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## ARTICLE

# Lived environmentalisms: Everyday encounters and difference in Australia's north

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on everyday encounters between environmentalists and Indigenous activists during a dispute around a proposed gas hub development in the Kimberley, NW Australia, to explore the possibilities of practising environmentalism differently. It makes visible the complexity, contestations and dilemmas of putting environmentalism into practice in particular places and calls for the specificity of how environmentalisms are negotiated and developed through encounters to be more carefully attended to. It draws on 32 face-to-face in-depth interviews conducted with activists from national Australian environmental organisations working in the Kimberley, Kimberley-based environmental groups, Kimberley Indigenous organisations, participant observations at protest camp site visits and analysis of campaign literature. Closely interrogating lived environmentalisms—how environmentalists put into practice their values in everyday encounters—reveals not only evidence of white environmentalists expanding their conceptions of the environment beyond dualisms and engaging with multi-species justice, but also a hesitancy and complexity in supporting Indigenous self-determination and a limited capacity to challenge colonial-capitalist frameworks.

## KEYWORDS

environmentalism, Indigenous, James Price Point, Kimberley, qualitative, White

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Environmentalism thrives globally, taking diverse and powerful forms (Doyle et al., 2016). However, critiques point to a problematic strand within this movement, which is too colonial, middle-class, consumption-focused and prioritises the concept of 'pristine nature' over social justice concerns (Bell, 2019; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Erickson, 2020; Gomez, 2020). Analyses reveal how this environmentalism can perpetuate 'othering' through its language and actions (van Holstein & Head, 2018), exclude marginalised voices from its narratives (Finney, 2014; Whyte, 2018) and reinforce a nature-versus-society divide (Loftus, 2012; McGregor, 2009). There are many forms of environmentalism that acknowledge the interdependencies between environmental and social concerns, most notably environmental justice movements. This article builds on the extensive work of Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latinx authors to critically interrogate the values and practices of an example of a seemingly problematic strand of environmentalism.

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This paper uses the Walmadan-James Price Point environmental conflict in North West Australia to examine lived environmentalisms—focusing on environmentalists' everyday lives and how their political ideologies and campaigns are complicated, tested and refined through practice grounded in particular places. These practices unsettle and disrupt environmentalisms by making visible their aporias. Environmentalisms are best understood through an analysis of the everyday encounters in place and their practices, as it is in such spaces that opportunities arise for more justice-orientated approaches to activism and more nuanced understandings of the socio-natural assemblages of 'the environment'. Building on established critiques of environmentalism, this article focuses on understanding how, and through what practical changes, environmentalists alter and adjust their *practices* through the 'messy contexts of lived experiences' (Howitt, 2020, p. 1). In other words, while 'why' environmentalisms should change is well established, the 'how' and 'doings' (Barker & Pickerill, 2020) of what this looks like in particular places would benefit from further evidencing.

This approach acknowledges that environmentalisms are dynamic and always in the making; they are a lived negotiation building on past experiments and learning from new practices (Moorcroft, 2016). It also builds on work by Whatmore (2013), Head (2022) and others in examining how environmental problems create useful arenas for the encounters necessary for reconceptualising how such problems are understood, and therefore what coalitions and responses are necessary and possible. Although this paper focuses on a particular place, the findings have resonance for global debates about the value, practices and possibilities of environmentalism.

Environmentalists' everyday lives are understood here through their geographies of encounter (Valentine, 2008). It is in their encounters with the types of difference environmentalists are so often accused of ignoring that provide the hopeful possibility of change. Encounters are more than moments of contact between strangers that can be fleeting, insignificant and can actually 'reinforce pre-existing stereotypes' (Gawlewicz, 2016). Rather, encounters are mutual meaningful engagements with difference through sites (such as neighbourhoods, schools and protests) that create space for collaboration and, ideally, repeated interaction over time (Gawlewicz, 2016). Different types of spaces (institutional, social, public and consumption spaces) have different potential to reduce prejudice and create positive affective attitudes (Piekut & Valentine, 2017).

Despite encounters often being ephemeral, fragile, shaped by unequal power relations (Halvorsen, 2015; Valentine, 2008) and dominant discourses of racialisation, they offer the possibility of creating 'transformative spaces' (Askins & Pain, 2011), however small and incremental (Wilson, 2014). In Halvorsen's examination of the role of encounters in anti-capitalist activism (Occupy London), he discerned that 'encounters were productive of new social relations' (2015, p. 314) albeit often temporary. Yet, apart from Vivanco's (2007) work examining the encounters of environmentalists in rural Costa Rica, the approach has rarely been used to understand environmentalisms, and as explored here, it can be a productive framework for revealing changes in everyday values and practices.

