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Concluding Remarks

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	作成者: サベール, ジェイムズ・M, 岸上, 伸啓
	メールアドレス:
	所属:
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Indigenous Use and Management of Marine Resources
Edited by Nobuhiro Kishigami and James M. Savelle

Concluding Remarks

James M. Savelle
McGill University

Nobuhiro Kishigami
National Museum of Ethnology

The papers in this volume address various issues dealing with the conservation and management of marine resources used by traditional indigenous societies, as well as the eco-politics affecting in at least one instance a 'developed' society. Each of the papers brings unique perspectives and/or new data on these issues. In these short concluding remarks, we do not summarize the various issues or case studies. Instead, we attempt to identify several underlying themes or topics that seem to us to be most urgent in terms of future investigation. We deal with each separately, in no particular order of importance.

1. *Sea Rights as Indigenous Rights.* It has been only recently that the idea of 'marine tenure' has received attention (as evidenced by various papers in this volume), and Peterson (this volume) in particular recognizes that there are several explanations why this may be so. That is, such systems a) are inherently fragile and so are unlikely to have been recorded by early anthropologists, b) are recent developments in response to the encroachment on traditional fishing areas by non-indigenous peoples, or c) they were longstanding and informal practices but only now are beginning to become formalized under strict western legal concepts. Although Peterson considered these in the context of the Arnhem Land situation, the history of such systems in other areas would prove extremely useful. This is especially appropriate in those areas where co-management or other management regimes are instituted on the assumption that marine tenure systems did not exist in the past.

2. *Variability in Management Systems.* The papers in this volume make it clear that there are a variety of conservation/management systems being used worldwide, each presumably put in place to achieve goals that may be specific to that particular case. While each can be examined on its own merits and within its own context, nevertheless a cross-cultural comparison of systems, taking into account context, would prove exceedingly useful. That is, like problem solving in any context, we need to ask if some systems have greater merit and produce better results than other systems.

3. *Conservation vs. Sustainability.* The issue of conservation vs. sustainability can be complex, and the desire to maintain an environment's biodiversity can often be in conflict with an

indigenous society's rights as regards to traditional use and cultural preferences. It can be anticipated this will be an increasing concern as more co-management systems are implemented and those already in place reassessed.

4. *Traditional Ecological Knowledge Studies.* There is obviously a need for much more research into traditional knowledge of indigenous groups. For obvious reasons, the greater the amount of traditional knowledge recorded for any given society/resource, the better the decisions regarding co-management. However, it should be understood that much traditional knowledge is being lost, as less tends to be passed down from traditional to more acculturated generations. While new types of knowledge may be acquired as contexts change (e.g. a hunter using an outboard motorboat with GPS guidance will develop appropriate new skills), the more 'traditional' knowledge of older generations may be far more relevant to questions concerning resource management. This does not suggest contemporary indigenous knowledge is irrelevant, only that it may be lacking in some areas critical to successful co-management.

5. *Traditional Ecological Knowledge vs. Scientific Ecological Knowledge.* Traditional Ecology Knowledge studies are obviously critical to any attempt to develop co-management systems. However, there is a very real tendency by some to treat this knowledge as absolute truth. While this may be politically correct, does it reflect reality? This is probably one of the weakest aspects of relying on Traditional Ecological Knowledge at present; not that this knowledge is necessarily incorrect or false, but there are rarely independent tests undertaken to verify this. Scientific Ecological Knowledge, on the other hand, while admittedly not perfect or culturally unbiased, nevertheless does have built-in checks and balances that allow it to a) maintain a degree of objectivity, and b) through the scientific process itself, continually progress. Obviously both types of knowledge are required in any consideration of co-management systems (see e.g. Omura, this volume), but neither knowledge system should be considered 'absolute' as a point of principle.

6. *Is There a Conservation Ethic Amongst Indigenous Peoples?* Related to (5) above, some current research amongst indigenous societies appear to have this as an *a priori* assumption, such that the research proceeds to attempt to document the structural properties of the conservation system believed to be in place. While not doubting that conservation is of very real concern to most, if not all indigenous societies, in some cases, as noted by Pollnac and Johnson (this volume), conservation *per se* amongst certain indigenous societies may be more imagined (hoped for) than real. Accordingly, there is room for more rigorous examination of these 'conservation' systems to attempt to determine if, in any given case, a) they do exist, and b) if so, are they intended or 'accidental'? These questions must of necessity be addressed in any co-management system development.

7. *Conservation/Co-Management Systems for Resources in High International Demand.* Several of the papers in this volume deal with this situation. Basically, conservation becomes increasing difficult when the producers of a resource are not the consumers. While traditionally, local exchange systems for resources between neighboring societies were certainly the norm, recent

economic and market globalization can result in very significant changes in how a resource with increasing high international demand is managed at the local level. Simply put: the higher the international demand, the more income from that resource, and the more difficult it may be to convince societies to avoid over-harvesting that resource. It is these situations which might be said to be most in need of concerted conservation efforts at both the local and international levels.

8. *The Effects of Climate Change on Marine Resources.* Climate change is certainly one of the most widely researched (or certainly funded) topic today, with vast amounts of time and resources going into studying impacts on ecosystems and wildlife. However, as Nuttall (this volume) notes, studies which address the corresponding impacts on social relations amongst indigenous societies are rare. However, such studies will become increasingly important, because co-management systems devised under one set of environmental conditions may not be appropriate (in terms of social costs or resource conservation) under a different set of conditions. Further, under certain conditions of climate change, habitats amenable for certain resources will increase and for other resources decrease. When co-management systems are imposed upon one or more of the affected resources, it may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the effects resulting from management vs. those resulting from habitat change. This is especially critical in the event the management strategies are continually monitored for their effectiveness.

9. *Contamination of Resources.* Contaminants entering any food change may be locally- or globally-derived. Currently it is of great concern, and necessarily so. In an ideal world, procedures would be put in place to reduce, and eventually eliminate contaminants at all levels. With increasing globalization/industrialization, this is unlikely to happen in the conceivable future. Certainly tracking of contaminant levels must be maintained, and this may mean that tough decisions regarding changes in traditional diets among indigenous societies must be made. Co-management systems to manage the 'alternate' resources will be especially critical if these new resources previously constituted only a small part of the diet and management concerns for them were minimal.

10. *Eco-politics.* With an increasing world population and industrialization, eco-politics is very likely to play at least as an important role in the near future as it does today. Ohmagari (this volume) has documented in detail the effects of eco-politics on the issue of whaling and the International Whaling Commission, and George Wenzel has previously discussed the European ban on seal products in this context. However, we can expect eco-political considerations to increase in importance in relation to the harvesting of many other marine resources, including smaller whales not currently subsumed under IWC management, dugongs, polar bear, walrus, etc. Under those circumstances, the onus will be on the various resource managing bodies to demonstrate to the various anti-harvesting groups (or nations) that in fact effective conservation measures are in place, and that the resources in question constitute a central cultural, and as well as dietary, role.

While there are many other themes arising from the conference that could be discussed here, we suggest those briefly examined above warrant much further research and thought.