracks the growth of the dugong industry in Moreton Bay in the mid-nineteenth century, before analysing the way in which dugong oil made its way through the hands of medical practitioners into newspaper advertisements and exhibitions from Australia to Europe. At this time, Australia was following Britain in the move to professionalise medicine despite a continuing popularity of heterodox and home treatments. ‘Discoveries’ of new medicinal remedies by medical professionals blur the lines of orthodox and unorthodox medicine and add another dimension to this history. Specifically, the case of dugong oil, learned from the Indigenous inhabitants, shows the interconnectedness of the dominant and the minority stories, shedding new light on the history of medicine, products, exchange and ideas in the age of empire.

In this thesis the history of medicine is a pathway into earlier history, both before and after European settlement on North Stradbroke Island — Minjerribah. I argue that the connections and relations between the local Aboriginal people — Quandamooka people — and white explorers, convicts, personnel, and later settlers, forged on the island from first contact in the early nineteenth century, paved the way for the growth of the dugong industry, which operated on and around the island from the 1850s until the second half of the twentieth century. By focusing on the medical history of dugong oil, I uncover the nuances and specifics of early contact on Minjerribah and the growth of a fluid and largely unregulated scene — the dugong industry. At the same time the thesis incorporates this seemingly small story into a global context by following the product of the industry from its roots as an Indigenous medicine to its ‘moments of glory’ as a prize-winning and much-praised product at exhibits in Europe throughout the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the second half of the twentieth century, it also became a sought after medicine in Australia.
All through this journey the story of ‘white’ dugong oil is intertwined with the story of the Quandamooka dugong oil. Through the effects of colonisation, materials such as food, tools and medicines were appropriated and transformed to appeal to different consumer groups creating new points of interaction, which resulted in what is called in this thesis ‘shared history’, a history in which the mainstream and minority interconnect and mutually affect each other. These products flew through colonial pathways between indigenous peoples and Europeans and created a connection in which interactions were inevitable. In Australia, dugong oil was a product that traversed the spatial and racial divide, within the limits and strictures of colonisation, being consumed by both Aboriginal and white people. In this thesis I argue that whether used as a ‘scientific’ medicine bought at the local chemist, a detested medicine enforced by colonial authorities, or a remedy passed down through generations, the story of dugong oil uncovers the duality of products and complicates the history of Aboriginal–European interaction.

In order for the new medicines to be appropriate for white Australian and European consumers, however, the product needed to be ‘cleansed’ from its Aboriginal origins, it needed to be whitened. This project has aimed to uncover the early history of this industry, with its possibilities of exchange and interaction, before the overt whitening took place. The process of whitening the oil meant erasing the (forced and voluntary) participation of the Quandamooka people in the industry and the longstanding connection of Quandamooka and other coastal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the dugong. The forgetting of the Quandamooka people’s role in the industry, however, did not succeed as I argue in this thesis. The strong cultural ties and the immense environmental knowledge of the Quandamooka people stand in stark contrast to the mainstream views and uses of culture and the environment by white Australians in the mid-nineteenth to twentieth century. Only in the last several decades have the environmental knowledge and the importance of cultural heritage of Indigenous people been recognised. My thesis sets out to contribute to this recognition by investigating the medical history in the context of Aboriginal history both on Minjerribah and further afield while at the same time exploring the Indigenous history of this seemingly European medicine. This combination sets out to show the movement of history in at least two directions; circulating between Minjerribah, the mainland, and Europe and creating a cultural product that is distinct yet inevitably also shared in its histories and meanings.
Acknowledgements

I would like to respectfully acknowledge the Quandamooka people, Traditional Owners of the land and sea on which I have concentrated my research, Minjerribah, and Elders both past and present.

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<tr>
<td>DDNA</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Native Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>Director of Native Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMEIC</td>
<td>Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSI</td>
<td>North Stradbroke Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSIHM</td>
<td>North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSIHMA</td>
<td>North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QSA</td>
<td>Queensland State Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCCOHP</td>
<td>Redland City Council Oral History Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLQ</td>
<td>State Library of Queensland</td>
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Preface

The sun’s rays warm my face as I travel across Moreton Bay on the Stradbroke Flyer ferry. It is a fine winter’s day. Ahead is Minjerribah: North Stradbroke Island (NSI) and the town of Dunwich, my destination. I gaze into the water, hoping to catch a glimpse of a dugong — the reason for my trip and the focus of my research. As Thomas Welsby’s books on Moreton Bay explain, the waters here once teemed with dugong. The early settlers saw the animal as a useful commodity, seeking its meat, bones and skin, but predominantly hunting it for its fat, which was used as a medicine.¹

On the island I walk the short distance from the terminal to the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum (NSIHM). The NSIHM is housed in the rebuilt buildings of the Benevolent Asylum (which serviced the poor and destitute of Queensland from 1865 to 1946) and holds information about all aspects of Stradbroke history. As I make my way through the building I move through the museum’s exhibits: the ‘Pioneer Room’; the ‘Shipping Room’ (including shipwreck information); the ‘Point Lookout Lighthouse’; the ‘Quarantine Station’; and the ‘Aboriginal Room’. This is why I am here. This room contains exhibits about the Quandamooka people, their connection to the island, their culture and their lives before and after the arrival of white settlers. There are also newspaper clippings, oral histories, photographs and dugong artefacts, including ‘liquid gold’: dugong oil. It is clear that the dugong played an important role in the lives of the Quandamooka people. But the dugong oil is contained in a bottle labelled Chemist Roush, a Brisbane pharmacist. Thus dugong oil must have been important to the white settlers also. Here is a product of a now vulnerable animal, exhibited in the ‘Aboriginal room’ yet with a clear connection to white settlers. Why?
To answer this question I scrutinise archival materials, read oral histories and compare material artefacts. Along the way I uncover the nuances and complexities of an industry where Aboriginal, white and non-white men work side-by-side, where control and

power shift and shape events, and where identity and ownership can be understood in multiple ways.

On my return journey, I imagine the dugong fishermen silently taking their boats out in the hope of finding a dugong in their nets. One local man with a strong connection to dugong fishing was Sam Rollands. Rollands was a member of the Nunukul tribe and was well respected by the Aboriginal community as well as white men. He lived on Myora Mission, the government-run institution on Minjerribah, where he kept a large orchard. He was employed as the local policeman, to clear the land of prickly pear and as a dugong fisherman. Apart from selling dugong oil to chemists in Brisbane, he would share the catch with the mission community, each person getting a section of the animal. Rollands’ story exemplifies the very complicated nature of the history and traditional custom of dugong fishing and how it affected the lives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.
Chapter 1

Introducing the thesis

The dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is a herbivorous marine mammal with its habitat spanning the Indo-Pacific region; from the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean to the western and central Pacific Ocean. It can be found along the north-west, north, north-east and east coast of Australia from Broome in Western Australia as far as Byron Bay in New South Wales. Once widespread, this species, listed as vulnerable, is under threat from habitat loss, pollution and human activities such as fishing and boating. It is the only surviving representative of the once-diverse family Dugongidae and the only strictly marine species of the order Sirenia.

Throughout its region, the dugong has been hunted for its meat and oil for thousands of years. The history of human interaction with the dugong is as diverse as the oceans and coastal seas it inhabits. While in some areas the dugong is a totem animal and to a degree a sacred animal (Torres Strait Islands and islands off the southern coast of Papua New Guinea), in other areas the animal is ‘just’ a source of food, medicine, and tools — from bones.

In the Moreton Bay region, the dugong was exactly that, a source of food, medicine and tools (although specific customs and rituals needed to be observed as discussed later in the thesis). Very little information about dugong fishing exists from before the arrival of Europeans and during the first decades of settlement. We have to rely on the experiences and memories of the Quandamooka people not only for this early period but also for the period when the dugong became a highly sought after animal by the settlers. This occurred in the 1850s, when as I show Dr William Hobbs began catching the animal in greater numbers with the aid of the Quandamooka men,
who comprised his crew.¹ This attempt at industrialising dugong fishing and dugong oil production (the prized product) was the first of many in creating an industry out of a thousands-year-old practice.

The oil of the dugong was marketed as a ‘cure-all’ but was predominantly used as a respiratory medicine, with claims to aid in tuberculosis. The oil was sold in Australia and in England (for a limited time) with increased interest in the product during the wars. The oil was used not only as a medical product but also as an exhibit throughout the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Australia, Europe and North America. Here it was presented as a new medical product as well as representing Australia as a country of riches and medical progress. Dugongs were caught and oil produced in Moreton Bay and exported overseas well into the 1930s with continuous and intermittent fisheries and boiling down plants set up along the coast of Queensland and operating until 1969 when the dugong was proclaimed protected. Throughout this time in Moreton Bay the dugong was caught by dugong fishing crews, comprising of Quandamooka fishermen, to be boiled down for oil, but at the same time it was caught by Quandamooka men to be utilised by the community.

The Quandamooka people had a relatively longstanding pre-existing relationship with settlers (first direct contact was made when Matthew Flinders landed on the island in 1803) at the time the first dugong was caught by a white man. Thus, from the beginning, the industry was a place of communication, collaboration and learning between white and Aboriginal fishermen, becoming a scene of cross- and multi-cultural contact. These relationships on Minjerribah in a way mirrored the situation on the mainland where the establishment of various industries was dependent or partially dependent on Aboriginal people’s knowledge and collaboration. However, the conditions on Minjerribah differed significantly to the explicit exploitation of Aboriginal people on the mainland for instance in the pastoral industry, where land grabs were connected with violence and death. The experiences and relationships of people on Minjerribah and the outcomes of these relationships challenge the idea of Aboriginal people as passive onlookers and victims to the development of settler industries and economies. This thesis is concerned with the multitude of relationships

¹ I refer specifically to men here as women were not allowed to be part of the industry. However, the analysis of gender is important in creating a nuanced history and so the role of women is discussed throughout this thesis, namely in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.
Figure 1.1: Map of North Stradbroke Island — Minjerribah with locations mentioned in the thesis and images of relevant people, places, and institutions.
and alliances between the Quandamooka people, Europeans, and others, including South Asian and Pacific Islander people, and their fundamental roles in the dugong industry over 150 years in order to uncover the complexity of these connections. The map shown in Figure 1.1 places the complicated history of the dugong industry into the geographical space of Minjerribah signposting the variety of stories examined in this thesis.

The central aspect for this thesis is the mixing of peoples, knowledge and ideas within the dugong industry as it draws together histories, such as histories of power and exchange, which are often presented separately thus providing a more comprehensive representation of the past. In researching this history we need to examine the intricate connections and cooperation of Aboriginal, white and non-white men in order to understand the power play, inter-dependence and the fragility of these relations. As I discuss in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, the industry was not simply built by white entrepreneurs with the employ of Aboriginal men. Both the crews and the crew employers were of different backgrounds (European, Quandamooka, Torres Strait Islander, Chinese, American) and came with a different set of ideas and knowledges. This intertwining of peoples is representative of the dugong story. Newspaper and archival sources cited in this thesis (such as the Brisbane Courier, Moreton Bay Courier, Queenslander and Sydney Morning Herald) alongside the Queensland State Archives (QSA) and the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum Archive (NSIHMA) reveal the links of the Quandamooka people to the ‘European’ story. Even from the white-dominated reports collected in the archives and presented in different newspapers, it is clear that the Quandamooka and European history of dugong use is inseparable (despite attempts to separate the two, see Chapter 4). As I argue throughout
Chapter 1: INTRODUCING THE THESIS

this thesis there are often no clear boundaries which define the history of the dugong and dugong oil. What this thesis illustrates is that the history of the dugong and the industry is multi-layered and fluid revealing the frequently overlooked agency of the Quandamooka people and showing that a less dialectic approach is essential in uncovering historical nuances.

In order to reveal the historical nuances within the dugong industry, a careful reading of works relating to the Queensland marine environment is essential. This scholarship, however, is insufficient in answering a number of questions. For instance, how did the oil come to travel from the antipodes to Europe and North America in the nineteenth century? What can this transnational journey tell us about the product and the people involved in its production and promotion? Without answering these questions, we cannot uncover a comprehensive story of dugong oil either as an Aboriginal history or European history. I intend to answer these questions through conceptual frameworks, such as shared history, environmental history, mobility and history of medicine, presented further in the introduction. Through these frameworks I expand the limited scholarship on the history of dugong fishing to show the industry as a set of wider and connected global networks.

So as to provide a comprehensive and progressive history, the dugong industry will be discussed in the following chapters as an evolving, intertwining history inevitably shared with European and Aboriginal history. Just as the Aboriginal and settler worlds overlapped on NSI, not least in the dugong industry, so the oil they produced interlaced these two worlds. Thus, dugong oil can be understood as a world product, but its origins and demise as a commercial product occurred specifically in Australia, and its Aboriginal historical origins continued to accrue to it, however distantly.

Having been promoted and distributed in England and used by people for various complaints throughout the second half of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, dugong oil disappeared as a commercial medicine in the 1970s. As I argue in Chapter 6, this last part of the story of dugong oil is embedded in the environmental and cultural heritage movements of the sort emerging in the second half of the twentieth century. Without approaching the topic from an environmental perspective as well, it would not be possible to grasp the importance of events leading up to and following the closure of commercial dugong fishing in the 1960s and the proclamation of dugong as a protected animal in 1969. These events constitute an important part of the debate over cultural heritage and the importance of biodiversity.

Note on place names

Throughout this thesis I refer to the island by both its traditional name: Minjerribah, meaning island in the sun; and its European name: North Stradbroke Island, named after the Earl of Stradbroke in 1827. I do this consciously and deliberately to highlight the island’s shared history, which is central to this thesis. The name Stradbroke was given by Captain Henry John Rous, the Earl’s son and commandant of HMS Rainbow: the first ship of war to enter Moreton Bay. This act of naming was designed to lay claim to the island, just as other explorers and surveyors had done to other places throughout Australia. This naming practice was in fact a process of colonisation and a step towards the forced ‘civilisation’ of a ‘savage’ land and people. Using the term Minjerribah symbolically returns the island to the Quandamooka people, the island’s traditional owners. I use NSI when the story shifts more towards the settlers’ point of view, and I use Minjerribah in all other cases.

Shared history

Investigating the dugong industry comes with many challenges, including choosing the optimal frameworks and applying these in the analyses of the varied topics. Already

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3 Minjerribah was returned to traditional owners on 4 July 2011 when the Quandamooka people’s native title rights were recognised.
from the above it is clear that many forms and aspects of history need to be combined in order to provide a more complete picture and one that shows how complicated and multi-layered history is. As argued in the following, the interrelationship of this more complex history reveals a deeper and more compelling story of dugong oil as a site of both possibility and agency, of exploitation and absorption. By recognising these diverse perspectives it becomes evident, for instance, that Aboriginal people were not passive onlookers, but were agents whose direct (and indirect) involvement shaped the trajectory of dugong oil. As such, they were implicated in dugong oil’s history within medicine; the representation of Australia overseas; and our contemporary medicinal and environmental knowledge. This interconnectedness and (unequal) agency of people working in the industry leads us to the concept of shared histories.

Shared history was promoted in 1994 by *The Council for Aboriginal Recognition* as a part of the key issue paper series. In it, the authors stress the need for ‘a shared sense of history’ as it ‘has the potential to be an influential agent of reconciliation’ and sharing histories became a major point of Reconciliation. However, as shown by Heather Goodall, while shared histories (in light of the reconciliation process) is an important yet complicated concept, mostly it has led to two strands of history: Indigenous and settler, where the Indigenous strand was merely added to the dominant settler strand. There were only a few histories which focused on the entangled and contesting interpretations of the past. In order to create balanced shared histories, Goodall stresses the ‘need to be alert to the processes of history making’ and creating collaborative histories. Reflecting this sense of complicated interaction, the story of dugong oil set out in this thesis draws from both official archival records (white Australian viewpoint) and oral histories (Aboriginal viewpoint), while also keeping in mind the inevitable selectiveness of history making by contemporary dugong industry participants, authorities and historians themselves. This cautious approach is key to any shared history, in this case the history of settler–Aboriginal relations and their connection to a product and the environment.

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This thesis approaches the interconnectedness of peoples and ideologies as a shared history connecting minority and dominant histories. This outlook allows for a more comprehensive understanding of settler–Aboriginal relationships. By studying a range of the techniques and people involved in the dugong oil industry, it becomes possible to uncover degrees of interconnectedness between tradition and industry that makes the idea of one-way exploitation of Aboriginal men not only questionable but difficult to defend.

The concept of shared history can be traced through various historical fields, and it could be argued that all of the fields applied in this thesis are shared or have shared aspects. In fact, just as the story of the dugong, the historical fields used throughout this thesis overlap, circulate and intertwine.

**Aboriginal history**

The primary human actors in the dugong story are the Quandamooka people. As mentioned above, and discussed in detail throughout the thesis, the Quandamooka people have fished for dugongs for thousands of years. Their relationship with the animal, the land and sea, and settlers shaped the dugong industry. Despite their crucial connection, the role of the Quandamooka people in the building of the industry and of dugong oil in western medical practice is best understood as a minority history. In the colonial setting, the minority often constituted the Indigenous peoples, their products and their knowledge. Although their presence is noted, it is mostly done so by the colonists, presenting a mainstream perspective of Indigenous peoples. Minority peoples and products move on the verge of society and acceptance, only occasionally traversing the gap separating the ‘outsider’ from the ‘insider’. For this reason their voice is often absent in official historical accounts. This absence creates a one-sided perspective allowing for the dominant point of view to shape past events. The interest in minority perspectives, however, opens up problematic issues of how to approach these voices and how they fit in and ultimately challenge the mainstream perspective. It is this intersection of minority and mainstream which drives this thesis, allowing us to explore the journey of people and products through a cross-cultural setting and broadening our understanding of the relationships forged between the two in a fluid and inevitably multi-layered colonial environment.
In order to capture the fluidity, changes and shifts, I am combining memory and myth, in the form of the oral histories collected on NSI, with archival documents held primarily in the QSA and NSIHMA. Apart from aiming to present a comprehensive picture, I am accessing these forms of history with the intention to pre-empt writing a history from the present perspective as explained by Bain Attwood in “Aboriginal History, Minority Histories and Historical Wounds”.6 This combination allows for a history that is time and place specific, veering away from the present concerns and which reveals ‘other ways of being in the world than those that prevail today.’7 Through the combination of these materials then, we look into individual moments in time, such as the moment when Quandamooka man Sam Rollands teaches Thomas Welsby how to catch dugongs in the 1930s, and we can better elaborate on the events of the day from a contemporary perspective.

The problematic nature of Aboriginal history often lies in who writes the history and for whom. There are clear limits of a non-Indigenous historian writing Aboriginal history as pointed out by Attwood. The problematic nature of such history is further problematised by Dipesh Chakrabarty’s ideas of the public life of history and historical wounds.8 Being a non-Indigenous historian, I am aware of these limits and I do not intend to write on behalf of the Quandamooka people. I am not writing an Aboriginal history for Aboriginal people. I am writing a shared history where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are key players. I seek to write an intersecting/shared history which does not represent either party but which examines the roles and relations of both from an outsider’s perspective.

Space

When considering a shared history; a history of intersecting ideas, peoples and places, the notion of a shared space is inevitable. Minjerribah was a location inhabited by the

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6 Bain Attwood, “Aboriginal History, Minority Histories and Historical Wounds: The Postcolonial Condition, Historical Knowledge and the Public Life of History in Australia,” Postcolonial Studies 14, no. 2 (2011): 184–85. ‘Minority histories such as Aboriginal histories are seldom able to provide accounts that enable us to apprehend the ways in which times past were often radically different from the present, since their principal forms, namely memory and myth, tend to interpret the past in terms of the concerns of the present’.

7 Ibid.

Quandamooka people for thousands of years and became a contested space with the establishment of the Moreton Bay penal colony in 1824. As such Minjerribah could be understood as an urban frontier. Urban frontiers were often considered empty spaces; the presence of Indigenous people was removed both from place and from memory and as such became a forgotten area of settler–colonial history. The term ‘urban frontier’ was coined by Penelope Edmonds in *Urbanizing Frontiers*, which brilliantly scrutinises spatial connection, the management of space, the contestation of Aboriginal people and settlers, and the movement through space. Being geographically placed just outside of Moreton Bay penal settlement (modern-day Brisbane), Minjerribah has been more than an urban frontier. With its own particularities we can go a step further and name it an island frontier. The characteristics of Minjerribah coincide with Edmonds’ description of a forgotten area, often considered empty from the beginning of settlement, yet with a violent history. An island frontier however, is further complicated by the isolation which sets it apart from the more connected and accessible urban frontier. Edmonds highlights the importance of racial identity and purity in this frontier. However, despite the efforts to create a pure society, the roles played by the settlers and by the Indigenous community opened the way to a diverse and multi-cultural place like Minjerribah. The notion of a diverse and multi-cultural community which developed on Minjerribah shapes this thesis.

Space was (and to an extent still is) highly contested in the colonial setting. By understanding the past of the post-colonial landscape through exploring race and space and the making of space in the colonial context, we can better understand the current operations of power in settler nations such as Australia. In order to do this, we need to incorporate people — both Indigenous and non-indigenous — into the discussion of bodies, ideas and ideologies circulating within it. This approach was undertaken by Banivanua Mar and Edmonds in their collection of essays *Making Settler Colonial Space*. Specifically, in the introduction they stress the importance of ‘exploring the distinctive and specific spatial histories of settler colonialism’s dispossession and...

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10 Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
marginalisation of Indigenous peoples." The importance of the collection to this thesis is the close inspection of ‘lived local spaces and the everyday encounters between settlers and Indigenous peoples’. By concentrating on a specific location and the interactions of peoples within that location we can broaden our understanding of space as a tool in creating and recreating the colony. On Minjerribah this was manifested in many ways including the relocation of Myora Mission, the spatial growth of the Benevolent Asylum, and (to this day) the contested One Mile settlement.

The Indigenous presence in colonial spaces and the connections forged between Indigenous peoples and settlers remind us that lived history and the formation of identity are contingent, relational and partial. When studying spatial management and connections we must also scrutinise identity and the formation of identity including, as in this study, by looking at connections made between individuals or small groups and how these shaped and evolved within the context of histories of colonisation. The struggle over space and spatial management and its place in the history of colonisation is closely linked with histories of legislation and control. How the scholarship on the history of policy, legislation and control has helped shape this thesis will be discussed further in the introduction.

Identity

As noted above, when considering the post-colonial landscape we not only examine space, but also ideas, ideologies and identity. The formation and transformation of identity in the colonial setting is difficult and often undecipherable. Australia and Australian identity have often been studied from a Euro-centric perspective. This is, perhaps, understandable when we look at early settlement and the connection of early settlers to Europe. From the Indigenous perspective, however, this approach is very limited. The complicated interactions and identity formation on Minjerribah then should be approached from a more holistic standpoint rather than the Euro-centric. Parallels can be drawn with Regina Ganter’s work on identity and the formation of identity through connections between Aboriginal people in the north of Australia with south Asian people. She argues that ‘rigidly conceived Aboriginality that draws its

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12 Ibid., 6.
salience from externally imposed, colonial ideas of essential “pastness” silences many personal histories.”13 This fresh insight into our understanding of identity by highlighting the complex forms an identity can have, ones that need to be understood historically from north down rather than Sydney (or England) up are a reflection of identity formation on Minjerribah.

The one-dimensional labelling introduced in colonial Australia and, as shown by Ganter, still used to this day, creates a much too simplistic history of Australia and Aboriginal people. For instance, Macassan contact along the northern coast of Australia is central to the ‘collective identity’ of the Arnhem Land people while it is almost non-existent in the national narrative which favoured a simpler (predominantly white) version of Australia.14 With the Quandamooka people in regular and intimate contact with white settlers, Pacific and South Sea Islanders, and South Asian people, their identity is also more complex and, just as with the Arnhem Land people in the north of Australia, we should question the simplistic national narrative by shifting our focus from Brisbane and the white entrepreneurs to the connections forged with the rest of the world.

Another way of focusing on the connections of the Quandamooka people with the world is by considering the range of non-white individuals who either passed through or settled on Minjerribah. After the increase of sea trade between Australia and the rest of the world in the mid-1800s, a large number of non-white men, predominantly from India, came to Australia on trading ships without official sanction. These men then often settled and became part of the Aboriginal communities, blending with them and ‘disappearing’. At this time Aboriginal policies and settler conflict meant individuals had to live on one side or the other. Heather Goodall, Devleena Ghosh and Lindi R. Todd argue:

[The] polarizing conflict between settlers and Aboriginal Australians has invariably meant that Aboriginal people of mixed background had to ‘choose sides’ to be counted simplistically as either ‘black’ or ‘white’. The need to defend the community’s rights has meant that Aboriginal people had

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13 Regina Ganter, Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 253.

14 Ibid., 254.
to be unequivocal in their identification and this simplification has had to take precedence over the assertion of a diverse heritage.\textsuperscript{15}

They suggest that a significant number of Indians entered Australia ‘outside the immigration restrictions of empire or settlers’ and for these reasons their histories are missing in official documents but can be found in the memories of communities into which they integrated.\textsuperscript{16} This is exactly the case of Fernandez Gonzales, a ‘Manilla-man’ who married into the Quandamooka community and ran a dugong fishing enterprise in the second half of the nineteenth century. Gonzales is remembered in the oral histories of the people living on Minjerribah today, many of whom are the descendants of Gonzales and his Aboriginal wife, Junobin. He is also mentioned on several occasions in Thomas Welsby’s extensive work on Moreton Bay including \textit{Memories of Amity} and \textit{Sport and Pastime in Moreton Bay}. However, Gonzales does not appear in official documents despite selling dugong oil to entrepreneurs in Brisbane for further processing.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus by jumping ship and settling on Minjerribah, Gonzales adds complexity to the Aboriginal identity of the Quandamooka people. Through his example we are faced with an array of possible inter-racial and non-white connections. Was he the only one? Were there other non-white individuals to settle on Minjerribah and further complicate the simplistic understanding of identity as singular and unchangeable? Minjerribah also had connections with South Sea and Pacific Islanders whose presence on the island is also predominantly held in memory and oral history. Despite being absent from official records, the connections forged between the Quandamooka people and the non-white settlers developed into intimate relations shaping and complicating the identity and experiences of the Quandamooka people and creating an intricate web of intimacy.

Minjerribah is an ideal environment for the study of this intricate web of relations because of the relatively large number of non-white settlers and the diversity of relations and friendships that developed there. Intimacy between family members is a vital aspect of mixed relation marriages, and so family relations could be considered the main shaper of an interracial community as argued by Adele Perry in “Islands of


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Welsby, \textit{The Collected Works of Thomas Welsby}.
Intimacy”. Importance is often given to marriage and sexual relations but there were many more intimate moments in a family’s lifetime ‘where friendship, community, and conflict encompassed but stretched well beyond partnerships between men and women.’ On Minjerribah there is evidence of specific male and specific female bonds forming within a family but also with ‘outsiders’ who then became a part of the family. These intimacies can cross family lines into friendships and partnerships both on a personal and professional level and are an integral way of understanding the communities lying behind the dugong industry. As argued by Perry, and essential to my work, the relations in a colonial setting were wide and diverse and if defined too narrowly or separately from the contemporary situation, both political and cultural, we are left with a much poorer and fragmented history.

**Mission history**

What has become clear from the scholarship on identity and space is that on-the-ground history is more complicated, intimate and changeable than when viewed from above. This fluidity is exemplified by Australian scholarship on missions and reserves and the duality of these highly contested and negotiated spaces. Faith Walker shows this duality in her study of Myora Mission, describing it as ‘a place of neither isolation nor desolation.’

Like Myora, a number of missions have been interpreted, for example, as ‘places of belonging’ or even ‘safe havens.’ Even though the constant presence of an authoritative government figure and the enclosing of missions do support the idea of missions being places of white domination and control of Aboriginal people, by

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19 Ibid., 309.


reading ‘between the lines’ we are able to see that missions could also be places of gradual change where Aboriginal people adopted aspects of the western life to suit their own customs and thus they were engaged in negotiating both cultures.\textsuperscript{23} For instance, Thom Blake illustrates the evolution of Aboriginal reserves and explores the dynamics of cultural resilience through the generations in his study of the Cherbourg Settlement (known as Barambah).\textsuperscript{24} Peggy Brock explores the varying responses to colonialism and mission life in the communities of Poonindie, Koonibba and Nepabunna.\textsuperscript{25} Philip Freier examines the challenges of Aboriginal people as forcefully sought after labourers at Mitchell River Mission from its foundation to the present day.\textsuperscript{26} These stories tell of the life on missions and the deep impact it had on the lives of Aboriginal families. It identifies the harsh working culture and the poor health of the people living there. At the same time, however, Aboriginal people often associated themselves with the missions because they met urgent survival needs: protection from hostile settlers, access to rations, and education and training in European skills. In fact, for many, the missions became home. For others, however, the emotional turmoil caused by the pressure to embrace Christianity on the one hand and the desire to maintain traditional ways on the other became unbearable.

Conceptions of transformation as acculturation survived in assimilation policies that envisioned Aboriginal people becoming the same as whites; however, Indigenous people maintained traditional relationships to kin and country, resisting white authority, often invisibly, through strategies of evasion and mobility. Aboriginal people have been measured through their material culture, domestic practices, aspects of culture intimately linked to Enlightenment notions of progress and social institutions such as marriage and property as shown by Lydon in her innovative monograph \textit{Fantastic Dreaming}.\textsuperscript{27} Her study examines the complex role of material culture and spatial politics in shaping colonial identities and offers a critique of essentialism in archaeological interpretation.

\textsuperscript{23} Jane Lydon, \textit{Fantastic Dreaming: The Archeology of an Aboriginal Mission} (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{24} Blake, \textit{A Dumping Ground}.

\textsuperscript{25} Brock, \textit{Outback Ghettos}.

\textsuperscript{26} Freier, “The Anglican Church of Australia and Indigenous Australians.”

\textsuperscript{27} Lydon, \textit{Fantastic Dreaming}. 
Chapter 1: INTRODUCING THE THESIS

A fresh view of a mission is as a place of connected histories, not only a place founded, managed and owned by white people, but as a place of significant Aboriginal history and past, a place of dual identity belonging to both white and Aboriginal people. On different missions, including Myora, we can examine how people moved through the mission, absorbing some aspects of ‘civilised’ life and rejecting others. A recent study by Carol Ann Pybus unpicks the mission as a contested place confirming the idea that the mission is in fact a shared space which constantly changes not only itself, but also the people who pass through it.  

Economic and labour history

This nuanced scholarship on mission history provides a suitably complicated picture of management, ownership and identity. However, it is also the case that Aboriginal people were managed in Queensland under the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (Queensland, 1897) [henceforth: Aboriginal Protection Act] on settlements like these. The management of Aboriginal people living both on and off missions and settlements in Queensland is pieced together by Rosalind Kidd, who provides a detailed insight into the government’s intervention in the lives of Aboriginal people for the first time stringing together a comprehensive history of what living under the Aboriginal Protection Act and under the direct influence of the Chief Protectors of Aborigines was like. The government intervened in all aspects of daily life including issues of marriage, homes and livelihood, and importantly in Aboriginal people’s employment and wages. Aboriginal people were employed as cheap (or free) labour and the competition to retain them as underpaid employees was high. This situation was mirrored throughout the colony. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour in Queensland has only recently come into historical discussion. Towards the end of the twentieth century, a number of historians in Australia criticised the insufficient interest in labour history — in particular the working lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Anne Curthoys and Clive Moore specifically criticise this lack of

28 Carol Ann Pybus, “‘We Grew up This Place’: Ernabella Mission 1937–1974” (PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2012).

29 Legislative Council, Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (Brisbane: The Office of the Registrar of Titles of Qld, no. [17] — 16/12/1897 to take effect on 01/01/1898).

interest, pointing to prevailing views that Aboriginal people are lazy, so their labour has not been acknowledged since.\textsuperscript{31} The first steps in incorporating Aboriginal and non-white people into the economic creation of Australia came in Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders and Kathryn Cronin’s \textit{Race Relations in Colonial Queensland} first published in 1975.\textsuperscript{32} Henry Reynolds, in his ground-breaking book \textit{The Other Side of the Frontier}, stresses the importance of Aboriginal workers as both domestic and farm workers, documenting both exploitation and situations of friendship and partnership; and in \textit{With the White People} he describes the highly stressed and destabilised working atmosphere in which Aboriginal people were more often seen as goods or slaves than workers in their own right.\textsuperscript{33} This relatively recent turn in Australian historical scholarship shows the importance of Aboriginal people as labourers with Quandamooka people as a perfect example as discussed throughout this thesis.

Among a resurgence of labour history that engages with the employment and role of Aboriginal people in the development of the economy, Robert Foster studies the relationship between Europeans and Aborigines on South Australian pastoral stations, and investigated how government policy shaped relationships, including how the Aborigines resisted government attempts to regulate their employment.\textsuperscript{34} On Minjerribah, a group of Aboriginal workers at the Benevolent Asylum went on strike demanding equal wage and came out of the strike victorious. Mark Hannah writes about efforts by an early nineteenth century pastoral enterprise to implement a British factory model of labour relations, and traces the emergence of a distinctively Australian work culture, which incorporated Aboriginal labour.\textsuperscript{35} In a detailed analysis of recruitment, organisation, productivity and remuneration, Hannah argues that Aboriginal engagement with pastoral capital was purposefully designed to maintain


contact with country and that Aboriginal workers were the most productive employees in the corporation. This can be related to the dugong industry where dugong fishermen carried on with a traditional practice while at the same time they became an indispensable asset to the industry. On the domestic front, Victoria Haskins, in her work on employers and the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board Trust Funds, connects labour history with government policy to illuminate the complexities of inter-racial relations between Aboriginal women domestics and their white women employers. Haskins argues:

[B]y interrogating the role of white employers in particular, [we gain] a deeper comprehension of the white experience and involvement in this history of wage withholding, an understanding critical in achieving the support of non-Aboriginal Australians in the Aboriginal workers’ cause today.36

With the increasing focus of Aboriginal labour history on Aboriginal and settler relations in the early twentieth century, the role of Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry became more apparent. For instance, in Born in the Cattle, Ann McGrath reveals the strength and capabilities of Aboriginal men and women working as stockmen.37 She uncovers the major contribution of Aboriginal people to the Australian economy.

Further, the role of Aboriginal people in opening up the Australian outback has been recently scrutinised by Dale Kerwin.38 He argues that Aboriginal dreaming paths and trading routes also became the routes and roads of colonisers. These routes criss-crossed Australia transporting goods and knowledge, and Kerwin importantly highlights the contribution Aboriginal people made in assisting European explorers, surveyors and stockmen to open the country for colonisation.39

Although a number of these histories, often pastoral or land-based employment and economic histories, are seemingly distant from the dugong story, they provide the context for the labour and economic history of the dugong industry. This growing body

36 Victoria Haskins, “‘& So We Are “Slave Owners”!’ Employers and the NSW Aborigines Protection Board Trust Funds,” ibid., no. 88 (2005): 147–64.


39 Ibid., x.
of scholarship relating to the complicated stories surrounding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce (contextualising industries, settlements and domestic spaces) allows us to analyse the Quandamooka people’s role in Australia’s labour history much more fully. As I argue, relations within the dugong industry are yet another added dimension to the power struggles, dominance and indispensability of Aboriginal people in the workforce and the economic growth of Australia.

**Imperial connections**

Just as we consider a wide array of relations, identities and exchanges within one location, we need to understand where the dugong story sits within the colonial world. Through a comparative study of colonialism and through a critical approach to the differences in colonial rule around the world, we are able to better understand the Australian setting. The critical study of imperialism is crucial in the ongoing research of settler colonies, such as Australia, as it provides an intricate picture of ‘on the ground’ relations and interactions. Contemporary historians have concentrated on relations between colonisers and colonised. As shown by Ann Stoler in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, they provide an insight into the effect that colonial rule had on the relations between individuals and on society as a whole by studying the intricacies involved in gender and colonial studies, and the multifaceted task of colonial historians. Her approach is inclusive of race, class and gender in illustrating a multiplicity of issues involved in relations of contact.  

This multiplicity of relations is central to my work on the dugong industry where race, class and gender intersect.

New imperial history offers a useful approach, seeing that Australia, and subsequently NSI, was a part of a larger set of ideas and connections within the British world. This approach has been adopted by a number of historians such as Ann Stoler (mentioned above), Tony Ballantyne and Catherine Hall.  

For instance, Ballantyne redefines the approach to colonial history by imagining the empire as a series of web-like networks arguing:

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Rather than envisaging the empire’s structure as resembling a spoked wheel, where Britain was simply linked to each colony through a discrete and self-contained relationship, it reimagined the empire as messier and more dynamic, a set of shifting linkages that were constantly being remade as the relationships between colonies, as well as between Britain and its colonies, shifted.\textsuperscript{42}

Thus imagining the story of the dugong oil as a single linear connection between Australia and Britain would be counterproductive to the kind of history I am presenting. Rather, this story sits in an intricate web of networks criss-crossing the empire with the Australia-Britain connection being only one strand of the immense network that connected the colonial world.

By looking at the webs of empire and the intricate connections and interactions along these webs it is possible to conceive of connections throughout the empire and between individual settler colonies. In their collection, \textit{Bodies in Contact}, Ballantyne and Burton focus on the body as a site of cultural encounter providing essential insights into world history. They argue that ‘tracking empires in a global context is … one way of reimagining world’s history so that both its monumental quality and its ultimately fragmented character can be captured simultaneously.’\textsuperscript{43} The importance of this approach is the departure from ‘the West and the rest’ mentality. By challenging this mentality, we come to the realisation that empires have not simply been carriers and enablers of global processes; they have in turn spawned new hybrid forms of economic activity and political practice.

The disruption of Anglocentric colonial history, by focusing on non-white subjects, is key in the dugong story as a number of the main characters in the story are, in fact, non-white. It is because of this Anglocentric viewpoint that some aspects of Australian colonial history have been overlooked. For instance, when considering early Australian colonial history, little attention was given to African convicts and settlers. Cassandra Pybus uncovers the story of two African men, through their living relatives, who settled in Australia, showing that indeed we need to broaden the Anglocentric perspective to include other inter-imperial connections.\textsuperscript{44} Similarly, I will be focusing

\textsuperscript{42} Ballantyne, \textit{Webs of Empire}, 16–17.


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on non-Anglocentric relations through the connection of the Quandamooka people, Pacific Islanders and people from South Asia. By taking this approach I aim to join Ballantyne, Burton and Pybus in disrupting the Anglocentric perspective of dominant colonial narratives.

Historians working on inter-imperial relations often use the term ‘contact zones’ when describing on the ground relations. The term, first introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, was defined as ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.’\(^{45}\) Thus the colonial setting forms a social space in which settlers and Indigenous peoples met and formed both hostile and amicable connections with one party, most often the settlers, assuming the dominant role. In the context of Minjerribah the contact zone represented a meeting space of the Quandamooka people and Europeans resulting in ‘highly asymmetrical relations’ between the two, which then played out through the operation of the dugong industry.

Although the contact zone has proven to be an innovative window into colonial history, it limits our understanding of settler-colonial relations as too dialectical. Understanding the contact zone as a part of a global and local, transnational and national network with focus on identity and difference, space and time broadens our understanding of culture, society and power. This longer term complexity of colonial interaction is argued by John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff in their analysis of colonial evangelism and modernity in South Africa.\(^{46}\) My study sets out to place the NSI dugong industry in a contact zone that connects the global and the local, the transnational and the national, and aims to problematise identity and space from both a local and a global perspective.