It is in the focus on everyday spaces of interaction with difference, in particular places, that encounters offer an important framework for understanding environmentalisms. Indeed, Askins (2016) has illustrated that encounters 'grounded in the complexities of places, lives and feelings ... produced through everyday spaces' (p. 515) have the potential to destabilise dualisms; dualisms that environmentalism is so often accused of entrenching. In different but complementary ways, this approach also builds on some geographies of activism, such as Chatterton's (2006) examination of 'uncommon ground' as a space for hopeful non-agnostic discourses crossing social difference and Routledge's (2003) 'convergence spaces' as moments of creativity and possibility.

## 2 | WHITE ENVIRONMENTALISMS

Environmentalism is about ensuring that the environment is valued as much as, if not more than, anything else in society, be that the economy, jobs, health, housing, etc. Environmentalism can be defined as 'activism aimed at protecting the environment or improving its condition' (Schlosberg & Bomberg, 2008, p. 1). The emphasis here is on action, activism and the 'doings' of making a difference.

The term white environmentalism is purposefully used here as a way of naming and tracing the genealogy of a particular form of environmentalism to racial capitalism and colonialism. This naming is a mode of critiquing the hidden assumptions (or, as Ferdinand, 2021 denotes, the 'double fracture of modernity') within this environmentalism that has given rise to the more recent formulations of Black, Indigenous and Latinx environmentalisms. This deliberate racialisation of what others have previously defined as 'mainstream environmentalism' (Bacon, 2019), 'conventional environmentalism' (Anderson, 2010), 'modern environmentalism' (Lorimer & Driessen, 2014), 'colonial environmentalism' (Erickson, 2020) and 'settler-colonial environmentalism' (van Holstein & Head, 2018), is a critical intervention designed

to reveal the colonial-capitalist underpinnings of such environmentalism. In doing so, it begins to explicitly explore what an environmentalism rooted in anticolonial and self-determination politics might look like and achieve. It also builds on Liboiron's political act of 'marking', and it has become contemporary academic convention to 'mark' Indigenous authors with their nation or affiliation, yet settler and white scholars remain unmarked; 'This unmarking is one act among many that re-centres settler and whiteness as an unexceptional norm, while deviations have to be marked and named' (2021, p. 3). Therefore, naming and marking this whiteness in environmentalism is a way to disrupt and unsettle the invisibility of whiteness as a 'norm', especially in relation to the purposefully named Black, Indigenous and Latinx environmentalisms.

This categorisation of white environmentalism might, to some, seem unnecessary or blunt. This is partly because white environmentalism's colonial roots, dualism and racial frameworks are often obfuscated and masked. There is a disjuncture here between a purposeful public narrative that environmental organisations believe they need to uphold to be successful in their campaigns—that environmentalism is morally righteous and has universal benefits—and the heterogeneous, messy, and contradictory values and actions of environmentalists who are aware of the failings, risks and harms of a white environmental framework. Environmentalists themselves may be aware of the shortcomings, risks and harms of this 'white' approach. As Anderson (2011) argues, the compromises and trade-offs environmentalists make blur the clear lines often presented in environmental discourse. Environmentalism, he suggests, becomes a complex and ever-evolving entity; 'actioning environmentalism...becomes a performance of the problematic' (Anderson, 2011, pp. 984–985). To understand how to address these critiques, we need to examine the practices of white environmentalists. This involves analysing the gap between their stated goals and everyday actions, and focusing on their lived experiences. Through such empirical analysis, we can explore the extent to which, and how, white environmentalists are responding to these challenges.

A core argument outlined in this article is that only by attending to the explicit requirement for environmentalism to be 'intimately linked to a demand for equality and emancipation' (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 175), precisely because environmental destruction is deeply entangled and interlinked with colonial social injustice, can environmentalism succeed in its quest for environmental protection. Put simply, environmental protection cannot be separated from a concern for people, particularly colonised people.

While white environmentalism is a broad and contested term and encapsulates a set of values that in practice are messy, dynamic, moveable and at times contradictory (Curnow & Helferty, 2018), it can be distinguished as having three enduring characteristics: the maintenance of Cartesian nature–society dualisms, employing colonial-capitalist frameworks, and as having racialised approaches.

