

# Using measures of wellbeing for evaluating the impact of Indigenous Land & Sea Management programs (ILSMPs)

## Policy note

by Silva Larson, James Cook University



Northern Australia  
Environmental  
Resources  
Hub

National Environmental Science Programme

World class research to support sustainable  
development in northern Australia

This policy note focuses on the contribution that Indigenous Land and Sea Management programs (ILSMPs) make to the wellbeing of Indigenous people, even those not directly involved in the programs.<sup>1</sup> It is one component of a broader project on the 'Multiple benefits and knowledge systems of ILSMPs'.

## ILSMPs contribute to people's wellbeing

### FINDINGS

These findings are based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 67 Ewamian people living in North Queensland and in the Brisbane/Cherbourg area.

► **FIRST**, health centres, paid jobs, access to country, safe community and role models emerged as the most important factors to wellbeing for the largest percentage of respondents.

► **SECOND**, over the last five years, increases in satisfaction have been recorded for all but two factors: local jobs and the prevalence of social ills (drinking and drugs). Not only did 'local jobs' record the biggest decrease in satisfaction, but it had a very low satisfaction score of 6.40 (out of 10) to start with. The further decrease gave it the lowest satisfaction score of all factors, at only 4.95 points (out of 10).

► **THIRD**, 'Country being looked after' and 'Access to country' recorded the largest increases in satisfaction of all the important wellbeing factors. 'Owning a business' and 'Language' also recorded very high increases in satisfaction. However, these were selected as being of importance only by a limited number of respondents.

► **FOURTH**, a qualitative exploration of responses revealed clear perceived linkages between the positive changes noted in our third finding and a) ILSMPs, specifically ranger programs, and b) the Native Title Indigenous Protected Areas processes (respondents did not always clearly differentiate between NT and IPA processes).

► **FIFTH**, our 'proof of concept' trial highlights the potential of our W-IE method as an evaluative tool. With further development and refinement, it could prove a valuable addition to our existing toolbox of evaluative methods.

## Summary

We combined insights from literature on the Theory of Change, impact evaluation and wellbeing to develop a novel approach to assessing impacts of an activity/program—a wellbeing-based method for impact evaluation (W-IE). The approach asks intended beneficiaries to identify and assign scores to factors that are important to their wellbeing, also rating their satisfaction with those factors. Then, we record qualitative responses to questions about perceived changes and causes of change in satisfaction with those factors.

We tested the W-IE approach with the Ewamian people of North Queensland and found that 'Knowing that country is being looked after the right way' and 'Having legal right/access to the country' were most important to their wellbeing. Those two factors, plus 'Feeling strong in our culture', were also the factors most strongly linked to the Native Title (NT)/Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) processes and Indigenous Land and Sea Management programs. The overall perception was that the recently declared Talaroo IPA and its associated NT determination has had a significant and positive impact on respondents.

Our 'proof of concept' trial highlights the potential of our W-IE method as an evaluative tool. Further method testing might determine its utility across a wide range of settings.

## Improving how we measure the impacts of ILSMPs on wellbeing

### METHOD

The face-to-face interview process has three, related steps.

First, we ask individuals to identify factors that are important to their wellbeing and to rate their satisfaction with each identified factor.

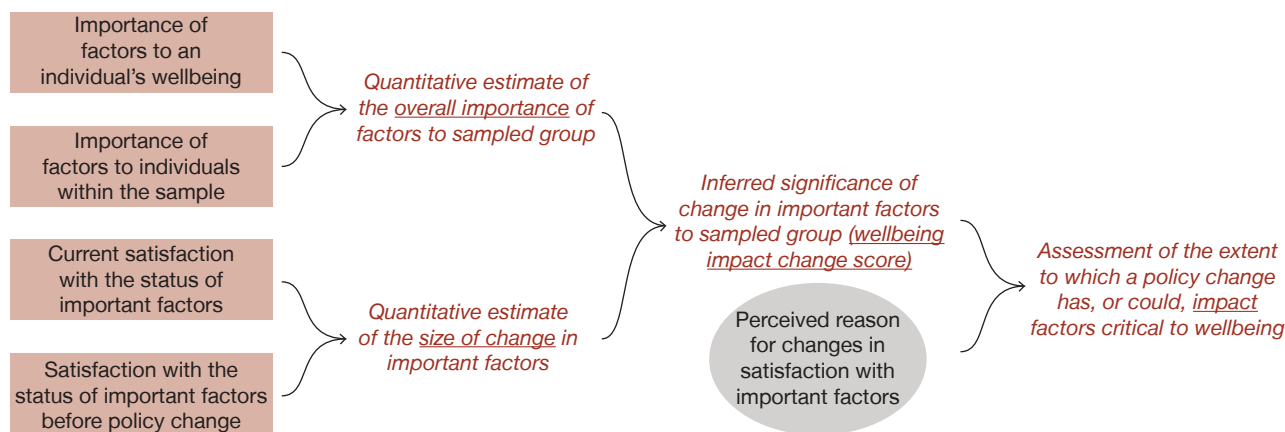


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for our proposed wellbeing-based method for impact evaluation approach (W-IE). Information elicited directly from intended program beneficiaries is shown in boxes (quantitative data) and ellipse (qualitative data), information inferred from responses to direct questions is shown in italics (without frame).

Second, we ask individuals to tell us how satisfied they are with those core factors, both now and previously (before activity/program occurred). Subtracting one satisfaction score from the other generates a quantitative measure of perceived change. By combining information about the magnitude of perceived change with sample importance scores, we can draw inferences about the significance of perceived change to the participant group's wellbeing .

Third, we ask individuals to talk about their perceived reasons for observed change, and we combine those qualitative responses with quantitative scores (above) to draw inferences about the extent and importance of an activity/ program's impact (Figure 1).

## BACKGROUND

Australian Indigenous people have managed their country for tens of thousands of years, undertaking a variety of different traditional land management practices. These practices involve much more than just managing the physical environment. Indigenous people also seek to manage the values, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with a geographical area. Evaluating the impact of ILSMPs is exceedingly difficult. This is because of the numerous interacting relationships between environmental condition, individual and community wellbeing and the role of so called 'co-benefits' that

reach beyond those associated with the environment and accrue to a wide and diverse range of stakeholders. Reducing uncertainty and complexity in identifying, evaluating, and monitoring of such co-benefits is emerging as a research priority.

We use insights from various literatures to propose a method (conceptualised in Figure 1) for evaluating the wellbeing impacts of activities and programs, such as those related to improving environmental condition, including, but not limited to, ILSMPs.

Conducting the interviews with the Ewamian people was a way to test this new approach.

## REFERENCE

1. Larson S, Stoeckl N, Jarvis D, Addison J, Prior S & Esparon M. 2018. Using measures of wellbeing for impact evaluation: proof of concept developed with an Indigenous community undertaking land management programs in northern Australia. *AMBIO*, available online, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-018-1058-3>.

## Further information

Contact project leader Natalie Stoeckl at [natalie.stoeckl@jcu.edu.au](mailto:natalie.stoeckl@jcu.edu.au) or researcher Silva Larson at [silva.larson@gmail.com](mailto:silva.larson@gmail.com). The project page can be found [on the Hub website](#), along with other resources.



This project is supported through funding from the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program.



National Environmental Science Programme

[nespnorthern.edu.au](http://nespnorthern.edu.au)

[nesp.northern@cdu.edu.au](mailto:nesp.northern@cdu.edu.au)



June 2018