Environmental history, land and water management

Environmental history stands as a relatively new field of research in Australia with topics spanning the creation of national parks, environmental management, notions of wilderness and Aboriginal land management.47

The first national park in Australia was declared in 1879 on the southern edge of Sydney.48 Now known as Royal National Park, it was seen more as an urban recreational area rather than a conservation area. However, as Ann Young shows in her study of environmental change in Australia, the emergence of bushwalking clubs and societies dedicated to wildlife preservation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to the growth of interest in natural flora, fauna and scenic values.49 Despite this early interest, most conservation parks in Australia were declared after 1980. Renowned environmental lawyer and cultural historian Tim Bonyhady notes an increased nationwide interest in conservation in the second half of the twentieth century.50

Land management

The idea of creating natural reserves and the growing interest in conservation stand in contrast to the way the natural landscape was managed by Aboriginal people. The Australian landscape changed with the arrival of European settlers, however it was not ‘primitive’ or ‘untouched’ before their arrival. In her later work, Young makes a very interesting insight into the history of Australian environmental change and management, and ‘two discontinuities: one with the arrival of Aboriginal people, and the other with the arrival of Europeans. It is the latter discontinuity that has caused the most pervasive, significant and rapid changes to Australian landscapes.’51 Clearly


49 Ann Rua Mackenzie Young, Environmental Change in Australia since 1788 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996).


51 Young, Environmental Change in Australia since 1788, 187.
changes in landscape did not all occur only under European land management. On the contrary, with the arrival of Aboriginal people the landscape was also altered and managed.

In a ground-breaking monograph in the field of Aboriginal land management, Bill Gammage argues that Aboriginal people managed the land in a far more systematic and scientific manner than previously envisioned. He recasts our perceptions of Aboriginal Australia and our understanding of the historic Australian environment and its land care. Although not the first historian to provide such an insight, Gammage shows that the landscape the settlers first saw upon their arrival to Australia was not natural but rather that it was created by Aboriginal people. In this way, Aboriginal people planned and manicured their landscape to prevent large bushfires, attract game and allow for the regrowth of nutritious plants. This complex form of land management shines light on a highly complex society with stringent rules and laws. Understanding the complexity of land management by Aboriginal people before the arrival of Europeans (and the changes in environmental management and environmental perceptions since) helps us grasp the interactions and exchanges between the two different groups. Clearly, these understandings further expose the conflicts and tensions not only over power and space but also over the system of land use and management arising in a contact zone. Through examining these, we can comprehend the more contemporary interactions and exchanges, such as those in the dugong industry.

Gammage considers the management of the Australian environment before European settlement. Kerwin, on the other hand, considers the role of environmental management and the exchange of environmental knowledge following the settlement as discussed above. This same process of acquisition of knowledge can be seen in other areas of Aboriginal–settler interactions. These include the dugong industry, where Aboriginal men taught Europeans how to catch the animal, but also fishing in general, where settlers would learn the best fishing spots and the best tactics to employ for a successful catch.

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54 Ibid.
From Kerwin’s work it is clear that environmental land management is closely connected with ideas of space and movement. Successful management of a land or seascape was only possible through the exchange of knowledge in specific locations and shared between individuals and groups both living in and moving through the location. The failure of knowledge exchange has had a detrimental effect on the Australian landscape, fauna and flora, as well as Aboriginal lives. This is documented in Gammage’s research in general, and more specifically in the work of environmental scientists, such as Helene Marsh, in connection to specific species and local environments. Understanding how perceptions of the Australian environment have changed helps us to understand the perceptions and processes of inter-racial relations and interactions, and the management of people and objects.

**Sea management**

Writing about early environmental management and the dugong, Ben Daley relates the dugong industry’s history to current problems surrounding reduced dugong populations. The dugong is only one example of a species almost depleted through poor management; other such examples are also discussed in this thesis. His work is of crucial importance in creating a comprehensive history of the Great Barrier Reef (and has helped define some points of this thesis). Young’s comprehensive study of environmental changes in Australia has helped determine the problematic ocean space in which the story of the dugong takes place. As stated earlier, settlers saw the sea as an inaccessible barrier, which can be especially useful in practising exclusion, but is problematic when enacting ideas of protection and conservation. As Young states:

> Marine ecosystems are more open and interconnected than terrestrial systems, so it is harder to protect marine reserves from outside influences.

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For all these reasons the marine environment is poorly understood and inadequately studied, and its resources are often poorly conserved.\footnote{Young, *Environmental Change in Australia since 1788*, 118.}

In fact the declaration of the first marine park in Australia, Green Island in the Great Barrier Reef, occurred in 1938, more than 50 years after the declaration of Royal National Park. The situation of dugong commodification versus dugong protection is further problematised by the competition between commercial exploitation of resources and conservation of the natural environment. In the following, I build on Daley’s and Young’s work in order to advance our knowledge of inter-racial interactions in the dugong industry and to better understand the use of dugong oil as an Indigenous medicine in Western medical practice.

The depletion of dugong numbers due to overfishing occurred several times during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because the fluctuating dugong catch numbers affected the stability of oil production, the industry was not of high interest to the government. This low interest resulted in the minimal management of the industry which in turn lead to the overexploitation of the dugong. This led to temporary industry closures and dugong fishing bans, which further affected the availability of dugong oil. The closures and bans can be seen as early signs of environmental management by settlers. The final realisation that dugong numbers were so low that the animal might die out, as other similar species had, came in the 1960s.\footnote{Steller’s sea-cow was hunted to extinction only 27 years after its discovery in 1741 in the Bering Strait of the Coast of Kamchatka, Russia. A comparison between Steller’s sea-cow and the dugong is made at the beginning of this chapter.} This is when the dugong became a protected animal and fishing was forbidden. Aboriginal people, however, had managed dugong populations sustainably for years (by selecting their catch), long before dugong oil became a commodity for the white population. The settlers had ignored Aboriginal practices and as Marsh’s research shows, we are still playing catch up in our attempts to secure the dugong for future generations.

In order to understand the process of setting up the dugong industry, temporary closures and fishing bans, and finally the declaration of the dugong as a protected species, we need to map the changes in attitudes towards the environment, cultural heritage and the significance of biodiversity. As Hamblin points out in *Sustainability*, European attitudes to Australian nature resources have been chronically over-optimistic and major shifts of ecosystems have taken place since European settlement. Hamblin
argues that it would be impossible to return all environments to a pre-European condition, as invasion by successful alien species together with great changes to vegetational composition have altered many Australian environments permanently.59

These permanent changes to the environment through European settlement occurred due to the concepts and ethics the settlers brought with them. They derived from Western cultural traditions and philosophical foundations, as pointed out by Kevin Frawley, in which humans were free to exploit nature as they wished.60 Frawley defines three eras in conservation history with regard to the dugong industry. Firstly there was little or no concern for dugong numbers in the nineteenth century when interest was placed on commodification, commercialisation and gain. Secondly, during the first half of the twentieth century some concerns were raised about dugong numbers, the sustainability of the industry, and its environmental impact leading to a decrease in commercial dugong fishing. Finally the dugong was declared a protected species in 1969. He further argues that ‘the consideration of environmental ethics, though a difficult task, is fundamental to understanding modern Australian environmentalism.’61

I intend to extend this scholarship on the dugong and conservation history in Queensland by connecting it with the study of inter-racial relations surrounding the dugong oil industry, and by exploring how the animal, the environment, the people and the product all interconnect with the history of medicine. As Marcia Langton and Zane Ma Rhea note, notions of wilderness and environmental management carry with them racial attitudes, spatial discrepancies and cultural clashes.62 This thesis opens a deeper and more comprehensive investigation of Minjerribah in nineteenth/twentieth century Australia by arguing that a fully fleshed out transnational history of dugong oil must include the local and minority history of this unique product and its producers. Without each of these elements we lose sight of the big picture and what happened on Minjerribah. Only in this multifaceted manner, can we provide a more comprehensive history of our own shared past.


61 Ibid., 56.

Mobility

Histories of whiteness

Apart from using the analytical framework of race and place in connection with shared history, we also need to consider representations of the body — the point of contact in administering medicine (this point of contact is both figurative and literal in the case of dugong oil). We can draw from frameworks that see bodies as places of contact and change (much like Ballantyne and Burton). In their collection on whiteness in Australia, Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus state that what ‘white’ means in any particular place and at any particular time can change, often in contradictory ways, so in this way whiteness can be understood as being ‘manifested’, ‘seen’ and, sometimes, ‘failed to be seen.’63 ‘Whiteness’ is crucial in understanding the body and the administration of health; and, in turn, understanding of the body and how health is administered frames our notion of whiteness.

The importance of understanding whiteness and non-whiteness in relation to governance is noted by Tracy Banivanua Mar, who follows the story of indentured Pacific Islander sugar labourers sent to north-eastern Australia (Queensland), and the impact this had on those peoples. The violent and brutal governance of indentured labourers embedded in the colonial state is a previously forgotten part of Queensland history. This brutality is a translation of the colonial power relations in the colonies; is reflected in the relations between white authorities and non-white people, and in the relationship between colony and homeland.64 Kirsten McKenzie looks at how these relationships shaped ‘whiteness’ in Scandal in the Colonies.65 Colonial societies offered European settlers the opportunity to invent new identities (built on politeness), for instance in the case of disreputable Dr Croft discussed in Chapter 5. Through individuals like Croft we can contrast the respectable and disreputable, showing that the divide between them is not as vast as might first appear under the veneer of the aforementioned politeness (or whiteness). However with the new colonies being so

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closely connected (albeit not in distance) with each other and with Britain, sustaining a polite manner and upholding the ideals of whiteness could prove to be an impossible task. The connection between the colony, empire and Indigenous people — as shown by Banivanua Mar and McKenzie — is visible on NSI. Through the governance of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, the Mission Superintendent, the superintendent of the Benevolent Asylum as well as all white men (representing whiteness in the colony), certain standards needed to be upheld (in the form of Mission housing, Aboriginal presence in town) and scandals silenced (inter-racial intimate connections between white inmates and non-white inmates of the Benevolent Asylum, use of drugs and alcohol) as shown in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

The role of whiteness in governing the colonies and self-governance has been explored in detail.\textsuperscript{66} Of the more recent works, Angela Woollacott, in \textit{Settler Society in the Australian Colonies}, looks at how settlers’ dependence on indentured labour and the place of Australia in the empire in the first half of the nineteenth century were based increasingly on racial hierarchies.\textsuperscript{67} This thesis brings together labour history and whiteness studies, proving a great example to the discussion of Quandamooka labourers in the dugong industry.

\textbf{Transnational objects}

Understanding Minjerribah as a contact zone, and thus dugong oil as a product of such a zone, allows us to further scrutinise the identity of a product/object. As noted already, commercial dugong oil was a product of Aboriginal–white collaboration that travelled across the globe. Thus when discussing identity formation, we must also consider the transnational identity of dugong oil itself. The importance of taking a transnational approach is investigated by Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake in \textit{Connected Worlds}, where they argue for the centrality of developing new understandings of the past, highlighting historical processes and relationships that, in transcending nation states, connect apparently separate worlds. They state: ‘transnational history suggests that historical understanding often requires us to move beyond a national framework of

\textsuperscript{66} An example of the diverse range of research on whiteness is Jane Carey and Claire McLisky, eds., \textit{Creating White Australia} (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{67} Angela Woollacott, \textit{Settler Society in the Australian Colonies: Self-Government and Imperial Culture} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
analysis, to explore connections between peoples, societies and events usually thought of as distinct and separate.  

A transnational approach is essential in uncovering the story of dugong oil, because it seeks to understand the ways in which past lives and events have been shaped by processes and relationships that have transcended national boundaries. In viewing the story of dugong oil through a transnational perspective, I argue in this thesis that we need to keep in mind the product’s origins. As dugong oil crossed national boundaries, it was showcased and tested in hospitals and by renowned pharmaceutical companies. The transnational mobile nature of dugong oil can broaden the notion of ‘mobility’. As argued by Catherine Coleborne in her insightful study of the transnational history of insanity, ‘the turn to “mobility” has enabled historians to think again about the imperial world of migration with a different appreciation of the meaning of movement.' In this thesis I turn to the mobility of white entrepreneurs, Aboriginal and non-white people working in the dugong industry, and dugong oil itself. I seek to broaden the scholarship of mobility by focusing on the movement of a product.

Further, following in the footsteps of Jane Carey and Jane Lydon (Indigenous Networks — an edited collection on Indigenous networks), I argue for the importance of recovering Indigenous participation within global networks of imperial power and wider histories of transnational connections. A focus towards considering the broader significance of ‘extra-local’ connections and exchanges for Indigenous peoples is stressed by Carey and Lydon:

[Such Indigenous networks and transnational encounters] demonstrate not only that Indigenous people could be part of, or exploit, transnational or imperial networks, but also that these networks were shaped and even constituted through engagement with Indigenous peoples’ actions, ambition and orientations.

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71 Ibid., 2.
Carey and Lydon’s argument is transferable to the history of dugong oil and the people involved in it. Networks of connections, exchange and mobility are visible, for instance, in the presence of Pacific Islander descendants on Minjerribah and in dugong oil itself; without the connections forged between white entrepreneurs and Aboriginal fishermen, dugong oil might never have been introduced to European consumers. When regarding these transnational and Indigenous networks and connections, we must consider both the Quandamooka people and the different peoples travelling through and settling on Minjerribah. The island, to a degree, is a transnational cross-road for people from Europe, South Asia and the Pacific, and for Quandamooka people who travelled on and off the island. These individuals created a web of transnational encounters where they, their networks and dugong oil were central.

Exchange

A transnational approach, as I have outlined, has the potential to develop new understandings of the past by highlighting historical processes and relationships that transcend nation states and connect apparently separate worlds. The place of dugong oil as a product in the transnational perspective will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Apart from being a product, dugong oil is also a medicine. So how would a transnational approach together with the history of medicine help develop new understandings of the past? We are no longer considering the physical path of a product traversing the globe. We are, in fact, considering knowledge, intellectual thought and their exchange. If we can trace the effect of a transnational voyage on the changes in how health and medicine were perceived globally, we can better understand the advancement of health and medicine in individual locations. In the case of dugong oil, we need to firstly consider how it was used and perceived initially; secondly, consider the changes to how it was perceived and used in Australia before being introduced to potential consumers in Europe; and thirdly, consider how it was perceived and used after this transnational venture.

In the case of a medicine-as-transnational-product, the exchange of materials and knowledge within a nation and between different groups, such as Aboriginal people and settlers, is as important as the transnational exchange. Interest in the history of exchange increased towards the end of the twentieth century with historians turning to special editions and conferences dealing specifically with such history. For instance
Ross Gibson stresses that the process of exchange between settlers and Indigenous peoples does not necessarily imply equality and that inequities associated with the settlement of Australia and the Pacific need to be kept in focus when discussing the past. He states: ‘[T]o account for the damage all the better, and perhaps to unsettle it somewhat, we need to understand the array of things, feelings, beliefs and ordinances that passed back and forth on the colonial ground.’

We can examine this movement, the ‘give and take’ of cultural encounters, on the colonial ground through the paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions — the specific circumstances of many and varied contacts. An example of this approach is, Nicholas Thomas, Vanessa Smith and Jonathan Lamb’s work on exploration and exchange in which they argue for the importance of understanding particular experiences so as to avoid generalising the history of exchange in Australasia. They take a more personalised approach (increasing in popularity among postcolonial historians at the time) because ‘we find ourselves suspicious of gross totalities that blur the specificity of each enterprise and the distinctiveness of its outcome.’ In this sense, ‘the processes by which all groups construct and narrate their histories shape their historical content.’ By writing shared histories we present a more balanced story of the past.

This more personalised approach, as described above, was utilised by Thomas in Entangled Objects, where he analyses colonial interactions in the Pacific through three centuries of European travel. Thomas’ fundamental theoretical argument is that ‘the social significance of objects of exchange originates from culturally established models and practices through which they acquire meaning and value.’ We need to stress the differences in exchange practices and meanings in relation to gender, religion and space. Despite of this, the history of exchange has been too simplified, expressing only

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74 Ibid., xvi.
75 Goodall, “Too Early yet or Not Soon Enough?,” 7.
one viewpoint of interactions and exchange: ‘Historians of relations between Europeans and people said to be “without history” have often described the process of European expansion … as though everything derived from the interests of the world market and imperial states.’\(^7^8\) In order to correct this misconception, we need to concentrate on the spaces where cultures collide and intersect or become entangled. We can thus understand these entangled spaces as contact zones in which exchanges occur under ‘highly asymmetrical relations’, however often in negotiated and managed spaces.\(^7^9\)

An innovative approach to exchange in connection with health management was taken by James Beattie, who considers the questions of imperialism, race and health, and the strategies to control local environments and improve health through the exchange of people, plants, ideas and garden designs between India and Australia. Beattie argues that ‘a crucial new understanding of the intersection between health and place in the nineteenth-century British Empire can be provided by tracing the networks through which people, plants, and ideas moved to consider the broader imperial frameworks.’\(^8^0\) He does this by considering the removal of people from ‘diseased’ areas and the introduction of new species, such as eucalyptus trees, to spaces aimed at improving health. Without using the term, he too is dealing with entangled spaces. Beattie utilises both an Anglocentric and non-Anglocentric perspective in considering England in relation to Australia and India but also India in relation to Australia, entangling these places of exchange even further.\(^8^1\) Such entangled spaces were created through exchange and management (and are complex and varied places of cross-cultural interactions). The idea of space and movement through space is crucial in understanding the dugong industry as well as understanding how dugong oil was created as a commercial product.

At this point we also need to turn our attention to the ideas of exclusion and isolation — as presented by Alison Bashford and Carolyn Strange in *Isolation*.\(^8^2\) They

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\(^7^8\) Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 83.

\(^7^9\) Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

\(^8^0\) James Beattie, “Imperial Landscapes of Health: Place, Plants, and People between India and Australia, 1800s–1900s,” *Health and History* 14, no. 1, Special Issue: Health and Place: Medicine, Ethnicity, and Colonial Identities (2012): 100.

\(^8^1\) Ibid., 100–20.

look at modern and postmodern isolation, the rationales of isolation, places of exclusion, and at the subjects of isolation and exclusion: ‘we have oriented our study of legally mandated exclusionary practices by examining the diverse historical and theoretical literature on the subject and by charting isolation’s rationales and geographies, as well as the subjectivities produced and desired in isolation.’ The ideas expressed by Bashford and Strange are especially useful when considering NSI’s history as a place of exclusion and isolation. For decades NSI housed a quarantine station, followed by the leprosarium, the Benevolent Asylum (the main institution, operating on NSI for 80 years) and Myora Mission. Apart from the Mission, the other institutions were all directed at health and health management. From a colonial viewpoint NSI was an ideal place of exclusion and isolation because of its natural sea boundary, but for coastal Aboriginal people, the ocean was not a ‘treacherous beast’, rather it was a source of nutrition, a means of transport and an area needing management just like land. Thus it was man-made seclusion which isolated the Quandamooka people. How these exclusionary practices affected subjectivities on Minjerribah will be discussed in Chapter 3. It is these subjectivities which lead to the ways in which dugong oil was procured as a commercial medicine and which in turn also affected the way in which dugong oil was used among the Quandamooka people. So understanding space as a location of isolation and entanglement has merit not only to the history of dugong oil as a commercial medicine but also as a traditional medicine.

As I outlined earlier, dugong oil was sent to a wide range of exhibitions in Australia, Europe and America, where it was exhibited as a medicinal product without mentioning its origins as a traditional medicine. Fairs and exhibitions became popular during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries with the ‘discoveries’ of ‘alien’ peoples and products — and with the advancement of scientific knowledge. Australia had a strong foothold in this area because of its tropical location and vast amount of new materials and ‘savage’ people. Sianan Healey and Elizabeth Willis each scrutinise

83 Ibid., 15.


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the place of Aboriginal products in our history and the evolving identities of such products.\textsuperscript{85}

Dugong oil was first exhibited at the Sydney Exhibition, in 1854, and continued to be exhibited around the world into the first half of the twentieth century. The purpose of the exhibits differed — whether to draw attention to a new medicinal product or to promote Australia as a place of immigration — so we need to understand these different purposes and goals in terms of their impact on dugong oil as both a traditional medicine and a commercial product within the medicinal market.

The dual position of dugong oil is intriguing, and adds to the complicated situation on the ground between settlers and Aboriginal people. It reflects the particular social situation and feeds in to the over-arching transnational perceptions helping reshape the debate on race, ethnicity, citizenship, the management of contested spaces and the development of identity.

**History of medicine**

Given dugong oil was marketed as a treatment of respiratory diseases and its primary value on the western market was seen in its medicinal use, we must engage with the history of medicine because it stands as an important key to following the path of the dugong industry — the oil, fishermen and entrepreneurs — across the nineteenth century. The history of medicine in Australia is often considered a marginal field of interest, with topics such as inter-racial relations and colonialism being the focal point of most historical work. As discussed above, there is a wide range of scholarship on Aboriginal history, cross-cultural history and shared histories. In this section I focus on the links between the above-mentioned frameworks and the history of medicine with emphasis on transnational and imperial/colonial connections. These histories have rarely been brought together.\textsuperscript{86} But as this new scholarship illustrates, bringing these


histories into dialogue provides a new perspective for histories of settler colonialism through scrutinising health and medicine in a settler colonial environment.

No account of the history of western medicine is complete without the interrogation of Roy Porter’s extensive work on the topic. He provides detailed accounts of the transformation of medicine from antiquity to the modern day in several of his works. Using a backdrop of religious, scientific, philosophical and political beliefs he places this transformation within the context of cultural change and evolution, including the rise of the pharmaceutical field. Porter also explores unorthodox medicine in the form of ‘quackery’, explaining the importance of such ‘alternatives’ in the growth of orthodox medicine during the eighteenth century. Through certain examples of well-known ‘quacks’ he portrays eighteenth century medicine as a market where all forms of treatments were acceptable. These themes all relate to the following discussion of medicine in Australia.

Although Porter’s work forms the backbone of history of medicine, he omits colonial history of medicine. We need to include medicine in the colonial setting in our discussion as these were strongly linked throughout the colonial period. The developments in European medicine often had colonial counterparts as shown by Pratik Chakrabarti in Medicine & Empire. We can track the increasing influence of natural history on medicine, the growth of drug markets, the rise of surgeons in status, advancements in sanitation and public health, and the expansion of the modern quarantine system both in Europe and in the colonies. Dugong oil and the proprietors of the oil are a good example of this. Dugong oil is a natural product used by generations, as a medicine it traversed the globe, the primary proprietor (Dr Hobbs) rose in status in the colony, and he and his colleagues pushed for better sanitation and worked in the newly established quarantine system in Moreton Bay.

The interesting aspect of dugong oil is its position on the medical market. Being a ‘newly discovered’ medicine in the tropics, the oil was not a mainstream product. The


connection between unorthodox and orthodox medicines is highly relevant to the dugong oil industry on NSI, as it was both ‘unorthodox’ and ‘orthodox’ — that is to say it was an unorthodox medicine presented by an orthodox medical practitioner, Hobbs. In the Australian setting, Philippa Martyr provides a factual overview of the place and role of unorthodox medicines in an increasingly professionalised field.  

Dugong oil can also be seen on the verge of traditional Indigenous and Western medicine — itself representing a layer of the contact zone. As in other traditional cultures, Aboriginal people used traditional remedies to treat various complaints. The knowledge of natural remedies was handed down from generation to generation and merged with the incoming Western knowledge of medicine. The merging of Western and Indigenous medicines and knowledges, however, could evoke anxiety over racial purity. Historian of medicine Warwick Anderson argues that the main representation of whiteness in scientific and public debates was a reflection of the growing anxiety about racial degradation. The outcome was that governments brought about changes to public health and biological science in order to segregate or alter the habits of non-white races that were seen as reservoirs of disease (with the tropics often defined as destructive places for European people’s health). This notion of non-white people as reservoirs of disease was noted by Blake in connection to Cherbourg Settlement. Cherbourg residents were not allowed into nearby towns as protests were organised by the white occupants, who saw the Aboriginal people as a threat to their civility, their health and the health of their children. On NSI this notion of Aboriginal people as carriers of disease took the form of the leprosarium, which was housed on the island — well away from the citizens of Brisbane, until 1907. Aboriginal people with Hansen’s disease (leprosy) were housed separately to the white patients, forbidding contact between the two groups and thus distinguishing them further as carriers of disease. 

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92 Blake, *A Dumping Ground*.

93 John Prangnell, “‘Intended Solely for Their Greater Comfort and Happiness’: Historical Archaeology, Paternalism and the Peel Island Lazaret” (PhD diss., University of Queensland, 1999).
Conclusion

The theme of possession and appropriation is equally critical when considering the path of the dugong oil as it was transformed from an Indigenous product to a transnational object which was seemingly stripped of its Aboriginal identity. The broad overview of scholarship presented above provides a platform from which to engage with the complicated story of dugong oil, the cross-cultural and inter-racial relations, and connections and interactions in the dugong industry. In this way, the history of individuals working the industry may come to the fore without losing sight of the larger history in which Aboriginal people were not considered autonomous subjects or waged workers. But, I argue, the dugong industry on Minjerribah provided Aboriginal people with relatively greater economic opportunities than in the majority of mainland Australia.

Chapter outlines

This thesis is divided into seven chapters with Chapters 2–6 examining the story of the dugong industry, the individuals in the industry and the product of the industry. The chapters are not arranged strictly chronologically, rather I am following the story thematically — looking at the cross-cultural, Indigenous and European sections of the story, which, as becomes evident in the thesis, are often strongly interconnected. Appendix Figure A.1 outlines the major events shaping Minjerribah and the dugong industry.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2 I look at the early contact, from the 1820s, between European explorers and early settlers, and the Quandamooka people. I argue that the process of settling NSI by the Europeans was a complex and unstable experience, which led to variable and unequal connections between the Aboriginal people and the settlers. Critical to this account is the ‘contact zone’. In the colonial frontier this represents a shared space in which first experiences and connections are shared and contingent. Specifically, I discuss the notion of early amicable relations and the onset of violence, comparing Minjerribah experiences with events on the mainland. By exploring the beginnings of
Aboriginal–European relations on the island I will set the scene for the dugong industry and the evolving and fluid experiences and relations stemming from there.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3 I focus on Indigenous knowledges and the uses of dugong oil by different peoples in the mid-twentieth century. I use settler-colonial histories to show the overlapping nature of such histories. A key theme of this analysis will be the identity of dugong oil as a product, and the ways in which this identity can develop and multiply from Indigenous origins and cross over into a ‘settler’ identity, often belying its origin. Indigenous products of use to Western incomers are often portrayed as travelling seamlessly between producers and users, appearing to transcend spatial and often racial divides, and in the process blurring their identity and ownership. But a product with more than one identity can tell us about relations between Indigenous and incoming populations and individuals in the colonial setting as well as about the local and global connections. The varied use of dugong oil further develops the idea of shared histories through the creation of a shared product with multiple identities. Thus dugong oil, used as a medicine throughout Australia, offers a fascinating window into twentieth century Australian ideas about Indigenous workers, resources, and the politics of ownership, power and the racial divide. It also brings to the fore the prior Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, which were sidelined within histories of colonisation.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 I examine the dugong industry, illustrating the cross-cultural relations, interactions and power plays within the industry in the second half of the nineteenth century. I look at the indispensable role Aboriginal people played in obtaining and processing dugong oil, a role that was silenced in the process of promoting the oil to a Western market. I argue that through participation in the dugong industry Aboriginal people were able to retain a fragment of control over some aspects of their life. However they were constantly under the watchful eyes of the authorities. One of these authorities, who is critiqued in detail, was Dr William Hobbs, the principal dugong oil producer/promoter and a well-known Brisbane doctor. Rather than setting up a notion of traditional versus European, I look at cross-cultural contact and exchange, arguing that a point or moment of contact cannot be simplified into one story. Rather, these
moments of cross-cultural contact, where all parties engage in exchange, complicate and enhance our understanding of the various histories interacting with each other in a contact setting. Understanding such contact and exchange is fundamental in understanding a shared history.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5 I reopen the question of silencing Aboriginal people’s role in the dugong industry by investigating the ways dugong oil was promoted and presented (in Australia and overseas) in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. My primary texts are Hobbs’ lecture on the qualities of dugong oil, and the numerous newspaper articles and advertisements relating to the product. I consider how Aboriginal people and their products were used to present Australia to the world at international exhibitions, supporting my notion that dugong oil was not presented as an Aboriginal product. However despite being presented as a white medicine, I argue that the Aboriginal origins of dugong oil were acknowledged overseas, albeit in symbolic terms, reaching their destination in the ‘old world’ in a rather minimal but still evocative process of counter colonisation. The incomplete silencing of Aboriginality proves that this transnational moment of dugong oil is an important aspect of the identity and life of a shared product.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6 I draw together the ideas of whiteness, Aboriginality and cross-cultural contact in order to look at the economic and environmental side of the dugong industry during its demise in the second half of the twentieth century. This involves focussing in on the ‘behind the scenes’ communication of authorities and bureaucrats, while also probing the labour and economic histories of Aboriginal and non-white people. In particular, I contrast the profit-driven industry against the sustainable dugong fishing practices of Aboriginal people. I also use the work of environmental scientists to track the rapid decline of dugong numbers and to track the increase in awareness of environmental and cultural heritage issues. I also argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were key figures in the economic success of the dugong industry, however fluctuating, and despite their central role in a Western enterprise, they retained a strong cultural connection to both animal and product. This shared history (via the
product and place-based experience) is strongly reflected in the evolutionary process of environmental management and dugong protection. Under current circumstances, without shared knowledge, the survival of the species is doubtful.
Chapter 2

First contact: the early interactions and settlement of North Stradbroke Island by Europeans

In 1770, NSI became a place of contact when James Cook sailed along its shoreline down the coast of the ‘new’ continent searching for a suitable harbour. Cook was entering an unfamiliar area to Europeans and although his trajectory would not intersect with the Quandamooka people, he was opening up a route for future exchanges and interactions between explorers, settlers and the Aboriginal people. In this chapter I argue that the settling of NSI was a complex and unstable process, which led to unstable and unequal connections between the Quandamooka people and the white settlers. I look at the idea of a complex dialectical contact zone between two peoples in co-existence, with reference to dugong fishing and early exchanges as well as the limits of such exchanges.

The early settlement of NSI accurately illustrates a contact zone, what Mary Louise Pratt calls the ‘space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect.’¹ But it does more than this, being a shared history that lasts beyond initial contact and thus concerns also the accommodation, coercion and resistance of the Quandamooka people. In order to better understand the on-the-ground situation during and beyond early contact, although it is very useful to consider the colonisers and the colonised as two parties whose trajectories intersect, we must also consider the complexity of each party on its own, the various ideologies within each party and how this was reflected during (and after) the moment of first contact. Thus, taking on board

¹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.
the insights of John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff in their work on the problematic of a dialectic opposition between Europe and Africa, we can imagine the parties as mirrors ‘refracting and reifying new orders of distinction and identity.’ In this encounter we are witness to the (differing) transformation of everyone and everything, the creation of new identities, ideologies, beliefs with a reflection of the old identities, ideologies and beliefs. We can trace the visible and invisible agencies and the varying levels of power, persuasion and force playing out during all interactions. It is this constant state of change and transformation which makes a colonial setting fluid, complicated and often impossible to detangle into a simple story consisting of two distinct parties. As will be shown in this thesis, Minjerribah was a place of constant movement and change in which different individuals and groups of various identities refracted and reified each other.

This thesis maps the story of Minjerribah, through the dugong industry, from the 1850s until the 1970s. However, the continuous occupation of the island and its inhabitants spans a much longer period. We know that Minjerribah was inhabited over 40,000 years ago and has been home to several different language groups. The European presence, in comparison, has been very recent. Although Cook was the first European to sail by and record the island, the first Europeans to set foot on the island and meet a group of the local Quandamooka people were Matthew Flinders’ crew in 1803. From the 1820s the island was gradually transformed, housing a pilot station at Amity Point and a convict-manned depot at Dunwich with failed attempts at growing crop there. In 1839 the island was opened to free settlement with the first Aboriginal mission opening only four years later. The mission was deemed unsuccessful and closed in 1846. In 1850, the Moreton Bay Quarantine Station was opened in Dunwich functioning until 1865 when its buildings were transferred to the Benevolent Asylum, which officially opened the previous year. The Benevolent Asylum operated on the island for over 80 years providing a workplace for the Quandamooka people until its closure in 1946. A second mission, Myora, operated on Minjerribah from 1892 after it was moved there from nearby Bribie Island. The mission, located at an important Aboriginal site named Moongalba, remained open until 1943. After the closure of the mission, the majority of the people living there moved to One Mile, an Aboriginal settlement located just outside Dunwich. Apart from the Benevolent Asylum,

Aboriginal people found work in all government run organisations on and around the island including the Quarantine Station, the Peel Island Lazaret, the Myora Mission, managing oyster beds, fishing (predominantly for mullet) and dugong fishing. This very brief history, aspects of which will be addressed in some more detail in this chapter, indicates that Minjerribah has been a complicated and multi-layered space often without clear boundaries in terms of European and Indigenous geographies, as one institution rolled into the next resulting in a fluid movement of not only people, incoming and local, but also — I will argue — ideas and knowledge between them.

In fact, it is instructive to think of Minjerribah as an urban meeting space where the Quandamooka people came into direct contact with Europeans. This contact, however, resulted in ‘highly asymmetrical relations’ by between the two, which played out also through the dugong industry. Minjerribah can be understood as an urban frontier where a diverse and multi-cultural community developed from early settlement in the 1820s. Given the proximity of incoming and local populations in the relatively restricted space of an island, moreover, it is useful to incorporate cultural geography into the mapping of the history of Minjerribah, specifically focusing on cultural clashes relating to Aboriginal people’s presence and role in an urban setting. As discussed in the introduction, deconstructing the idea of an urban frontier, a space which was often considered empty and in which the presence of Indigenous people was removed from both place and memory, is pivotal for this project.

Secondly, this chapter follows a microhistorical perspective concentrating on several specific persons and groups. Through this narrative we can present local or regional histories with emphasis on the individual, placing these histories into a global context. This approach sets out to restore the voice of a marginalised story; that of the Aboriginal people, in a transnational history of dugong oil. As key historians in this field have shown, the interactions and exchanges in a contact zone can be either of an amiable or violent nature and were often both. Tiffany Shellam, in *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*, looks at the early contact between the British soldiers and the King Ya-nup

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3 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

4 Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*.

people at King George’s Sound in the 1820s and 30s. She notes the relatively peaceful exchanges in order to ‘understand both British and Aboriginal behaviour as far as possible in terms of their own past contexts.’\(^6\) Although there were signs of possible violence — the shaking of spears and lighting of fires in the bay — the Aboriginal men and the white sailors interacted politely with each other in this early period of settlement, and no direct violent intent seemed to be part of their intention. By reversing the narrative, where the British are the fringe-dwelling minority on King Ya-nup country, we see the transformed meaning of a peaceful greeting. Although a respected greeting signalling trust in British culture, in this new setting it was transformed into a new, jointly constructed, ritual signifying different feelings and intentions.\(^7\)

Similarly, Inga Clendinnen examines the early colonisation of Port Jackson Bay in *Dancing with Strangers*.\(^8\) She notes the seemingly convivial atmosphere and interprets the notion that the Aboriginal people and Europeans danced together as a sign of friendly relations between them. Like Shellam, Clendinnen describes a non-violent episode in the very early colonisation of Australia before frontier violence became an almost everyday part of life.\(^9\) By reversing the narrative, the white incomers being the marginalised minority, we begin to question who needed whom in the colonial context where the colonists, while asserting their dominance, were often dependent on Aboriginal people.

Both historians are looking at some very early interactions in the contact zone that were soon followed, however, by violent outbreaks and ongoing warfare. This pattern of a relatively friendly first encounter followed by hostility and violence is evident on Minjerribah. The first Europeans to set foot on NSI in 1803 were allowed to fill up their supplies of water without any unfriendly gestures or approaches. Twenty years later a group of escaped convicts was cared for by the Quandamooka people for several months, while amenable relations were reported in 1825 by Major Edmund Lockyer. However from the late 1820s onwards, unrest began to grow, escalating in

\(^6\) Tiffany Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George’s Sound* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2009), 22.

\(^7\) Ibid., 71.

\(^8\) Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers: Europeans and Australians at First Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

\(^9\) Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*. 
several violent clashes. These early friendly encounters followed by a period of unrest will be discussed later in this chapter.

The next section will examine the complicated relations between the European incomers and Quandamooka people on Minjerribah in the pre- and early-contact period. It will highlight the indispensable role Aboriginal people played in the settlement of Minjerribah, arguing that the sustainability of European settlement was dependent on the Aboriginal people’s knowledge and skills. By examining the early interactions and relations on Minjerribah and contrasting them with other locations we are able to see the ongoing negotiations and exchanges operating on the island and we are able to reveal the delicate balance of life in an isolated and enclosed location where a greater co-dependency afforded a certain degree of independence to the Quandamooka people as opposed to most mainland locations.

Minjerribah: NSI in the early contact period

According to traditional knowledge, Minjerribah was inhabited by Aboriginal people for at least 40,000 years. Geological findings place human occupation of Minjerribah at 21,000 years. The region in which Minjerribah is located is known as Quandamooka and comprises the Moreton Bay Islands and sections of the mainland including the modern-day areas of Cleveland and Redland Bay. The Minjerribah people, often referred to as Quandamooka people, include three language groups: the Nunukul, Goerenpul and Ngugi. More language groups were identified by European travellers and/or settlers as temporarily and/or permanently residing on Minjerribah between 1887 and 1940, including the Choochibbmehally, Coonool-cabalchu, Tarangarie-cabanchu, Jannai, Tchandi, Jundai, Moondjan and Ngundan language groups. The Quandamooka people’s ties to land and sea are evident in their rich local knowledge.


11 Spelling may vary. The known and most commonly used spelling is: Nunukul, Nunukkal, Noonukal and Goerenpul, and Ngugi.

12 Frederick Stanley Colliver and Frank Palmer Woolston, *The Aborigines of Stradbroke Island* (Brisbane: Royal Society of Queensland, 1975); Michael SasBaczynski et al., *North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah Planning and Management Study: Component Studies, Stage Two Reports* (Stanthorpe: LPM, 2000).
and oral history; as well as in archaeological findings and archival materials, or more precisely in identifying the gaps and reading between the lines of archival material. Sources indicate a complex system of belonging to land and sea, which enables us to understand the environmental and resource management in the Quandamooka region before and after European arrival in the early nineteenth century. As shown in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6, this sense of belonging to land and sea, although destabilised by the arrival of Europeans, was not discontinued after settlement but survived in altered forms (indeed, into the present).

Early contact between the Quandamooka people and British sailors — James Cook in 1770 and Matthew Flinders in 1779 and 1803 — is documented in ship logs and diaries.\textsuperscript{13} Other surviving firsthand accounts were created predominantly by explorers and surveyors, for instance John Oxley, ex-convicts, Thomas Pamphlet, John Finnegan and Richard Parsons, or survive as retrospective fragments from the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement officials, for instance Allen Cunningham.\textsuperscript{14} These sources describe the Quandamooka as peaceful. However, as I argue in the following section white settlement on NSI is more complicated than these descriptions show, and we need to read between the lines if we are to uncover the intricate history of the Aboriginal people’s engagement and response to early settlement on the island. The seemingly peaceful settlement process on NSI was challenged and ultimately transformed as disputes and violent outbreaks increased following the expansion of settlement. The violent clashes disappeared within two decades and ‘polite’, although rather unequal, interactions come into existence as settlement was consolidated, remaining the dominant characteristic for Aboriginal–white relations on Minjerribah well into the twentieth century.

The extent of Aboriginal settlement of Minjerribah is known from archaeological findings such as middens and fireplaces but also from Europeans passing through NSI.

\textsuperscript{13} For instance Matthew Flinders, \textit{A Voyage to Terra Australis: Undertaken for the Purpose of Completing the Discovery of That Vast Country, and Prosecuted in the Years 1801, 1802 and 1803, in His Majesty’s Ship the Investigator, and Subsequently in the Armed Vessel Porpoise and Cumberland Schooner: With an Account of the Shipwreck of the Porpoise, Arrival of the Cumberland at Mauritius, and Imprisonment of the Commander During Six Years and a Half in That Island}, Facsim. ed. (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1966).

in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as mentioned above.\textsuperscript{15} Contemporary accounts are also useful in gaining a sense of what early Europeans arriving on the island considered noteworthy:

[A] shipwrecked timber getter, Finnegan, reported in 1823 that Aboriginal dwellings were ‘so numerous I could scarcely count them’ comprising of large and well-built huts, with each clan occupying its own residential area. When he landed at Amity Point in 1824 Botanist Allen Cunningham spoke of ‘the strength and capacity of a number of their huts on the sands above the beach.’\textsuperscript{16}

It is clear from this quote that Minjerribah was occupied by the Quandamooka people when first settlers arrived. The Aboriginal settlement on Minjerribah was developed in a way that the settlers, with their Western notions of housing and town structures, were impressed with the dwellings and residential range.