First, white environmentalism has a long and established historical trajectory from early environmental movements in the 1800s, which identified threats to wildlife and landscape aesthetics and advocated for forms of protectionism; whereby particular species or places are protected from human activities (Eckersley, 1992). This preservation and dualist approach to 'nature' and society remains evident in forms of contemporary white environmentalism such as support for National Parks, rewilding movements and invasive plant management (Atchison et al., 2024). A focus on landscape aesthetics privileges a colonial vision of nature, or what Lorimer and Driessen aptly describe as 'the impossible geography of wilderness' (2014, p. 178), and a *preservation* of existing societal structures (Liboiron, 2021; Walton, 2023).

This separation between nature and society, and displacement of humans, also prevents environmentalists from understanding the interconnections between struggles (McGregor, 2009), and can, for example, result in evicting Indigenous people from their homelands under the guise of environmental protection (Begay, 2023). Disconnecting people from places—both through people-free 'wilderness' and 'solutions' that require outsourced off-shored resources (such as conflict metals)—severs vital interdependencies, place-based knowledge, and perpetuates a spatial distance and scale whereby 'environmental injustices are facilitated by decision-makers who behave as if sites where hazards are produced "out of sight and out of mind" are somehow irrelevant to the health of people and ecosystems at the original sites of decision-making power and consumption' (Pellow, 2016, p. 224). As Liboiron (2021) argues, 'there is no "away" at any rate' (p. 17), as demonstrated in their work on the inability to confine pollution to particular places. Acknowledging the interdependencies between people and places also challenges the notion that 'saving' one place (while sacrificing others) is even possible, let alone adequate. Colonialism, by creating this dualism, disrupts crucial systems of reciprocal and relational responsibility between Indigenous people and their environments (Whyte, 2018) such that 'our interference with other beings' ability to fulfil their responsibilities is an example of a great environmental injustice' (McGregor, 2009, p. 40).

Second, there is a troubling colonial-capitalist framework which underpins white environmentalism (Ferdinand, 2021). This is evident in the Eurocentric and settler-colonial processes of imposing wildlife and forest management doctrines onto the colonies in the 1800s at the same time as land grabs and violently extracting material resources (a process of

‘colonial inhabitation’, Ferdinand, 2021), and the 1970s discourse of limits to growth and fears of population growth (often focused on Global South populations) (Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Erickson, 2020).

These processes continue today where carbon offsetting and mineral extraction for technological solutions for climate change ‘perpetuate the problems of climate coloniality and climate apartheid’ (Sultana, 2022, p. 62) and therefore maintain existing systems of inequality and privilege. White environmentalisms advocate for and celebrate solutions such as renewable energy transitions without fully acknowledging the uneven spatial implications of these technologies on the already dispossessed (Begay, 2023; Sultana, 2022). Unfortunately, renewable energy remains reliant on the extraction of labour and resource from the already marginalised, for example, to mine lithium needed for electric car batteries, generating new forms of carbon colonialism (Lennon, 2017). As capitalism (including ‘green’ capitalism) relies upon these spatial processes of extraction and inequality, Erickson (2020) argues there is a need for environmentalisms to directly challenge white supremacy, existing colonial structures and capitalist economies.

Pellow (2016) goes further and argues that environmentalists must also look beyond the state—beyond seeking state interventions and the changing of regulations and laws—to anti-authoritarian actions which can challenge state violence and oppression, given that ‘environmental racism is often a form of state-sanctioned violence’ (Pellow, 2016, p. 230; see also Pulido & De Lara, 2018). Echoing these sentiments, Whyte (2018) suggests that the settler ecologies built through colonial-capitalist frameworks—reliant upon transporting materials and living beings internationally and enforced through rights, contracts and regulations—have been unable to create the necessary qualities of relationships to maintain eco-social relations, to the point that a ‘relational tipping point ... has already been crossed’ (Whyte, 2020, p. 1) where we do not now have an adequate quality of relationships to tackle environmental injustices. This colonial-capitalist framework underpinning white environmentalism ‘just looks at the world exactly as it is now and tries to make a “green” replication of it’ (Loach, 2023, p. 74), thereby leaving unchallenged deep inequities and colonial-capitalist relations.