NSI was first formally charted by James Cook in 1770. Cook sailed by (without landing) the series of islands in Moreton Bay naming several prominent places such as Point Lookout, the northern-most point of NSI. The first documented white men to set foot on the island were Matthew Flinders and several of his crew in 1803. Flinders was on his way to England, on the Porpoise, a mere passenger on the vessel which struck Wreck Reef on 17 August 1803. Flinders and several crew members were chosen to make the journey to Port Jackson in a cutter named Hope. On 29 August the Hope landed at Point Lookout in need of fresh water. In his journal, Flinders writes of the ‘Indians’ on NSI as ‘peaceably disposed, amusing us with dances and imitations of the kangaroo.’ He suggests that their peacefulness and distance — which they kept the entire time the crew members were on land filling up on fresh water — could have been caused by his expedition to Glasshouse Bay in 1779, ‘in which I had been provoked to make one of them feel the effect of our arms.’ Flinders further notes that had the Aboriginal people given them any trouble, he and his crew were ‘prepared to have given them a volley.’\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} As mentioned above, James Cook sailed by NSI in 1770 and Matthew Flinders sailed by and landed on NSI in 1779 and 1803.


\textsuperscript{17} Flinders, A Voyage to Terra Australis.
In this exchange, Flinders was experiencing Minjerribah at the first moment of direct European–Aboriginal contact. Flinders’ claim that the ‘Indians’ kept their distance because they were afraid of the arms carried by the white men may be true. The Aboriginal people would almost certainly have known of white men not only from witnessing the vessels sail by but also through communication along trade routes with people from other parts of the continent. For example, red ochre, used in ceremonies as body decoration and in cave paintings, was carried along trade routes for thousands of kilometres; shells from the north of Western Australia were worn as pendants in the Great Australian Bight; and Baler shells from Cape York were traded through Central Australia to Lake Eyre, the Flinders Ranges and eventually to the coast of South Australia.  

The Quandamooka people most likely knew about white men before their arrival to the island because of communication across the mainland and with the island through these trade routes and through songlines and corroborees. According to Frederick Stanley Colliver and Frank Palmer Woolston, and also noted by John Gladstone Steele, ‘Communication between people of Minjerribah was by means of message-stick: “a semaphore-like method using pieces of bark”; beacon fires; and mirror flashes over distances of up to 40 kilometres.’ Thus the news of an Aboriginal man being shot in Glasshouse Bay in 1799 would have likely reached Minjerribah before Flinders sailed through the area in 1803. The landing of Flinders’ men on NSI merely signifies the first face-to-face contact between the Quandamooka people and European sailors, which would lead to the European settlement of the island in the early 1800s.

As the Quandamooka people watched the Endeavour pass their shores likely they had been forewarned about the strangers’ arrival from neighbouring Aboriginal groups. Such knowledge did not stop with the coastline; on the contrary, Aboriginal people living on the island and along the Australian coast were no doubt very aware of the movement of vessels both European and non-European. This highly developed level of

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Chapter 2: FIRST CONTACT

communication disrupts the notion of a primitive people without a notable past. As Bruce Buchan reminds us, positioning Indigenous people as primitive and history-less ‘was a key concept in the discursive strategies employed by Europeans in their colonial endeavours.’ In the case of Minjerribah, just as white men were discovering the Quandamooka people as a supposedly history-less people, so were the Quandamooka people ‘discovering’ white men. What they saw is harder to access for the historian. But combining these two perspectives presents, nonetheless, a more comprehensive contact history in which the lines between one side and another are blurred and our collective memory of their meetings may operate in different ways.

The existing information about NSI in this earlier context is predominantly available to us through a European perspective. Although it is important to argue the contestability of such accounts, in the context of NSI as a contact zone they represent individualised and varied interpretations of largely otherwise undocumented events. The diversity in these accounts is due to the different conditions faced by a variety of Europeans and the varying pursuits they were undertaking as well as their differing assumptions about ‘primitive’ peoples. Both violent and friendly relations between each side characterised this early period. An inevitable rise in hostilities followed a similar pattern to the mainland: initial instances of encounter and exchange were relatively friendly, until it became apparent that the newcomers were here to stay; then violent clashes increased. With expanding settlement came fences, land clearing and dams, which changed movement, habitat, and rivers and streams. Such environmental changes disrupted the Aboriginal people’s lives both in the short and long term. It is perhaps not surprising then, that violence between the two grew as settlers claimed and changed their surroundings.

Amicable and violent: European settlement prior to the dugong industry

The first white people to reside on NSI were three timber getters and ex-convicts, Pamphlett, Finnegan and Parsons. Shipwrecked on Moreton Island in 1823, they spent

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eight months exploring Moreton Bay. Once they arrived at Pulan (later Cypress Point and then Amity Point), the three men were cared for by the Quandamooka people who showed them how to make a canoe. The men departed six weeks later.23

In 1824, Surveyor General John Oxley arrived at Pulan (naming it Cypress Point) while undertaking an exploratory mission with fellow surveyor Robert Hoddle and botanist Allan Cunningham in search of a suitable site for a penal colony. Cypress Point was renamed Amity Point after Oxley’s ship Amity. Thus the early contact between Aboriginal people and white men, including first direct contact with Flinders, can be understood as friendly.24

At first, relations between Aboriginal people and settlers were, if not amicable, at least tolerant, but they gradually lead to open conflict as it became evident that the settlers were in fact settling, not leaving, and their numbers were increasing. This move from tolerating the incomers to trying to dissuade them from settling has been evidenced throughout Australia. In South East Queensland for instance, Aboriginal people would intercept communication and travel routes, thus isolating and starving settlers already in residence and preventing the possibility of a coordinated defence against attacks. As noted by Raymond Kerkhove in his analysis of mid-nineteenth century Aboriginal warfare in South East Queensland, ‘Settlers had no illusions about the main motive: their foes were asserting land ownership. They note raiders had: “an unforgiving resentment towards the intruders into their native wilds” and were unwilling to share “use of the soil”’.25

This unwillingness to share the land with settlers and the violent and defensive steps taken by Aboriginal people to prevent increased settlement on their lands played out in different parts of Australia during the early settlement period. In South Australia there were very few clashes between settlers and Aboriginal people in the first eighteen months of settlement due to the slow expansion from Adelaide. However within a few years of settler expansion, Aboriginal people began showing their dissatisfaction through violent acts to which the government responded with large-scale punitive expeditions. Thus the process of colonisation is often accompanied by a varying level

23 Thomas Welsby, Memories of Amity (Brisbane: Watson, Ferguson, 1922), 71.

24 Ibid.

of both friendly relations and violence with relatively clear patterns of friendly or indifferent encounters followed by unrest. Henry Reynolds contrasts the more peaceful early encounters in his work on the violent interactions between Aboriginal people and early settlers.\(^{26}\) In effect, Aboriginal people were marked as troublesome marauders or plunders, and their acts of resistance the acts of savages, while the settlers would for years be remembered as pastoral pioneers, central to the pioneer legend. These mythologised pastoral settlers would often employ ex-convicts to form ‘outstations’, and they would be consequently in direct contact with Aboriginal people and ‘did the job that was expected.’\(^{27}\) Violence against Aboriginal people often went unreported and when it was reported, ‘it was typically ascribed to ex-convicts … said to be drawn to the isolated and lawless boundaries of European settlement’ thus further promoting the pastoral pioneers and pioneer legends.\(^{28}\) Between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries this increasing resistance and conflict can be explained as a response of Aboriginal people to invasion/settlement ‘triggered by tension and misunderstanding, by the possessiveness of Europeans towards land and water, by competition over women and by the diametrically opposed concepts of personal property’ with reciprocal violence quickly spiralling.\(^{29}\)

In this way the situation on NSI mirrors the events which took place in the early settlement of Sydney, where the first contacts between Aboriginal people and Europeans had a friendly, if paternalistic, tone. Scenes such as View in Broken Bay, New South Wales, 1788 painted by Lieutenant William Bradley, which accompany the early settlement of Port Jackson, suggest a hospitable setting in which violence had no place. It is a convivial scene, with several Aboriginal and British men in a dance pose.\(^{30}\) As the painting is Bradley’s representation of the early settlement, it cannot be seen as an accurate description of the events occurring at the time. However it provides one

\(^{26}\) Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*.


\(^{28}\) Ibid.

\(^{29}\) Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, 94–95. Reynolds estimates the number of Aboriginal people killed in frontier conflicts at 20,000; ibid., 123–27.

dimension of Aboriginal–white encounters. Inga Clendinnen writes of these early encounters of Aboriginal and white men, commenting on the experiences of the white men at Sydney Cove through Bradley’s eyes:

‘these people mixed with ours and all hands danced together’. The next day at Spring Cove there was another impromptu dance party when about a dozen of the local men came paddling in soon after the British landed, left their spears in their canoes as a sign of friendship, and all proceeded to more ‘dancing and otherwise amusing themselves.’

Clendinnen’s approach is useful in interpreting archival material, as she presents a viewpoint of early colonial contact that reconstructs early Australian settlement. However, as noted by historian Ani Fox, even Clendinnen does not give sufficient emphasis to the Indigenous voice: ‘[e]very source is British and told from a British point of view’, while she does not reference either the seminal work of John Mulvaney and Johann Kamminga: Prehistory of Australia in which the authors examine the many cultures, languages and life styles of Aboriginal people before the arrival of Europeans pointing to a strong Aboriginal agency. Further, although Clendinnen convincingly argues that the early encounters between settlers and Aboriginal people were friendly, she does not engage sufficiently with the violence that followed and often came hand in hand with first contact into sufficient account. Reading between the lines of archival documents and including oral history and memory in analysing these documents greatly benefit our interpretation of the past, however we need to keep a balance between the positive and negative accounts so as to not emphasise one side of the story over the other. While this balance is very difficult to accomplish, it is possible — as demonstrated by historians Ganter, Pybus and Walker, who both illustrate Aboriginal agency and the limits to that agency.

Just as violence was to a certain degree always present in the process of settling Australia, both violent and predominantly friendly episodes are remembered by the Quandamooka people. In 1998 the Redland City Council organised an oral history project, titled Redland City Council Oral History Project (RCCOHP). The project ran

31 Clendinnen, Dancing with Strangers, 8.
33 Ganter, Mixed Relations; Pybus, “‘We Grew up This Place’.”; Walker, “Useful and Profitable.”
for eight years, and the aim was to collect the memories of both Quandamooka people and long-term residents of Minjerribah. These oral histories provide us with a depth of information about everyday life on the island, which would otherwise be lost. An interesting characteristic of the island, through many of the interviews, concerns the peaceable relations and lack of hostility and racism remembered down the generations. This effect is reflected upon further in Chapter 3.

In 1825, Amity Point was established as Moreton Bay’s first Pilot Station, and upon Oxley’s strong recommendation NSI was to become a penal settlement.³⁴ Convicts were used to set up the Station, along with two soldiers and a crew of five sailors (followed shortly by three more soldiers and seven more convicts). Relations between the Pilot Station crew and the Aboriginal people were amenable at first, according to Lockyer, who noted that the Nunukul at Amity seemed to be tolerating the


Figure 2.1: Town of Dunwich, ca. 1895.
Source: Picture Queensland, image 239811, John Oxley Library, SLQ.
presence of the white men.\footnote{Raymond Evans, “The Mogwi Take Mi-an-Jin: Race Relations and the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement 1824–42 in Brisbane,” in Brisbane: The Aboriginal Presence 1824–1860, ed. Rod Fisher (Brisbane: Brisbane History Group, 1992), 7-30.} Two years later (November 1827), on Commandant Patrick Logan’s advice, the settlement of Dunwich was established as a loading depot — the wharf is still in operation today (Figure 2.1).\footnote{Dunwich was named after the heir of the Earl of Stradbroke, Viscount Dunwich.} In the following year a cotton plantation was established at Moongalba, known to Europeans as Myora. Moongalba, or ‘sitting down place’, was an Aboriginal camp before the arrival of white people. It would later be the location of the government-run Myora Mission. The first mission was established in 1843 by four Passionist missionaries.\footnote{The Passionists, Congregatio Passionis Iesu Christi, are a Roman Catholic religious institute founded by Saint Paul of the Cross with a special emphasis on the Passion of Jesus Christ. As professed by the Passionists, their mission is rooted in prayerful community life and is expressed in collaborative ministry to the people of God in all walks of life especially to the poor and suffering.} It closed three years later. Myora Mission was set up at the same location in 1892, after the Bribie Island Mission was closed and the Aboriginal people living there — many of whom were originally from Minjerribah — were moved to Myora (Figure 2.2).\footnote{Walker, “Useful and Profitable.”} The role of Myora Mission during the operation of the dugong industry is discussed later in this chapter and provides some context for Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

The use of convict labour on the island — at Amity and Dunwich — was short-lived, with the Moreton Bay penal settlement coming to an end in 1842.\footnote{Between 1824 and 1842 Moreton Bay was established as a place of secondary punishment to house previously convicted prisoners who committed further crime in the Port Jackson region. During this time, nearly 2,400 men and 145 women lived at depots located throughout the region including Stradbroke Island, Cowper’s Plains, Eagle Farm and the locality of the present city of Brisbane. The convicts were under the control of military commandants with detachments numbering up to 100 soldiers.} The last shipment of convicts arrived in 1839. The area was opened to free settlement via a proclamation in the New South Wales Government Gazette on 11 February 1842:

\begin{quote}
In reference of the proclamation of this date, His Excellency the Governor directs it to be notified for general information, that the district of Moreton Bay will be opened for settlement … and that consequently all persons whatsoever may henceforth resort to Moreton Bay, as freely as to any other part of the Territory of New South Wales.\footnote{New South Wales Government Gazette, 11 February 1842, 249.}
\end{quote}
Although convicts were present on NSI, only a small number of men worked there. It is possible that the absence of conflict, as noted by Lockyer, was directly linked with the small number of convicts. Based on the work of Reynolds and other historians, we can see that hostilities between Aboriginal people and convicts who were working for the settlement were common.\(^4\) Thus the absence of a larger group of convicts on the island could also explain the early friendly relations.

Despite a lack of information about conflict occurring after the construction of the Pilot Station, growing unrest is evident after Dunwich and the cotton plantation (Moongalba) were established. The plantation site was a favoured campground for the Aboriginal people and circumstantial evidence points to the likelihood of conflicts. For example, the plantation was abandoned after only five months; in Dunwich the storage buildings were connected to the living quarters by underground passages and a 13 foot brick wall was constructed around the entire depot site. Further, a soldier was speared

and killed around this time, most likely bringing an end to the planned move of the Brisbane penal establishment to Dunwich.\footnote{Evans, “Early Racial Contact and Conflict on Stradbroke Island,” 27; Mamie O’Keeffe, A Brief Account of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement 1824–1839 (Brisbane: Oxley Memorial Library of Queensland, 1974); Raymond Evans, A History of Queensland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a comprehensive study of early race relations and conflict in Moreton Bay, including conflict on Minjerribah, see “On the Utmost Verge: Race and Ethnic Relations at Moreton Bay, 1799-1842.”}

Between 1831 and 1832 there were more than ten violent (and fatal) clashes between the Europeans and the Quandamooka people.\footnote{“Early Racial Contact and Conflict on Stradbroke Island,” 27; William Ross Johnston, Brisbane, the First Thirty Years (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1988).} These clashes resulted in deaths on both sides, and can be seen as a mirror of occurrences on the mainland, as violence spread across the continent in this period.\footnote{Peter Dean Gardner, Gippsland Massacres: The Destruction of the Kurnai Tribes, 1800–1860, 2nd ed. (Ensay: Ngarak Press, 1993); Christobel Mattingley and Ken Hampton, eds., Survival in Our Own Land: ‘Aboriginal’ Experiences in ‘South Australia’ since 1836 (Adelaide: ALDAA in association with Hodder & Stoughton, 1988); Henry Reynolds, Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).} Similarly, in the following decades conflict on Minjerribah shifted from direct violence to indirect forms. For instance, a government-mandated curfew was set in place so that Aboriginal people could not remain in Dunwich after 6pm, and Aboriginal people living on Myora Mission needed permits to leave the island. So while movement around the island was not under strict control, both the curfew and the issuing of official travel permits signify the struggle for the control of space in the contact zone.\footnote{RCCOHP interview with Margaret Iselin, 8 August 2002.}

Nearly 100 years later, an interesting struggle occurred between two white men, disputing the use of Myora Mission as an ‘Aboriginal area’. This personal dispute between Billy North, a pastoralist living at Point Lookout, and missionary Philip Bensted, culminated in 1922. On his regular pathway to and from Point Lookout, North would have been trespassing on Myora grounds. He was annoyed when Bensted refused him access, immediately notifying the Lands Department. In turn, Bensted informed the Chief Protector’s Office, citing that it was an offence for unauthorised persons to enter Aboriginal reserves. He provided the Chief Protector with a summary of the sentiments of the Myora residents, as he claimed to know them, in support of his argument, stating in paternalistic terms that:

My people will be more happy and content as they much resent the intrusion of strangers, especially white ones, upon the Reserve. As you know the men
are extremely, and unreasonably jealous of their women, and also much resent strangers being present when they are card playing.\textsuperscript{46}

This dispute over land, land use and ultimately over space has been a characteristic of colonial settings into the present. The management and use of space is an important factor in discussing power relations. Exclusion and isolation are the ultimate tools of control over the lives of a specific person or group of people, whether it was Aboriginal people isolated from their surroundings by the Mission grounds or Indigenous peoples excluded from towns. In the past, islands have often been used for isolation and seclusion as they were seen as the most efficient places of isolation.\textsuperscript{47}

In Moreton Bay for instance, St Helena Island, traditionally known as Noogoon, was used as a jail; Peel Island as a lazaret; NSI as a benevolent asylum and Bribie Island was used as a mission. This struggle over space in an urban setting has been defined as an ‘urban frontier’.\textsuperscript{48} What is highlighted by this urban frontier is the fact that land is a multilayered space in almost constant dispute in colonial settings even if direct violence and resistance are not apparent.

When considering islands and their characteristics suitable for control and punishment, Saint Helena and Palm Island off the coast of Queensland or Flinders Island off the coast of Tasmania come to mind. Such islands were ideal places for the isolation of a certain group of people as they could be under constant surveillance. On Palm Island and Fraser Island, geographical constrictions proved very efficient in the control of Aboriginal people’s lives.\textsuperscript{49} Although Palm Island represents a different kind of space, with individuals who were considered ‘trouble-makers’ on the mainland sent there, it is a prime example of the use of an island as a space of control and punishment. However, NSI, as can be seen from the previous sections, was not used in this sense. In contrast, the Aboriginal people on Minjerribah had a certain amount of liberty of movement: they would be allowed to leave for the mainland and to have visitors stay at

\textsuperscript{46} W.R. (Billie) North to Hasder, 1922 in Walker, “Useful and Profitable,” 155.

\textsuperscript{47} Bashford and Strange, “Isolation and Exclusion in the Modern World.”

\textsuperscript{48} Edmonds, \textit{Urbanizing Frontiers}.

the Mission as discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly to other Aboriginal reserves, Myora Mission was in some senses a safe haven for Aboriginal people, a place of belonging. Nevertheless, tensions and contradictions still arose in such a complex space where people were both brought under surveillance but also provided with degrees of safety and community. These tensions were exemplified by North pursuing his right to trespass through the Myora grounds, a curfew notice strapped to a pole in Dunwich outside the Mess Hall and the exclusion of language from the Myora School.

On Minjerribah the violent clashes did gradually disappear and more friendly, although often unequal, interactions came into existence. This amicability can also be seen as a truce between the Quandamooka people and the settlers, which grew from the rising dependence on Aboriginal employment. As I argue in this thesis, one activity characterised by this more friendly interaction on Minjerribah was that of dugong fishing. Although a regular form of obtaining food for the Quandamooka people, dugong fishing was a new technology for Europeans understood only gradually through observation and participation.

Through the dugong and other industries like mullet fishing and oystering, this study shows that an unequal collaboration was gradually formed between Aboriginal and white people. On the one hand, Aboriginal men gained a certain degree of freedom from the Aboriginal Protection Act through their indispensability in the dugong industry. Conversely, the white men who worked with them relied on the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal dugong fishermen in order to sustain a growing enterprise. This complex web of strict management and partial independence helps us understand the particular situation on NSI and shows that the history of Aboriginal–white relations does in fact need to be scrutinised from the ground up in order to present a more comprehensive picture of these relations. In fact, the depth of control and management of Aboriginal people set out by the Aboriginal Protection Act reveals NSI as a place of control as much as opportunity.

50 Brock, Outback Ghettos.

51 The Aboriginal Protection Act controlled the lives of Indigenous people in Queensland throughout much of the twentieth century. It became the model for similarly ‘protective’ and restrictive legislation in Western Australia in 1905, the Northern Territory in 1910 and South Australia in 1911. A third of this Act dealt with the supply of opium to Aboriginal people, with two thirds concerning the management of Aboriginal people. For detailed accounts of the Aboriginal Protection Act see Kidd, The Way We Civilise; Raymond Evans, Kathryn Cronin, and Kay Saunders, Race Relations in Colonial Queensland: A History of Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1988); Noel Loos, Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal–European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier, 1861–1897 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982).
For one thing, the *Aboriginal Protection Act* was not carried out as rigorously on NSI as in other locations. Aboriginal people on NSI were not restricted from interacting with other people living on the island. They could work and there are a number of instances of inter-racial marriage. And while the autonomous movement of Aboriginal people around the island was often curtailed, such as by the 6pm curfew, such rules were often unevenly applied as can be seen from the RCCOHP. Once the government-operated Mission was established on NSI in 1892, local Aboriginal people were forcibly moved there. But throughout the operation of the Mission only some families lived onsite; others remained at One Mile and away from the direct control of the Mission Superintendent. After the closure of the Mission school in 1941 all the children from the Mission as well as those living at One Mile attended Dunwich Public School — a ‘mixed race school’ — contradicting the separation tactics approved by the *Aboriginal Protection Act*. Nonetheless, on the Mission itself, the constant presence of an authoritative government figure, the Mission Superintendent, and the enclosing of the Mission by a fence undoubtedly created a place of white authority over Aboriginal people. By reading between the lines, we are able to see the duality of missions: as well as being sites of domination, they were seen as places of gradual change where numbers of Aboriginal people succeeded in transforming Western demands to suit their own customs. Accordingly, some succeeded in integrating both cultures, despite the government control and restrictive conditions. Missions were places of control as well as places of determination. Similarly contradictory or dual effects were present in the early European industries.

**Creating relations: early European dugong experiences**

From the first contact between Flinders and the Quandamooka people up until the opening of NSI to free settlers, Europeans began encountering a peculiar animal in the Moreton Bay region. It was the dugong, which is native to the east, north and northwest coast of Australia, and South-East Asia. It is referred to by different variations of

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52 RCCOHP, interview with Estelle Bertossi, 1 April 2003.


54 Lydon, *Fantastic Dreaming*. 


the local word *yungun.* Although new to Europeans, for the Quandamooka people the dugong had been a staple food for thousands of years. From archaeological research, we know that dugongs were caught from south-east Queensland to the north of Western Australia. As revealed by archaeologists Ian McNiven and Alice Bedingfield, the oldest archaeological excavation site containing dugong bones confirms that dugongs were hunted in Torres Strait for 4,000 years.\(^{56}\)

Due to the timid and shy nature of dugongs, catching the elusive creature entailed a great degree of experience, knowledge and skill. Dugong fishing techniques differ from place to place, and, doubtless, have been perfected through trial and error over thousands of years. Each group of fishermen use a technique specific to their area. On Minjerribah the Quandamooka people used one- or two-row nets made out of the bark of the hibiscus (a local cotton tree) and sometimes a harpoon. These nets were highly prized articles. When Sam Rollands, a local dugong fisherman, died in 1936, Aunty Mabel Brown sold his dugong net and with the proceeds had a headstone erected on his grave.\(^{57}\) When Flinders sailed by NSI in 1799, according to Steele, he recorded seeing nets that were most likely used for dugong fishing, ‘the meshes … were wide enough to admit the escape of a moderate size porpoise, and the line of which it was made from three-quarters to an inch in circumference … [and] about fourteen fathoms long.’\(^{58}\)

Tom Petrie, an early Queensland authority, recorded the process of making a dugong net:

> To get the bark the blacks would cut the vines in lengths, and then beat these well with sticks until it peeled off easily with the teeth. This they would then soak in water for several days, at the end of which time the rough outer bark would be thrown away, while with their thumb nails the men would split the inner bark up in the fibre. This fibre was dried and then twisted on their thighs into excellent string, which was very useful in many ways. [Nets for Dugong] were formed of big meshes, and were sewn up in the shape of huge pockets; they were hand nets, and were finished off at the

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\(^{55}\) Variations of the word dugong include dugong, dugon, yangon, yungun, jungun, joungan, zungun.


\(^{58}\) Steele, *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District, 1770–1830*, 62.
top by two pieces of stick ending in the handle. When making nets the
natives used to measure to get the correct size of mesh. To catch a dugong, the net was strung between trees in a bay or otherwise secured in a
place of heavy dugong traffic. A group of 4–5 men would wait in a canoe some way
from the net, with one man on lookout on land. When a dugong was spotted, the
lookout would signal, and the men in the canoe would scream and splash, chasing the
dugong towards the net, where the animal would get entangled. To kill the dugong, the
men would either drown it (dugongs are mammals), or they would harpoon it. This is
dangerous work, as dugongs grow up to 3m, weigh up to 400 kg and can be aggressive
when distressed. On Minjerribah, only older and experienced men went dugong
fishing. This whole process is complex and it would have taken years for individuals to
perfect their technique.

Gustavus Birch, an employee of the Brisbane Lands Department, lived on NSI for
30 years in the second half of the nineteenth century. Birch kept a diary for the year
1873, the earliest remaining personal account of life on the island. In his diary he
regularly mentions dugong fishing, and while he appears to attribute little importance to
the event, suggesting it was a relatively routine occurrence, his commentary does
provide insight into dugong fishing, living conditions on the island, Indigenous–non-
inigenous relations and general experiences of post-contact Minjerribah. On 13 and 14
January Birch noted: ‘Wind N with rain and wind which prevented Ellis and crew from
going out after Joungan.’ And ‘[S]howery today and too much wind for them to go out
after Joungan.’

Although written almost 35 years after the opening of NSI to free settlers, Birch’s
diary indicates that dugong fishing was considered a relatively ordinary activity. He did
not show any particular enthusiasm for dugongs, nor did he get excited about sharing
the dugong catch, which, as he mentions in his diary, occurred several times when an
Aboriginal dugong fisherman brought him pieces of dugong meat. Aboriginal people
would have regularly taken foodstuffs from Birch’s hut, namely flour, sugar, tea and

59 Constance Campbell Petrie, Tom Petrie’s Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: University of

60 Murray D. Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Whaling’: The Moreton Bay Dugong Fishery 1846–1920,”


62 Ibid.
tobacco. Birch commented on the disappearance of his provisions regularly, often
naming the perpetrators. Nonetheless it seems he did not make much of his supplies
being shared as he would, perhaps in return, have received dugong meat and fish. This
type of unofficial exchange system can often be seen in colonial settings.63

As with the act of dugong fishing itself, Birch did not seem to give much
importance to eating dugong meat. He made brief comments about receiving and
cooking, only occasionally mentioning the taste. He was provided dugong meat by
‘Ellis’, and, most commonly, ‘Fernando’. Fernando is Fernandez Gonzales, who came
from the Philippines (possibly from Manilla because Thomas Welsby referred to him as
‘Manilla man’64). His part in the dugong industry as neither white settler nor
Indigenous person is an example of the multiple connections and fluidity within the
dugong industry and will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Birch regularly received different parts of the dugong: the nose, the flipper,
unidentifiable large pieces, and either cooked them straight away to eat with other
foods or salted them for future use: ‘Cooked the remainder of the Joungan and ate it;
and also fried a sweet potato. … Fried some of the Joungan, more tender than when I
tried it before … boiled nose and flippers today; they are still in the pot, will test their
quality.’65 His routine mention of cooking and eating dugong meat suggests it was
commonplace, so did not require special recording. He also experimented with
preparing the oil, suggesting that such extraction also occurred regularly. On 6 July he
made a memo: ‘Mem: Re boiling down fat with water not to overdo it as the refuse is
very difficult to be got rid of and the gelatine mixes to a certain extent with the
water.’66

Later accounts of eating dugong meat are more descriptive, and suggest that it
became less usual to eat dugong meat as the settlement became more established. This
could also be a novel way of remembering the early days of colonisation as somewhat
wilder. But perhaps it could have been a marketing strategy. Dugong meat was sold in

63 For instance Daniel Usner outlines the role of foodstuffs in the development of both regional trade
networks and regional cultures in Daniel H Usner, Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange
Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

64 Welsby, Memories of Amity, 71.


66 Ibid., 6 July 1873.
Brisbane in the first half of the twentieth century as a sort of bacon. For instance, in a newspaper article Welsby describes the tastes of the different sections by comparing them to other meats:

The meat on the dugong from the neck down to a certain distance from where the tail is cut off is known as bacon meat. This meat right through to the bones and rib is flaked with layers of lean, and layers of fat, exactly as in a pig. … On reaching the tail where the good thick meat is to be found, and no fatty portions, this meat is cut off in large lumps … or salted slightly for table purposes. When so salted and kept for a few days, when boiled it is very difficult to tell it from boiled corned beef, and makes excellent eating.67

In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the author, Venoral, offers another description of dugong meat: ‘Some who have tried it compare it to coarse, oily bacon; nevertheless, tinned or potted dugong is still considered a delicacy. … The meat … had a taste between veal and pork.’68

At this time, the habits and characteristics of the dugongs were often related to human habits and characteristics. The care for young was understood as very human-like; a dugong mother would care for her young, allowing it to suckle when hungry, teaching it to graze on seagrass and keeping it away from danger. Probably the two most human-like characteristics observed in the dugong were female dugongs placing their flipper over their young just like a human mother would hold her baby, and the grief of a female dugong when its young was killed or vice versa. Witnesses of such events claim that dugongs cry when grieving, a characteristic of human expressions of grief. It is possible that these human-like traits were a deterrent for potential dugong consumers.

The Quandamooka people today liken the taste of dugong meat to pork, veal and beef depending on what part of the animal the meat comes from (Fred Campbell and Ann Monaghan of Minjerribah compare the meat of the dugong to beef, likening it to corned beef69). In a 2003 interview Quandamooka elder Bruce Borey stated:

> Oh the taste is great. We used to get — well they used to say we got three different sorts of meat off the one animal. Sometimes it’d taste a bit like pork, a bit like steak and a bit like mutton. Some of it is a bit white, some of

the meat is a bit fair like pork and others are very dark like steak, like roast.\footnote{RCCOHP, interview with Bruce Borey, 26 August 2003.}

It is unclear why so few accounts by Europeans of eating dugong meat have survived or even if such accounts existed in diaries or letters. Nevertheless, the fact that Birch did not pay much attention to dugong fishing and eating dugong meat does suggest that these were regular activities which the settlers had become accustomed too. Birch’s diary is the earliest account of dugong fishing from a person not involved in the dugong industry and so offers a unique point of view. Also important is Welsby’s extensive study of Moreton Bay, as discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, providing the next detailed account concerning dugong fishing in the waters surrounding Minjerribah.

Because of the high level of expertise needed to catch dugongs, Europeans only gradually mastered the skill through collaboration with Aboriginal men. This kind of collaboration created a range of co-dependent relations and opened a path for white men to exploit Aboriginal people’s knowledge of the Australian landscape and their experience in working the land. A European-controlled dugong industry could generate great revenue for the entrepreneurs and for the colony. Other European-controlled industries relying on Aboriginal skills (whaling, pearl-shelling and bêche-de-mer) had proven successful and highly profitable.\footnote{For whaling see Lynette Russell, \textit{Roving Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790–1870} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); for pearl-shelling and bêche-de-mer see Regina Ganter, \textit{The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline 1860s–1960s} (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994).} These newly acquired skills and an unrestricted access to free manpower opened up opportunities on the Australian and international market for the colonisers. Goods from Australia were often sent to Britain or used to enhance the growing colony. However, the urge to succeed and profit in the new colony caused an imbalance which led to the extinction and near extinction of many native species, including the dugong.

\section*{Learning the craft: dugong fishing as an unequal partnership}

The first documented interaction between white men, Aboriginal men and dugongs was published in a short article in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} in 1846:
A gentleman a few days since, whilst amusing himself in the Bay with a crew of black-fellows catching turtle, succeeded in harpooning and killing one of those singular animals frequently captured by the aborigines in the Bay, called by them a youngen or sea-pig.\textsuperscript{72}

This event signifies the beginning of Aboriginal–white interactions and illustrates the power relations within the dugong industry: Aboriginal men formed the backbone from the very beginning, and even though several white-only crews existed (with fishermen from whaling or sealing backgrounds), their knowledge and skills were no match for the Quandamooka fishermen. So, Aboriginal knowledge and skills were heavily relied upon by the white entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{73}

This first documented moment of contact also signifies a very complicated relationship between settlers and Aboriginal people. Despite notions of Aboriginal people being ‘primitives’, ‘savages’ and members of ‘a dying race’, they were crucial in white man’s settling of Australia.\textsuperscript{74} Contemporary accounts by explorers and scientists such as William Dampier and Charles Darwin, and newspaper articles of the time evidence the perception of Aboriginal people as ‘primitive’, ‘savage’ and ‘dying out’.\textsuperscript{75} For example, a 1909 article in the Advertiser noted: ‘Gradually the [A]borigines of Australia are dying out. The periodical official reports show plainly that they are a doomed people.’\textsuperscript{76}

On the contrary to these contemporary accounts, we now know that Aboriginal people were in fact progressive farmers who managed the country in a sustainable fashion. In rivers and lakes Aboriginal people created nurseries and hatcheries to effectively farm fish, while sea-based animals were caught sustainably.\textsuperscript{77} Welsby writes

\textsuperscript{72}“News from the Interior: Moreton Bay,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 19 August 1846, 3.


\textsuperscript{74}Social Darwinist notions of racial hierarchy and of the survival of the fittest helped rationalise the decline in the Aboriginal population and so it was widely believed that Aboriginal people were a primitive race doomed to extinction.

\textsuperscript{75}Kay Anderson and Colin Perry examine how Aboriginal people were seen throughout the nineteenth century and how this affected racial thinking of the time in Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin, “‘the Miserablest People in the World’: Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine,” \textit{Australian Journal of Anthropology} 18, no. 1 (2007): 18–39.

\textsuperscript{76}Advertiser, 20 November 1909.

\textsuperscript{77}Scott Cane, \textit{First Footprints: The Epic Story of the First Australians} (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), 226.
of the specific seasons in which dugongs were caught with only dugong bulls being taken.\footnote{Welsby, \textit{The Collected Works of Thomas Welsby}.} This sustainable system was practiced successfully before being disturbed by white men’s advances in the dugong industry. The transformation of the dugong industry from sustainable ‘sea farming’ into a profit-driven industrial system would prove a turning point for both the dugongs in Moreton Bay and the Quandamooka people on Minjerribah. As Michael Aird states, ‘Aboriginal people were a part of the industries that destroyed the environment because they had no choice.’\footnote{Michael Aird, “Cultural Borders: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and Others — Inclusiveness under Whose Terms?,” in \textit{Sold Coast Symposiums} (Gold Coast2013).}

Through their involvement in the dugong industry, Aboriginal fishermen were able to maintain their position on Minjerribah. They were employed in an area of work they were highly experienced in, so became a crucial part of the dugong industry. This allowed them to incorporate traditional fishing practices into Western concepts of the industry, and so successfully negotiate the new Aboriginal–European collaboration. In his extensive work on the whaling industry, Martin Gibbs describes the experiences and events occurring in the industry as ‘a largely forgotten history of Aboriginal–European collaboration, as well as a story of participation and successful negotiation for personal power in changing circumstances.’\footnote{Martin Gibbs, “Nebinyan’s Songs: An Aboriginal Whaler of South-West Western Australia,” \textit{Aboriginal History} 27 (2003): 2.}

Whaling can be viewed as a certain form of escape for Aboriginal people from the brutal impacts of colonialism: dispossession, relocation, disease, murder and institutionalisation.\footnote{Russell, \textit{Roving Mariners}.} Whaling and the export of whale by-products (such as whale oil, primarily used for lamp fuel, lubricants, candles, and as a base for perfumes and soaps; and baleen or whalebone, used for corsets, whips and umbrellas) became one of Australia’s first primary industries. The industry opened in 1799 with Captain Ebor Bunker — considered the father of commercial whaling in Australia — sending the first barrels of whale oil to England.\footnote{John S Cumpston, “Bunker, Eber (1761-1836),” in \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography} (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966), 178; Henry Richard Taylor Hodgkinson, \textit{Eber Bunker of Liverpool: The Father of Australian Whaling} (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1975). APW King, “Our First Whaler: Captain Bunker’s Story,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 2 March 1929, 16.} What the study of the whaling, sealing and in fact dugong industries show us is that Australian history, in these instances combining
economical history, labour history and the history of European–Aboriginal relations, is made more complex when Aboriginal and settler communities are recognised as intertwined in the economic and social relations upon which they rely.

The whaling and seal industries bear some resemblance to northern Australia, where coastal Aboriginal groups are described as interacting closely with Macassans who arrived each year with the north-west monsoon to gather trepang (sea slug) for the Chinese market.\(^8^3\) In both cases, the non-European, non-Aboriginal people arrived by sea, worked seasonally, employed Aboriginal people with relevant skills and did not engage in missionising activities. The presence of non-Aboriginal and non-white people on Minjerribah is equally significant as it points to the movement and involvement of these people in communities and industries. Among these individuals were Fernandez Gonzales of Philippines origin (already referred to) and Sam Rollands of South Sea Island origin whose role on the island and in the industry is discussed in Chapter 4.

As indicated by Walker’s study of the Myora Mission, Goodall’s analysis of the Benevolent Asylum, and Ganter’s work on land use and rights on Minjerribah, the situation on NSI was markedly different from conditions of unpaid indenture on the mainland in that Aboriginal people found paid employment at the Benevolent Asylum, and in the dugong fishing, oyster farming and mullet fishing industries. Due to their status as indispensable workers and their own understandings of government bureaucracy, Quandamooka people and their descendants retained a certain degree of power and self-management compared with Indigenous people living on most mainland missions and stations.\(^8^4\) So, in spite of having to adapt to fit into a settler idea of enterprise for profit, the Aboriginal people were able to maintain their life on Minjerribah (as well as the lives of their families) by incorporating the new laws and restrictions (and the opening of various industries) into their way of life. The dugong industry arguably provided an avenue of employment that partly ameliorated the restrictive measures of the Aboriginal Protection Act. Walker calls this ‘a measure of

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financial independence as well as … an interdependent relationship with a number of government agencies; an unprecedented position for Aboriginal people at the time.\textsuperscript{85}

The first reference to individuals involved in dugong fishing was made by Birch. On 16 January he noted in his diary: ‘Ellis with Donald[.] Tommy and the boy out after Joungan — no success — sprung the mast.’\textsuperscript{86} Although it is not always possible to provide any additional information about such individuals and their origins, the fact that Birch referred to them by name suggests they were important individuals in his daily life. Also, through paperwork produced by the employees of the various institutions located on NSI, some insight emerges into who some of these individuals were. A number of Aboriginal men worked at the Quarantine Station, the Benevolent Asylum and at the Peel Island Leprosarium, under a European overseer. For instance, Donald Blow, identified by Birch as a dugong fisherman, was a white overseer employing Aboriginal men. Blow lived on NSI with his wife in the vicinity of the Aboriginal camp. He had a boat and boat crew comprising of Aboriginal men from the camp, and he and his crew would have carried out maintenance work for the Quarantine Station. On 19 May 1864, Blow complained to the Colonial Secretary about the planned removal of the Aboriginal camp (away from white people’s residences). Blow was concerned the removal would have made it harder for him to ‘get at them’ to carry out work duties.\textsuperscript{87} Sydney Moore, the Superintendent of the Quarantine Station at Dunwich, reported the changes to the Colonial Secretary on 4 September 1865:

\begin{quote}
Donald I have moved to a camp, between the Neutral Ground the Fence round the Immigration Camp. I have arranged to give Donald and his Blacks rations, and instead of his (Donalds) receiving 27/ per week [sic] his wages for the future will be at the rate of 17/ per week [sic].\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

Blow was not happy with the new arrangements, and one month later he resigned his services to the Quarantine Station and moved ‘over to Peel Island with his effects and blackfellows [sic].’\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} Walker, “Useful and Profitable,” 138.


\textsuperscript{87} Donald Blow to the Colonial Secretary, letter Against the removal of Blacks camping ground, 19 May 1864, Quarantine Station file, NSIHMA.

\textsuperscript{88} Sydney Moore, superintendent of the quarantine station, to the Colonial Secretary, Report on Station, 4 September 1865, Quarantine Station file, NSIHMA.

\textsuperscript{89} JS Beach, Superintendent of the Quarantine Station, to AM Manning, telegraph, Reporting Donald Blow Having left Quarantine service 10 October 1865, Quarantine Station file, NSIHMA.
Similarly, Ellis was a white man residing on NSI. Perhaps his connection with these institutions was not strong because there is no account of him other than in Birch’s diary. Birch talks of him going to the mainland and bringing back brandy, tobacco and other goods. These goods would not have been as easily accessible to the Aboriginal people despite their relative freedom to move on and off the island. In another section of the diary, Birch also notes that Ellis beat ‘the boy for tumbling about his oompee after he had told him not.’ In a further diary entry, Ellis is said to have made out a Memo of Agreement with a fourth person, Sambo, for Takoora. The other two people mentioned, Tommy and ‘the boy’, are hard to place. Tommy would appear to be a white man as he went to the mainland to get tobacco for Birch, however he was never mentioned in situations which would suggest he had some power over Aboriginal people, for instance when Ellis beat ‘the boy’ or made out an agreement. It is possible, therefore, that Tommy is Tommy Nuggin, mentioned by Welsby when writing about the ‘love story of Tommy Nuggin and Sarah’ in *Memories of Amity*. ‘The boy’ referred to many times throughout the diary may be one or more young Aboriginal men. Historians have shown that Aboriginal men were commonly referred to as boys, the term stripping them of their identity and position in society. ‘The boy’ was probably a young adult as only experienced, skilled and strong men could fish for dugongs.

In deciphering the identity and ethnicity of the four people mentioned by Birch and comparing the information to other documents from the late nineteenth century, something of the complicated relations on Minjerribah is revealed. Aboriginal people were central to the work carried out on NSI, while white men played a major role in the everyday work and employment of the Aboriginal people. There were varying degrees of dependence and status which led to the different power relations. For instance Birch seemed to find apparent amusement in some of the actions performed by the Aboriginal people, taking a benign approach to supplies disappearing from his hut after visits from members of the Aboriginal camp. On the other hand, Donald and Ellis seemed to have a more professional relationship with the Aboriginal people. In fact the relationships were directly affected by the degree of reliance and collaboration.

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92 A comprehensive study of the different forms of relationships created during the early stages of Australian colonisation by Europeans can be found in Reynolds, *With the White People*. 
In later years Aboriginal workers were employed by the Benevolent Asylum without a white overseer. A group of Aboriginal men performed general maintenance: mainly the heavy and dirty jobs as well as tending to the cattle and tracking down runaway inmates of the Asylum. They were also employed in the piggery and the dairy — both managed by the Benevolent Asylum. In 1898 the Asylum proposed accommodation for the Aboriginal workers on their grounds. The women were employed as servants, maids, assistant nurses and as laundry staff, regularly taking the loads of washing to their houses at One Mile where they would have washed the bed linen in large copper pots using water from the creek.

The degree of power and self-management retained by the Quandamooka people did not eliminate the politics of race or inequalities on the ground. These politics were experienced by the Aboriginal people from first moments of contact — from Flinders preparing ‘to have given them a volley’ and continued to the banning of dugong fishing in 1969 when as will be shown, little consideration was given to the significance of the dugong to the Quandamooka people as a staple food or a source of medicine.

**Exploiting the resources: beginning a business in the Australian environment**

By the end of the 1850s, new methods of dugong fishing were introduced and more white men were brought in to work in the industry. Within less than ten years, the small groups of Aboriginal men waiting patiently for dugong in their canoes were replaced by several large crews of men (white, non-white and Aboriginal) in boats armed with harpoons. This shift to taking greater numbers of dugong without considering the resulting decrease of dugong numbers in Moreton Bay is exemplified by a conversation

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94 RCCOHP interview with Uncle Bob Anderson, 17 October 2002; ibid. interview with Estelle Bertossi, 1 April 2003.

95 RCCOHP interview with Diane Barker, 5 August 2003.
between Birch and Leftwich, a white settler on NSI, mentioned on several occasions in Birch’s diary:

Leftwich says that he saw today Joungan and turtle. Says that he is sure that he was not mistaken — plenty of them. … L. says that when he goes into this business he will take anything which the blacks catch … pay them in money and then sell them rations back — he intends to work double tides!96

This over-use of the environment is a common outcome of settlers coming to Australia in search for profit. Comparable behaviours can be traced in other industries developing in the early stages of white settlement on mainland Australia. For instance, in close proximity to Minjerribah the timber industry took hold shortly after the arrival of the first settlers in South East Queensland. The timber cutters were interested in the red cedar — nicknamed ‘red gold’.97 It was highly prized for its height; long, straight trunk; and the quality of the wood. The trunks were used as a building material throughout the colonies. In Brisbane almost all private housing and many of the public buildings used red cedar; in Sydney, Government House and Town Hall were both constructed with cedar, and Sydney’s brick houses had cedar window frames, skirting boards and other joinery; and the long, straight trunks were used in boat building. Thus, the red cedars were almost wiped out by the timber industry in South East Queensland and northern New South Wales.98

The koala also fell victim to exploitation. According to Ann Moyal in her historical biography of the koala: ‘in the later nineteenth century and well into the first two decades of the next, the gun came to play a phenomenal role in the relationship between man and the native fauna, in which the koala played a pivotal role.’99 Diggers and explorers used it as a food source; hunters, sportsmen and trappers killed it for its fur; while the timber cutters’ practice of ringbarking gum trees destroyed its habitat. Alan Marshall provides a further reason for the decimation of the koala population in his work on the extermination of Australian species by settlers. He notes: ‘Everything

with marketable fur was slaughtered in order to eke out a supplementary living on selections all over the country.100

Although the koala population at the time of European settlement is unknown, the Chief Inspector of Game in Victoria, Frederick Lewis, provided some statistics concerning the state of the koala. Lewis reported in 1934 that despite ‘Native Bears’ being exceedingly common ‘over almost the whole of the Colony in the 1880s, they had been brought to near extinction’ by 1934, when he estimates a total of 500–1,000 koalas remaining in Victoria.101 In Queensland, koalas were under government legislation but, as historian Norma Howlett states: ‘it had been worded to assist the fur trapper and protect grazing and agricultural interests’, with ‘open season’ declared in 1915, 1917 and 1919.102

Like the dugong, all of its close relatives: the West Indian manatee (Trichechus manatus), the Amazonian manatee (Trichechus inunguis) and Steller’s sea cow (Hydrodamalis stelleri), suffered a similar fate of exploitation for meat, skin, bones and oil. Steller’s sea cow was hunted to extinction only twenty-seven years after its discovery in 1741. It was the largest member of the Sirenia order, growing over seven metres in length and weighing up to 4,000 kilograms. Steller’s sea cow was first discovered by Europeans when Captain Vitus Bering and his crew were shipwrecked on an island in the Bering Sea off the coast of Kamchatka, Russia. Although Bering did not survive, German-born naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller and half the crew managed to rebuild the ship and return home a year later. They survived on a diet of sea cow. Upon their return to Kamchatka the news of the qualities of the sea cow meat spread quickly through the sailing community. The sailors were predominantly fur hunters and they would travel to the Komandorskiye Islands, the habitat of the sea cow, chasing otters and feasting on sea cows. According to Stejneger, the estimated population of sea cows in the mid-eighteenth century was 1,500.103 As noted by Anderson: ‘Over the next


101 Moyal, Koala, 122.


25 years, sea cow meat was a staple for fur hunters, and the islands became both a winter base and a larder for stocking ships heading farther. Steller’s sea cow was reportedly exterminated by 1768.

The dugong population in Moreton Bay from the early dugong fishing period is unknown. We have, however, Welsby’s account of the size of a dugong herd numbering eighty adult male individuals and a herd stretching for 300 yards. The numbers of dugongs were presumably large enough to sustain the infant dugong industry and raise enough revenue for the entrepreneurs to continue with the enterprise. However, the dugong population was almost immediately threatened by the arrival of white settlers.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the history of Minjerribah in the pre- and early-contact periods. By looking at the early encounters and exchanges between Europeans and Aboriginal people — during the infrastructure-building convict era: 1825–1839, and the opening of NSI to free settlers: 1839 onwards — I have shown the complex nature of establishing and maintaining complicated relations between unequal parties in a colonial setting. Specifically, these relations were characterised by both domination and negotiation, and often oscillated between violence and amity. Through participation in the dugong industry Aboriginal people retained a fragment of control over their lives and their culture. Not least, this was because of the essential role that Aboriginal people played in the European colonisation of NSI, given that the sustainability of the settlement was dependent on Aboriginal knowledge and skill.

The entrance of Europeans into the lives of the Quandamooka people resulted in a shift between traditional practices and European ways. European dugong fishermen and Aboriginal people forged an unequal yet interdependent relationship within the industry. As the next chapter illustrates, for individual settlers who followed (mainly doctors and businessmen), this relationship secured wealth and recognition as they introduced dugong oil to international markets. Given the relatively small scale of the

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104 Ibid.

industry, due to a direct dependency on (dwindling) dugong numbers, we can identify these white individuals, trace their story as they ‘discovered’ the healing properties of dugong oil, promoted and sold the oil, and then disappeared from accounts of the industry.
Chapter 3

Multiple identity: using dugong oil on Minjerrribah and mainland Australia

Early accounts of dugong oil

Oral history suggests that dugong was a staple food for the Quandamooka people for thousands of years. Throughout this time, dugong fishing would have been perfected as the knowledge was passed down through generations. Along with the fishing techniques, other aspects of the catch were doubtless shaped and evolved, such as the processing of the animal and the customs associated with it. This chapter focuses on the Aboriginal, and later European, uses of dugong oil and, utilising a shared history framework, sets out to show where and how these histories overlap.

As remembered by the Quandamooka people today, a successful catch would be shared among the community with all parts of the dugong being used. The meat was a staple food, while the skin and bones were used as utensils and other everyday objects. In Stradbroke Dreamtime Oodgeroo Noonuccal remembers her mother using the intestine — grumpii — of the dugong as sausage skin.¹ Dennis Moreton describes how the sausages were made: ‘Mum used to make sausage out of the running guts. Put the stake up and clean all the shit out, all the goona. Then she’d … get all the fine meat, ham or something, stuff it in and she’d make like sausage, tie it at both ends then boil it.’²

Noonuccal also mentions the customs associated with a dugong catch. It was taboo for women to see a dugong, thus after a successful catch the men would bring the dugong onto the beach and cut it up before the women were allowed to take the

¹ Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Stradbroke Dreamtime (Pymble: Angus & Robertson, 1992), 55.
² RCCOHP, interview with Dennis Moreton, 15 March 2005.
individual pieces for further processing. In a 2003 interview, Grace Baird, born 1950, remembers this taboo from when she was young: ‘On no … we weren’t allowed, girls weren’t allowed, I never ever seen how they cut them or cut them up because we weren’t allowed near them.’\(^3\) Gavin Costelloe, Sharon Costelloe and Dennis Moreton mention that women and children were never present when a dugong was being butchered.\(^4\) Aileen Moreton-Robinson remembers never seeing a dugong:

[W]e weren’t allowed anywhere near the dugong. Like I mean so I never knew what a dugong looked like but I knew what it was to eat because the kids and the women had to stay away … but I knew what it was like to taste, it was like beef you know but I didn’t know what it looked like because we weren’t allowed to go there.\(^5\)

The oil, like the meat, was a common article, which was shared among the community. It was taken regularly to improve general health, or specifically for colds, aches and pains, and other more severe complaints. Quandamooka people speak about taking the oil orally, as well as having it rubbed into their chest as children. Bruce Borey explained the variations of the oil in a 2003 interview:

There’re a couple of oils you get out of them. One’s for drinking ah it’s internal and the other one’s for rubbing on like if you got arthritis and stuff like that (and other) different ailments. They tell me that the one that you drink is you know very good, it helps your digestive system and that. … And the other one was used for rubbing like in liniment. They used to rub it into the skin. I remember when I was a kid, we used to always get rubbed with it if we had any sort of ailments, they’d rub you with this oil. Or, sometimes they’d give it to you to take, the other stuff that was — it (oil) come from two different parts of the animal, the oils. And so one is very thin and easy to swallow and the other one’s yeah, it’s good for rubbing in. It’s a thick oil, very, very strong I guess. If you were to drink it, it’s very strong.\(^6\)

As explained by Grace Baird dugong oil was used to ‘rub you down. It was good for everything. People used to even drink it, have a teaspoon of it. It kept them healthy, no colds.’\(^7\) Lesley Crouch remembers dugong oil as a pleasant substitute to castor oil:

\(^3\) RCCOHP, interview with Grace Baird, 12 April 2005.


\(^5\) RCCOHP, interview with Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 6 March 2005.

\(^6\) RCCOHP interview with Bruce Borey, 26 September 2003.

\(^7\) RCCOHP interview with Grace Baird, 12 April 2005.
on[e] a month on a Saturday, you’re always given castor oil. And even sometimes, I didn’t mind having it, I always thought if they got a bit of dugong oil, they’d give us that when they had it and I always thought that tasted better. It had a better taste than that castor oil. It didn’t repeat on you, you know it was not very often that we got it.\(^8\)

In Aunty Charmaine Abberdan’s case, the oil was in fact a lifesaver. She was born in 1950 in Brisbane, into the Costelloe family, and moved to the island as a little girl. She was diagnosed with meningitis as a baby and was sent home to die. Her mother nurtured her with dugong oil — obtained from Aunty Vera Perry:

[They used to rub me morning and night with the stuff. All the time, and then I came good. The doctors couldn’t believe it when they found out that I was still alive. They were amazed … they thought that I should have died and it was the dugong oil that saved me.\(^9\)]

Aunty Charmaine has been using dugong oil all her life for various complaints. She would also use dugong oil on children, rubbing it on them when they were sick, sometimes mixing it with Vicks Vaporub, a brand of over-the-counter medicine used primarily to ease cold and flu symptoms, or applying the heated dugong oil on its own.

The connection to the dugong has clearly developed over a long time (over 4,000 years), making dugong oil a significant product for Aboriginal people. Generations of knowledge and a connection to the animal are embodied in a dugong catch, with specific ceremonies and customs still adhered to in the present day. Thus the oil was an Indigenous product used by generations of Aboriginal people living on Minjerribah.

When objects cross over from Indigenous origins into settler culture, they can be attributed with identities that belie their history. Indigenous objects of use to Western incomers often may travel as if seamlessly between producers and users, appearing to transcend spatial and often racial divides, and in the process blurring their identity and ownership. Although emerging locally, then, an object with more than one identity in the contact zone can tell us about relations between Indigenous and incoming populations; individuals in the colonial setting; as well as about the local and global connections of any one place. Dugong oil, used ‘locally’ as a traditional medicine throughout Australia, offers a fascinating window into twentieth century Australian ideas about Indigenous workers, settler culture, resources, and the politics of

\(^8\) RCCOHP interview with Lesley Crouch, 20 October 2003.

\(^9\) RCCOHP interview with Charmaine Abberdan, 21 May 2003.
ownership, power and the racial divide. It also brings to the fore the prior Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, which were sidelined within histories of colonisation.

**Under the Aboriginal Protection Act (1897)**

From the late 1930s, the Moreton Bay dugong industry ceased operation, however a small number of Aboriginal men living on Minjerribah continued to fish for dugongs, sustaining the use of dugong oil by the Quandamooka people. After a number of smaller dugong fishing stations closed in Hervey Bay, Wide Bay and Tin Can Bay, European and non-Aboriginal consumers were forced to find alternative sources of dugong oil. They found a suitable source in the Torres Strait Islands (TSI).\(^{10}\) There, a group of Torres Strait Islander men predominantly from Boigu Island fished for dugongs under the eye of the Director of Native Affairs (DNA) in office on Thursday Island, who then distributed the oil to missions, companies and individuals throughout Australia.

Dugong oil was used by several Queensland missions to boost the immunity of the Aboriginal populations forced to live there. The main Mission to administer dugong oil to its Aboriginal inmates was Cherbourg, located 250 km northwest from Moreton Bay. ‘The quantity of Dugong Oil issued monthly at this Settlement is three (3) gallons and the dose given to each native is one (1) tablespoon full four times per month.’\(^{11}\) There, nurses would give children living in the dormitories a ‘spoonful’ of dugong oil once a week, while distributing dugong oil to Aboriginal families living on the Mission grounds. If the children were sick, they would get a spoonful each day as described later in this chapter.

The process of obtaining the oil (for all missions) was highly bureaucratised. The Acting Superintendent would send a letter to the DNA asking for an extra shipment and explaining the reasons. The DNA would then reply to the Acting Superintendent, dictating the amount of oil to be sent. The shipment would then be dispatched from the

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\(^{10}\) Dugong fishing in other regions, such as Hervey Bay, Wide Bay, Tin Can Bay and the Torres Strait Islands will be discussed in Chapter 5.

\(^{11}\) Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “Superintendent to the DNA, Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement, 9 September 1941,” QSA, Brisbane.
store on Thursday Island. The oil was transported by boat to the mainland and then by either train or coach (up to 2,000 km).

Although Cherbourg was not the only mission to administer dugong oil, it was the closest to Moreton Bay, so several Cherbourg families were connected with families on Minjerribah. For example, Grace Baird (Minjerribah) mentions Aunty Therlys (Minjerribah) who married Billy Saunders (Cherbourg). It is possible that Aboriginal people at Cherbourg knew about, or experienced, dugong oil from their Minjerribah relatives. The connections between Aboriginal people on and off missions were also strong and ongoing. Historians, such as Blake, Brock and Choo, reveal these lasting connections in various missions around Australia. In the case of how Minjerribah was connected to different missions we can rely on oral histories that point to a sharing of knowledge about dugong extending to the mainland.

Estelle Bertossi was born at Cherbourg in 1929. Three years later, a group of men from Minjerribah visited, and Estelle’s mother, Katie Ross, married one them and they moved to Dunwich. That was not the only interaction between Minjerribah and Cherbourg for Estelle: ‘a couple of times we had to go back there [Cherbourg], with the government. But then we came back again to Dunwich, as I said, my stepfather was a Stradbroke Island man.’

Estelle’s mother came to Cherbourg from Brisbane before Estelle was born. After moving to Minjerribah and then back to Cherbourg, they moved again, to a dairy farm near Nambour on the Sunshine Coast. During this time Estelle met local people from those areas, as well as people who had moved or been moved to those areas:

[W]hen we were on Cherbourg Mission where I was born — my mother was born there — they would bring people in from, say, Cooktown or the north. You know, they were just so different, they had their different culture and their corroborees were different, you know. They used to call them Northern Murris, you know. It was different. Cherbourg was more urbanised, you know, the Mission outside of Murgon.

12 RCCOHP interview with Grace Baird, 12 April 2005.
13 Brock, Outback Ghettos; Blake, A Dumping Ground; Choo, Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley.
14 RCCOHP interview with Estelle Bertossi, 1 April 2003.
15 Ibid.
Estelle’s experience confirms the wide-ranging movement of Aboriginal people from around Queensland. The different cultures continued mixing and learning from each other, sharing their corroborees and their experiences both from their own Country and from Country they had passed through.

Gavin Costello’s grandfather, Alec Landers, would have been one of the many people who brought their stories with them from Country and shared them with the new community they were living in:

I know he had a bit of song and dance, you know, that he used to do, that he probably brought down from you know his Country up near Rockhampton, there; and that was the ‘honey bee’ dance. I think, ‘Mayee woomba’ I think is the name of the dance and ah the one about the horses, the ‘yarraman’. He brought them because they used to tell me that he used to do a lot of dancing at Cherbourg, too, so when he come over here I think he brought a lot of that stuff over here too and they danced it.16

Like Estelle Bertossi, Gavin Costello’s family is spread throughout a large area, connecting and mixing different cultures:

my grandmother (grandmother’s mother — granny Landers), she lived in the old Mission out at Woodford. She was only a little girl then and then they took her to Cherbourg when it was called Barambah … and that’s where she met my grandfather Alec Landers … through speaking to a lot of mob at Cherbourg, you know, people all around the place, I can link up with all my cousins, you know. The Landers mob, you know, that’s our people there and this and this and this so I’m lucky that way because I got family on the mainland and Cherbourg and all over you know.17

Mary Martin’s family ties exemplify the mobility between Country and cultures throughout Queensland as well. Her mother was born in Springsure (central Queensland), but her grandmother was born in the Mitchell area. The family moved to Cherbourg shortly after Martin’s mother was born. Martin’s family had ties throughout the various Queensland missions. Her mother’s uncle Adrian was taken with his family to Woorabinda from Springsure. So there was a direct connection between Minjerribah, Cherbourg and Woorabinda. People would travel back and forth for family visits and work. Dennis Moreton remembers travelling to Cherbourg as a child to visit his Aunty Sarah, while Aileen Moreton-Robinson would visit her grandmother’s relatives, Aunty


17 Ibid.
Eileen Brown and Aunty Nellie. 18 Similarly, Cynthia Flucker remembers being taken to the Cherbourg show by her grandparents. 19 Sharon Costelloe remembers the move of several families and individuals from Cherbourg to Minjerribah in the 1940s to help with the shift of houses from Myora to One Mile:

I’m going back before I was born, you know, when the move — that’s when my mother come over here with her family from Cherbourg — there was going to be a shift from Myora, at that time, and a lot of people … um, were asked would they like to volunteer for work service to come from Cherbourg at that time and come down to Stradbroke to help with this shift, because it was getting quite big and a lot of children needed to come to school — there were no buses or anything in them days, so, they had to sort of move in closer … from Myora Mission and move in closer … and um, closer to the creek … to the water and to the school and they settled at One Mile. At that time, grandfather Landers had been one of the volunteers for his family to come down, for the work on Myora Mission, to help pull down the huts and rebuild and help families do this sort of thing. Back in them days, that’s when my mother was only young and they spent several years here. 20

The connections between the missions and other areas of Queensland are an important factor when considering the different measures of control and management of the various areas. Mobility is evident throughout the continent, but in addition, Minjerribah is distinct in being less regulated allowing for greater interactions and transfer of knowledge both amongst Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal and white people. The Aboriginal Protection Act was carried out on NSI through the Mission Manager, just like on other missions; however, there were fewer restrictions than at Cherbourg. The differences in how the authorities managed Aboriginal people on Minjerribah and at Cherbourg Mission can be compared using Walker’s work on the Myora Mission and Blake’s monograph on Cherbourg. 21 There is a clear distinction between the two missions in the oral history. Donna Ruska and Aileen Moreton-Robinson mention the need to obtain permits before being allowed to travel from Minjerribah to Cherbourg. Aunty Margaret Iselin, a Quandamooka woman, remembers being forced to speak English at Myora Mission:

18 RCCOHP interview with Dennis Moreton, 14 March 2005; ibid. interview with Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 6 March 2005.
19 RCCOHP interview with Cynthia Flucker, 11 April 2005.
20 RCCOHP interview with Sharon Costello, 10 April 2003.
21 Blake, A Dumping Ground; Walker, “Useful and Profitable.”
The language was stopped, so we weren’t allowed to speak that. The ruling was that we had to learn English, and that was the main thing there on the Mission … away from there the grannies spoke the language, but not in front of the Superintendent or the teacher.\(^\text{22}\)

As a consequence the language was almost lost, and although efforts have been undertaken to ‘get the language back’, the result is a combination of the three languages spoken in the area: Noogi, Noonuccal and Goombul, so it is not ‘the true Stradbroke Island language’.\(^\text{23}\)

At the same time, however, when asked about the differences between the two missions, Estelle Bertossi remembers Myora Mission as ‘a much more freer place’, she puts emphasis on the way children grew up on the island:

\[\text{[B]ecause our schools have integrated, everybody grew up together. There was no problem, well, I didn’t think so anyway. But, living elsewhere, we didn’t get to know the white children very much. … On Cherbourg and Woorabinda, and on Palm Island would have been the same, Aboriginal missions would have been the same. This is why I think this is such a wonderful place.}\(^\text{24}\)

As a result the racial attitudes on Minjerribah seemed to be less evident for a number of people who grew up on the island. After the Myora Mission School closed in 1941, the children from Myora attended Dunwich State School. From both the oral histories and the school’s official enrolment register it is clear that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children attended the school. Aunty Audrey Borey has fond memories of those times, ‘I really liked my school days because we all mixed together too. One good thing, you know, the whites and the blacks, we all mixed. There was no, well I couldn’t see any discrimination anyway in those days.’\(^\text{25}\)

Aunty Rose Borey confirms the relatively small degree of racism faced by children attending the state school and the overall pleasant situation on the island in the mid-twentieth century,

\[\text{It was a good community in those days, because there was no racial tension like there has been over the past few years. Nobody thought about the colour of people’s skin. All the kids went to school together, and we all went to the}\]

\(^{22}\) RCCOHP interview with Margaret Iselin, 8 August 2002.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) RCCOHP interview with Estelle Bertossi, 1 April 2003.

\(^{25}\) RCCOHP interview with Audrey Emma Borey, 13 February 2005.
sports, and even though the mining company staff socialised by themselves, all the rest of the people mixed up and went to dances to raise money for different things. Different clubs would put on these Cabarets and just everybody just all mixed up.26

Although Audrey and Rose Borey’s accounts of their childhood on Minjerribah are positive, and neither of them mentions experiencing racism, it was however present. It was present in the establishment and operation of the Myora Mission; in the employment and treatment of Aboriginal people on Minjerribah (as noted in Chapter 2); and in the communications between individuals on NSI and the Chief Protector(s) of Aborigines: Walter Roth and John William Bleakley. Unsurprisingly, not everyone’s memories are as positive as Aunty Rose’s and Aunty Audrey’s. Diane Barker remembers the school being the only place where ‘black–white’ issues would surface, with every other aspect of life on the island being fine — she speaks of the island as a protected place. These issues, Barker presumes, were there because the teachers were not prepared for a mixed classroom.27

Overall, however, the Aboriginal people on Minjerribah had greater freedoms than many other Indigenous people of the time. They could interact with other members of the community; to a degree they controlled who they met at school and in the workplace; they had greater choice in what they ate — a combination of provisions, shop-bought produce and locally sourced food such as dugong meat; they could control how they dressed — some clothes were provided by the governments, but the men working at the Benevolent Asylum were paid in cash, so they could buy clothes; and they could access various medicines.

The differing management of Aboriginal people on Minjerribah and at Cherbourg can be seen as well in the administration of medical care. Minjerribah and Myora Mission were populated both by the traditional owners of the land and by people who had either married into the community, been moved there or come by their own accord. There were strong links to Country, a depth of knowledge of Country and expertise in how to manage the land. Cherbourg, however, was an artificially created place with Aboriginal people being moved from all over Queensland onto the Mission and forced to live in new multi-cultural groups and communities. It was therefore harder for people

26 RCCOHP interview with Rose Borey, 19 November 2002.
27 RCCOHP interview with Diane Barker, 5 August 2003.
on Cherbourg to continue using traditional medicines because they often did not have access to the same flora and fauna as in their Country and the administration of medicines was controlled by white authorities.

While dugong oil was administered at Cherbourg, Woorabinda, Yarrabah, Palm Island and Doomadgee missions, the traditional use of dugong oil on Minjerribah (as shown in the previous section) continued. This fact indicates a degree of difference but also connection between different missions, given the transfer of knowledge between them, and the impact the administration of dugong oil had on Indigenous people living in them. Making comparisons between Minjerribah, Cherbourg and Woorabinda helps to show how dugong oil was both a traditional Aboriginal medicine and a ‘product’ appropriated by white authorities.

For example, Cherbourg, Woorabinda, Yarrabah, Palm Island and Doomadgee had to officially request dugong oil from the DNA (Thursday Island). As indicated by correspondence between the Director and individual missions in 1941, Cherbourg was the greatest consumer of dugong oil (standing order of 16 gallons a month) with Palm Island needing half that, and Woorabinda only 4 gallons a month.28 There is little correspondence with Doomadgee and Yarrabah, however, and only Cherbourg and Woorabinda provide an insight into how the oil was restricted, administered and used.

Dugong oil was given to Aboriginal people on Cherbourg and Woorabinda for cooking. Specifically at Woorabinda, the Matron reported the way in which dugong oil was used at the Mission among families:

Some mothers use dugong oil in cooking when children will not take it any other way in cakes instead of butter and to fry scones. … Roughly 4 gallons a month, more in winter than summer. The children do not like the oiliness especially in hot weeks.29

In a letter from the Woorabinda Superintendent forwarding the information from the Matron to the DNA, the Superintendent adds that approximately 50 children from the dormitories and 50 ‘camp children’ receive the oil.30 The medicine was detested by the
Aboriginal children living in the dormitories and so the nurses would bake bread using
the oil when other methods of forcing the oil onto the children failed. The elderly, like
the children, would often prefer to take dugong oil either baked or fried. The
Superintendent of Cherbourg Mission explained this in a letter to the DNA: ‘The matter
has been referred to Doctor Underwood who states that many of the natives cannot take
the oil in its raw state, and when given by the spoon vomiting results, but that if used in
cooking beneficial results will be obtained.’

The term ‘by the spoon’ recurs in letters between Mission Superintendents; the
DNA, the Matron and the Doctor. The recurring use of this expression strengthens the
idea of dugong oil as a Western medicine. Although the oil was most likely taken ‘by
the spoon’ on Minjerribah, the Quandamooka people do not mention ‘spoonful’ in their
oral histories. This suggests that the longstanding tradition of dugong oil as a local
medicine was not overcome by the bureaucratisation of the oil, as on the other
missions. On Minjerribah there was no need to report or document oil use, so taking the
oil remained a traditional practice apparently without constraints or guidelines. But at
the other missions, the oil was a Western medicine and as such it had to be inventoried.

As described by Blake, conditions at Cherbourg Mission were harsh and
appalling. Children were kept separate from their families and often tried escaping. If
and when they were caught they received severe consequences. The oil became a part
of the controlling regime. Although an Aboriginal product, it had been appropriated,
was controlled by white authorities and was administered by white hands — in the form
of the nurse. It is likely that the Aboriginal people on Cherbourg and Woorabinda knew
about the origins of dugong oil through their family ties and connections to
Minjerribah, even though the product had been seemingly stripped of its Aboriginal
identity by European entrepreneurs and authorities.

It is worth remembering also that the use of traditional medications on missions
was not an anomaly. Folk medicines based on traditional recipes were used long before
the rise of scientific medicine, when little was known about what caused diseases and
how to cure them: bloodletting and purging being among the two most popular cures. It
is perhaps not surprising that early missionaries turned to traditional medicines in

31 Item ID 505771, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 December 1940–13
January 1942, “Superintendent, Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement to the DNA, Brisbane, 29 September
1941,” QSA, Brisbane.

32 Blake, A Dumping Ground.
colonial settings. As Norman Etherington argues in his study of missionaries, missionaries were involved in caring for bodies and minds, European doctors were sent out as medical missionaries ‘with the double charge of ministering to sick missionaries and attracting converts.’

33 Probably the most famous medical missionary, David Livingstone, exemplified this reliance on traditional medicines despite being trained in the medical profession during his time in Africa in the mid-1800s, because when he fell ill, Livingstone did not hesitate to take medicines recommended by Africans with local knowledge. He trusted that the local medicines would provide adequate healthcare and he even went as far as stating that ‘the people he encountered in Central Africa enjoyed generally better health than the urban masses he had known in Britain.’

34 This process of exchange was two-way. Although Etherington concentrates primarily on medical missionaries, he points out a crucial effect that the introduction of Western medicine had upon traditional medical practices:

People from diverse cultural backgrounds all over the Empire demonstrated that medicine was not part of a take-it-or-leave it Western cultural package. Like present-day Europeans and North Americans, Pacific Islanders, Africans, and Asians could mix ‘scientific’ medicine with alternative therapies, faith-healing, charms, and snake oil.

35 This mixing is exactly what happened in relation to dugong oil. With the introduction of Western medicines and their industrialisation, readily available medicines would be mixed with traditional remedies, such as the combination of Vicks Vaporub and dugong oil as described by Aunty Charmaine. Introduced medicines, like other aspects of colonialism, could be interwoven into traditional practices, and such these combined practices were not always forcibly brought about but could evolve in everyday ways.

36 The entwining of traditional and Western medicine is a relatively common effect noted in other histories of colonisation. For instance, in Re-constructing Indian Medicine, Poonam Bala considers the role of higher caste in managing the relationship


35 “Education and Medicine,” 280.

36 RCCOHP interview with Charmaine Abberdan, 21 May 2003.
between traditional (Ayurveda) and Western medical practices in India. Although the colonial relationship between Great Britain and India differs from that in Australia, the forging of traditional and Western medicine can be said to follow a similar path; the two disparate forms of medicine became intertwined.

Given comparisons have been made between the South African and Australian colonies, as two white Dominions, another ready comparison might be found in the position of traditional medicine in colonial South Africa. In his study of the role and function of medicine and medical practice in South Africa, Russel Viljoen tracks this history over 300 years. His analysis builds on observations made while researching pre-colonial Khoikhoi society:

Medicine was not brought to the Cape by Europeans as often implied by scholars of medical history, but was rooted in Khoikhoi and other African societies centuries before … settlers had set foot on South African soil. The concept of medicine as practiced in Khoikhoi society was in itself not something foreign nor exotic, but was deeply embedded in their society for centuries.

Thus traditional medicinal practices of the Khoikhoi people were largely adapted into Western medicine, and their knowledge of herbal medicines contributed to the growth of medicine in South Africa. Ultimately, however, this contribution was never acknowledged by the colonists, a situation as I show that was mirrored in the way dugong oil was taken up as a medicine in Australia.

New Zealand provides another interesting comparison. Like the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, the Maori had their own medical procedures and


products developed and tested long before the arrival of settlers. An innovative approach to the history of colonial medical practice is presented by Joanna Bishop in her study of the use of plants by domestic healers, herbalists and doctors in New Zealand. Her findings echo my findings concerning how dugong oil was used and by whom: as a traditional medicine for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and a new mainstream medicine for the settler society and further afield. Along with a recognition of the fluidity and multi-layered nature of the exchange of knowledge and medicine in colonial settings, Bishop points to the problematic categorisation of medicine and medical practitioners, the early colonial culture, and the uneven control of medical products on the one hand and the high status of individual practitioners on the other. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 I investigate parallel effects in the Queensland and NSI contexts and their significance for dugong oil. The medical product was ‘translated’ from traditional to innovative occupying both a heterodox and an unorthodox position depending on who was using the product and where.

Providing further confirmation that the use of medicines and healing methods were strongly embedded in Indigenous societies prior to European arrival, the use of natural healing products — both plant and animal — was witnessed by Europeans when they first began observing Aboriginal people and their customs in early twentieth century studies of traditional societies on the mainland. While the deteriorative nature of medicines makes archaeological evidence scarce, bone excavations in the Murray River region, for example, have shown that healing methods such as casts and slings were used in the treatment of fractures.

A vital source of information on the traditional uses of medicines before European arrival is in oral histories and many have been recorded as a part of the


41 Joanna Bishop, “The Role of Medicinal Plants in New Zealand’s Settler Medical Culture, 1850s–1920s” (PhD diss., University of Waikato, 2014).

42 Walter Edmund Roth comments on different types of medical treatments from sorcery such as the Death Bone to the use of plants and clay as medicines in Walter Edmund Roth, The Queensland Aborigines, Facsim. ed. (Sydney: Hesperian Press, 1984).

RCCOHP.\textsuperscript{44} A detailed insight into Aboriginal health and management written by Gordon Briscoe uses official documents to map forty years of health care provided by the state to Aboriginal people (1900 to 1940) in Western Australia and Queensland, with an emphasis on the role of Aboriginal Protectors, missions and medical institutions (such as hospitals and clinics).\textsuperscript{45} Briscoe concentrates on health care administration and the major health problems of the time (venereal disease, leprosy, tuberculosis, pneumonia), but does not focus on whether the treatments or remedies were Western or traditional.

Briscoe cites several observations made by Aboriginal Protectors Walter E Roth and Archibald Meston in Roth’s 1899 Report as the Northern Protector. Roth notes that local remedies of Western medicine were used by both Protectors and police, while Aboriginal people resorted to sorcery and witchcraft: ‘Roth recognised that the power of Aboriginal belief in sorcery — “superstition” — had ramifications for the effectiveness of Western medicine in healing diseased Aborigines.’\textsuperscript{46} The use of dugong oil, then, as a traditional healing practice was embedded in Indigenous society. Such practices are not deleted with the arrival of Western knowledge and the interventions of settlers and later Aborigines’ Board and Department of Native Affairs. I have sought to show that the whitening effect did not mean the product lost its Indigenous connections. Rather they came to accommodate the incoming practices and in some places like Minjerribah without losing a sense of tradition and ownership.

Thus the history of dugong oil is complex, mostly seen as ‘Aboriginal’ by the Quandamooka people and as ‘European’ by white consumers. For the purpose of this study, my argument is that we need to interpret the oil as having a dual identity and a connected history, and thus having a divided ‘ownership’ even though Aboriginal people’s prior ownership (through their long-standing uses of the oil), like that of the land itself, was rarely acknowledged. Used by the Quandamooka people (as a remedy passed down through generations), by white Australians (as a ‘white medicine’ to ease the pain of arthritis and scar tissue) and distributed to Aboriginal people living on

\textsuperscript{44} RCCOHP 2001–2007.


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 225–26; See also Andy; Knight Barr, Terry; Andrews, Milton; Alexander, Valerie, Traditional Bush Medicines: An Aboriginal Pharmacopoeia (Richmond: Greenhouse Publications, 1988); Tim Low, Bush Medicine: A Pharmacopoeia of Natural Remedies (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1990).
missions by the local authorities (to improve general health), dugong oil occupies an intricate position inside the global medicine cabinet. The disparate positions attributed to the oil signify an unstable foothold over appropriated products. Although white settlers adopted dugong oil as their own, it remained on the periphery of Western medicine, an unorthodox medicine sought by some who encountered its remarkable properties, yet unheard of by so many.

**European uses in the twentieth century**

With the opening up of the penal settlement in Moreton Bay to free settlers in 1842, an influx of white Europeans meant more services and resources were needed to sustain the growing population. Along with infrastructure and provisions, medicines were highly sought after. As described by physicians and newspapers at the time, cod liver oil was a popular but distasteful medicine, so was only a matter of time before settlers would come to regard dugong oil as a possible substitute.

The first European to procure dugong oil on a significant scale was Dr William Hobbs. Hobbs promoted the medicine via his private practice and through a public lecture — *Elaiopathy, the Administration of the Oil of the Dugong, Halicore Australis, as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease*, published in 1857.47 The lecture, reprinted in numerous newspapers, positioned dugong oil as superior to cod liver oil (see the following chapter for more detail).48 Although he did talk about other Indigenous peoples within the Empire, such as the Guachoes in the Pampas of South America and the inhabitants of Terra-del-Fuego, and their use of oil and fat as a medicine, Hobbs did not refer to the Aboriginal people’s use of dugong oil on NSI. And so he made the product his ‘invention’ and his ‘discovery’, a classic effect of colonisation as it was reported back to the empire.