Third, this dualistic environmental colonial-capitalist framework is deeply racialised (Ferdinand, 2021; Pulido, 2000; Pulido & De Lara, 2018; Sultana, 2022; Wright, 2018). The predominance of white participants facilitates a racist othering, whereby environmentalists ‘reinforce their own white environmental subjectivity as the norm’ (Hickcox, 2018, p. 496; see also Hughey, 2022) and therefore Black, Indigenous or Latinx environmentalists as ‘out of place’ in environmental movements and spaces (Finney, 2014; Gomez, 2020). This racialisation has also meant ‘that climate action has only begun to speed up now that Global North majority-white countries are coming under threat’ (Loach, 2023, p. 58).

A white environmentalism privileges activism which mostly benefits white people, reinforcing practices that treat marginalised populations as expendable (Pellow, 2016), and parts of the Global South as ‘sacrifice zones’ (Loach, 2023). This is a form of white supremacy (Pulido, 2015), and there needs to be recognition that ‘white supremacy has both created this problem and held us back from solving it’ (Loach, 2023, p. 66). White environmentalism reproduces and sustains whiteness and colonialism in which it can ‘assume access to Indigenous Land and its ability to produce value for settler and colonial desires and futures’ (Liboiron, 2021, p. 11). Extractive land relations are developed in how land is appropriated as property (such as National Parks or for resources for renewable energy transitions), and in how uneven pollution is encouraged in order to ‘save’ other landscapes. These dynamics produce and ‘maintain whiteness’ (Liboiron, 2021, p. 79) while actively disrupting Indigenous relations. White environmentalism, critics argue, does not realise the need to centre questions of justice, challenge the ‘oppressive principles of whiteness’ (Loach, 2023, p. 84) and radically reconfigure the alternative futures they are seeking, because they benefit from the status quo, *and* therefore resist taking proportionate responsibility for environmental problems (Whyte, 2018). Moreover, an anticolonial environmentalism would likely require losing something (land, particular species, access to knowledge and power), which white environmentalism is not accustomed to (Liboiron, 2021).

White environmentalism, therefore, excludes and silences the voices of those most impacted by environmental change, despite an established and emerging array of distinctive environmentalisms—such as Latinx environmentalism (Carter, 2016; Wald et al., 2019), Indigenous environmentalism (McGregor, 2018; Porter, 2014; Powell & Curley, 2008) and crucially interracial solidarities (Pulido & De Lara, 2018)—that explicitly call for environmentalists to centre questions of race.

These critiques are articulated alongside clear advocations for ways to change and improve, which can be grouped into three interventions: tackling the colonial-capitalist root causes of environmental degradation, supporting self-determination and reconceiving ‘the environment’ to enable multispecies justice.

First, white environmentalisms must tackle the root causes of colonial-capitalism and settler colonialism (Whyte, 2018) by making visible and then dismantling the systems that extract from, harm, and then dispose of the people and places deemed sacrificial for the benefit of the (majority white) elite (Pellow, 2016). More than that, whiteness cannot survive

anyway without Black liberation because we are interconnected and ‘inequalities do not act independently of one another’ (Pellow, 2016, p. 225).

Second, white environmentalists need to directly support Black, Indigenous and people of colour-led quests for self-determination (Howitt, 2020; McGregor, 2018). This includes actively supporting decolonialisation that includes land-back, reparations (repaying for loss and damage) (Ferdinand, 2021), cultural resurgence (Sultana, 2022) and decentralised decision-making that ‘are forged in opposition to selective recognition of kinds of modernisation and development projects acceptable to settler-colonial institutions’ (Denzin Gergan & Curley, 2023, p. 764). This also prioritises supporting and working with those most vulnerable to environmental degradation (Pellow, 2016), ensuring distributive justice (Sultana, 2022) and equitable access to resources like affordable energy-efficient homes (Walton, 2023). For example, self-determination can be facilitated through white environmentalists backing regenerative economies and agricultures (Begay, 2023; Penniman, 2023), which use Indigenous knowledge to manage land and ecologies (Birch, 2016). These are place-based approaches that acknowledge Indigenous-environmental relations and the reciprocal responsibilities of interdependence that continue even after (often forced) migration (Whyte, 2018).