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47 William Hobbs, *Elaiopathy, the Administration of the Oil of the Dugong, Halicore Australis, as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease: A Lecture* (Melbourne: Fairfax, 1857).

In Hobbs’ lecture, dugong oil was promoted to the Australian public as a remedy for almost every ailment. And although used mostly as a rub or liquid for respiratory diseases, it found a market among arthritis sufferers. However, little documentation exists of how dugong oil was used among the white Australian population in the first half of the twentieth century. Its European use almost seems to have been deliberately forgotten.\(^49\) On the other hand, more practical explanations for dugong oil’s relative disappearance from the record may be found in the reduced numbers of dugongs that likely slowed oil production — thanks to their increased exploitation; or perhaps the negative reputation that the oil experienced when it was revealed that producers had been diluting it with shark liver oil in the late nineteenth century.\(^50\) However, towards the middle of the twentieth century dugong oil became sought after again, this time by arthritis sufferers and as a rub for scar tissue by World War veterans. Individuals seeking dugong oil from the DNA frequently stated that their local chemist no longer had any supplies or they heard of someone successfully healing their complaints with dugong oil. The oil was, then, a talked-about remedy popular among specific consumer groups who knew where to turn to obtain the product. This suggests a greater interaction between Europeans and Aboriginal communities and the transfer of knowledge. This transfer of knowledge is the case with Donald Doyle of Charters Towers in Queensland and his appeal to the DNA on Thursday Island for dugong oil:

I have had a badly ‘Broken Leg’, and the ‘joints’ are fairly stiff. A similar case to mine responded to dugong oil, […] the Dr. wanted to amputate his leg, but to-day, it is as good as the day he was born. So, I will be pleased if you will supply me with the same.\(^51\)

Other appeals to the DNA for dugong oil came from Mrs Gilbert in 1952 from Violet Town, Victoria, whose son was a tuberculosis suspect; from the Lambert sisters in 1955 from Brisbane, Queensland, whose mother was suffering from severe attacks of rheumatism; from Mrs Pearce in 1966 from Cairns, Queensland, whose husband had a

\(^49\) We cannot be sure that dugong oil was not being used: home remedies were still very popular. An in depth oral history could provide some clues about the use of dugong oil at this time, however, there is no written evidence of such use.

\(^50\) Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Whaling’.”

\(^51\) Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “Donald Doyle, Charters Towers to Superintendent of Native Affairs, Brisbane, 30 June 1955,” QSA, Brisbane. Unlike other individuals, Doyle states he can obtain refined dugong oil from the chemist; however he would prefer pure dugong oil.
mild stroke and wanted to use dugong oil for massaging; and from Mr Kinnon in 1975 from Aspley, Queensland, to massage his back to relieve war injuries.52

Apart from individuals, companies were also searching for new sources of dugong oil, after they lost their local suppliers. The first company to turn to the DNA was Arthur Vale and Co, Pty. Ltd (Oil Chemists and Merchants based in Brisbane). Vale telephoned the Deputy Director of Native Affairs (DDNA), Brisbane, in 1949 asking for 16 gallons of dugong oil. He stated that he had had dealings with the Department in the past; had traded in the commodity on previous occasions; and he specified that the oil would be used for medicinal purposes. Although the call was not documented, the DDNA forwarded this information to the DNA (Thursday Island) on 14 March 1949. Three days later Vale sent a telegram to the Department of Native Affairs, asking if they would ‘kindly purchase on our behalf 23 gallons at 10/- per gallon f.o.b. Thursday Island.’ 53 There is no documented reply to the inquiry, nor is there any evidence of previous correspondence between the Department and Vale, as he stated on the telephone had taken place. At the time dugong oil supplies from Thursday Island were being sent to missions and it is possible that supplies were running low due to the unpredictable nature of dugong fishing.

A well-known and successful company dealing with dugong oil was Queensland Pastoral Supplies Ltd. (QPS). In the 1930s QPS advertised itself as:

[O]ne of the chief distributors of Queensland-made goods — any hardware or grocery lines made in Queensland will be found in their warehouse. They manufacture actually many lines — including barb wire, sheep and cattle lick, fencing posts, troughing, tanks, and all rain water goods, besides bottling and canning motor oils, Dugong oil, methylated spirits, and many grocery lines.54

In their advertisement, QPS describes the dugong and how dugong oil can be used, claiming it has lasting benefits for a consumptive, is useful for all lung and chest complaints, and can help serious burns. As QPS ran low in their supplies, the Managing Director, AS Huybers, turned to the DDNA (Brisbane) and urgently inquired about a

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52 Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “DDNA to Protector of Islanders, Thursday Island, 23 October 1941,” QSA, Brisbane.

53 Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “DDNA, Brisbane to DNA, Thursday Island, 14 March 1949,” QSA, Brisbane; ibid. “Arthur Vale and Co. Pty. Ltd. to Department of Native Affairs, Brisbane, 17 March 1949.”

54 “Queensland Pastoral Supplies, Ltd,” Brisbane Courier, 17 December 1931, 14.
possible supply of the oil from ‘any of your Islands Settlements … we could take all that is offering.’\textsuperscript{55} Although a reply to this letter has not survived, so we do not know whether QPS managed to obtain a new supply of oil, we do know that the DNA continued to refer dugong oil consumers to the QPS in later years.

One of the main retailers of dugong oil in Brisbane was Chemist Roush. Owned by Eric Anderson Roush, the business was located in Adelaide Street in the heart of Brisbane and had its own manufacturing laboratory. Morden Laboratories, established in Charlotte Street, used old remedies, incorporating them into modern products to be sold by Chemist Roush. The dugong oil product sold by Roush was processed in this laboratory.\textsuperscript{56} Chemist Roush had their own dugong oil bottles and labels with instructions on how the oil should be taken (Figure 3.1). According to Colleen Costello, a Quandamooka elder, Minjerribah resident Sam Rollands had a contract with the government to supply Chemist Roush in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{57} By the 1950s, however, the business was unable to obtain the required quantities of dugong oil. The manager of Chemist Roush, AD Love, advised the DDNA on Thursday Island on 5 February 1958 that they had been considerable users of dugong oil, but they had not been able to acquire supplies for several months. They asked if the department could offer them a quotation for dugong oil, and if they had any available supplies, offering to provide drums for the oil and requesting information about possible quantities and price. On 11 February 1958 the DDNA replied that there were currently no supplies available.\textsuperscript{58}

Even in the late 1970s, dugong oil was sought after by pharmaceutical companies and suppliers. In 1977, a representative of Kingston Pharmacies, Maryborough, contacted the DNA inquiring about the possibility of obtaining dugong oil. The Director advised that dugongs are a protected species and only small quantities are

\textsuperscript{55} Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “AS Huybers, Queensland Pastoral Supplies to DDNA, Brisbane, 28 September 1950,” QSA, Brisbane.


\textsuperscript{57} RCCOHP interview with Colleen Costello, 27 March 2006.

\textsuperscript{58} Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “AD Love, manager of Chemist Roush - Modern Laboratories, Manufacturing Chemists, Brisbane to DDNA, Thursday Island, 5 February 1958,” QSA, Brisbane; ibid. “DDNA, Thursday Island to AD Love, manager of Chemist Roush - Modern Laboratories, Manufacturing Chemists, Brisbane, 11 February 1958.”
Figure 3.1: Dugong oil bottle with etiquette as follows: ‘Standardised medicinally purified dugong oil. For the prevention of coughs, colds, bronchitis and all pulmonary affections. Also valuable in emaciation and debility arising from disease. Directions. Adults: 1 tablespoon three times a day. Children: in proportion. Chemist Roush, Brisbane.’

Source: registration number H28369, Social History Collection, Queensland Museum.

taken for individual use in the Torres Strait and it is no longer available for commercial use.59

By writing to the DNA on Thursday Island or DDNA in Brisbane, individuals and companies were going ‘straight to the source’. As the majority of the dugong fisheries throughout Queensland had been closed down by the mid-1960s either due to the low numbers of dugongs or due to the full ban of dugong fishing in 1969, the only place to turn were the fisheries operated by Torres Strait Islanders. The majority of dugong oil was provided to the chemists and suppliers by non-Aboriginal men, with the exception of Sam Rollands and the Campbell family on Minjerribah. Hence the majority of suppliers and predominantly consumers would have dealt with have dealt

59 Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “DNA, Brisbane to Kingston Pharmacies, Maryborough, 18 February 1977,” QSA, Brisbane.
with non-Aboriginal men in obtaining the oil. With dugong oil running low on the shelves of chemists, individual consumers were inspired to write directly to those in control of the remaining source of the oil. This suggests the consumers knew that dugong oil came from a local source. Whether they knew about the direct role that Aboriginal people had historically in the process of obtaining dugong oil is a different, and most likely unanswerable, question.

Conclusion

Although dugong oil has disappeared from the shelves of pharmacies and it is no longer used in institutions, there are locations where it still serves its medicinal purpose — one of these is Minjerribah. In a 2006 interview, Ronald George Tippo described the current situation with dugong oil on the island:

Families will get permission and then they’ll ask other probably another mob to join in with them and then two family members can go and catch it and then they’ll share it out between, you know, try to look after old people first and then come down the line with it to the young ones needing it, babies and that.60

Dugong oil, in this context, has reclaimed its original identity — an Aboriginal one. Because of the dugong industry and environmental changes affecting the dugong populations, fishing for dugongs is now only permitted to persons of Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal descent. Its two earlier identities — white medicine sought by white Australians and an appropriated yet white medicine (in many cases) forced onto Aboriginal people on missions — have faded largely from memory. Only by scrutinising historical documents and oral histories are we able to discern that the product had multiple historical pasts, existing on the edges of both Western and traditional medical practice.

60 RCCOHP interview with Ronald George Tippo, 24 February 2006.
Chapter 4

The rise of a dugong industry on NSI

The history of dugong oil has the potential to open up new areas of study and expand horizons precisely because it is the story of an object in constant motion — fluid and changing — as it crosses oceanic and racial boundaries. Despite being presented as a white medicine, I argue in this chapter that the Aboriginal origins of dugong oil traversed the ocean to Europe, if in symbolic terms, reaching their destination in the ‘old world’ in a rather minimal but still evocative expression of counter colonisation. By applying the various frameworks outlined in Chapter 1 to destabilise the dominant historical narrative of white colonisation in Australia, it becomes possible to see dugong oil as a historical/social object in a transnational voyage. Thus, we are able to connect the cross-cultural, medical and environmental histories of dugong oil in new ways.

With the successful establishment of a white settlement on NSI, an opportunity opened up to launch a dugong industry under the ostensible control of white entrepreneurs. Over the next seven decades, white entrepreneurs who looked for a lucrative business venture in the dugong industry however remained reliant on Aboriginal and later Torres Strait Islander people for their success. Although run predominantly by white men, dugong fishing was almost wholly in the hands of Indigenous men in the beginning of the industry. Later white and non-white men became involved, however Indigenous knowledge was still sought out in order to perfect fishing techniques as will be discussed in this chapter.

The changes in traditional practices and lifestyle wrought by European arrival on NSI resulted in a shifting fluidity between traditional practices and European ways in all aspects of everyday life (including dugong fishing). The mixing of different ethnicities and the influence of the Western material-oriented lifestyle affected both
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, with Aboriginal people regularly positioned as the lowest members of society. Nonetheless, this cultural and interpersonal intermixing provided some Aboriginal individuals with a partial escape from racially oriented controlling mechanisms in place at the time; namely, the *Aboriginal Protection Act*.

Dugong fishing was a partial means of escape for Aboriginal people on the island from the controlling mechanisms of the *Aboriginal Protection Act* and the Chief Protector of Aborigines. The dugong industry brought greatest monetary profit and a range of non-material gains, including social status, professional development and medical advancement, to a handful of white individuals (as signposted in Chapter 2, further discussed here, and in Chapter 6 in relation to more recent decades).

Those who gained most from the dugong industry, namely the likes of Dr William Hobbs and Dr John McGrigor Croft, promoted it in the medical sphere, bringing the oil to the European market. Both men were seemingly interested in the advancement of medicine, looking for an alternative remedy to the distasteful cod liver oil, one which they could market internationally.

In their account of medical research in Australia, Peter Hobbins and Kathryn Hillier argue that ‘rather than isolation or dependency, Australian medical science has been characterised by a profound interdependence across two centuries of antipodean endeavour.’¹ News and goods were sent to and from Australia, however the goods from Australia were often viewed more as a curiosity rather than as a contribution to the growth of knowledge (see Chapter 5). Despite this, scientific progress was being made on Australian soil, for instance in the form of the ‘discovery’ of dugong, eucalyptus, goanna and emu oil (the medicinal properties of these items had been known for years by Aboriginal people). Further contributions to scientific knowledge were the development of new medical procedures, for instance the relatively new chloroform anaesthetic administered by Hobbs in Brisbane in 1854, the first narcosis with chloroform having been performed only a few years earlier by James Young Simpson in Great Britain in 1847.²

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A similar interdependence between local (antipodean) and introduced (European) medical knowledge and progress applies in the dugong industry. Hobbs and Croft were among the first medical pioneers in Australia. They searched for alternative cures, rather than merely bringing European medicines to Australia, and they were interested in introducing these new and alternative Australian medicines to Europe. In their efforts to find a suitable market for their product, Hobbs and Croft took dugong oil out of the Australian and ‘traditional’ surrounds and transformed it into a white medicine more acceptable to European consumers. They were not working in isolation, but were dependent on medical exchanges, as both spent their early years in Britain and subsequently travelled through the British colonies.3

These complex connections of individuals within the industry and of the oil itself allows for a three-dimensional history in which regional and national histories connect along transnational routes, in a way expanding the horizons of historical works by concentrating on a fluid field constantly in motion and without obvious limits.4 Thus dugong oil manufacture, being a relatively small regional industry, tells about early work relations, knowledge exchange and ideologies within that region, but when connected with the story of Croft’s use of the oil in England, we can expand on this regional history. The exchange of knowledge, for instance, is no longer merely between an individual, such as Hobbs, and the dugong fishing crew; it now encompasses the experiences and ideologies forged in various spaces which affected the journey of the individual and of the oil itself. In fact by connecting the regional histories of the dugong industry we see a much more complex and multilayered history. The notion that objects are important historical players in these historical frameworks is not new. This effect has been discussed by historians and anthropologists for decades. In his edited collection on objects/commodities and their position in history, Arjun Appadurai argues for the importance of focusing on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange.5 He states:

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3 Hobbins and Hillier, “Isolated Cases?,” 4.


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[An object is worth studying to understand] human transactions, attributions and motivations … whereas an anthropologist studies [an] object’s concrete, historical circulation … [and to do this, historians must] follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories.6

In order to understand an object’s historical context, we must examine both human interaction with the object and the object itself. These two approaches can be understood as the theoretical recognition that human actors encode things with significance; and the methodological approach that things-in-motion illuminate their human and social context.7

Thus in practice, we see the significance of dugong oil through the way individuals use, write and talk about it, and we can place the oil into a human, social and historical context by looking at the way it was exchanged, the people who exchanged it, and the locations it moved through. According to Wim van Binsbergen, a further point of interest in studying an object (or in our case a product) is its ‘commodification’, which is defined as ‘the ways in which things and social relations are effected by the market’.8 Here van Binsbergen builds on Appadurai’s The Social Life of Things, arguing the importance of applying culture and history to the predominantly economic studies of commodities, naming anthropology as the tool to accomplish this.9 Like Appadurai, van Binsbergen also argues that goods are fluid in nature. The way goods move through society and the significance they are afforded is complex and continually changing. For this reason they are a great object of historical study as they provide information about the society itself as well as its individuals.

It is important to understand dugong oil in a transnational context. It is directly connected to Australia, but has other less direct connections to areas of the world to where it travelled, or where the manufacturers gained their medical knowledge (England), or where a prospective market was found (Europe and the United States).

6 Ibid., 5.
7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 19.
Chapter 4: THE RISE OF A DUGONG INDUSTRY

Historian Michael McDonnell elaborates on the myriad transnational histories of consumer goods in relation to the Americas:

Atlantic history has, most obviously, something to do with the ocean itself. But is that the North Atlantic, or South, or both? Is it about the sailors and ships that plied that ocean, or about the myriad people who depended upon them to cross it — in chains or with chests, with fear or with hope — or is it about the people those ships connected? Is it about the places that the ocean connected — Lisbon, Madeira and Rio de Janeiro — or the goods that travelled between those places — the beaver pelts trapped by Ottawa Indians that ended up on the heads of wealthy Parisians, or the silver mined by drafted indigenous mit’a workers in Peru that fuelled European expansion in the early modern period?10

McDonnell raises the question of what kind of history transnational should be. Is it about movement across oceans; connections between the people who meet on these journeys; the goods themselves (travelling transnational routes); or the changes that occur in the new locations as a result of new goods, people and/or colonies? Oceanic histories, he concludes, combine all of these points of interest, an insight equally valid for transpacific histories, because the transnational connections forged between the old world and Australia were dependent on Pacific trade routes.

Just as settlers utilised Pacific trade routes to transport goods, they adopted existing trade routes within Australia adding them to colonial trade routes, and ultimately connecting Australia with Europe. The export of dugong oil through the colonial trade routes shows us the global implications a local product can have. The oil would have travelled on cargo ships, most likely ‘clippers’ as they were the fastest ship used for the transport of goods between Great Britain and its colonies in the mid-nineteenth century, along established cargo routes. The fastest route from Australia lead east, around the southern end of New Zealand and as far south as possible to take advantage of the strong winds. The route passed under the treacherous Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America, and turned north up the Atlantic to reach Plymouth in Great Britain. The trip of 23,740 km would average 100 days. Some ships would travel west along the southern coast of Australia passing under the Cape of Good Hope and north along the western coast of Africa; however this route was not as widely used for cargo. These trade routes can be understood as highways of the seas, not merely

connecting point A and point B, but rather allowing for many points of intersection and creating a web of exchange within the Pacific.

The Pacific has been a central point of voyage, exchange and migration since the first movement of people 60,000 to 40,000 years ago, and can be understood as a two-way channel of goods, people and knowledge. Matt Matsuda sees it as a ‘[c]rowded world of transit, intersections, and transformed cultures … [as] multiple sites of trans-localism, the specific linked places where direct engagements took place and were tied to histories dependent on the ocean.’

Matsuda describes these migrations as well as the interactions and trade that occurred in the Pacific before European arrival in the fifteenth century. The voyages of Pacific Islanders show them to have been mobile peoples and the creators of their own destiny, an aspect of Pacific Islander history overlooked by historians until relatively recent years. Previously, the Pacific Islands were studied from a European perspective in which European explorers, traders, missionaries and settlers were the mobile and dominant people, producing histories of ‘impact on peoples who were not themselves mobile.’ However from recent scholarship we have changed our focus and come to view the Pacific Islanders not as victims but as actors in these histories. As Nicholas Thomas argues in Islanders, Pacific Islanders were accustomed to travel, cross-cultural encounters and trade well before the arrival of Europeans, and they actively took part in all three after European arrival to the region.

The increased export of dugong oil in the nineteenth and in the twentieth centuries; its continued promotion as a pharmaceutical product (in Australia and overseas); its use to promote Australia as a rich and self-sufficient colony; and its growing local and international usage meant that increased amounts were needed to meet the growing demand. The amount of procurable oil from the relatively small industry fluctuated, and so the pressure to sell more oil led to dugong oil being mixed with shark oil. The result of this was degradation of the product and by the late 1860s, lasting damage had been done to the industry’s reputation. This was the first step in the demise of a hitherto relatively successful enterprise. A further hit to the industry was

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13 Ibid., 1–28.
the dramatic decrease of dugong numbers in and around Moreton Bay (discussed in Chapter 6).

The rise and fall of dugong oil on the national and international market (and the decrease of dugong numbers) was of concern to the individuals behind the success of dugong oil. These men (women were rarely involved as discussed later in this chapter) entered the industry for various reasons, from proving themselves as doctors and gaining ‘fame and fortune’ to finding a means of income and continuing a connection with culture. The following sections map the history of the dugong industry as narrated using the stories of the, arguably, most important individuals involved in the industry.

**Dr William Hobbs**

The most prominent individual connected to the dugong industry in the initial stages was Dr William Hobbs (Figure 4.1). Hobbs arrived in the Brisbane penal colony in 1849, two years after the first documented dugong catch by a white man. The son of James and Anne Hobbs, née Phillips, Hobbs became a member of the Royal College of

![Figure 4.1: Dr William Hobbs.](image)

*Source: John Oxley Library, SLQ, no date.*
Surgeons in London on 15 May 1843. This allowed him to travel to Australia as a surgeon on the *Chaseley* and subsequently to open his own practice in Brisbane, where he remained in private practice throughout his professional life. By travelling to a colony, he was able to gain status and authority which might not have been achievable in Britain. Apart from a successful private practice in his own lavish home in today’s Redcliffe, Hobbs held several official government positions throughout his life (apart from a few months in 1850 when he filled in as resident surgeon of the Brisbane Hospital on the death of David Ballow). At various times he held appointments on the honorary staffs of the Brisbane Hospital, the Lying-in Hospital and the Hospital for Sick Children. For many years he was a visiting medical practitioner at the Benevolent Asylum (in the 1850s and 1860s), a visiting surgeon at the Brisbane Gaol on St Helena Island in the 1850s, and the medical officer to the Immigration Depot. He was Health Officer for Brisbane (1854–1888) and a member of the Medical Board of Queensland (1860–1888). These positions doubtless enabled him to pursue his interest in dugong oil as shown in this section.

Hobbs is first mentioned in connection with dugong fishing in 1853 in an article in the *Moreton Bay Courier* stating: ‘A substitute for cod liver oil has been brought into use by Mr Hobbs, a surgeon practicing in this town. … Mr Hobbs has been using it with much success for the last six months.’ Cod liver oil was a popular but distasteful medicine among Europeans. Ruth Guy, writing about cod liver oil in a 1923 article asserted that the use of fish oils in medicine had already been mentioned by Hippocrates and Pliny in the fourth century BCE and first century CE, respectively. She further explains that cod liver oil has been used by the fishermen along the coasts of northern Europe for many years. It is stated that, in the Island of Shetland and the north of Scotland generally, the liver of the cod has long been considered a special delicacy, and hence is given to invalids and people in poor health.

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Guy supports her claims with numerous accounts of the historical use of cod liver oil, such as the observations made by Dr Bardsley in the Manchester Infirmary, a prized essay from the Society of Science and Arts of Utrecht on the chemical and therapeutic properties of cod liver oil published in 1822, and a case study by Schütte in 1824 of rickets cured by cod liver oil, stating that he had used it for 25 years. This interest in cod liver oil signified resurgence in the use of traditional cures from the mid-nineteenth century; concurrently it opened up a path to the globalisation of local remedies including Indigenous knowledges.

The date of the *Moreton Bay Courier* (5 February 1853) coincides with the first administration of chloroform anaesthetics in Brisbane. Hobbs was the medical practitioner to administer the anaesthetic, proving himself as a medical professional seeking to enhance the state of medical practice in the colony. Understanding Hobbs in this way is significant when we consider his position as the promoter and administrator of dugong oil. He was able to reconcile his belief in the need to modernise and improve medicine in the colonies with his entrepreneurial side. Combining the medical and the entrepreneurial was a driving force behind Hobbs’ role in promoting dugong oil.

Hobbs provides us with the reasons for his interest in dugong oil in his *Elaiopathy* lecture. In this text he sets out his intention to promote dugong oil as a superior remedy to cod liver oil, and deems to explain his intentions as philanthropic:

> [T]o give the members of the School of Arts a brief sketch of some of the vital phenomena of the human frame when in health … to introduce to their notice a remedy, obtainable in Moreton Bay, possessing the valuable properties for the renovation and restoration of the frame when worn out and exhausted by chronic disease.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 112.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 113–14.


\(^{20}\) Hobbs, *Elaiopathy, the Administration of the Oil of the Dugong, Halicore Australis, as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease*, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 8 October 1869 states that Dr Hobbs prescribed dugong oil to his patients for many years ‘before he took any steps to place the article before the public’.
On the first page of the lecture Hobbs focuses on the use of cod liver oil as a treatment for consumption. He notes this treatment became popular two years after the publishing of Liebig’s work *Animal Chemistry* in 1842.\(^{21}\) In his work, Liebig explained the chemical process of respiration and nutrition, comparing the animal body to:

\[\text{[A]n apparatus of combustion, a furnace which we supplied with fuel, and showed that this combustion was supported by the oxygen of the atmosphere taken into the lungs in the act of respiration, meeting with the carbon taken into the system in the process of nutrition.}\] \(^{22}\)

So the use of oil to treat respiratory diseases and the use of animal fats as a remedy for various other complaints were not new ideas to Hobbs when he started using dugong oil. Throughout the first half of the lecture Hobbs introduces the properties and uses of cod liver oil; highlights the positive effects of cod liver oil on people suffering from respiratory diseases; and briefly mentions dugong oil as the replacement for cod liver oil.

He describes different bodily fluids (blood, saliva and bile, among others) and their changes when the body is struck down by different diseases, and he provides scientific tables with the ‘analyses of the constituents of fish and animal fluids’ and ‘analyses of the parallel vegetable principles.’\(^{23}\) Despite stating that he will ‘endeavor [sic] … to be as plain-spoken as possible sinking scientific pretensions for the more useful end of being understood’, the lecture is highly scientific, presumably creating a barrier for the general public among his audience.\(^{24}\) The descriptive nature of the lecture provides a platform for Hobbs to proclaim himself also a man of science and medicine; however it provides little sense of the conditions on the ground on NSI and of the involvement of Aboriginal people.

In the second half of the lecture Hobbs’ entrepreneurial nature comes through. He even names himself as ‘the baptismal sponsor, and introducer of the Dugong oil in the place of that produced from the cod’s liver.’ He also provided four pages of testimonials from patients to support his claims about dugong oil:

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\(^{22}\) Hobbs, *Elaiopathy, the Administration of the Oil of the Dugong, Halicore Australis, as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease*, 3.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 5.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 3.
The very first dose I took of it seemed to sweeten my stomach.

... 
I had recourse to the Dugong oil, and to the astonishment and delight of her anxious relatives, ere three months had elapsed she was in perfect health.

... 
The oil was taken for about two months, and afterwards rubbed into the chest for two more. By this means his health became perfectly restored.

... 
and therefore [I] think in such cases a sweet unirritating [sic] oil, like that of the Dugong, to be decidedly superior to the cod liver.25

By including the scientific section in the lecture alongside the testimonies, Hobbs aims to situate dugong oil (and himself) above heterodoxy, which in his case was relatively simple given his professional standing as a registered medical practitioner and government employee. His article was as much an advertisement for a product as it was a scientific essay. The line between promoting dugong oil for the enhancement of medicine and for Hobbs’ fame and fortune is blurred. Through its wide publication in the daily press, Hobbs’ Elaiopathy lecture reached the general public, and presumably it was this audience that would have been most influenced by the testimonies provided by Hobbs and impressed (if largely mystified) by the scientific nature of the lecture.

Hobbs himself refers to numerous Indigenous groups throughout the world, including the people of the arctic, South American peoples, and even farmers in England who use animal fat to restore the health of people and animals. The consumption of oils and fats, or the use of fat or lard as a rub was a widely-known home remedy at this time. Thus Hobbs did not have to refer to Aboriginal people and their use of the dugong oil to explain its purpose. He could merely reach to his homeland for the familiar examples he required to describe an unfamiliar product. It comes as no surprise, then, that he does not make reference to the Quandamooka people and their use of dugong fat and oil (this omission will be discussed further in this chapter and in Chapter 5). It is unlikely he did not know about Aboriginal people catching dugongs in Moreton Bay — since his positions as visiting medical practitioner and visiting surgeon took him to NSI regularly, and dugong fishing was a regular activity and not secret (see Birch’s diary).26 We cannot definitely know if Hobbs knew

25 Ibid., 8–10.
of dugongs, and the consumption of the meat, fat and oil by Aboriginal people. However, he was in the right place at the right time to understand the dugong’s significance as a food source and remedy.

When Hobbs opened his private practice in Brisbane in 1850, he was a well-respected member of Brisbane society, having built a career in government-run institutions. A very profitable marriage to Anna Louisa Barton (the sister of Australia’s first Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton) brought him prestige among the higher class, which reflected on his position as a medical practitioner. Due to his high status, he would have been trusted by his patients and so the virtues of dugong oil would have been easier to promote.

In order to present dugong oil as a quality product, Hobbs needed to show that he had tested it on various diseases and illnesses. Between 1853 (the first mention of Hobbs in connection with dugong oil) and 1857 (the publishing of Elaiopathy), Hobbs treated his patients with dugong oil and collected data. His prominent position in the Brisbane medical scene allowed him to test the oil on various people without any obvious restrictions. The regulation of pharmaceutical goods was common at this time in Great Britain, the Apothecaries Wares, Drugs and Stuffs Act allowed for the supervision of medicines as early as 1540, however it was not so in Australia.

As the Brisbane Gaol visiting surgeon, Hobbs could use prisoners as test subjects. In contrast to his private practice, prisoners did not have any choice, they were unlikely to complain, and if they did complain, their complaints were unlikely to be recorded or followed up. Based on the visiting surgeon’s medical records 1889–1892, Brisbane Gaol inmates/patients were treated quite haphazardly. The most common treatment of any disease at the Brisbane Gaol was a pint of milk.27 We cannot speculate about the feelings the prisoners had towards the treatments provided at the Brisbane Gaol; Hobbs’ use of dugong oil in the 1850s may (or may not) have been welcomed by the prisoners.

The Medical Board of Queensland (Queensland Medical Board) was established in 1860 under Medical Acts current in New South Wales. Hobbs was a member from 1860–1888 concurrently working as a Brisbane Health Officer until 1888. Among other responsibilities, the Medical Board oversaw how doctors treated their patients; what
treatments were being used; the professional behaviour of registered medical practitioners; and current medical procedures being used. As a registered medical practitioner, Hobbs would have needed to conform to Medical Board standards (specifically in relation to testing new unorthodox medicines), but in regard to dugong oil it looks like he managed to bypass any possible restrictions. On the contrary, his high position in the medical scene looks to have enabled him to administer unorthodox treatments in both government-run institutions and in his private practice unhindered.

Hobbs’ endeavour to present dugong oil as a genuine and reputable product is further confirmed in a letter to the editor published in several newspapers throughout the colony. In it, Hobbs notes he was ‘literally besieged with applications from all parts of the colony for supplies of this valuable oil, and which … I have hitherto been unable to furnish.’ He does admit others have been more successful in obtaining the oil (verifying that other dugong oil entrepreneurs were working in the Moreton Bay district), however, he claims that the amount of oil produced — 150 gallons in a year — does not correspond with the amount of oil sold as genuine dugong oil throughout Australia. He warns consumers not to take the ‘abominable imposters’ as a new technique of dugong fishing should allow for greater numbers and an increase of genuine dugong oil on the market. Hobbs ends his letter with a vision of dugong oil production becoming an important branch of the industrial pursuits of Australia within a few years. This correspondence confirms Hobbs’ endeavour to promote dugong oil as a high-quality article both in Australia and overseas, thus both he and the oil needed to be seen as orthodox and respectable.

At the time of the establishment of the Queensland Medical Board individuals practicing medicine without medical education were abundant. The use of heterodox and non-scientific treatments has its roots in traditional healing methods and can be found evolving alongside scientific medicine from Ancient Rome. Unorthodox medicines were popular throughout Europe up until the professionalisation of medicine in the eighteenth century. The move to professional medicine, however, did not occur simultaneously in Great Britain and its colonies, where this shift occurred almost a century later. It was easier for unorthodox medicines to become popular in the less


29 Martyr, Paradise of Quacks.
regulated colonies, and in an area like Moreton Bay where Western medicines were often hard to come by. This dualistic trend in nineteenth century Queensland accepting alternative treatments alongside scientific approaches recalls the shifting ground in medicine taking place in eighteenth century England. In any case, unorthodox medicines such as dugong oil would come to blur the very fluid boundaries between Indigenous and Western, orthodox and unorthodox.

As mentioned above, the line between orthodox and unorthodox doctors/healers and medicine was not clear. Nineteenth century medicine was a complex medical ‘marketplace’ in which the mixing of orthodox and unorthodox was inevitable and it often remains problematic if not impossible to categorise medicines and treatments in this relatively simplistic way. What we learn from following the story of dugong oil is, in fact, that medicine, medical treatment and medical practitioners in the colonies were far more complex. Creating a dichotomy of unorthodox versus orthodox is highly problematic, although still used regularly by historians (as noted below) as it can be ‘heuristically useful and analytically convenient’.  

Equally problematic is the term ‘quack’ and ‘quackery’ as this term was often used to degrade medical practitioners who were following a heterodox path.

As Porter and others have noted, nineteenth century medicine was ‘hit and miss’ and the lines between ‘quackery’ and medical science were very much blurred. The fluctuant success of treating a medical problem by educated doctors as well as non-educated healers meant that both educated doctors and healers were called upon by all social groups, including aristocrats. The concurrent practice of both orthodox and unorthodox doctors and healers lead to the mixing of orthodox and unorthodox treatments. So it is not surprising that someone as curious as Hobbs would have been ready to experiment with new treatments and remedies. According to Porter: ‘for much

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31 Joanna Bishop describes the problematic nature of the term in Bishop, “The Role of Medicinal Plants in New Zealand’s Settler Medical Culture, 1850s–1920s.”


33 “Before the Fringe.”
of the nineteenth century, doctors introducing new diagnostic technology … always ran the risk of being accused by old-guard senior brethren of stooping to quackery.’

Therefore, despite his standing as an orthodox doctor in the medical establishment, Hobbs could have easily been labelled a ‘quack’ due to his dugong oil experiments (a second unorthodox treatment was the use of mineral water, found in a spring on his property at Humpybong, Redcliffe, which he claimed had healing properties).

When discussing Australian medicine in the nineteenth century, historian Peter Phillips notes that ‘This was the golden age of quackery.’ ‘Quackery’ and the circulation of unorthodox medicines remained relatively high in Australia throughout this time, reflecting the continuing popularity of unorthodox medicines in England and mainland Europe. In fact, the Australian medical scene was following Britain not only in the continuing popularity of unorthodox medicine, but also in mainstream medicine and the institutionalisation of medicine ‘modelled on British imperial institutional spaces and with imperial sensibilities.’ Phillips looks at the ways on which medical practitioners, whether registered or unregistered, approached their prospective customers and marketed their business: ‘Doctors were few. The law was far from clear as to who could practice medicine and who could not, and in an age that enshrined free enterprise, lying and extravagant advertisements were accepted as normal.’ We know this to be a simplistic view of the medical world in the colony. There was an array of medical practitioners and healers both educated and uneducated making the medical scene varied and far more complex than Phillips presents.


38 Coleborne, Insanity, Identity and Empire, 2.

39 Phillips, Kill or Cure?

40 Joanna Bishop presents a comprehensive study of medicine, medical practitioners, healers in New Zealand in her 2014 thesis clearly showing that we need to move away from the dichotomy of unorthodox versus heterodox.
In her work on unorthodox medicine, Philippa Martyr investigates trends in Australia from 1788 to 2002. She notes that significant numbers of medical practitioners in nineteenth century Australia were adopting unorthodox ‘local’ treatments found in an effort to overcome the high mortality rate in Australia. The orthodox medicines were often unavailable; when they were available they were frequently unreliable; and the diagnosis of various diseases was often incorrect, so prescribed treatments were unsuitable. Patients could not always rely on medical practitioners, so they reached out for unorthodox treatments. Self-medication, home treatment and self-administered healthcare were also prevalent throughout the colonies. Domestic medical books would frequently encourage the empowerment of colonists in the self-management of trauma and illness. In some cases no treatment at all was better than incorrect treatment as can be found in the death registers of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum on NSI where Hobbs worked in the 1850s and 60s; more patients died there with doctor present than when they had no medical care at all. Martyr makes only brief mention of Hobbs and dugong oil, confirming Hobbs’ place in the orthodox and unorthodox medical worlds and in a way merging the two.

Looking beyond the history of dugong oil, other unorthodox remedies were tried and some successfully incorporated into orthodox medicines by European doctors and patients. Goanna oil, for example, while already widely used primarily for skin problems such as rashes and eczema, became particularly popular during the twentieth century but had already been widely used in the nineteenth century. Goanna oil never reached the level of success enjoyed by emu oil, which, after a period of largely unsuccessful promotion as a leather-softening product, became widely known for its

41 Martyr, Paradise of Quacks.
42 Ibid.
43 Bishop, “The Role of Medicinal Plants in New Zealand’s Settler Medical Culture, 1850s–1920s.”; John Pearn, “‘Where There Is No Doctor’: Self-Help and Pre-Hospital Care in Colonial Australia,” Health and History 14, no. 2 (2012).
44 Dunwich Benevolent Asylum death registers, NSIHMA, Dunwich.
45 Walter Froggat describes emu oil as a universal remedy for rheumatism among the bushmen in Walter W Froggatt, “Mind of an Emu: Developed by Environment,” Sydney Morning Herald, 27 December 1932, 3. He quotes Ludwig Leichhardt: ‘several times when suffering from excessive fatigue I rubbed it into the skin all over the body, and its slightly exciting properties proved very beneficial’, confirming that emu oil was a common remedy among white settlers in Australia from the first half of the nineteenth century.
healing value for arthritis. Advertising material for both these remedies can be found in numerous newspapers throughout the twentieth century.\footnote{46}

Neither goanna nor emu oil received the kind of newspaper coverage given to dugong oil, which was available to settlers before goanna and emu oil.\footnote{47} While all three oils were advertised in numerous newspapers, only dugong oil was featured in full articles covering the product, the industry and the oil’s health-giving qualities. We can only speculate about the reasons behind this difference in newspaper coverage. The information supplied by newspapers in the mid-1800s also points to the fact that the extraction of dugong oil was industrialised before emu and goanna oil. Perhaps the press followed the story of dugong oil more closely as it was a novelty.\footnote{48} Another aspect of the specific attention given to dugong oil is the exotic nature of the animal.

The use of local oils in the new colony began as early as 1789 when Sir Joseph Banks sent a sample of eucalyptus oil to Governor Phillip. The Eucalyptus plant was considered to be of greater quality than the English Peppermint (\textit{Mentha piperita}).

Howard Hamlet Gordon McKern provides an extensive history of this in \textit{A Century of Scientific Progress}.\footnote{49} Research into volatile oils in Australia was conducted in the 1850s by English pharmacist Joseph Bosisto in Victoria.\footnote{50}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item For instance as stated by Betty Crouchley in Betty Crouchley, “Marconi, Joseph Cornelius (1876–1922),” \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography}, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/marconi-joseph-cornelius-7482/text13041, published first in hardcopy 1986, accessed online 8 November 2015. Joseph Cornelius Marconi, a Brisbane-based goanna oil manufacturer, produced and sold goanna oil in the first half of the twentieth century. His company, Goanna, continued to produce the oil until the 1960s when goannas became a protected species. The company continues to produce ointments for muscle pain relief which no longer contain goanna oil. Emu oil was not produced by a renowned individual or company like dugong or goanna oil and although used as a rub for muscle and joint pains, it was often used as a treatment for leather or to prevent rust on metal tools. It is only recently that menu oil has received greater scientific interest and is produced on a large scale for medicinal purposes.
  \item In later decades, newspaper coverage of dugong oil concentrates mainly on advertisements and letters of inquiry, thus mirroring the way in which emu and goanna oil was covered.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The interest in plants and their uses from the very early period of Australian colonisation is connected with the need to find alternative commodities, like dugong oil. Philip A. Clarke addresses the role of ‘explorers and plant hunters’ and their ‘silent partners’ in *Aboriginal Plant Collectors* by ‘investigating the role of particular Aboriginal groups and individuals in the botanical discovery of Australia.’\(^{51}\) One plant, the *Duboisia myoporoides* (Corkwood), was used extensively in orthodox medicine as an ophthalmologic agent, sedative, treatment of Parkinsonism, anaesthetic and to manage seasickness. It was harvested in Australia from the late nineteenth century to this day. Paul Foley tracks the plant and its uses in “Duboisia Myoporoides”\(^{52}\).