Finally, McGregor (2009, 2018), Pellow (2016), Whyte (2018), Liboiron (2021) and others call for white environmentalism to reconceive their conceptualisation of ‘the environment’ to enable multispecies justice. This needs to acknowledge that water, the Earth itself and other elements are living things that require mutual relations of care, a reciprocal ethics that respects that ‘nonhumans have their own agency, spirituality, knowledge and intelligence’ (Whyte, 2018, p. 127). This requires not only abandoning a dualistic approach in favour of reciprocal relations but also understanding what it means to ‘live well with Earth’ (McGregor, 2018) and ‘belonging-together-in-Country’ (Howitt, 2020, p. 1).

### 3 | INDIGENOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN THE KIMBERLEY

The place of analysis of these everyday encounters is the Kimberley, NW Australia—a site of sustained and ongoing conflict between those who advocate ‘development’ through resource extraction and those who propose ‘protection’ of the environment. As detailed below, this place has particular Indigenous ownership, heritage and history alongside ecological biodiversity including rare and endangered species. This region and case study was chosen because it had attracted the attention of national white environmental organisations (who had started campaigns and relocated activists to the region), Indigenous communities were fracturing around support for the gas plant, and the future of the region was represented, in national politics and in the mainstream media, as polarised and contested (Francis, 2013). The Kimberley is also considered ‘one of the most ecologically diverse areas in the world ... a biodiversity hotspot’ (Beazley, in Laurie, 2010, p. 1); a region of large tracts of intact remnant eucalypt woodland, abundant wildlife, and rare and endangered nonhuman species (Woinarski et al., 2007).

Yet, the anchors of the dispute between Indigenous owners, multinational corporations, settlers and environmentalists (with these identities intersecting and overlapping), and therefore between colonialism, capitalism, environmentalism and Indigenous self-determination (again, with interconnections between these), are also recognisable in many other conflicts worldwide. The Kimberley site enables close empirical analysis of a conflict that is, unfortunately, often replicated elsewhere, and as such is vital in furthering understandings of how it might be possible to generate different and progressive outcomes from long-standing geographical tensions.

During a 3-month period, 32 face-to-face interviews were conducted with national Australian environmental organisations (11 interviews), Kimberley environmental groups (11 interviews) and Kimberley Indigenous organisations (9 interviews) (Table 1): approximately a third of interviewees identified as Indigenous. The interviews took place across Western Australia (WA); in Perth, Broome, Derby, Middle Lagoon, Fitzroy Crossing and Pender Bay. All research was conducted by the author.

I have worked with environmental groups in Western Australia as a participant in local environmental campaigns and as an academic researcher for many years. This included living in WA for several years, and conducting research with The Wilderness Society, WWF-Australia and Indigenous Development Corporations in Victoria and Queensland (Pickerill, 2008). My positionality as an outsider (as English and white) and with a certain form of power (academic, funded by The British Academy, from the colonising country, no longer living in Australia, and as aligned with environmental organisations) positioned me with access to environmental interviewees and problematically in relation to Indigenous activists. In addition to being overt about this positionality, I also sought specific guidance from local Indigenous academics and leaders about protocol and ethics and shared my political commitment to supporting Indigenous self-determination with all interviewees prior to conducting research. All interviewees signed consent forms

TABLE 1 Organisations and groups included in this research.

Type of organisation	Interviews conducted with activists from
National environmental organisations	The Greens The Wilderness Society (TWS) WWF-Australia PEW Charitable Trust Conservation Volunteers EcoTrust Australia
Kimberley-based environmental groups	Environs Kimberley (EK) Save the Kimberley (STK) Birdwood Downs
Kimberley Indigenous organisations	Kimberley Land Council (KLC) Nulungu Research Institute Yawuru Group Madjulla Nyikina Middle Lagoon KRED Enterprises

to take part in the study and were given verbal and written information about the project and given an opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time.

## 4 | INDIGENOUS COUNTRY, COLONIALISM AND THE BROWSE GAS HUB CONFLICT

The Kimberley is an Indigenous Country. The Middle Dampier Peninsula, and specifically Walmadan, is home to the Jabirr Jabirr and Goolarabooloo people (Muecke, 2018). The Jabirr Jabirr and Ngumbarl people (Bindunbur Native Title Claim Group) secured Native Title ownership of the site in 2017, a claim that has been challenged several times by the Goolarabooloo people, whose counterclaim was most recently rejected by the Full Court of the Federal Court in 2020 (O'Neill, 2019).

Australian settlers never signed a treaty with the Country's Traditional Owners. Half the current population of the Kimberley are Indigenous, and large sections of this region have been legally returned to Indigenous ownership (Moorcroft & Adams, 2014; National Native Title Tribunal, 2021). The Kimberley is a place where Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous leadership and Indigenous autonomy have grown in recent years and, as such, Indigeneity is fundamental to this region (McLean, 2014).

Indigenous Australians have 'sovereign responsibility' (Birch, 2007, p. 116, italics in original) for all beings (including more-than-human relations) alive and dead in their Country, to their past and future, where 'country is multi-dimensional and consists of people, animals, plants, Dreaming, underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air. Country has origins and a future: it exists both in and through time' (Rose, 2004, p. 153). Reciprocal relations to Country are spatially determined through belonging and require active embodied engagement with place to maintain them. These relations are enacted as 'Caring as Country' (Bawaka Country et al., 2013) which ensures the maintenance of 'healthy' Country and Indigenous cultural survival (Black, 2010; Moorcroft et al., 2012). Indigenous Country is a lived, lived-in and dynamic environment, imbued with humans, meanings, memories and Dreamtimes. All Indigenous Country is valued for its sociocultural and environmental elements, not just particularly for spectacular aesthetics, rare biodiversity or 'wilderness' landscapes.

### 4.1 | Colonisation and 'development' of the Kimberley

Although one of the last regions in Australia to be colonised, in the 1880s the lure of gold and promise of fertile pasture lands encouraged an influx of settlers. Despite armed Indigenous resistance, the region was calved into a patchwork of large-scale cattle farms (many of which still operate today), mines (particularly diamond, nickel and iron), large-scale

irrigation schemes and mission-owned land (McLean, 2014; Pedersen & Woorunmurra, 2000). Indigenous people were forcefully dispossessed from their lands, massacred or made to work unpaid in the cattle stations.

The economic legacy of colonialism in the region is a disconnect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous economic systems and wealth (Stoeckl et al., 2014), where Indigenous people in the Kimberley are among the most disadvantaged in the country (Biddle et al., 2009). Living costs (especially housing and food) are high, employment opportunities limited and infrastructure fragile. This is a situation of 'entrenched disadvantage' in all areas (except central Broome, the regional capital and a small area in the East Kimberley), where there is no sign of improved socio-economic outcomes for Indigenous people. As elsewhere, colonialism is an ongoing structure shaping the Kimberley (Wolfe, 2006).

## 4.2 | Browse LNG gas hub

In 2009, the West Australian State government declared plans to develop a large gas plant in the sea and a terminal on the cliffs at Walmadan on the Dampier Peninsula, just north of Broome. The Browse LNG processing plant proposal was led by Woodside Energy Ltd. The gas was to be piped across the Kimberley and power new resource extraction industries, extending activities from the existing modest diamond, nickel and iron mines to gas, oil, copper, bauxite, silver, lead, plutonium, palladium, coal, zinc, lead, uranium and base metal extraction (Stephenson & Hunter, 2014).

The chosen site for the gas plant is home to the Jabirr Jabirr and Goolarabooloo people, and is part of the Lujjarri cultural heritage trail that connects key spiritual sites and traditional campsite, and is used to celebrate and teach Indigenous and settler people about heritage and traditional skills (Figure 1).

The State government and Woodside offered the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), the peak regional Indigenous body, AUS\$1.5 billion in funding over 30 years, in exchange for supporting the project (Ruiz Wall, 2010). But the proposed development aggravated already complex Indigenous relations (Muecke, 2018; Pickerill, 2018). Goolarabooloo Traditional Owners challenged the mandate of the KLC in accepting the deal, triggering 18 months of political wrangling, a Federal Court case and a vote by Jabirr Jabirr and Goolarabooloo Traditional Owners in May 2011 where 60% (164 to 108 votes) accepted the proposed development. Objectors then legally successfully challenged the State's compulsorily purchase of the land in 2011, Woodside withdrew from the development in April 2013, and by August 2013 any development of the Browse LNG plant at Walmadan was blocked by the Supreme Court of Western Australia (Muecke & Roe, 2020).