While Hobbs was testing dugong oil in government-run institutions, no mention of dugong oil was ever made at any Medical Board meeting. The minutes mention medical procedures, treatments and doctors, and Hobbs was often present, however there is no mention of dugong oil or elaiopathy. The written documents may not be a full testament to what was said at the meetings, and it is possible that Hobbs’ colleagues did question his ambitions in using dugong oil. However, if these discussions did arise, they were not recorded.

The Medical Board was not the only authority that could regulate use of dugong oil. The Pharmacy Board of Queensland was established under the *Pharmacy Act of 1884*, and took over registration of chemists and druggists from 1885.\(^{53}\) The Pharmacy Board held regular meetings (like the Medical Board), kept minutes of these meetings, kept lists of chemists in Queensland and kept a list of medicines which chemists provided to their customers. Despite people connected to dugong oil, such as Thomas Warry, appearing in these lists, dugong oil is not on the list of medicines available to patients through chemists.

Based on this silence in official documents, we are lead to two conclusions. First, Hobbs was in a high enough position to conduct his own scientific experiments and to manufacture a new medical product without the authorities attempting to compromise these efforts. Being connected in high places, Hobbs was left an open arena in testing

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\(^{53}\) Series ID 9215, Pharmacists Board of Queensland, Minute Books, 3 July 1885–1 November 1994, QSA, Brisbane.
and producing the oil. Through Hobbs and his efforts a new treatment could be ‘discovered’ and presented to the public not only in Queensland, but in Australia and even in the ‘mother-land’ — England. Thus Hobbs could bring popularity and fame to Moreton Bay through dugong oil, a feat no doubt welcomed by government authorities in Brisbane. Second, the authorities did not see Hobbs’ enthusiasm with dugong oil as threatening. Testing new products was a regular occurrence in the colony, and it is likely that the authorities paid little attention to these attempts. Hobbs’ fascination with new products extended beyond dugong oil. As noted previously, he discovered a spring with alleged anti-anaemic virtues.  

Quandamooka people in the industry

Hobbs’ success with dugong oil was strongly connected with the Quandamooka people, despite a lack of recorded collaborations. Hobbs was reliant on the Aboriginal men working for him as dugong fishermen and although he did eventually employ an all-white crew, it was the Aboriginal fishermen who stood at the beginning of his enterprise. As mentioned earlier, dugongs were no longer caught in nets but were harpooned with the industrialisation of dugong fishing. Yet, this did not lead to the loss of fishing knowledge on Minjerribah, contrary to other aspects of cultural life, such as basket weaving, being lost due to the efforts of local authorities to distance Aboriginal people from their culture and assimilate them, via the Aboriginal Protection Act.  

Dugong fishing, however, remained an important cultural practice for the Quandamooka people and, much like the comparable whaling industry, offered certain opportunities.

Although the dugong industry did not offer the same experiences and opportunities as whaling, we can draw several similarities between the two. When discussing the participation in the whaling industry, Martin Gibbs notes the possible advantages attained by Aboriginal people:


55 Basket weaving is now being recreated by women on Minjerribah with the help of old local woven products. The distancing of Aboriginal people from their culture on Minjerribbah was for instance discussed by Margaret Iselin in Fischer et al., Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place.
Chapter 4: THE RISE OF A DUGONG INDUSTRY

The eventual integration of Aboriginal men (and possibly women) into the whaling crews might be seen from the perspective of the European industrialists as addressing labour shortages by exploiting Indigenous people’s skills. However, the reverse is to consider what it provided for the Aboriginal youths who decided to participate. There has long been recognition by historians and anthropologists that in contact situations, young Aboriginal men and women were quick to grasp opportunities to exploit new skills and economic resources to gain advantage within, or in some cases to side-step, traditional hierarchies.\(^{56}\)

Following Gibbs’ hypothesis, Aboriginal people taking part in the dugong industry were able to ‘grasp opportunities to exploit new skills and economic resources to gain advantage’, however this advantage was not in the traditional hierarchy as stated by Gibbs, but more in Minjerribah’s mixed community, which allowed for integration at a time when Aboriginal people on the mainland were being segregated.\(^{57}\) The greatest advantage came from the white men’s dependency on Aboriginal people to ensure a steady intake of dugongs. This could not be achieved without Aboriginal knowledge and skills. Although this dependence created an unequal relationship among industry participants, it led to an avenue for Aboriginal people to become a fundamental part of a white enterprise, the industrial production of dugong oil. As studies of NSI indicate (Walker’s study of the Myora Mission; Goodall’s thesis on the Benevolent Asylum; and Ganter’s edited collection on the past and future of NSI), the situation on the island was different to that on the mainland.\(^{58}\) The dugong industry provided employment opportunities and interaction that was to partially ameliorate the restrictive measures of the Aboriginal Protection Act in future years, giving the Quandamooka people ‘a measure of financial independence as well as an interdependent relationship with a number of government agencies.’\(^{59}\)

\(^{56}\) Gibbs, “Nebinyan’s Songs,” 11–12.

\(^{57}\) The Shore Whalers of Western Australia: Historical Archaeology of a Maritime Frontier (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010), 31.


Due to a lack of surviving documents concerning the dugong industry, we are left guessing who worked for whom and under what conditions. The existing information comes from a combination of oral history, newspaper articles and accounts of life on NSI, such as those by Welsby or Petrie. Through these we can reconstruct the fishing and oil procurement processes. The machinery needed was relatively simple. All that was required to set up a processing plant was a large vat. The remains of a copper vat can be found exhibited at the NSIHM (Figure 4.2).

The process involved cutting up a dugong and placing the pieces in the vats filled with water, which was hung above a fire. Once dissolved over the heat, the oil was either scooped off the surface using a ladle or drained into a prepared container via a tap located at the top of the vat. The process is described in a newspaper column in 1860:

A large boiler, capable of holding one of these monsters, is continually steaming away, and the oil flows away from a tap in the upper part of the boiler in a clear limpid stream of the color of pale sherry. Upon cooling, the oleine and stearine separate, the latter being retained in the flannel bags.

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through which it is filtered, and is sold to the soap-makers for about forty pounds per tone; while the former is used for medicinal purposes[61]

Given the method was not particularly technical, while the majority of newspapers point to Hobbs as the primary dugong promoter and manufacturer, other entrepreneurs and dugong fishermen (not working for Hobbs) were also boiling down the oil and fat themselves[62]. Hobbs employed Aboriginal men in the early stages, but as the white crew members learned the techniques, the Aboriginal men were replaced. It is likely that as the industry grew, the Aboriginal fishermen dismissed by Hobbs would have moved to different crews. This is similar to the whaling industry, where men would find employment by moving between foreign whaling vessels. Gibbs mentions a Nyungar man from Albany who travelled to Sydney and Hobart on board a French whaling boat[63]. Similarly Aboriginal people employed in the sealing industry often travelled far distances from their home Country. Historian Lynette Russell follows several Aboriginal men and women in the sealing industry as they travelled between Tasmania, Kangaroo Island, Bass Strait and Southern Victoria, further into the Indian Ocean and to New Zealand, London and China[64]. Russell makes an important point of the relative freedom Aboriginal people working in the whaling and sealing industries had, while recognising the harsh conditions Aboriginal people faced at this time:

It’s a story of enterprise and entrepreneurship, of Aboriginal Australian people seizing the opportunity to profit from participation in the colonial economy and pursuing life at sea as sealers and whalers. In some cases participation was voluntary, in others it was more invidious and involved kidnapping and trade in women. In many cases the people involved maintained and exercised a degree of personal autonomy and agency within their new circumstances. They acted and reacted, sometimes they made unexpected choices and decided to sail the world’s oceans, moving between their own native worlds and the world of nineteenth century European colonialism[65].

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[65] Ibid., 6.
Although the dugong industry did not provide such adventurous journeys, those working in the industry exercised a certain degree of autonomy and agency, similar to the choices whalers and sealers had. The movement of Aboriginal people within the dugong industry points to a level of control in their everyday lives.

Fernandez Gonzales

An example of the way different peoples, knowledges and skills intertwined in the dugong industry is Fernandez Gonzales. Gonzales arrived on Minjerribah in the mid-nineteenth century. His origins are unclear, however, according to Welsby, Gonzales was a ‘Manilla man’ employed as a sailor along the east coast of Australia. The movement of South Asian people along the coast of Australia was relatively common at this time, although it is only beginning to be looked at by historians. Examples can be seen in the pearl shell and bêche-de-mer industries. In a narrative about escaped convicts from Norfolk Island and their piracy on NSI, Welsby introduces Gonzales:

Let me here say that Gonzales was a Manila man, and had become a sailor. In 1848 he, with others of a crew of a ship, struck work at sea, and, being then imprisoned by the captain, was in due course tried in Sydney, but escaped any severe punishment. He left Sydney in 1849, came to Moreton Bay, and joined the pilot service. Later on he was in the employ of Andrew Petrie, and was engaged in obtaining coral from Mud Island for lime-burning purposes. Then he made Amity Point his home for good. He married a native woman, and for many years toiled in the winter season, catching dugong around Pelican Banks and turtle at Victoria Passage. He left a fairly large family, chiefly girls.

Gonzales operated his own crew of dugong fishermen on his boat *New Zealand* along with a small boiling plant at Amity Point (Figure 4.3).

He employed Aboriginal people from the island. Following custom, it was taboo for Aboriginal women to see a dugong. So after a successful catch, the animal was brought onto the beach by the fishermen and cut into pieces. Only after the shape of the

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dugong was unrecognisable could Aboriginal women take part in the processing. The question with Gonzales and his dugong fishing enterprise is the role his wife and five daughters played in the processing of the dugong (Figure 4.4).

The plant was located at Amity Point and it seems inevitable that the women would come into contact with a fresh catch before processing. Did Gonzales’ origins change the customs his daughters had to follow? Or did the dugong business, run by white entrepreneurs, alter who could and could not witness the catch? A photograph from the 1940s showing Col Bennet and his daughter gathered around a dugong catch suggests this change did occur sometime during the industry’s operation (Figure 4.5).

Further evidence of a change in custom comes from Margaret (Peggy) Pratt, a Quandamooka woman who lived on Minjerrribah until her death in 1997. She remembers going dugong fishing with Sam Rollands and Paul Tripcony. Similarly, Vera Perry, Rollands’ step-daughter, recalls going dugong fishing with him. The influence the industry had on the lives of Aboriginal people and vice versa needs to be

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68 Fischer et al., Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place, 20.

69 Ibid., 42.
acknowledged. By changing the taboo, the dugong fishermen crews supplying oil to the white entrepreneurs could industrialise the boiling down process and provide a greater amount of oil, thus increasing the total profit.

Thus Gonzales held a dual position within the dugong industry. He was an ‘alien’ to Australia (of non-Caucasian origin), yet he was accepted sufficiently to run his own enterprise. Having married an Aboriginal woman he could have been ostracised by the settlers, but he and his family lived on the grounds of Myora Mission and were left alone by the authorities. He led a team of Aboriginal dugong fishermen, who were rarely left without ‘white’ supervision, and he was paid for the dugong oil, probably paying his employees. So, like dugong oil itself, Gonzales does not fit into the boundaries of early colonial settlement, but sits between categories.\textsuperscript{70} As stated by Goodall:

\textsuperscript{70}Fernandez Gonzales is not mentioned in any government communication with and about the residents of North Stradbrooke Island nor in any official communication about the dugong industry.
Despite claims of imperial regulation ... significant numbers of Indians among others entered Australia outside the immigration restrictions of empire or settlers. Given that many of them entered or remained in Australia without official sanction, their histories will not be found in the official immigration records, but rather in the memories and mementos of the communities into which they might have moved.\textsuperscript{71}

Goodall sees movement and communication between Australia and other colonies as ‘flexible highways with infinitely variable branches rather than as being sealed tubes of controlled passage.’\textsuperscript{72}

Although Australian authorities tried to contain Southeast Asian workers by not allowing them to leave the docks and no official documents speak of Southeast Asian people settling in Australia, oral histories and surnames on various official lists and reports, on NSI, tell a different story. The information available to us about Gonzales

\textsuperscript{71}Goodall, Ghosh, and Todd, “Jumping Ship — Skirting Empire,” 44.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 48.
comes through the work of Welsby, who was a personal acquaintance of Gonzales, and through the memories of the Quandamooka people.

Gonzales was not the only person to blur the lines of colonial identity. He was one of a handful of non-white individuals who managed to secure a relatively independent lifestyle ‘behind the back of Empire.’\footnote{Ibid., 49.} What we witness in Gonzales are the changes and modernization of dugong fishing into an industry. Although, as mentioned, in order to maintain a degree of control over their lives, Aboriginal people had no choice but to work in a European industry in order to survive. The types of collaborations forged saw white, non-white and Aboriginal men working together in the industry.

**Sam Rollands**

Like Gonzales, Sam Rollands was also heavily intertwined within the dugong industry, the Aboriginal community and white authorities. Rollands was born on Minjerribah in 1851 to Sydney Rollands, a Quandamooka woman, who is one of the best known ‘Myora Grannies’. However, he is also said to be of South Sea Islander descent.\footnote{Fischer et al., *Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place*, 41; Walker, “Useful and Profitable,” 163–64. Tom Welsby, “Popular Native Personality Sam Rollands, of Myora, Dead: Dugong Fishing Expert,” *Telegraph*, 28 February 1936, 9.} He grew up on the island and lived at Myora Mission with his wife Margaret (Mibu) and her children, until his death in 1936. Rollands was considered the principal dugong fisherman by the Aboriginal community. He would take his boat, the *Rona* (Figure 4.6), into the bay and set nets near Myora Mission or further out toward Moorgumpin (Moreton Island). He would then go out the next day, to collect his catch.\footnote{Fischer et al., *Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place*, 42.} Charlotte Richards, a Quandamooka woman, has fond memories of Rollands bringing in a dugong catch (Figure 4.7) — providing further confirmation of the change in taboo when women were not allowed to see a dugong catch: ‘I recall Uncle Sammy Rollands would go out in his little sailing boat called the *Rona*. On his return if he had a dugong he would put a flag on the mast telling everyone and then we would all gather down on
the beach and help roll it up.\textsuperscript{76} Paul Tripcony, a Quandamooka man who spent a lot of
time with Rollands in his youth, recalls dugong fishing in these words:

\begin{quote}
The arduous and interesting profession of netting dugong (zungun) exerted the skill and perseverance of Sam Rollands. Highly gifted and well versed in his knowledge of the ways of the sea he hand made his own nets using six (6) coils of rope. The nets were set during the winter months. A big beast yielded 16 gallons of oil valued at 33 shillings a gallon. With the first catch of the season it was the custom to give each family a piece of beef called taste. This gesture preserved a relic of Aboriginal tradition when the whole tribe equally shared the food. Selected portions of the animal were cut up and boiled in water. The oil rising to the surface during this process was skimmed off and clarified and bottled when cool and sold as medicine. The beef was preserved with coarse salt and used as food and some parts of the dugong could be salted down and smoked and furnished a delicately flavoured bacon. Sale of dugong oil and of preserved salted beef were sources of income that were much needed to keep the boat, the sails and the net in good running order and repair.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 55.
Rollands had a contract with the government to supply the Brisbane chemist company Roush with dugong oil in the 1930s. He was employed by the Moreton Bay Oyster Company and he owned two oyster beds. The Royal Queensland Yacht Club employed him to tend to the lamp on the black beacon leading into Myora passage. He was also employed as the native policeman on Myora Mission with a monthly wage of £1 (for these services chief protector Bleakley waived Rollands’ repayments on his home, and he was outfitted in a tracker’s uniform — khaki for summer and serge for winter). Rollands also worked in the Prickly Pear Eradication Scheme. He ‘offered to cut out and burn the pear from Myora Mission for either a weekly wage of £2.10, or a lump sum of £50.00.’ He was contracted to clear prickly pear from around the school

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78 RCCOHP interview with Colleen Costello, 27 March 2006.
81 Ibid., 161.
grounds for £5 in 1920, with the school teacher, N. A. Fletcher, complaining that Rollands would leave the work to go dugong fishing.\(^82\)

Because of Rollands’ high status in the community and his extensive dugong fishing knowledge, Welsby turned to him for help after a number of failures experienced by white entrepreneurs attempting to enter the industry. As remembered by Rose Borey, Rollands taught Welsby the finer points of fishing and processing. During this time, the two men would likely have created a bond. Tiffany Shellam in her study of early Aboriginal–white relations at King George’s Sound describes this type of relationship as a ‘delicate friendship’ dependent on mutual patience, prone to misunderstanding and shaped by exchanges of goods, knowledge and disease.\(^83\) Welsby’s collaboration with Rollands apparently placed both men in a position of relative equality. Their example underlines the complexity of interracial relations in the dugong industry. The employers, while fully reliant on the knowledge and skills of the Aboriginal employees, were also gradually learning the skills for themselves. The Aboriginal employees, on the other hand, were reliant on the white employers for wages and for a way to enter the growing enterprise. Thus the Aboriginal employees were not simply giving their skills and knowledge away, they were sharing them in exchange for the knowledge and skills of business and survival in a commercial society.

Rollands’ participation in the industry exemplifies cultural heritage; that is, dugong fishing’s importance to the Quandamooka people as a traditional custom. Yet Rollands lived on the Mission, and thus he was under the jurisdiction of the Mission Superintendent and ultimately the Chief Protector of Aborigines. Although Myora was not as restrictive as the majority of missions throughout Queensland, the Aboriginal people living on the Mission still had to adhere to a number of rules and restrictions. One of these was the need to obtain a permit to leave the island. In 1931 the Superintendent refused to allow Rollands to go dugong fishing without a permit. Instead of accepting or disobeying this measure, Rollands contacted the Chief Protector of Aborigines, John William Bleakley, and complained about the ruling. The chief protector over-ruled the Superintendent’s decision and Rollands continued fishing without any further disturbance from the authorities until his death in 1936.

\(^82\) Ibid., 153, 63–64.

So how is it possible that Rollands was able to continue a traditional practice while speaking out against unfair measures towards the Myora residents? Welsby’s obituary in the *Telegraph* goes some way to answering this. He recalls Rollands as kind and unobtrusive, and a highly skilled dugong fisherman: ‘Now that he has gone I am inclined to think the dugong industry and the manufacturing of its oil has departed with him and that no more dugong will be taken in Moreton Bay.’\(^8^4\)

### Conclusion

The multi-layered relationships between Hobbs, Gonzales, Rollands, Welsby, Bleakley, Tripcony, even Fletcher, shine a light on the dugong industry, the Quandamooka people, and on the social and economic situation on the island itself. The peculiarity of Minjerribah is that it is close to the mainland (approximately 10 km) but remains isolated. It is small, but was hugely important to various industries developing at the turn of the twentieth century in the Moreton Bay area.

The part Gonzales and Rollands played in this history is only one aspect of the story. And yet their roles in its development open up discussion about space, place and management. Dugong oil serves as the product that ‘flows’ through history, taking us from traditional Aboriginal practices to Gonzales and Rollands, and to white doctors and entrepreneurs. The fluid nature of this story comes to the fore when we read modern day accounts of the use of dugong oil (as discussed in the previous chapter), together with the complicated history of dugong fishing and oil production, which draws together Aboriginal and white workers, and to a certain degree, Aboriginal and white consumers. In order to comprehensively understand the story of dugong oil, the next chapter returns to these transnational, national and regional intersections to follow the path of Hobbs’ ambitions.

\(^{84}\) Tom Welsby, “Popular Native Personality Sam Rollands, of Myora, Dead: Dugong Fishing Expert,” *Telegraph*, 28 February 1936, 9.
Chapter 5

Exhibiting the oil overseas: constructing a ‘white’ product

With the introduction of dugong oil to the settler population by a prominent white member of Brisbane high society, the origins of dugong oil became increasingly blurred. Although we do not have firm evidence that Hobbs used dugong oil after learning to do so from the Quandamooka people, it is highly likely he came across this information either as an eye witness or from his colleagues or patients at the Benevolent Asylum on NSI. However, the connection between the medicinal use of dugong oil and Aboriginal people was all but removed in the early period of the dugong industry. Although newspaper articles mentioned Aboriginal crew members, these references disappeared with the introduction of greater numbers of white and non-white men as crew.¹

Despite the disappearance of Aboriginal men being reported as dugong fishermen, knowledge of dugong oil continued to be interlocked with Aboriginal people, and the necessity of Aboriginal people’s cooperation with white men to ensure the growth of the dugong industry remained (as explained in Chapter 4). Regardless of these facts, the origins of the oil were never acknowledged by Hobbs or his successors publicly. In his Elaiopathy lecture, Hobbs touched on the use of oils by Indigenous peoples of different areas around the world, for instance the inhabitants of the arctic regions and Northern Russia. Hobbs came geographically ‘nearer home’ (presuming home is Australia) when he described the Guachoes in the Pampas of South America and their feasting on fatty beef (which is an interesting observation as dugong oil was

¹ Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Whaling’,” 31.
described as tasting like beef also yet Hobbs’ lecture did not mention this). He also referred to Charles Darwin and his account of the inhabitants of Terra-del-Fuego with custom of feasting on whale carcases including the blubber, storing it in sand for times of famine. Hobbs even mentioned Englishmen using oils to fatten up livestock. However despite his comment on coming ‘nearer home’ when referring to the Guachoes of South America, Hobbs never mentioned the Aboriginal people of Moreton Bay and their use of dugong oil.

This silence by Hobbs as well as other men from the industry is also evident in the advertising and promoting of dugong oil to white settlers. One explanation is that advertisements of medical or other consumer items that would make a reference to Aboriginal people in Australia, or African people in Great Britain and North America, have historically contrasted the quality of the product with the ‘primitiveness’ of the depicted person. ‘Primitiveness’ has thus been conducive to the promotion of consumer products in Australia, North America and Great Britain. Such advertisements played on skin colour, often suggesting that by using their soap even a dark-skinned person could become white. For example, for many decades in Australia, Pelaco shirts depicted an Aboriginal man in a white cotton shirt (late-nineteenth century); Cadbury’s Cocoa showed a white girl seated between two African boys with a cup of steaming cocoa and the slogan ‘absolutely pure’ in the 1890s; and Chlorinol, a bleaching product, depicted three African boys, one with fair skin, alongside the slogan ‘we are going to use Chlorinol and be like de [sic] white nigger’ (late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century).


3 Ibid. This omission of Aboriginal input coincides with the ‘great Australian silence’ as presented by anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner in his landmark Boyer Lecture of 1968.


As can be seen, the inclusion of Indigenous people to promote products was built on racist notions of otherness. However, the essential involvement of Aboriginal men in oil production in Australia and the fact that dugong oil was an Aboriginal remedy contradicted this distinction between primitive and modern. Thus it did not receive any mention in advertising material. This silence about the Aboriginality of dugong oil is not surprising, when we consider mid-nineteenth century Australia and the attempts to create a new British society. Aboriginal people were seen as a dying race at the time, as described by Darwin on his visit to Australia in 1836. Connecting the ‘primitive’ (Aboriginal people) with the ‘innovative’ (dugong oil) might have been counterproductive in the promotion of dugong oil and may have had a negative impact on sales.

Aiming to create a sophisticated white society, goods needed to be seen as ‘civilised’ and ‘appropriate’. Goods obtained from Aboriginal people needed to be ‘whitened’ before reaching the intended settler customers. Some of the first consumers of dugong oil Hobbs used to test the oil were Brisbane Gaol inmates. But he eventually aimed to promote his product at higher society for whom he needed an unblemished product. However, despite efforts to colonise and whiten the oil to appeal initially to settlers and then to Europeans more generally, dugong oil arguably never lost its Aboriginal connections as it entered ‘civilised’ white households. How isolated would those families really have been from information about dugong oil? Brisbane had a population of only around 5,000 in the early 1850s, the time of the first records of dugong oil consumption. Based on the size of the colony and the tendency to ‘gossip’ — as suggested by McKenzie in Scandal in the Colonies — it is more than likely that this first generation of dugong oil consumers knew about the Aboriginal connections to the industry and the oil. Like the whitening of dugong oil, the process of hunting was also whitened by not acknowledging Aboriginal people’s role in securing the final product. Their role as dugong hunters in the industry was silenced.

This chapter is divided into three sections dealing with dugong oil as a national and international exhibition product, and the marketing strategies to raise interest and revenue. Detailed analysis is given to the export and marketing of the oil in Great Britain

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7 McKenzie, Scandal in the Colonies.
Britain and mainland Europe. Although marketing and exhibiting was connected both in their time period (ca. 1850–1910) and in efforts to advertise dugong oil and promote it to a worldwide audience, for clarity they are presented separately. In combination, however, they illustrate the measures taken to create and promote a product suitable for worldwide consumption.

Exhibitions in Australia and Europe 1854–1905

To successfully reach a large consumer market, Hobbs needed to take dugong oil beyond his private practice. ‘Word of mouth’ did prove successful, such as the views of his patients recorded in the Elaiopathy lecture, although to limited effect. But Hobbs needed a larger arena and he found this in world exhibitions. These events were becoming increasingly popular in Australia, North America and Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The first exhibition to showcase Hobbs’ dugong oil was the 1854 Sydney Exhibition. Two samples were exhibited — one by Hobbs and one by Thomas Warry. According to the Brisbane Courier, Hobbs had set up his St Helena plant with Warry, who was a chemist from North Brisbane.\(^8\) Both samples received positive reviews in Australian press. The Empire stated:

> It is exhibited as a new therapeutic agent, and is a substitute for cod liver oil, having been used by the exhibitor, the Health Officer at Brisbane, for two and a half years with perfect success in the treatment of a variety of chronic disease. The distinction between this and the cod liver oil is that it contains no Iodine, but it possesses all the advantages of the latter without its nauseous taste and smell.\(^9\)

The success of the Sydney Exhibition must have encouraged Hobbs to develop the oil further, and to introduce dugong oil to a potential European market through European exhibitions such as the 1855 Paris Exposition Universelle. At these exhibitions, Aboriginal people were often used to promote Australia and its products internationally at this time, presented as a ‘noble savage’, being ‘civilised’ through their interactions with Europeans. In her article on exhibiting Aboriginal people and their

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\(^8\) “The Dugong,” Brisbane Courier, 8 October 1869, 2–3.

products at world exhibitions, Elizabeth Willis describes the ways in which Aboriginal people from Victoria were showcased in the Paris *Exposition Universelle* stating that:

> There was a further reason for displaying works of Aboriginal industry in the Melbourne and Paris Exhibitions: Victorians wanted to prove to the world that, in Victoria at least, the Indigenous people were both still working in traditional ways and adopting new ways.\(^\text{10}\)

Willis illustrates the mid-nineteenth century notion of Aboriginal people as both traditional and developed by referring to the New South Wales commissioners and their approach to what she calls an exhibition theme of ‘Aboriginal industry’. Under this heading she includes exhibits such as native dillies, Aboriginal baskets, a boomerang and ‘womera’ [sic], several native spears and waddies, and an opossum rug. She also notes the complicated nature of Aboriginal knitting needles from the Tumut River, and gloves and cuffs from opossum fur, examples of European products adapted to local materials.\(^\text{11}\) A pair of knitting needles, in this context, stands for an example of the progress or assimilation of Aboriginal people, as evidence of Aboriginal people learning from white settlers. Willis notes that these articles were read as evidence that Aboriginal people were adopting new ways at the time.

Although there was a relatively strong presence of Aboriginal products at the Paris Exhibition, there was a significant difference between these products and how dugong oil would have been promoted. This is because dugong oil exemplified the opposite process at work: it showed how white settlers were learning from Aboriginal people. Thus, dugong oil could not have been represented as an Indigenous product, but was more likely explained as a peculiar new article — both a medicine, to be taken orally and as a rub, and foodstuff, to be used in baking (the oil) or as an alternative to bacon (the fat/meat).

The evidence for how dugong oil was advertised at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* — as a medicine, a food or curious new article — is sparse. By examining accounts from later exhibitions at the turn of the twentieth century, however, we can see that the oil was being exhibited at that time as a medical curiosity from an exotic

\(^{10}\) Willis, “Exhibiting Aboriginal Industry,” 48.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 51.
Australia. Our only sources for the Paris Exhibition are newspaper articles which reported on the success of Australian exhibits including the reception of the oil. The Moreton Bay Courier noted the triumph of the dugong oil winning a medal in Paris:

A sample of the oil of the Dugong was sent to the Sydney Commissioners of the Paris Exhibition. It was exhibited at the Sydney Museum, along with the other products, and was afterwards forwarded to Paris. In acknowledgment, a medal has been received by Dr. Hobbs from the Emperor of the French.

According to the Moreton Bay Courier, the sample sent to Paris was the same as the one sent to the Sydney Exhibition. However Warry was not mentioned and it was Hobbs who won the silver medal (Figure 5.1). So what was the relationship between the two men and these samples? Warry could very well have been working for Hobbs and thus they decided to exhibit both their samples in Sydney in an attempt to draw a greater audience. Because exhibiting in France was more prestigious, Hobbs may well have wanted the limelight to himself, since he was promoting the oil as a possible medical breakthrough and as his ‘discovery’.

Despite a relative lack of information concerning the Sydney and Paris Exhibitions, it is possible to deduce how dugong oil may have been represented there from letters to the editor of the Moreton Bay Courier 1875 and 1877 from Charles Chubb, a silk manufacturer. A further source of information is a catalogue of products sent to the 1901 Queensland House Exhibition in London. Although both the letters and the catalogue are from a later date, they allow us to imagine what visitors to the Sydney and Paris Exhibitions may have seen.

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14 Dugong oil was first presented at the 1854 Sydney Exhibition in Australia and at the 1855 Paris Exhibition in Europe. Dugong oil continued to be exhibited throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for instance in the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London and in the annual International Exhibitions in London in the 1870s. For more information on the exhibition of Queensland produce, including dugong oil, see Judith Marilyn McKay, “‘A Good Show’: Colonial Queensland at International Exhibitions,” Memoirs of the Queensland Museum: Cultural Heritage Series 1, no. 2 (1998).

15 The medal pictured was awarded to chosen items at the Products of New South Wales Exhibition held at the Australian Museum on 14 November 1854. Items exhibited there went through a selection process. Chosen items were then forwarded as New South Wales exhibits for the 1855 Paris Exposition Universelle. Silver medals, Figure 5.1, were the first class awards. A similar medal was awarded to Hobbs at the Paris Exhibition.
In 1875, Chubb wrote to the *Moreton Bay Courier* complaining about the lack of safe packaging when sending goods to overseas exhibitions. His woven silk products — which he notes won a gold medal in London — were packaged with dugong oil, which broke and spoiled the silk. Because of this breakage, Chubb could not exhibit his silk at the Philadelphia Exhibition in the 1870s.\(^\text{16}\) In this letter, Chubb provides a rare insight into dugong oil being exhibited in the United States. Otherwise reports in Australia of dugong oil exhibition, promotion and use in the United States are limited.\(^\text{17}\) We do, however, know the product was available there. In an 1896 book published in Philadelphia on animal and vegetable oils and fats, dugong is listed under the section ‘Whale Oils, subsection Sirenia or Sea Cows’. Although the Latin name used for the

\(\text{Figure 5.1: Silver medal presented to selected exhibits at the 1854 Products of New South Wales Exhibition.}\

\text{Source: item number 20512, Products of New South Wales Exhibition, Museum Victoria.}\

\(^{16}\) Charles F Chubb, “Philadelphia Exhibition,” *Brisbane Courier*, 28 September 1875, 3.

animal is *Halicor indicus*, it is clear that the animal is Hobbs’ *Halicore australis*, today’s *Dugong dugon*, because the range of its habitat is listed as ‘the Archipelago and the northeastern [sic] coast of Australia.’ As well providing information on the size of the animal, the process of hunting and procuring the oil, and the amount of oil rendered from one animal, the entry confirms both the availability and high demand of dugong oil (due to its medicinal properties) in both the European and American markets.

Chubb wrote to the newspaper again, two years later, in relation to the Paris Exhibition in the 1870s. This time Chubb argued for the need to select products worthy of representing Australia and to carefully package them for the journey. He complained that once again his silk products sent to London and Vienna for exhibition had been damaged by more broken bottles of dugong oil. Based on these letters to the editor, it is evident that dugong oil was not packaged together with Aboriginal or medicinal goods but with fabrics. The packaging of goods for transport to exhibitions offers a small clue to the layout of the exhibition (although products could have been packed separately but not in the categories in which they were exhibited).

Another possible indication of how dugong oil was exhibited comes from the way in which products were displayed in groups at the 1901 London Exhibition in Queensland House, the London headquarters of the Queensland government. In 1908 several copies of the exhibition catalogue appeared in extensive correspondence between a dugong oil manufacturer, John Signato of Coomera, and H. E. Garraway, the Agent-General for Queensland in London. The catalogue shows that the dugong oil was grouped alongside turtle soup at the very end of a long list of household goods.

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20 Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane; John Signato was an Austrian born businessman living in Coomera who had many entrepreneurial ventures including a general store, grazing land, three dairies as well as an auctioneer and commission business. He was also a distributor of many products throughout the region and to Brisbane including products from his dairies, farm supplies and dugong oil. According to the *Brisbane Courier*, 15 June 1907, 13, Signato was a ‘universal provider on the Coomera River’ and he filled ‘a leading place in the industrial life of the district’.
including wines, cordial, brushware [sic], dairy products and ground nuts.\textsuperscript{21} In a handwritten version of the catalogue, in contrast the oil is placed alongside wax models of fruit and ewes.\textsuperscript{22}

Such inconsistencies suggest that dugong oil did not hold any specific place in such exhibitions, and, in particular, that it was not represented as a product of Aboriginal Australia despite the fact that Aboriginal people were represented at these exhibitions. The 1855 Paris \textit{Exposition Universelle} included photographs of Aboriginal people taken by John Hunter Kerr, a Scottish station owner who settled in Australia in 1839. In addition, on display there were articles relating to women’s work; items of ceremonial significance; tools, weapons and skins; and two native bark drawings (one showing animals being hunted, and the other showing Aboriginal dancers wearing emu feather headdresses).\textsuperscript{23} In her study on the representation of Aboriginality, Lesley McCall suggests that ‘the fascination of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europeans with the primitive and savage created … an image of Aboriginality in which the portrayal of a state of primitiveness was fundamental.’\textsuperscript{24} The representation of Aboriginal culture as ‘savage’ coincided with this growing interest in ‘primitiveness’. Dugong oil and its inherent Aboriginal-ness did not fit this depiction of primitive savages, and so exhibiting dugong oil as an Aboriginal product would have been counterproductive to this image.

Dugong oil continued to be showcased into the twentieth century both in Australia and overseas. Four years after the federation of Australia, in 1905, the Australian Natives Association organised an exhibition in Sydney that aimed to promote Australian products and industries in order to showcase the riches of the new country. Dugong products — refined oil, crude oil, lard and hide — were listed as a contribution of the Inspector of Fisheries in Brisbane with a remark that the products were to be returned to the Inspector. The exhibit was successful having ‘evinced great interest’ from the visitors.\textsuperscript{25} The fact that different people were listed as dugong oil

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane.
\item \textsuperscript{22} The catalogue does not specify if the ewes were also wax models or live specimens.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Willis, “Exhibiting Aboriginal Industry,” 39–58.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Lesley McCall in ibid., 51.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Item ID 902807, Batch file, agricultural, 5 January 1905–22 March 1906, “Australian Natives Association Exhibition, 2–9 December 1905, Sydney: Correspondence including list of exhibits of Queensland primary and manufactured products,” QSA, Brisbane.
\end{itemize}
contributors indicates that the products of the dugong industry were promoted by individuals from different walks of life, including a private entrepreneur from Coomera and a government official from the Fisheries Department. Thus, just as dugong oil was considered a medical treatment on the verge of orthodox and unorthodox medicine, so it was on the verge of private and government control. As shown in Chapter 3, dugong oil was not bureaucratised like most European medicines. Rather, the circulation of dugong oil was partially ungoverned, which allowed for the blurring of boundaries of ownership and control and allowing for the continuing of Aboriginal labour, knowledge and tradition within and alongside the dugong industry.

Today the dugong and turtle are connected with ‘salt-water people’, however this sensibility would not have been prevalent therefore dugong oil would have been shown as a curious item — alternative means of diet and medicine in the tropics. It was shipped to London not as a representation of Aboriginal products but as a showcase of the riches of Australia, specifically Queensland. Yet without the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal people, the oil could not have made this transnational oceanic voyage.

On the dugong oil’s transnational journey it carried with it exchanges first made during the days of early contact, and later the connections between Aboriginal people and settlers working in the industry. Although documenting these exchanges has proven difficult, it is also the case that almost identical uses of dugong oil had been made by the two populations over the decades. Thus, despite being brought to the public eye by a white entrepreneur and doctor, dugong oil arguably retained something of the threads of its Aboriginality both in terms of the dugong fishing skills and the medicinal knowledge of the Quandamooka people that settlers came to enjoy and in some cases seek to exploit. Early exchanges between Aboriginal and settler knowledge and skills created the context for Hobbs’ endeavours. The industrialised manufacturing of dugong oil was a product of that ‘contact zone’ when settlers appropriated the knowledge and skills from the Aboriginal people during the early period of contact in Moreton Bay.26

The journey dugong oil made to Paris in 1855 offered a way to showcase Australia and Moreton Bay as a rich, diverse and progressive region. The prospect of a new consumer group in Europe was no doubt a driving force for Hobbs’ endeavours. However an equally important possibly even greater force was the acknowledgment he sought from the medical establishment. Hobbs was bringing a new medical product to

26 Pratt, Imperial Eyes.
Europe, one apparently surpassing cod liver oil so unpopular among patients due to its nauseating smell and taste. Despite finding a new home in Australia, settlers looked to their motherland for affirmation and in this sense, doctors aiming to gain a reputation as men of science and progress needed to find recognition in England. For this reason, Hobbs’ international success was crucial to confirming his status in Australia. By looking for affirmation from the motherland and endeavouring to create a greater market for dugong oil, a transnational platform for the oil was created connecting patients, distributors and medical practitioners with Aboriginal people on Minjerribah.

Export to Europe 1859–1902

The transnational platform built on the connections of both Aboriginal and white dugong oil producers, promoters and consumers was utilised shortly after the Paris Exposition Universelle (1855) and just one year after Dr John McGrigor Croft published his pamphlet on dugong oil in London (discussed in the following section), when dugong oil appeared as an export item to Great Britain in the Statistical Register of Queensland (later referred to as the ‘Blue Books’). Export to New South Wales began in 1859: two years after Queensland’s separation from New South Wales. Figure 5.2 shows the fluctuation in prices of dugong oil during 1859–1866 ranging from just over £2/gallon to £1.25/gallon. In the last two years, 1865 and 1866, the oil was either of an unspecified nature or generally titled animal oil, however, based on the price — between £0.3 and £0.4 per gallon — we can assume that dugong oil was not being exported under either one of these names.

As shown in Figure 5.3, dugong oil continued to be exported from Queensland to Great Britain and Canada as well as to other Australian colonies, namely New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, into the early twentieth century. Apart from the oil, dugong hides, bones and stearin (a glycerol-based compound present in fats) were also exported to be used to manufacture leather, cutlery handles and soap.27

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Based on the data in Figure 5.2, it is clear that dugong oil export to Great Britain was too irregular to create a solid customer base. The figure further shows that dugong oil disappeared from the export register in the mid-1860s coinciding with the first low point in the industry. The fluctuating export numbers were presumably due to a drop in production at the time caused most likely by overfishing. The consequent decreased production of dugong oil led to its adulteration with shark oil staining the oil’s reputation as documented on several different occasions in the Australian press.28 Shark liver oil has been used for centuries as a folk remedy to promote the healing of wounds and as a remedy for respiratory tract and digestive system problems.29 It would seem that mixing dugong and shark oil would go unnoticed by consumers as both were used for similar complaints. However, according to the Australian Town and Country Journal in 1881, shark liver oil ‘has an unpleasant taste and disagreeable smell. A good


deal of the oil sold as “Dugong” is really shark oil.’ The ‘unpleasant taste and disagreeable smell’ of cod liver oil is one of the reasons Hobbs started experimenting with dugong oil in the first place.

Coinciding with the disappearance of dugong oil from the export tables is the disappearance of Hobbs’ connection to the oil. It is likely he moved on to a different venture, possibly still administering dugong oil to his patients, but leaving the dream of an international dugong oil market behind.

**Marketing the oil in Europe as a medicine 1860–1908**

Hobbs was not the only medical professional searching for the limelight in connection to dugong oil. He might have been the sole medical professional to promote it in Australia, however, in Great Britain another doctor was on the path to introduce the oil to the European market and propagate his name. In 1860 Dr John McGrigor Croft ‘M.D., F.O.S., M.R.C. Physicians London, Late medical officer to H.M. Ceylon Riples [sic] in China and Ceylon, and staff surgeon to H.M. forces’ published an eight-page pamphlet (obtainable only from the author at a sixpence) titled *The Dugong Oil, Its...*  

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31 Hobbs, *Elaiopathy, the Administration of the Oil of the Dugong, Halicore Australis, as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease.*
Valuable Medicinal Properties for Consumption & Various Diseases documenting the biology and nature of dugongs and the therapeutical effects of dugong oil. Croft refers to Hobbs as the medical practitioner to introduce dugong oil to Western medicine, and, like Hobbs in Elaiopathy, offers testimonials about the miraculous effects of dugong oil. Croft states:

[F]or the last twelve months … for the purpose of testing its value, and submitted it to the analytical opinion of my respected friend, the eminent chemist, Professor Taylor, of Guy’s Hospital, who has kindly allowed me to state that he considers the oil ‘very palatable’, in fact agreeable, differing in that one point specially from the best cod liver oil.

It is evident that Croft was using his personal connections to highlight the qualities of dugong oil and at the same time to emphasise his own position as a friend to an esteemed professor.

Croft administered dugong oil to patients in his private practice in London (although the pamphlet does not provide details regarding his practice) and to patients in the Hospital for Consumption in Brompton. Croft sought to connect himself with the names of well-regarded physicians Dr John Forbes, whom he provided with elaborate title: ‘Sir John Forbes, M.D., Physician extraordinary to His Royal Higness [sic] Prince Albert, Physician in ordinary to Her Majesty’s Household, and Consulting Physician to the extensive Hospital for Consumption, at Brompton’, and Dr Cotton (the hospital’s visiting physician). According to Croft, he was ‘given’ a patient with a serious case of advanced consumption under the supervision of these two physicians. In his pamphlet Croft states that, to the astonishment of the medical men, the patient began to heal after just one week: ‘Increase of weight, less difficulty of breathing, bloody expectoration checked, scarcely any profuse perspiration, diarrhoea stopped, appetite better, in fact the results of the treatment were already apparent.’ After a month of treatment, the patient was so pleased with his state of health that, according to

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33 Ibid., 4.

34 Consumption was the term most often used for tuberculosis throughout the 19th century.

35 Croft, The Dugong Oil, Its Valuable Medicinal Properties for Consumption & Various Diseases, 6.

36 Ibid.
Croft, ‘he begged to be allowed to shake hands and thank me for what had been done.’

Although Croft does not detail the scientific properties of dugong oil, he includes esteemed physicians in his pamphlet. Through these medical men, Croft hoped, as did Hobbs, to be recognised as a well-respected doctor and man of science. From later correspondence between Cotton and the British Medical Journal we find out that Croft used his dugong oil pamphlet to apply for a position at the Western General Dispensary. The position was given to a different applicant however.

In addition, in his pamphlet Croft gives the name of a reliable distributor of dugong oil in London. He claims that only this distributor could be trusted adding that he ‘would guard the public against imposition, for this oil may easily be adulterated, and at present, I can say, Mr. Squire is the only chemist likely to have the oil, and dependence may be placed on him.’ At the time of printing, Croft claimed that he did not have a large enough quantity of the oil to meet demand. So he advised potential customers to contact Squire, stating that he would obtain a large quantity of the product very soon. Although Croft referred to other distributors, he did not mention them by name, identifying them generally as the ‘principal chemists in London.’

Croft’s aim to publicise his name and distribute dugong oil among medical circles did not have positive results. Shortly after publishing his pamphlet, Cotton wrote twice to the British Medical Journal (26 July and 17 August, 1860) about the testing of dugong oil at the Hospital for Consumption by Croft. In the process Cotton confirmed that Croft approached him with a sample of dugong oil. Although he considered the experiment using dugong oil as encouraging, Cotton questioned the results, concluding that ‘it was made with a carefully selected sample, which consisted only of one bottle and so he could not regard the experiment as conclusive.’ Further, Cotton registered a degree of surprise at the claims Croft made in the pamphlet, stating ‘that he [Croft] had ‘diagnosed the patient” and had “astonished” both me and my colleagues by the

37 Ibid., 7.
38 “A Candidate for the Office of Physician to a Dispensary,” British Medical Journal 2, no. 28 (1861): 49.
39 Croft, The Dugong Oil, Its Valuable Medicinal Properties for Consumption & Various Diseases, 8.
40 Ibid.
success of his treatment.’ According to Cotton, however, there were no colleagues present at the testing of dugong oil and not one of them at the hospital knew of the existence of the oil.

Despite the controversy created by Croft, this short episode indicates that dugong oil had made its way to England even before being officially recorded as such in the Statistical Register of Queensland. The sample of dugong oil Croft had access to could have been privately sent, possibly by Hobbs, before the export commenced in greater quantities. Croft referred to the planned export in his pamphlet and his statement was supported indeed by the first shipment of dugong oil to England in 1861. 42

As a ‘new medical product’ arriving from an ‘exotic’ land, dugong oil needed to be tested (and advertised) before being placed on the market. This was done, although with less than resounding success, by Croft at the Hospital for Consumption. Given Croft’s aim to gain a position in Croydon and his speculation with dugong oil, it is possible he used Hobbs’ Elaiopathy as a template for his own pamphlet, and it is even plausible that the two men met in person earlier in their careers as they both lived in South East Queensland in the same period of time. Croft claimed to have been in ‘long residence in Oriental and Australian lands, in Her Majesty’s Service.’ 43 Croft lived in Australia between 1839 and 1857. The Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser published a notice of the birth of Croft’s son in 1839; The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser announced the marriage of ‘Charlotte Winiford Amelia, eldest daughter of Deputy Purveyor, J. Croft, Esq. Medical Staff Sydney’ in 1841; the Australian announced the birth of a second son in 1842; and the Sydney Morning Herald the birth of a third son in 1857. The announcement read, in part: ‘at the Grove, Clevelon, Somersetshire, [to] the wife of J. Mcgrigor Croft, Esq., M.D., late senior medical officer of H.M.’s Ceylon Rifles in China, and staff surgeon to the forces.’ 44 This suggests Croft moved from Sydney, where he was based in 1842, to the Somerset shire in Queensland by 1857. 45 Somerset shire is a mere 100 km inland from Moreton Bay. Thus it is quite possible Croft’s and Hobbs’ paths overlapped.

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42 “Export,” Statistical Register of Queensland for the Year 1861, 70.
43 Croft, The Dugong Oil, Its Valuable Medicinal Properties for Consumption & Various Diseases, 7.
While Hobbs’ lecture was aimed at both promoting the product for the betterment of humanity and for his personal gain, Croft seemed more interested in social and monetary status. Nonetheless, both of their pamphlets brought dugong oil to the attention of new customers and medical professionals overseas. Despite his questionable claims, Croft did test the oil under professional supervision and the results were satisfactory, potentially opening the way for dugong oil marketing in Great Britain.

When the new trade in dugong oil between Moreton Bay and Great Britain opened, with the first official shipment in 1861, a steady and reliable supply of dugong oil was needed. As dugong oil was a new product in Great Britain, it was yet to become a household item and so it required a strong reputation for customers to adopt the product. In Australian waters, however, dugongs were being taken at unsustainable rates. As dugong numbers decreased, so did oil production leading (as we have seen) to the adulteration of dugong oil with shark liver oil. The fluctuating export numbers and the scarred reputation of the oil could have affected the reception of dugong oil in Great Britain. The popularity of the product is in any case difficult to trace. Based on newspaper advertisements presenting dugong oil as a suitable substitute for cod liver oil, we can deduce that the oil was available there in the 1860s and 70s.46 This period coincides with the gap between the first and second waves of successful dugong fishing in Moreton Bay. The popularity of dugong oil among consumers in Great Britain, however, remains largely undocumented.

After the first wave of advertising of dugong oil in the British press in the late 1860s and early 1870s, all mention of dugong oil disappeared. It is likely stocks ran low following the unproductive phase as mentioned above. There is no evidence of further export, and distributors would have no means of obtaining new supplies.

Despite the consumption and popularity of dugong oil being largely undocumented, dugong oil continued to appear, suggesting resurgence, in newspaper advertisements, exhibitions and correspondence between government officials and London based chemical companies. This resurgence of the dugong oil in Great Britain was commented upon in the Brisbane Courier (1871):

The season for dugong fishing in and about Moreton Bay is just commencing, and considering the high favor [sic] in which dugong oil is held by the medical profession here, and the attention which it is attracting in England, it may be reasonably expected that the capture of the dugong will soon be developed into an important industry.\textsuperscript{47}

Interest in dugong oil then rose again in Britain in the early 1900s, when mass advertising of the oil appeared in the Western Gazette, Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser.\textsuperscript{48} The rise in advertising and consequently consumer interest coincide with the 1901 Queensland House Exhibition in London, and the testing of dugong oil by British companies between 1906 and 1908. The fluctuating interest in the product in Great Britain corresponds with the relatively low place the dugong industry occupied within the Queensland economy. Because the industry did not yield a large profit, the government did not manage (and help promote) the industry as would have been the case with industries yielding a greater profit, such as the pastoral, bêche-de-mer or pearling industries.

The advertisements appearing in British newspapers in 1900s likely sparked the interest of chemical companies seeing dugong oil as a possible alternative to oils prevalent at the time. Following the 1901 London Exhibition, H. E. Garraway (an employee of the Commercial Enquiry Branch of the Agent General for Queensland in London) suggested more samples of the oil should be sent in order ‘to test the market as to its proper commercial value of the oil.’\textsuperscript{49} E. J. Reid & Co was to perform the testing of the oil to determine its quality before it would be made available to a wider market. In a letter to Garraway, they inquired about a one ton sample of dugong oil.\textsuperscript{50}

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In our opinion this oil is of very fine quality and likely to command a very extensive sale in this country and other parts of Europe, but of course we
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{47}“Social,” Brisbane Courier, 27 November 1871, 2.

\textsuperscript{48}“Dugong Oil,” Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser, 4 April 1900, Somerset, England, 4; “Dugong Oil,” Western Gazette, 16 February 1900, Somerset, England, 5; “Dugong Oil,” Western Gazette, 30 March 1900, Somerset, England, 2.

\textsuperscript{49}Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane.

\textsuperscript{50}E.J. Reid & Co was a family owned company based on Glasgow with main interest in telegraphy. The company was originally founded by William Reid (Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Member of the Royal Institution and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society) as William Reid & Company in 1820 in London. The company changed to Reid Brothers in 1861 and comprised of William Jnr, James and Robert Nichol Reid. Edwin James Reid became a partner in the company in 1895, with the name changing soon after to E.J. Reid & Co.
must point out to you that as it is an absolutely new article, it will be necessary to thoroughly test its usefulness, and for that purpose we would ask you to be good enough to send us say one ton of the oil.\textsuperscript{51}

They even suggested that an amount of unrefined oil be sent ‘as it would probably have an equal value in its crude state, and it would enable your people to get it into this country at a lower price.’\textsuperscript{52} But after testing the samples, they concluded that its greatest market would be in soap making. Dugong oil would need to compete with other natural oils in this industry. For this reason E. J. Reid & Co was interested in lowering the price, stating that while small quantities of the oil could be sold for other purposes, in comparison ‘some thousands of tons weekly’ could be purchased for soap making.\textsuperscript{53} An article in the \textit{Queenslander} reacted to the findings, the writer expressing concern about the amount and price of dugong oil needed for soap making:

\begin{quote}
Permit me to point out that, if I am rightly informed, there is not more than enough dugong oil manufactured in Queensland to supply the demand for medicinal purposes. In fact, such a small quantity is produced that no official figures are recorded as to the yield in gallons. It is admitted that, if the industry were prosecuted in accordance with business principles, it might be made a most lucrative one. Old Moreton Bay fishermen agree that it has been on the decline for many years, and at time of writing very few persons are engaged in dugong fishing, although it is well known that the pure oil is a sovereign remedy in cases of consumption and wasting diseases. It cannot, however, be produced for £9 per ton. In the opinion of persons qualified to express themselves on the matter, the lowest sum at which it could be produced with any certainty of returning a profit to the manufacturer is 6s. per gallon, or at the rate of about £100 per ton. It is, I am informed, retailed in small quantities for medicinal purposes at from 12s. to 20s. per gallon, or at the rate of from about £140 to £240 per ton. It will be seen therefore that it is much too valuable to be used for soap-making purposes.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

The correspondent was clearly well-informed about dugong oil, correctly commenting that the industry as a whole was not managed well, that dugong numbers dwindled several times during the industry’s operation, and that it would be financially unviable to sell the oil at the low prices E. J. Reid & Co suggested for soap making. In fact this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{54} “Dugong and Its Oil: A Neglected Industry,” \textit{Queenslander}, 29 February 1908, 40.
\end{itemize}
person provided a brief summary of the uncertain situation of the industry and the oil itself. Through their concern we are reminded that the sustainability of the industry, like the oil itself, was not the focus of the authorities or consumers.

Despite the medicinal qualities of dugong oil, it was in fact used for soap making as suggested by E. J. Reid & Co above. It was advertised as an ingredient in soap and pomade in the second half of the nineteenth century — used by Rimmel to make eucalyptus perfumed soap.\(^\text{55}\) There is no evidence of the popularity of the products or of the success businesses gained from dugong hygiene products. These advertisements appeared in newspapers only for a short period during the early 1870s, suggesting that the use of dugong oil in cosmetics was not successful.

Other companies were in communication with Garraway (Agent General for Queensland in London) about dugong oil, its quality and commerciality, however E. J. Reid & Co was most confident about its success. For instance, Burgoyne Burbidges & Co examined the oil, found it to be of fine quality and estimated the price at £20/ton for the thick oil and an extra 20–30s for clear oil.\(^\text{56}\) However, they found it difficult to give a close evaluation until it was thoroughly tested on the market.\(^\text{57}\) Langton Fort & Co (London-based wholesale dealers) suggested a sample of pure oil with a seal from the Queensland Government to ‘be submitted to a leading London Analyst, whose name would carry weight … which would be a point of great importance in introducing this Oil to the Medical Profession.’\(^\text{58}\) This suggestion was adhered to. Only 19 days after the communication was received, the *British Medical Journal* published a short analysis of dugong oil, comparing it to cod liver oil and indicating ‘that it cannot be expected that the former (dugong oil) would possess the same high degree of assimilability. No doubt it might prove a useful form for administering fat, but there is no evidence that it would show any peculiar value.’\(^\text{59}\) The *British Medical Journal* further noted that dugong oil

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56 The Burgoyne Burbidges & Co Ltd was a chemical works company located in East Ham, England.

57 Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane.

58 Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane.

had been available in London for over 20 years, but was never used widely as a substitute for cod liver oil. With this in mind, Langton Fort & Co remained unconvinced of any commercial success of the oil until more data was made available, such as the procurable amount and the price.\(^\text{60}\)

Although the chemical companies were not convinced the oil would succeed in the medical market, it continued to draw interest of British newspapers. For example, an article in the *London Lancet* (1907) describes the oil and its uses:

> We have received from the office of the Agent General for Queensland (73, Basinghall-street, London, E.C.), some samples of dugong oil which has been used more or less as a substitute for cod-liver oil in Queensland for many years. As a nutritive in wasting diseases it is said to give very satisfactory results. It is a clear yellowish oil of the same consistence as cod-liver oil and we find that its flavour is not objectionable. According to a note in the United States Dispensatory (nineteenth edition, 1907) the oil was introduced into use many years ago by Mr. W. Hobbs, a surgeon of Brisbane. It is obtained from two species of halicore, Halicore Australis (Owen) and Halicore dugong (Illig), which are described as cetaceous animals inhabiting the rivers and bays of Northern and Eastern Australia and many of the East India Islands. The flesh of these animas is said to be delicate and palatable and valued for food. The oil is obtained by boiling the superficial fat and is described as ‘bland and sweet and free from disagreeable taste and odour, so that it may be taken more freely than cod-liver oil, which it is thought to equal in virtues.’\(^\text{61}\)

The article suggests dugong oil could find a market among European consumers: it praises the oil and provides some historical context of its origin. It is possible that Garraway, who sent the sample, was searching for a way to promote Queensland, and wanted to find out if a European market for tropical and curious products like dugong oil was viable.

It is clear from the level of communication between Garraway and the companies testing the oil that preparations were underway to launch dugong oil onto the European market. The *Lancet* article only confirms this idea, publicly connecting dugong oil with the Agent General of Queensland. Despite dugong oil gaining publicity as an Australian substitute for cod liver oil, the European launch of dugong oil never occurred.

\(^{60}\) Item ID 902820, Batch file, agricultural, 5 February 1900–8 May 1908, “Agent General London: Correspondence re samples of Queensland products forwarded for exhibition purposes; lists of sample products,” QSA, Brisbane.

contrary, it seems that it was retracted from the European market entirely as there are no further accounts of testing or use of dugong oil in Europe after 1908.

**Conclusion**

Although the product disappeared from the European market, dugong oil left its mark on the ‘exhibition circuit’ as a curious medicine from Australia. The economic reasons behind sending the oil as an exhibit were twofold: to promote Australia as an ‘antipodean equal’ with a range of new products which could replace their European counterparts; and to bring profit to Australia by introducing export-worthy products. Both of these reasons supported the notion of Australia as a promising and important part of the colony, inevitably standing on its own after Federation. Because Australia was presenting itself to the world through these exhibits and through export materials, its products needed to be of a reliable standard and, based on the racial notions of the day, having Aboriginal people connected with the production of an export-worthy article could have been detrimental to the reputation of the colony (and later, state). For this reason dugong oil was not represented as an Indigenous product, with all merits going to the white entrepreneurs involved in the dugong industry instead. Apart from the publicity gained at exhibitions, the partial success of the oil in the second half of the nineteenth century as a medical product is suggested by export numbers and by the positive accounts of chemical testing companies and in British newspapers. The fluctuating export numbers reflect the situation of the dugong as a limited resource in Australia; with growing demand came greater exploitation and the slow-breeding dugong soon found its name on the ‘vulnerable’ list.
Chapter 6

Protecting the dugong and cultural heritage in a Western economy

By the second half of the twentieth century, dugong oil had crossed a racial and spatial divide. In its original manufacture it was a shared and mixed endeavour being used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but, as I have shown, in its later representation it was portrayed as a European/exotic product traversing the globe in an effort to mould it into a product suitable for the European market. As it made this cultural and geographical journey, its story became more complex, with layer upon layer of interconnected stories. At the core of this story were the Quandamooka people and the dugong. The oil was ‘whitened’, but did not lose its Aboriginal connection. The story of the Indigenous people and the dugong was submerged under layers of ‘new’ history. We can track this submerged story through the momentary appearances of individuals, such as Fernandez Gonzales and Sam Rollands but also through the absent presence of Aboriginal people as shown in Chapter 4.

The path of the oil from being exhibited and marketed around the world as discussed in Chapter 5 to its gradual disappearance in the second half of the twentieth century as discussed below is relatively hard to follow due to the scarcity of records. The oil was still being manufactured and used in Australia during this period as discussed in Chapter 3; nevertheless the amount of oil available on the market was dwindling and the detrimental impact of the industry on dugong numbers was becoming apparent. In this chapter I compare the environmental management practices of Aboriginal people with those of white settlers in order to explore the idea of overlapping histories of Indigenous sustainable practices and exploitative Western practices.
A study of the dugong fishing industry from an ecological perspective was undertaken by Daley, Griggs and Marsh in 2008.\(^1\) They map out the various sites of the industry in Queensland — from 1847 to 1969 (Figure 6.1). The aim of their article is to ‘reconstruct the historical commercial dugong … fisher[y], to indicate the likely scale of their ecological impact, … to assess the environmental significance of [the industry] and to derive implications for contemporary environmental management.’\(^2\) Their work shows that the commercial dugong fishery was operated without effective regulation leading to the overexploitation of the animal on a larger scale than was originally presumed. At the same time, however, they suggest that the scarcity of dugongs in some locations including Moreton Bay was caused by a combination of factors including overexploitation during the operation of the industry as well as large-scale movements of the animal caused by the shortage of food. Their study provides a great deal of statistical groundwork on the environmental impact of the dugong industry, which has allowed this project to concentrate on historical frameworks (see the introduction in Chapter 1), such as the intricacies of power relations, traditional knowledges and colonialism.

Just as the preceding chapters have argued that the dugong industry was a fluid and largely unregulated platform, in which tradition and change were connected and mutually impacted each other, this last chapter looks at cross-cultural contact and exchange in connection with the use of the environment, arguing that moments of contact complicate and enhance our understanding of the various histories which intersect and interact in the shared history of a contact zone. As put forward by Calder, Lamb and Orr in their work on European and Polynesian encounters in the Pacific, ‘it does no service to local culture to say that in changing it becomes less than it was, because it leaves the victims of change the option either of vanishing into the long night of authenticity or of applying for subject status in the only history on offer.’\(^3\) Likewise, in this thesis I have sought to argue that ‘contact’ has been a positive force shaping history in myriad, often unexpected, ways. Hence, I am not focusing on changes to the culture of the Quandamooka people; rather, this chapter maps the way that culture and

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2 Ibid., 229.

environmental awareness, in a larger sense, was influenced through the interactions of Aboriginal and white people specifically in the dugong industry.

Traditional practices, knowledge and cultures are subject to change through both outward influence and the experience of trial and error. Authenticity is not lost with the introduction of a new culture; rather, it is shaped to suit the changing lifestyle. This can be seen in the way dugongs were caught along the Queensland coast. In the Moreton Bay region, dugongs were traditionally caught by netting, while in the North of...
Queensland and in the Torres Straits, dugongs were caught using harpoons. Both techniques evolved through trial and error and were authentic to their local areas. As the dugong industry developed in Moreton Bay, new and alternative fishing techniques evolved. The authenticity of these new practices, however, was not compromised because change is a natural aspect of culture.

During the 115 years (1854–1969) of white–Aboriginal collaboration in dugong fishing in Moreton Bay, dugong numbers decreased significantly. The decrease in the dugong population continues until the present day, causing the dugong to be classified as vulnerable to extinction. The reasons for this ongoing decline in dugong numbers in the second half of the twentieth century has been covered thoroughly by Helene Marsh, who argues that a number of external influences have reduced the dugong population there, including water pollution leading to the loss of seagrass, accidental dugong catches in fishing nets, and boat strikes.4

Environmental consciousness was growing at the time the industry closed in 1969. However, it was not only European settlers who changed the environment; Aboriginal people also altered their surroundings. These impacts have been researched by historians such as Bill Gammage and Tom Griffiths, and by scientists adopting a historical approach such as David Bowman and Stephen Dovers.5 Their research shows that Aboriginal people lived sustainably and cared for their environment but that at the same time they actively changed and transformed their environment. The rapid transformation of the dugong habitat is now of great concern. How the dugong

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populations have been affected and what the outcome for the future should be is proposed by Marsh and colleagues in “Dugong.” For the urban coast of Queensland their suggestions include the creation of Dugong Protection Areas, management of habitat leading to the minimisation of human impact on dugongs, and encouraging Indigenous peoples and commercial fisheries to partake in dugong management.

The field of economic history surrounding cross-culturally collaborative industries in Australia is of growing interest. Historians such as Anne McGrath and Mark Hannah provide interesting new insights into labour and economical history and cross-cultural relations within working environments. Their work suggests that the environmental protection of species has also played a role in economic history. Although the dugong industry was not a major enterprise in Queensland — with sporadic financial success and only a small financial gain compared to other cross-culturally collaborative industries such as the whaling, pearling and bêche-de-mer industries, it did impact on the economy of the colony; and the prospect of economic gain was to have a major impact on the survival of a species.

Economic gain from the dugong industry was important for the Queensland Government, for the entrepreneurs seeking to develop the industry and for the fishermen (a number of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men). Taking part in the dugong industry allowed Indigenous men a certain degree of freedom in continuing a traditional practice while also gaining an income, which could alleviate their dependence on rations and local authorities. A flipside to this partial economic independence was that it disrupted the sustainable dugong fishing practices of their own people.

The sustainability of traditional dugong fishing was studied extensively by Marsh. Her work focuses on impacts such as habitat loss and degradation, fishing pressure, boat-related impacts and ecotourism. But she also acknowledges that dugongs were culturally significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. During the twentieth century a shift occurred in environmental management to include the

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6 Marsh et al., “Dugong.”


Chapter 6: PROTECTING THE DUGONG

protection of cultural heritage as part of that management. Hence, when looking at the
dugong industry and the steps taken to protect the animal, we need to incorporate ideas
of cultural heritage management, because, as has been shown elsewhere, cultural life is
a crucial element in maintaining continuity in the environment and our understanding
of the past.\(^9\)

The need to preserve cultural heritage is a relatively recent idea in Australia and
most often focuses on material culture. This focus on material objects can be seen in the
early colonial period through exhibitions of Indigenous items such as spears, woomeras
and possum skin cloaks (see Chapter 5). However, the preservation of a cultural
practice, like dugong fishing (which has been modified over decades of cross-cultural
interaction), is perhaps a little more complicated than the collection and preservation of
material culture because it is more abstract and precisely because it is subject to change.
This gradual change to cultural practices — traditions — does not, however, diminish
their authenticity.

While the topics of the Indigenous presence in the dugong industry together with
environmental, economic and cultural heritage issues could be discussed separately,
they appear in this chapter together as they provide us with a greater depth of
understanding of power relations in a profit-driven industry and the endurance of
Indigenous people in adhering to customs in the face of colonialism. The Indigenous
presence in the industry was closely linked with its economic successes and failures,
its connected to environmental issues such as the viability of dugong as a hunted
species. Similar issues surrounded the eventual protection of the dugong, being deeply
linked to issues of cultural heritage protection emerging in the second half of the
twentieth century, and in turn intimately related to the ongoing Indigenous presence on
Minjerribah. By analysing together these outwardly separate topics, the story that
unfolds, and to a certain degree concludes with this chapter, is more complex than just
the closure of an industry.

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\(^9\) For instance Jane Lydon uses material culture as the focus of her study of Ebenezer Mission in north-western Victoria in Lydon, *Fantastic Dreaming*; Cultural heritage has proven inseparable in the study of TSI communities as shown by Alfred Haddon in his anthropological analysis of Torres Strait Islanders in Alfred C Haddon, *Head-Hunters, Black, White, and Brown* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).
‘Decay’ of the industry

As dugong oil disappeared from Europe (early- to mid-twentieth century), documents on dugong oil use in Australia also became sparse. The newspaper articles referring to dugong oil often alluded to past successes and vague hopes for the future. A *Brisbane Courier* article (1917) described the dugong industry as ‘decayed’, despite efforts to restart the industry. The beginning of the season was slow, it reported, and the fishermen, unsuccessful; the catch at Myora and Amity Point had numbered fewer than a dozen. The article lamented that, ‘some years ago the annual catch at these places often reached the vicinity of 100.’

Twenty years later in 1937, a *Courier-Mail* article called Hervey Bay the only commercial dugong fishing location and stated that 50 animals had been caught there during that year. Hervey Bay, Tin Can Bay and Wide Bay were alternative dugong fishing locations during and after the decline of the Moreton Bay enterprises. However even there catch sizes had not met demand, so Tin Can Bay and Wide Bay fishing operations had closed in the mid-1870s, within a decade of their opening. The Hervey Bay fishery closed for over 30 years in the mid-1870s, but reopened again in the early 1900s due to increased demand (as explained in Chapter 5). It remained open until the prohibition of commercial dugong fishing in 1969 as shown in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 shows that the Moreton Bay dugong fishing industry was the longest-running operation, followed by Hervey Bay. The periods of intermittent dugong fishing in Moreton Bay coincided with closures of the fishery due to low numbers of dugongs. The numbers of dugongs caught in Moreton Bay throughout the operation of the industry were not documented in its entirety (Figure 6.3). Daley, Griggs and Marsh summarise the documented dugong catches in Moreton Bay between 1884 and 1938 (years 1912–1928 being omitted in the Annual Reports of the Inspector of Fisheries).

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12 The Hervey Bay dugong fishery was run by Lionel Ching until his death in 1893. Ching was interested in creating a correctly functioning dugong fishing industry and he corresponded on this topic with Cecil Fison, Queensland Inspector of Fisheries, on several occasions. Ching employed several crews of Aboriginal fishermen as well as white employees during his time. In the 1910s to 1960s dugong fishing was performed sporadically by various individuals. For more information on the Hervey Bay dugong fishery see Daley, Griggs, and Marsh, “Exploiting Marine Wildlife in Queensland.”
According to Daley, Griggs and Marsh, this ‘omission probably reflects the comparatively low status of the dugong fishery in Queensland.’

News of dugong catches in Moreton Bay were increasingly presented as exciting stories of individuals seeing or hearing about a dugong catch. This would suggest that the previously regular and numerous dugong fishing crews moving in and around Moreton Bay had all but disappeared and had been replaced by individuals, predominantly Quandamooka men. A curious account of such case came from Harry Higgs, who informed the Brisbane Courier that ‘Bertie Levinge, a native fisherman, captured three dugong [sic], and lost one — a big bull, which broke through the 1in. rope net and escaped into deep water, after giving his would be captors some anxious minutes.’ A highly interesting note to the story added by the Courier was that the oil from this catch sold at the highest price ever paid in the region for dugong oil in bulk.

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13 Ibid., 240.

14 “Dugong Fishing,” Brisbane Courier, 4 July 1917, 6.
This high price suggests that there was a scarcity of dugong oil on the market but a continuing demand.

Despite the negative analysis printed in the *British Medical Journal* (as mentioned in Chapter 5) and the various Australian newspapers articling the decline of the dugong industry (as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5), occasional accounts of the popularity of dugong oil could still be found in the early twentieth century. The *Argus* claims that:

> The natives were the first to discover the high medicinal value of the dugong oil which is now used extensively throughout the world in the treatment of chest complaints, bronchial troubles, and for rheumatism and paralysis. The oil is also excellent for treating bad burns, a method which the natives have employed since the earliest days.  

The article raises two interesting points; Aboriginal people were the ones to discover the healing properties of the oil, and it was used worldwide. We know from Hobbs’ lecture, newspaper articles from the nineteenth century and exhibitions that Aboriginal people were not acknowledged at the time as the originators of dugong oil as a medicine. In this article from 1935, their crucial role is finally acknowledged. Also, apart from this newspaper article, there is no other evidence of the worldwide use of dugong oil. Dugong catches in Moreton Bay increased significantly in the 1930s as can

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be seen in Figure 6.3, however we do not have evidence of the oil being used outside of Australia during this period.

There is no evidence of worldwide popularity of dugong oil from this or any other period despite the *Argus* article claiming the extensive use of dugong oil throughout the world. Apart from the attempts to popularise dugong oil in Europe and the few mentions of the product’s appearance in the United States (in Brannt’s *A Practical Treatise on Animal and Vegetable Fats and Oils* and Chubb’s destroyed woven silk articles shipped for an exhibition in Philadelphia, see Chapter 5, in the 1870s), dugong oil was used in Western medical practice on a larger scale only in Australia. A similar story can be read from a report on dugong oil prepared by the DDNA in 1951 in order to analyse the viability of the industry. From it we learn that dugong oil was not successful in Britain. The information was taken from the *Bulletin of the Imperial Institute* and concerns the testing of a sample of dugong oil sent to the Imperial Institute in London by the High Commissioner for Australia in 1925. The tests confirmed the qualities of dugong oil, nevertheless the conclusion of the Institute was that ‘[D]ugong oil does not appear to have been produced hitherto on any large scale and it rarely appears on the market of the United Kingdom.’ Further confirmation of the failure of dugong oil on the international market appeared in a 1935 report by Sir Raphael Cilento (Queensland Director-General of Health and Medical Services). In its pages he states that ‘the oil has little value as a commercial product, but is useful as a routine prevention of various complaints, especially “chest troubles” to children. … [It] is used extensively on all the Aboriginal Settlements and Mission Stations throughout Queensland.’

There were several factors involved in the decline of the industry. One was an unstable supply. Dugong catches varied dramatically from year to year. The reason for such variable numbers was the rapid decrease of the Moreton Bay dugong population as noted above. Inevitably the majority of the dugong herds, which, as stated by Welsby, ‘stretched across the Bay and measured up to 300 yards in the early days’, were either slaughtered or relocated to different waters. Because of this insufficient

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16 Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.


supply, the product would not have been seen as reliable, making it less attractive to retailers than products they could obtain easily. Customers would have also possibly been less likely to try a product that would have not been readily available, instead purchasing items already regularly on the shelves, including plant-based products like eucalyptus oil or products utilising farmed animals, such as emu oil.

Another reason for the decline of the industry was the damage done to the oil’s reputation when entrepreneurs mixed shark and dugong oil as discussed in Chapter 5. High demand combined with an unstable supply saw shark oil mixed with dugong oil to increase saleable quantities. Despite positive reviews of shark oil in medical journals; the long-term use of the oil throughout the world; and the availability of shark oil capsules to this day, the mixing of oils scarred dugong oil.\(^9\) Sold as ‘pure’, ‘unadulterated’ or ‘warranted genuine’, the dilution would have been seen as fraud making dugong oil a less attractive product.\(^{20}\)

Also, new medicaments which targeted the same complaints as dugong oil were available. Emu and goanna oils were popular remedies throughout the twentieth century for various complaints, including muscle and joint pain, arthritis and eczema. Goanna oil production ceased in the 1960s when goannas became a protected species and so, like dugong oil, goanna oil is now only used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Emu oil, contrastingly, grew in popularity during the second half of the twentieth century, perhaps with the gradual disappearance of both dugong and goanna oils. Anecdotal evidence of emu oil characteristics and its popularity possibly led to scientific research into the medicinal qualities of the oil at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. This research suggests emu oil as a medicine for gastrointestinal ailments, while anecdotal evidence (based on advertisements) listed a variety of uses, including relief from arthritis, joint pain, muscular aches, bruising, sprains and strains; a reduction of irritation and inflammation caused by skin disorders including eczema, dermatitis, psoriasis, nappy rash, cradle cap and acne; a reduction in


\(^{20}\) “The Dugong,” Brisbane Courier, 8 October 1869, 3; “Dugong Oil,” Moreton Bay Courier, 14 July 1860, 3.
itching and pain associated with insect bites; a reduction in the pain and scarring caused by burns; and possibly aiding in lowering cholesterol.\textsuperscript{21}

**End of commercial dugong fishing (Amendment to the Fisheries Acts 1957–1962)**

Commercial dugong fishing ceased with the introduction of the 1969 *Amendment to the Fisheries Acts 1957–1962* [henceforth: *Fisheries Acts*] proclaiming full protection of the dugong. Dugongs were only allowed to be taken ‘for consumption by Islanders and Aboriginals’ either living on reserves or after applying for a permit.\textsuperscript{22} The protection of the dugong coincided with a decreased demand for dugong oil. Although the change from dugongs being an exploitable article to a fully protected species was a complete turnaround in relation to how the animal was viewed, the communication between the DNA and individuals concerned with the dugong industry suggests that the parties impacted were aware of the situation. In a response to Reverend Prenzler from Nambour concerning the sale of dugong oil in 1962, the DNA consulted with T. Marshall, ichthyologist for the Department of Harbours and Marine, responding he had

> ascertained that at present there is no restriction on the obtaining of Dugong and the sale of oil obtained from them. … [H]owever, consideration is at present being given to the introduction of regulations for the protection of Dugong. It may not be long therefore before they are fully protected.\textsuperscript{23}

On 11 February 1970 the Regional District Officer for the Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs (Thursday Island) informed the DNA that the store on


\textsuperscript{22} Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.

\textsuperscript{23} Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “DNA, Brisbane to Reverend Prenzler, Nambour, 8 June 1962,” QSA, Brisbane.
Thursday Island had accumulated 123 gallons of dugong oil. This was, according to the Regional District Officer, due to limited demand. He requested advice as to the disposal of the oil, with regard to the $2 per gallon paid by the Department to the Torres Strait Islander fishermen.24 Communications between customers and the Director Patrick Killoran (1970–1979) indicate that the excess oil was in fact disposed of gradually. For example, in 1970 dugong oil was distributed to medical aid posts throughout Queensland. Mr Kinnon of Aspley was sent a quantity of dugong oil in 1975. In 1976 five gallons were purchased from Boigu Island.25 In a response to Mrs Fischer of Brisbane in 1979, the DNA confirmed that there was an excess of 123 gallons in store in 1970, however, that amount had been disposed. He advised enquirers after that point that the dugong had been fully protected under the *Fisheries Acts* since 1969.26

Protection of the dugong through the *Fisheries Acts* resulting in the end of the industry is further confirmed by N. T. E. Hewitt (Minister for Conservation, Marine and Aboriginal Affairs) in 1970. In response to a letter suggesting developing a dugong oil industry in the Torres Strait, Hewitt rejected the suggestion based on the protected status of the dugong in a hand-written note on the letter (he also stated that Torres Strait Islanders living in the TSI could hunt and use dugong for their own purposes).27 The idea to re-establish a Moreton Bay dugong industry was proposed by Eric W. Wood (Secretary of the Cleveland Liberals), who had learned about the oil’s healing properties from Mr Porter of Ekibin. According to Wood, Porter had been using the oil as a liniment and oral treatment for his arthritis. Although Hewitt rejected the idea, it was not fully ignored as he informed Wood that ‘from time to time the position with regard to protection is reviewed but circumstances have not materially altered to an extent that would justify alteration in the currently exiting measures of protection.’28

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24 Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.

25 Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs manager, Thursday Island to Mr Kinnon, Aspley, 19 May 1975,” QSA, Brisbane; ibid. “Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs manager, Thursday Island to Boigu Island chairman, 6 July 1976.”

26 Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “DNA to Mrs Fischer, Brisbane, 9 October 1979,” QSA, Brisbane.

27 Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.

28 Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.
The management and protection of dugongs were not the only concerns of the *Fisheries Acts*. Cultural heritage management was also addressed. Traditional access by Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people to dugongs under the *Fisheries Acts* were considered as well via a permit system. Section 3(iii) of the Special Exemptions notes:

Nothing in this Act applies to (iii) the taking by any person, under and in compliance in every respect with prior permission in writing of the Minister or of any persons appointed by the Minister either generally or in the particular case in that behalf of pearl shell, trochus, beche-de-mer, green snail, fish, oysters or other marine product.[29]

The dugong and turtle fishing permit system allowed Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people not living on reserves to take dugongs and turtles. This cultural fishing right was officially discussed in 1970 when J. M. Harvey, (Director-General of Primary Industries) raised the topic with the DNA.[30] The Director saw a benefit to the Indigenous dugong fishermen in creating a very restricted form of permit:

The approach be viewed in the light of a special permit being granted to a particular area for a limited number of animals, to be available during a twelve month period and such might be administratively handled through [the] Fisheries Inspector in consultation with this Department’s local officer.[31]

In finalising the matter, Harvey concluded that this permit system would allow for the taking of 30 dugongs and 60 turtles in any year by ‘Aboriginals or Islanders who do not usually live on reserves.’[32]

The permits were to be issued by the Director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs who would have the authority from the Minister of Industries with the instrument of delegation being forwarded to the Minister for Conservation, Marine and Aboriginal Affairs. The Director of Aboriginal and Native Affairs was then to supply copies of the


[30] Item ID 1238502, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 23 May 1971–4 June 1975, “J. M. Harvey, Director-General of Primary Industries, Brisbane to DNA, Brisbane, 27 May 1970,” QSA, Brisbane.

[31] Item ID 1238502, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 23 May 1971–4 June 1975, “DNA, Brisbane to J. M. Harvey, Director-General of Primary Industries, Brisbane, 23 July 1970,” QSA, Brisbane.

[32] Item ID 1238502, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 23 May 1971–4 June 1975, “J. M. Harvey, Director-General of Primary Industries, Brisbane to DNA, Brisbane, 2 April 1971,” QSA, Brisbane.
permits to the Department of Industries and the Department of Harbours and Marines for reference to Fisheries and Boating Patrol Officers. This lengthy, bureaucratised process ensured that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had access to dugongs without having to be restricted to a reserve but also enforced a limitation upon access to dugongs and turtles.

One of the reasons for establishing the permit system was that Torres Strait Islanders were migrating to Queensland at that time, and thus losing contact with their cultural heritage in the form of dugong fishing. The DNA supported the idea of the new permit system by noting that dugong fishing ‘is psychologically beneficial and in regard to their children, of value in the retention of some of their cultures, particularly with regard to special food preparation.’

In initial communications with the Director-General of Primary Industries, the DNA only mentioned Torres Strait Islanders as eligible for permits; however, the Director-General wrote of both Aboriginal people and Islanders. During the system’s first four years, the majority of permits were issued to people of Islander descent in North Queensland. Each permit was signed by the DNA. Each stated it was for ‘an Aboriginal/Islander not living on a reserve’ to take one dugong and/or one turtle during a five-day period, usually Monday to Friday. The conditions were:

(i) Such Turtle/Dugong shall be consumed by Islanders or Aborigines.
(ii) Such Turtle/Dugong shall be utilised without waste.
(iii) All offal and other waste material resulting from the preparation of the dugong or turtle for consumption shall be disposed of so as not to become nuisance or danger to health.
(iv) This permit shall cover the taking of the quantity detailed above only.
(v) A further permit shall be applied for prior to the taking of subsequent Turtle/Dugong.
(vi) The Turtle/Dugong covered by this permit shall not be sold.
(vii) This permit is not transferrable.

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33 Item ID 1238502, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 23 May 1971–4 June 1975, “J. M. Harvey, Director-General of Primary Industries, Brisbane to DNA, Brisbane, 2 April 1971,” QSA, Brisbane.

34 Item ID 1238502, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 23 May 1971–4 June 1975, “DNA, Brisbane to J. M. Harvey, Director-General of Primary Industries, Brisbane, 23 July 1970,” QSA, Brisbane.

It is clear from the stipulations of the permit that dugong fishing was managed in detail and heavily restricted by the issuing authorities. The cultural importance of dugong (and turtle) fishing had been recognised, however the decision of when, by whom and how the dugong was to be caught and/or processed was up to the authorities.

**Aboriginal presence in the industry**

Throughout the thesis I have sought to show the interconnectedness of the white entrepreneurs and Aboriginal fishermen in the Moreton Bay dugong industry. To illustrate my points, I have used a case study of two important individuals: Fernandez Gonzales and Sam Rollands. The industry was built on the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal men; and their ‘collaboration’, whether voluntary or not, was crucial to the industry’s success. The first dugong catch by a white man involved an Aboriginal crew. Hobbs employed Aboriginal men until changing to white labour in 1858.\(^36\) When Gonzales began fishing for dugongs, he employed Aboriginal men alongside his family. In the twentieth century dugong fishing was carried out by Rollands and later by the Campbell family. Uncle Bob Campbell was employed by the government, supplying dugong oil with the help of his family until his death in 1946 (Figure 6.4). He has been called the last of the dugong fishermen in Moreton Bay.\(^37\)

After commercial dugong fishing ceased in Moreton Bay, traditional fishing continued. To this day dugongs are taken for community needs and special occasions. The oil is used on Minjerribah as a medicine and in ceremony during baptisms. These occasions are attended by large numbers of community members and are an interesting platform for the mixing of different belief systems — using a traditional artefact in a Catholic ritual. Such a ceremony occurred recently on Minjerribah. Early on the morning of Sunday 26 May 2013 the Minjerribah Catholic community was preparing the Saint Paul of the Cross church in Dunwich for a special event. The Archbishop of Brisbane, Mark Coleridge, was holding a mass to celebrate the 170th anniversary of the Church’s presence on Minjerribah. During the celebration five children were to be baptised. There was a festive atmosphere as the church filled. Those unable to get in

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\(^36\) “Domestic Intelligence,” *Moreton Bay Courier*, 16 January 1858, 2; “Elaiopathy: Dugong Oil as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December 1858, 5.

\(^37\) RCCOHP, interview with John Foster Campbell, 3 September 2003.
formed groups on the lawn, peering hard against the windows trying to see inside. Baptisms on Minjerribah are especially important spiritual events because dugong oil is used. Earlier I explained how the dugong industry created a two-way platform for the exchange of knowledge and skills. In this case, new ideas have been incorporated into traditional practices. An article important to the physical well-being of the Quandamooka people transcends a cultural divide and becomes an article of spiritual well-being through the performance of a religious act brought to Aboriginal people by colonialism. This experience shows the key place dugong oil continues to occupy in the Quandamooka community.

Figure 6.4: Dolph Campbell (left) and Bob Gregory with a dugong caught in one of Dolph’s nets, Amity Point, ca. 1940.
Chapter 6: PROTECTING THE DUGONG

Torres Strait Islander presence in the industry

Because of the relative abundance of dugongs in the TSI and with the dugong industry on a gradual decline in Moreton Bay in the 1940s, commercial dugong fishing was conducted on a larger scale in the TSI throughout the mid-twentieth century until 1969. In the TSI, dugongs have been an important food source and a culturally significant animal for thousands of years. The use and significance of the animal is highlighted by Ephraim Bani — an expert on and interpreter of Torres Strait Islander culture — in numerous articles in the *Torres News*.38 In an article on dugong fishing, he separated dugongs into five categories: *kazil ay* (pregnant dugong), *nanayg* (mother with newborn calf), *apukaz* (mother and a grown-up calf), *baraklihaw garka* (husband), and *thuawlayg* (leader whistler). Each category can be recognised by an experienced dugong fisherman based on their swimming formation and their song. The *kazil ay* is hunted for special occasions only and cannot be taken at other times. The rest (except the *thuawlayg*) are taken for food and initiation purposes — to show bravery and skill. The *thuawlayg* is the leader and is too dangerous to be captured by inexperienced fishermen. Bani wrote that ‘such a dugong was harpooned at the back of Badu Island and it towed the dinghy as far as Naghir Island’ (approximately 50 km).39

Torres Strait Islander fishermen use sophisticated techniques based on thousands of years of systemic investigation: observation and experience. Fishing is done by harpoon from a boat, a canoe, or a platform (traditionally of bamboo but more recently metal) — the platform technique is almost abandoned. Fishermen know exactly where to find dugong based on the tides — *kulis* being east to west and *guthath* west to east — and on the way the seagrass has been eaten:

[I]f the hunter sees the grass … is cut in diagonal position and he knows that the eastward ‘Guthath’ tide is not due till night, he does not go in the daytime. … He waits for the night and proceeds straight to the location of the clues. He never misses, the dugong is waiting for him at the exact spot where he collected the sample and discovered the clue.40

40 Ibid.
This knowledge prevails to the current day having been passed down from elder to elder.

In his anthropological expedition to the TSI, Alfred Haddon studied the various cultural aspects, customs and beliefs of Torres Strait Islander life. He devoted a chapter to dugong and turtle fishing and mentioned dugong in relation to several customs and beliefs. He described the various charms used by fishermen (usually a carving of a dugong) which show the strong spirituality connected to the animal. Further significance is evident in the numerous myths and legends from the TSI where the dugong is connected with the creation of islands, reefs, rivers and other landmarks.

Dugongs were caught mainly around Boigu Island in the north. Although dugong fishing was less controlled by white authorities on Thursday Island (the boat crews consisted only of Torres Strait Islander men), the enterprise was still managed by the DNA. In the TSI, the Director would tell the fishermen how many dugongs were needed and he would pay them for the amount of oil their catch yielded (at $2/gallon). In 1966 a decision was made to raise the price to $2.50/gallon, however, as can be seen from later payment lists, the price remained at $2/gallon. For instance Samuel Banu received $50 for 25 gallons in 1969.

The anticipated demand for dugong oil was so large that, in 1941, the Protector of Islanders (Thursday Island) asked the DNA about purchasing a steam jacketed pan in order to extract dugong oil (a similar plant had been used with some success at Cape Bedford Mission since 1938). When contacted by the DNA, the manager of Cape Bedford Mission agreed to lend the steam jacketed plant to the Protector of Islanders on Thursday Island to test the suitability of the extraction plant for commercial purposes. Further, United Metal Industries (in Brisbane) was contacted because they provided the Cape Bedford’s pan. The company provided a sketch and a quote of ten pounds, seven

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42 Ibid., 153–54.
43 Wolfgang Laade, *Oral Traditions and Written Documents on the History and Ethnography of the Northern Torres Strait Islands, Saibai — Dauan — Boigu*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1971); Margaret Elizabeth Lawrie, *Myths and Legends of Torres Strait* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1970); *Tales from Torres Strait* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1972).
44 Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.
45 Item ID 507367, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 17 March 1941–9 October 1979 “DNA, Brisbane to DDNA, Thursday Island, 16 May 1969,” QSA, Brisbane.
shillings and sixpence. According to the Protector of Islanders the plan was to ‘obtain a plant of moderate capacity and reasonable cost … so that one can be established at each of the four main Western Islands, Saibai, Boigu, Mabuiag and Badu.’

This transaction did not occur. In fact the Protector of Islanders’ enquiry came as a surprise as it stood against the rising awareness further south of the need to protect species vulnerable to extinction. Commercial dugong fishing was already on a decline along the coast of Queensland due to low dugong numbers resulting in bans and restrictions on dugong fishing in various areas. In contrast, the exploitation of dugongs in the TSI was not yet considered a threat even though the amount of dugong oil available for commercial sale was decreasing. As shown in Chapter 3, despite numbers of missions requesting dugong oil, chemists searching for new supplies and individuals turning to the DNA in search of the miraculous remedy, the commercial dugong fishing enterprise in the TSI had to decline more and more of these requests. In 1950, only nine years after the Protector of Islanders’ request for a new plant to extract dugong oil, it was suggested that the capture of dugongs should be prohibited.

In 1951, E. J. Coulter (Director-General of Health and Medical Services) and C. O’Leary (DNA) corresponded about dugong oil as a necessary medical article that was used by ‘natives, particularly in the North.’ The Department of Harbours and Marine suggested the need to create a special zone in which Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people could continue fishing for dugongs, O’Leary brought forward the idea and confirmed that both Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people on Cape York Peninsula depended on the dugong:

The position is that all Torres Strait Islanders utilise the dugong as food. This prevails on the Western Islands of Sabai, Boigu, Dauan, Mabuiag and Badu to a greater extent than applies with the Eastern Islands of Murray and Daraley in that the Western Island Section of Torres Strait is better feeding grounds than the Eastern, nevertheless all Islands participate in the consumption of dugong. Likewise Lockhart River Mission and the Missions on the west coast of the Peninsula as far south as Mornington Island depend

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46 Item ID 507178, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 27 March 1941–20 August 1941, “United Metal Industries Limited director, Brisbane to State Stores Board manager,” 27 June 1941, QSA, Brisbane.

47 Item ID 507178, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 27 March 1941–20 August 1941, “Protector of Islanders, Thursday Island to DNA,” 27 March 1941, QSA, Brisbane.

48 Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976, “Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.
on the dugong for food and the consensus of opinion is that it is an essential
to the diet of coloured people in the area.\textsuperscript{49}

Thus O’Leary was aware of the extent of dugong meat consumption and the reliance of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on dugong as a staple food source. His fear
was that unless a dugong fishing zone was created, Aboriginal people in the Gulf
missions, along the coast of Queensland to Palm Island and ‘the hundreds of Torres
Strait Islanders working on pearling boats as far south as Mackay’ would be deprived
of their main food source. He suggested ‘a regulation under the \textit{Fish and Oyster Act}
prohibiting any person other that a Torres Strait Islander or an Aboriginal in catching
dugong.’ He further advised that the ‘utilisation of dugong for any purpose other than
by Islander or Aboriginals’ should be prohibited. These suggestions were made with the
presumption that the quantities taken by Torres Strait Islander men, predominantly at
Boigu Island, were not a threat to the future of the dugong.\textsuperscript{50}

The introduction of the permit system in 1971 ensured that even after the closure
of the dugong industry, which had been built in the previous century on the knowledge
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fishermen, white entrepreneurs and authorities,
who managed the enterprise, retained control over the dugong.\textsuperscript{51} By having to apply for
a permit if not living on a reserve, the Indigenous fishermen could not manage this
cultural practice without the permission of white authorities.

Traditionally, Torres Strait Islander fishermen only caught certain dugongs.
Similarly, on Minjerribah mating bulls and dugong cows with calves would not be
taken. This stands in stark contrast with the practices within the industry when all
dugongs were taken. Western concepts of the environment were in direct contrast with
Indigenous ideas of land/sea and fauna/flora management as will be discussed in the
following section.

\textsuperscript{49} Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976,
“Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.

\textsuperscript{50} Item ID 338582, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16 October 1947–6 July 1976,
“Islands — Marine Produce — Dugong Oil Industry,” QSA, Brisbane.

\textsuperscript{51} Item ID 1238502, Correspondence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 23 May 1971–4 June 1975,
permit is not located in this file nor in any other file concerning dugong fishing.
Environmental protection and management

The importance of the dugong as a food source and in cultural rituals ties in with sustainable fishing practices and with the management of both land and sea. Population numbers and grazing grounds were protected and managed by the actions of the Indigenous people. The dugong remains culturally significant for the Quandamooka people to this day. In Torres Strait, the animal is an integral part of the myths and legends, and holds a special position as a totem for the people from Moa Island.\(^52\)

In this chapter thus far I have outlined Western environmental protection attitudes in the introduction, as they were central to the decision to protect dugongs and hence shut down commercial dugong fishing. However, an important aspect of environmental management and protection is the way the environment has been understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Australian land and seascape had been managed long before the arrival of white settlers. As Ann Young states, ‘Australia has had two such discontinuities: one with the arrival of Aboriginal people, and the other with the arrival of Europeans. It is the latter discontinuity that has caused the most pervasive, significant and rapid changes to Australian landscapes.’\(^53\)

There have been several forms of Aboriginal land and sea management, with fire stick farming possibly the most widely known and observed by settlers. Using fire to manage the landscape maintained plant and animal diversity. It allowed for pockets of high forest, dense shrubs, plains, and swamps, all situated within a comfortably reachable distance. The combination of many ecosystems supporting a wide variety of plant and animal life has been anecdotally called nature’s supermarket. To create such abundance took years of management. Bill Gammage describes the reasons and outcomes of this patterned landscape created by using templates:

> [Aboriginal people] coupled preferred feed and shelter by refining grass, forests, belts, clumps and clearings into templates: unlike plant communities associated, distributed and maintained for decades or centuries to prepare country for day-to-day working. Templates set land and life patterns for

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\(^{53}\) Young, *Environmental Change in Australia since 1788*, 188.
generations of people. They were the land’s finishing touches, offering abundance, predictability, continuity and choice.\textsuperscript{54}

This kind of landscape did not go unnoticed by settlers and numerous remarks of a park-like country or a country of the best kind can be found in the early accounts. In fact, settlers often commented on the practices of the Aboriginal people and their use of fire to regenerate the country and aid in hunting. Similarly, they commented on Aboriginal farming; the use of fire to clear old grass and the dissemination of new seeds.\textsuperscript{55}

Apart from managing the land (soil, plants and animals), Aboriginal people also managed water courses and coastal areas. Swamps were managed by fire — drying up some parts of the swamp to create a wetland labyrinth. Rivers and creeks were altered by creating crossings and deep pools where fish would be abundant. Dams were built in drier areas to hold storm water, and wells were dug in places of unreliable water supply.\textsuperscript{56} Water management in Australia is dated as far back as 6,000 BCE when evidence of an artificial lake was found in western Victoria to aid with eel farming. The traditional owners of the country, the Gunditjmara people, are now renowned for their eel aquaculture systems.\textsuperscript{57}

Dugongs were managed by Aboriginal people through the selective fishing practice — taking only certain animals so that the dugong population numbers would not be affected, a practice that occurred in both the TSI and Moreton Bay. On

\textsuperscript{54} Gammage, \textit{The Biggest Estate on Earth}, 211.


\textsuperscript{56} Gammage, \textit{The Biggest Estate on Earth}, 229–32.

Minjerrribah there was clear evidence of coastal water management at One Mile beach. Today this area is filled with mangroves, however in the mid-twentieth century it was a clear sandy beach maintained by the Aboriginal people, who would walk along the beach pulling out young mangroves. The beach provided easy access to enter water in order to go dugong or mullet fishing or oystering and was used by the fishermen to lay out their nets for fixing as well as a safe place for children to swim.58

All the kids would go down swimming on the flat at One Mile there and it was lovely. You know, it was nice and clear. It’s all grown up now. The mangrove trees are coming up everywhere. But, they weren’t ever there and the fishermen used to mend their nets all along there.59

Contemporary accounts, oral history and current research indicate that Aboriginal people managed both their land and seascape in a way that promoted diversity and kept animal and plant population numbers safe. The land, ocean and their inhabitants needed to be cared for under the Aboriginal belief systems, in which each person had a totem, which they had to care for and could not consume. As noted by Dermot Smyth in his study of the connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country, ‘the importance of maintaining a connection with traditional country continues to be of fundamental importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ identity and wellbeing across much of Australia.’60 This personal connection to country (meaning both land and water) is in stark contrast to the way in which the natural environment was understood by settlers.61 In fact, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s connection to the sea is manifested by the same kind of care and by abiding the same laws as practised on land. From this perspective, the sea is considered an ‘owned domain’ by the Aboriginal people, one in which the owners have priority, sometimes exclusivity, to the area. However, sea areas were viewed as an ‘open commons’ by non-


61 Smyth defines ‘country’ as a ‘place of origin, literally, culturally or spiritually. It can have the political meaning of ‘nation’, but refers to a clan or tribal area rather than a nation-state such as Australia … it is a shorthand for all the values, places, resources, stories, and cultural obligations associated with that geographical area. For coastal Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, ‘country’ includes both land and sea areas, which are regarded as inseparable from each other’. ibid.
Aboriginal communities where everyone should have equal rights and equal access for both commercial and recreational purposes.\textsuperscript{62} Frawley sets out the opposing attitudes of Aboriginal and settler understanding of the land and sea, and our place in it, and the reasons behind them:

The newcomers’ leaders were products of the Enlightenment — that period centred on the eighteenth century when earlier religious-based cosmologies were replaced by a view of nature and human society based on ‘scientific principles’. By contrast, for Aboriginal Australians, nature and culture are inextricably bound together in a cosmology referred to as the Dreaming, the time when the word, including Aboriginal people and their law, was created.\textsuperscript{63}

It was inevitable that such opposing ideologies would cause problems between Aboriginal people and settlers, and that the struggle over land and sea management would be an ongoing issue. European settlers brought with them a Western cultural perception of the environment where the concepts and ethics were built upon the unquestionable right of humankind to exploit nature. To understand these concepts and ethics surrounding the natural environment, historical geographer Dennis Norman Jeans offers an interpretation of how Western societies have regarded nature over the last 300 years:

As a commodity, or as a lifeless thing, either because Judaeo-Christianity makes it subordinate to humankind, or because it is reducible by science to measured criteria and observable facts,

... As something separate and noble — an escape from decay and dirt of civilisation,

... As a philosophical principle that pervades society, provides a framework for action, and gives us terms such as ‘natural rights’ and ‘natural justice’.

All three points characterise the natural environment as something removed, either lesser than humankind or as a means to create an escape for or advance of humankind. This approach allows people (settlers) to manage nature as a commodity suitable for

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{63} Frawley, “Evolving Visions in Australian Environmental History,” 58.

commercial profit designed to enhance lives. It does not allow for a close connection to nature in which individuals would nurture their natural environment.

The consequences of this approach are now visible throughout Australia with the extinction of numerous animal and plant species largely due to the overuse of the Australian environment: examples already used in this thesis are the red cedar and the koala. The population numbers of seals and whales living along the Australian coast were also severely depleted during the operation of the sealing and whaling industries.\(^{65}\)

Despite being on the brink of extinction, however, a number of plant and animal species harvested throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are now recovering thanks to protective measures and general environmental awareness. When did this shift from exploitation to protection happen? In the Australian sense, Frawley argues that we can divide the perceptions and use of the environment into three eras: exploitative pioneering in the nineteenth century during which government-aided environmental protection was not present; raised awareness between 1900–1960s with a growth in government intervention in environmental management; and modern environmentalism from the 1960s onwards with a high level of government involvement in environmental management and protection.\(^{66}\)

Certainly, as I have argued in this thesis, the events in the dugong industry correspond to the three eras. In the nineteenth century, the industry was not managed by one authority and dugongs were harvested in such numbers that the production of dugong oil plummeted several times due to extremely low numbers of dugongs. Throughout the twentieth century there were calls for better management of the industry and internal communication about dugong fishing prohibition, however without any results. In the last era, the dugong became protected, fishing was prohibited, and the industry finally closed.


\(^{66}\) Frawley, “Evolving Visions in Australian Environmental History,” 59.
Although the majority of environmental issues only came to the fore in the mid-twentieth century, it is possible to see some gradual changes from exploitation to protection even earlier. These were, however, most likely driven by particular resources beginning to run low as can be seen in the dugong industry, leading to temporary closures to protect the species but more importantly at the time to protect and maintain the industry. As noted by environmental scientist Ann Hamblin, ‘[h]istorically, European attitudes to Australian nature resources have been chronically over-optimistic. They have concentrated on the small population and apparently unlimited, cheap space, without assessing its real potential.’\textsuperscript{67} The early settlers were surrounded by ‘empty space’ which they turned into agricultural land, without realising that the introduction of new species, hard-hooved animals and cereal crops would negatively alter the entire Australian ecosystem. These changes are irreversible as they have caused the extinction of numerous plant and animal species. Perhaps because of these permanent environmental changes, interest in the protection of relatively ‘undamaged’ areas grew in the twentieth century.

It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the first national parks were not established so much for the conservation of species as human enjoyment and recreation for urban dwellers. The first national park in Australia, Royal National Park, was created in 1879 on the outskirts of Sydney after increasing calls to the government to provide ‘public parks, pleasure grounds, and places of recreation adjacent to all thickly populated areas’ after which ‘the Government, conceived and developed the idea of bequeathing to the people of this State a national domain for rest and recreation.’\textsuperscript{68} Ideas of environmental protection and appreciation of natural flora and fauna increased in the late nineteenth but predominantly in the early twentieth century with the growing popularity of bushwalking and the emergence of clubs and societies fighting for wildlife protection. Interest in the protection of marine environments was slower with the first marine park, Green Island in the Great Barrier Reef, declared in 1938.\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, despite the growing

\textsuperscript{67} Hamblin, \textit{Sustainability}, 2.


\textsuperscript{69} Young, \textit{Environmental Change in Australia since 1788}, 119.
interest in the natural environment and its protection in the early twentieth century, most conservation areas and national parks in Australia were declared after 1980.\textsuperscript{70}

The process of creating protected natural environments was more successful on land than in the sea. On land it is simpler to create boundaries that enclose the protected areas. Whereas marine ecosystems are more open and interconnected, thus it was more complicated to create marine reserves. For these reasons, as argued by Young, ‘the marine environment is poorly understood and inadequately studied, and its resources are often poorly conserved.’\textsuperscript{71}

This difference in management corresponds with attempts to create a safe marine reserve for dugongs in the 1990s — mostly unsuccessful according to marine scientists.\textsuperscript{72} Success or failure of such reserves is determined by conflicting concepts of how such space is needed. In protecting the dugong, moreover, three groups or interests come into conflict: commercial exploitation by fishermen; conservation; and recreation and tourism. As Frawley argues, ‘to create a stable environment in modern Australia, the Western ethics need to be changed.’\textsuperscript{73} As I have striven to show, the history of the dugong industry provides a platform for further discussion of Indigenous and European (Western) ideas about the environment.

### Conclusion

It is clear that one of the reasons for the ‘decay’ of the industry was the exploitation of the dugong to fulfil demand of a Western economy, however we need to examine this statement through the lens of a connected history developing within a contact zone as I have endeavoured. The Western principles which govern the use and management of natural resources stand in stark contrast to the principles governing Aboriginal societies for over 60,000 years. The Quandamooka people took part in a Western industry; and by participating, they were able to continue traditional practices, and maintain relationships with the land and sea. The Quandamooka people’s strong cultural

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 184.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 118.

\textsuperscript{72} Suzanne Smith and Richard Corfield, “The Dugong War,” in Quantum (ABC-TV1998).

\textsuperscript{73} Frawley, “Evolving Visions in Australian Environmental History,” 54.
connection to the environment is clear from how Minjerribah’s various ecosystems were managed and nurtured, thus encouraging the stability of fauna and flora (like the beach at One Mile). Incorporating Indigenous land and sea practices into contemporary environmental management is a possible solution to the years of land and sea overexploitation by white settlers.
Chapter 7

Conclusions

I have worked on this project for several years, travelling to and from Minjerribah countless times. I have lived in South East Queensland for over seven years, spending most of my time on the coast and in dugong waters — bays, estuaries and shallows where seagrass grows. I have never seen a dugong in the wild. I am told there are places on Minjerribah where it is not uncommon to spot the animal, locals see them regularly. They are out there. I am hoping that next time I travel across the bay I will hear the puff of air and see a dugong glide through the water.

Sitting in the research room of the NSIHM, leafing through documents, I gradually learnt of the complicated and often hidden stories of the dugong industry. What was evident from the material is the ongoing strong cultural connection of the Quandamooka people to Minjerribah and to plants and animals on and around the island — the dugong is just one example. This connection has been maintained despite numerous restrictions and regulations.

The importance of Country and culture became even more evident to me through several experiences on the island. I have written about the use of dugong oil during the baptisms celebrating 170 years of the Catholic Church on the island. A second event I attended was the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation (MMEIC) open day (17 September 2011) at Terra Bulla Leumeah, meaning ‘A beautiful place, here I rest’. It is a historically significant place because, before it was Myora Mission, it was a regular camping spot of the Quandamooka people. The MMEIC have created Terra Bulla Leumeah with a vision to ‘develop this area as a Historical Cultural Place where Cultural knowledge, education and awareness programs will be transmitted.’

Members of the Quandamooka community and people working with the community talked with visitors about the bush, traditional dance, songs and art — in order for them to develop an understanding of parts of the culture. Through these events I witnessed the strong connections to Country I had read about in the oral histories; connections that are often found in between the lines of official paperwork relating to Myora Mission, the Benevolent Asylum and the dugong industry. The strength of these events is their inclusiveness. Everyone is welcome to experience the culture, so for a fleeting moment everyone is part of it. Through my research I feel I have become a small, likely insignificant, part of NSI history, even making an appearance in the NSIHM Newsletter (Figure 7.1). Perhaps years down the track a researcher will come across this short article archived in the NSIHMA and note my presence on the island.

Although sections of my work focus on the history of the Quandamooka people, I in no way intended to speak for them. Being an outsider and a non-Indigenous researcher, I do not have access to all aspects of the past. I cannot ever understand the ongoing experiences of Indigenous people in the face of colonialism. I was aware of this throughout the work on the thesis and I have taken care not to make any
representations or assumptions which would contradict this fact. I did not seek to write a history of the Quandamooka people, nor did I seek to write a settler history. The purpose of this shared story has been to map the intersections between parties (Indigenous, settler and ‘other’) within a contact zone by shifting the minority story, that of the Quandamooka people, into the foreground.

It can prove difficult to correctly balance a shared history, perhaps more so where the minority becomes the focus, from an outsider perspective. The difficulties arising from the insider/outsider position was analysed by Lorina Barker in a paper on her experiences as a community and family member, and researcher in a remote Aboriginal community in western New South Wales. Barker found that through learning about the past and the connections and disconnections, she began her own journey of rediscovery and reconnection.²

My position as a researcher is very different to Barker’s. I was born in central Europe and have voluntarily moved several times. As a result, I too began a journey as I delved deeper into this project. I was not rediscovering or reconnecting with my Country, I was discovering the strength and vulnerability of the participants in this story and their ongoing connection to Country and culture. I was constantly questioning my approach, ensuring to let these strengths and vulnerabilities shine through. I was personally touched by the memories of the RCCOHP participants, and I was especially intrigued by the immense knowledge of traditional food and medicine. I feel strong connections to my current home in Australia where the natural places — forests, marshlands, beaches — in my surroundings are places of safety and calm. But I do not have the depth of knowledge of the Aboriginal people. Conversely, in my home country, I could go into the forest or a field and come back with medicine and food. There I know. I am deeply connected through my own experiences and stories passed down from my maternal grandmother and aunt. But in Australia where I was not born and where this knowledge has not been passed down to me, I remain an outsider. It is from this position that I accumulated and analysed the material and wrote this thesis and it is from this position that I am presenting my findings and conclusions.

Throughout the thesis I have aimed to show the interconnectedness and fluidity of people, products and ideas. I have endeavoured to create a shared history with focus on a ‘minoritised’ people and products from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth

century. In the process I have uncovered the interactions and intersections between Aboriginal, white and non-white people all entering the dugong industry in various locations, times and ways. Their interactions reveal the often hidden nuances which can only be found through inspecting history from multiple angles. To do this I needed to begin my history of the dugong industry with an account of first Aboriginal–white contact in the area as the relationships forged through the industry are a continuation of the early connections made by the Minjerribah people and settlers.

By looking at the early encounters I sought to show the complex nature of establishing and maintaining relations between unequal parties. Specifically, by focusing on the pre- and early-contact period I have set out to illustrate the beginnings of a complicated set of relations between the white settlers and Quandamooka people, showing how these were characterised by domination and negotiation, and oscillated between violence and amity. Through the dugong industry Aboriginal people retained a fragment of control over some aspects of their life. In addition, I strove to demonstrate the indispensable role that Aboriginal people played in the European colonisation of NSI, arguing that both the settlement and the sustainability of the settlement were dependent on Aboriginal knowledge and skills. This was particularly evident in the dugong industry. The changes occurring on NSI through industries and institutions managed by the settlers meant a constant shifting between traditional practices and European ways. The mixing of different ethnicities and the influence of the Western material-oriented lifestyle affected both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people’s positions in society, providing some individuals a partial escape from the racially-oriented controlling mechanisms in place at the time.

I examined the use of dugong oil in Australia from three different perspectives: the traditional use of the oil by the Quandamooka people; the use of dugong oil as a Western medicine by arthritis sufferers and world war veterans; and the regulated consumption of the oil by Aboriginal People living on missions. After being promoted as a white product to Australian and European consumers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, dugong oil became a product with three identities in the mid-twentieth century, breaking down ideas of ownership and management of appropriated products. Although dugong oil has disappeared as a commercial product, it still serves its medicinal and cultural purposes on Minjerribah.

Ultimately, dugong oil kept its Aboriginality despite being presented as a white product. Although used to promote Australia as a rich and self-sufficient colony, and
later as a strong country, dugong oil was still an Aboriginal product appropriated by white Australians, but not valued enough by the new consumer group to become an everyday item. Despite efforts to popularise and align it with cod-liver oil and similar accepted orthodox treatments, it remained on the edge of Western medicine.

The entrance of Europeans into the lives of Aboriginal people on NSI meant a continual shifting between traditional practices and European ways. I have set out to show that the non-Aboriginal dugong fishermen and the Quandamooka people forged an unequal relationship in which both parties were dependent on each other. This dependency spanned from the dugong industry and into other areas of both business enterprises and private encounters. For a number of individuals, the relationship with Aboriginal people in the industry was to secure them a lucrative position in Australian society. These people included doctors and businessmen, especially Hobbs and Croft, who strove to introduce dugong oil to European markets and gain wealth and popularity. Given the relatively small scale of the industry, we can identify these individuals and trace their story as they ‘discovered’ the healing properties of dugong oil; promoted the oil to Australian and international consumers; and, in the end, disappeared from the dugong industry. The early exchanges between Aboriginal and settler knowledge and skills arguably created the context for their endeavours. The industrialised manufacturing of dugong oil can therefore be considered a product of the contact zone being appropriated by settlers from the early period of contact with the Aboriginal people of Moreton Bay. As we trace the dugong oil from its Aboriginal origins through the hands of medical practitioners to the 1855 Paris Exposition Universelle, the Hospital for Consumption in Brompton (London) and ultimately an unspecified number of anonymous consumers, we can see the complexity of the relationship between local and transnational histories in which the two histories coexist and influence each other.

I have looked at the global implications of a local product travelling the trans-Pacific trade routes. In becoming available to white consumers in Australia and Europe, dugong oil was positioned between orthodox and unorthodox medicine. Medicines which lay on the verge often fell through the cracks of medical regulation. This further complicated their position as they were used by the mainstream population but not managed by official authorities. Thus they ‘infiltrated’ orthodox medicine despite never

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3 Pratt, Imperial Eyes.
being accepted as a mainstream medical product. The position of an unorthodox product in orthodox medicine shows the complicated nature of the nineteenth century colonial medical scene. Unorthodox medicine and doctors were still popular in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however they often stood separate from professional doctors. In Australia, however, given the specific conditions in the relatively new colony, the merging of orthodox and unorthodox was more common — as the case of dugong oil shows. Further, the export and promotion of the appropriated product as an alternative to cod liver oil deepened dugong oil’s orthodox/unorthodox duality.

Dugong oil’s complicated identity as a product only partially controlled by medical authorities is only deepened by its various uses in Australia in the mid-twentieth century. Dugong oil succeeded in finding a consumer market in Australia despite being marked by a bad reputation. Although no longer available on the European market, it remained on the shelves and in the minds of Australians well after the decline of the industry itself. Subsequently, attempts to remake dugong oil into an orthodox medicine failed, presumably due to the dramatic decrease of dugong numbers in and around Moreton Bay.

As the industry did not draw much profit compared to other Queensland industries (such as the pearl shell and bêche-de-mer industries), it was of low interest to the government and the general public. This was one of the reasons the dugong became scarce — there were few regulations on their fishing. Despite the industry being closed several times due to low numbers, presumably to re-establish the dugong population, the size and gender of the animal was not regulated resulting in juveniles and gravid females being taken, leading to a further dramatic decrease in numbers. Such overexploitation was the result of the profit-driven settler society. In order to succeed as a self-sufficient colony, Australia, and each state separately, had to prove it was capable of producing goods that would create profit. For this reason dugong oil was exhibited at various exhibitions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. However the need for profit was detrimental to numerous Australian plant and animal species, bringing several of them to the brink of extinction. The ongoing environmental impact from the poorly managed dugong industry is the current ‘vulnerable’ status of the dugong.

Managing the environment in Australia is an ongoing problem which stems from the non-reciprocal Western approach to nature. This exploitative relationship with the environment has caused immense damage to Australian ecosystems and the fate of the
dugong is now fully dependent on new forms of environmental management. Although steps have been taken in the right direction, the dugong is still vulnerable to extinction. With the extinction of the dugong, a part of Australian history would be lost in the same way that the history surrounding Steller’s sea cow is widely unknown. From the settler’s point of view, the environment was exploitable, it was there to use at their will without consequence. To the Aboriginal people, however, the natural surroundings were their home, for which they needed to care. In return, they were rewarded with a healthy environment which supported their lifestyle without depleting the fauna or flora. Such a major difference in understanding the natural world was an impassable obstacle for the development-oriented settlers, and so the sustainable management practices of the Aboriginal people were overridden. It is only in recent years that the value of traditional management practices is better understood and pathways of collaborative environmental management are being forged.

Apart from the environmental impact the loss of dugongs would have, such a loss would also affect the cultural heritage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I sought to show a clear and strong connection between Indigenous people and the animal. Dugongs appear in the legends of creation in the Torres Strait and in the oral histories in Minjerribah. The dugong industry was a highly fluid place where power and cross-cultural relations shaped the people, the environment and their shared history. Writing and studying such an interconnected history have brought me a greater understanding of Australia. Despite being an ‘outsider’, I have become acutely aware of Aboriginal knowledges about the dugong — I hope these knowledges are present and obvious to the reader. In paying my respect to this presence, I end with a poem by Quandamooka poet, political activist, artist and educator: Oodgeroo Noonuccal. In 1988 Oodgeroo wrote about the calm and compassionate nature of the dugong, and of the importance of family to the herd, evoking empathy for this gentle mammal. The human-like features described by Oodgeroo place the dugong in the Dreaming and provide a beautiful and important shared counterpoint to this thesis. In the poem, the dugong is presented as belonging to both the natural and spiritual world and its ongoing presence is not questioned.
Yungun
by Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Yungun was of the sea tribe. His tribe were travellers. They would travel south in the summer and when winter came, they would return to the north and its tropical waters. They travelled many, many miles.

When the weather grew rough, they would rest from their travels in the shelter of the bays dotted along the shore-line.

Yungun’s tribe were vegetarians. Their food, the sweet seaweeds growing along the coast. They would place their nose close to the sea bed and scratch out a line of blue sand as they went hunting for the roots of the seaweed.

They were very fond of their children, and the women of Yungun’s tribe could be seen cradling their young and rocking back and forth, as they sang to them, while their babies sucked the sweet milk from their mother’s breast.

They would stay in the bays until their babies were big and strong enough to take to the oceans.

Now one day, while they were resting in the bay, a strange tribe came amongst them with long sticks and Yungun’s tribe was very frightened, so they went deep into the deepest part of the waters of the bay.

But one of the women’s babies became separated from the tribe and the strange tribe threw the long sticks and one of them struck the baby. The strange tribe took the baby and their long sticks and disappeared, and the baby Yungun was never seen again.

The baby’s mother fretted for her baby and there was nothing the tribe could do, for they knew that in Yungun’s tribe, if a mother is separated from her baby, she will fret herself to death. She will not live if her baby dies.

And so the tribe waited with the mother until she was dead and then they herded their tribe out into the oceans and continued their travels.

In the new Dreamtime Yungun’s tribe is known as DUGONG.4

Appendix
### Minjerribah Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>At least 21,000 years ago Aboriginal people settle Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Lieutenant James Cook charts Moreton Bay naming several places such as Point Lookout on Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Matthew Flinders lands on Minjerribah in search of water. Most likely the first contact between Quandamooka people and Europeans on Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Moreton Bay Penal Settlement is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>Pilot Station at Amity Point is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Moreton Bay opens to free settlement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Passionist missionaries set up unsuccessful mission at Dunwich, Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>First dugong catch by white man in Moreton Bay assisted by Aboriginal crew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early 1850s</td>
<td>Dr William Hobbs begins the dugong fishing industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Dugong oil is exhibited at the Sydney Exhibition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Dugong oil is exhibited at Paris <em>Exposition Universelle</em>, receives silver medal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late 1850s</td>
<td>Fernandez Gonzales begins dugong fishing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Hobbs publishes <em>Elaiopathy, the Administration of the Oil of the Dugong, Halicore Australis, as a Curative Agent in Chronic Disease in Australia.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Dr John Mcgrigor Croft publishes <em>The Dugong Oil, Its Valuable Medicinal Properties for Consumption &amp; Various Diseases</em> in London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Dunwich Benevolent Asylum is opened on Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Myora Mission/Moongalba is opened on Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td><em>Aboriginal Protection Act</em> comes into effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Dugong oil is exhibited in London at the Queensland House.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>Sam Rollands supplies Brisbane chemists with dugong oil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Rollands, said to be one of the last dugong hunters, dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Campbell family supply Brisbane chemists with dugong oil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Queensland missions use dugong oil from Torres Strait Islands as medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Myora Mission/Moongalba is closed, most people move to One Mile on Minjerribah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Dunwich Benevolent Asylum moves to Sandgate, Brisbane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Dugong is proclaimed a protected species.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Quandamooka people gain native title.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure A.1:** Minjerribah timeline.
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