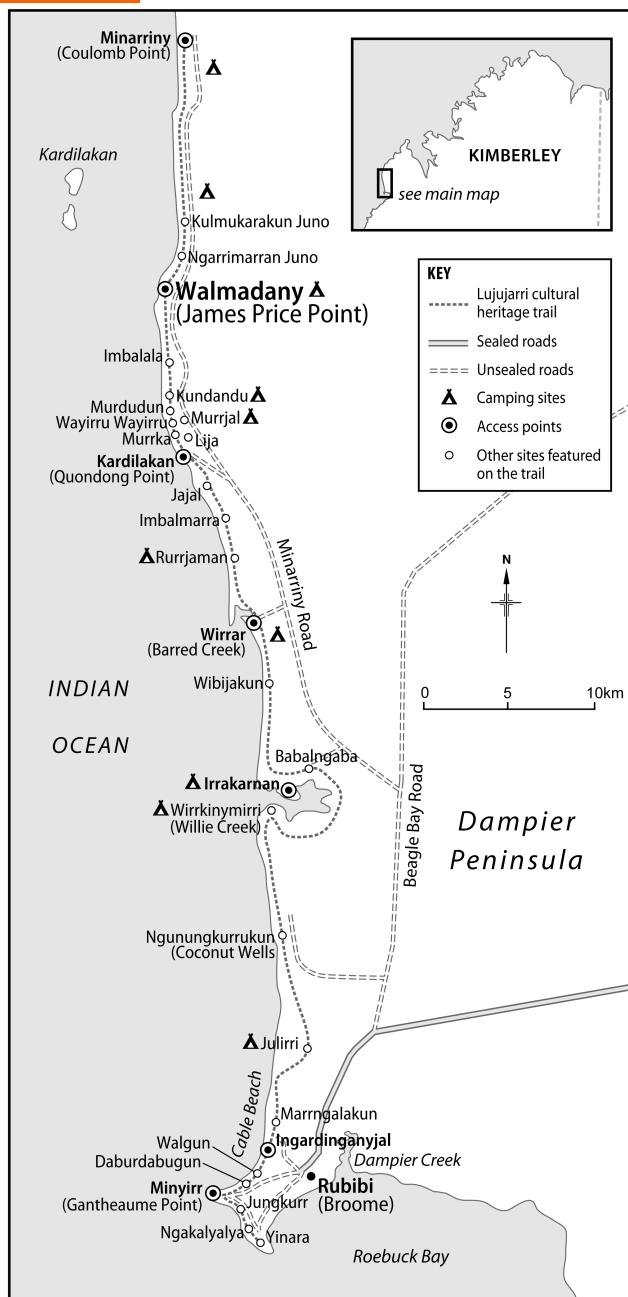
## 4.3 | Contentious environmental politics

There is a long history of environmental groups' involvement with the Kimberley, particularly by the Broome-based Environs Kimberley (EK) and national environmental organisations The Wilderness Society (TWS), the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and WWF-Australia.

The Browse LNG proposal renewed white environmentalism in the region. Campaigns objecting to the proposal were orchestrated from groups' headquarters, which for TWS and WWF were 1400 miles south in Perth. As the campaign evolved, TWS and ACF established temporary regional offices in Broome and dispatched campaigners to staff them, with TWS making an alliance with EK. The campaign to prevent the gas processing hub rekindled historic tensions between Indigenous people and environmental settler activists in Broome (Muecke, 2016; Vincent & Neale, 2017). Into this mix arrived numerous additional white environmentalists, under banners of different national environmental organisations, who had little experience of the region and who consequently had new encounters with Indigenous activists who challenged their agendas (Muir, 2012).

The Wilderness Society's 'Hands up for the Kimberley' campaign appeared at first glance to adopt a conventional 'wilderness' protection discourse, centring on the possible disruption to whale migration paths and the contribution that burning the extracted gas would make to climate change (Figure 2). They led with whale iconography and argued 'we are a conservation organisation and we can see that this gas hub will have disastrous environment and social impacts, and as far as we're concerned we're obligated to oppose it' (Peter Robertson, Campaigns Co-ordinator of The Wilderness Society, Western Australia, Perth, non-Indigenous interviewee). However, closer analysis of their campaign literature reveals a shift towards acknowledging the importance of Indigenous Country, the inside pages of a flyer acknowledged: 'a rich and unbroken Aboriginal cultural history extending back many thousands of years. Involving the region's Traditional Owners is key to improving protection and management of the Kimberley'. TWS had explicitly partnered with EK in order to ensure local place-based connections and knowledge. It also argued that a sustainable future in the area required





**FIGURE 1** Location of Walmadan (James Price Point) and Lujjarri cultural heritage trail on Dampier Peninsula, Kimberley, Australia.

an expansion of Indigenous land and sea management. TWS national identity also shifted during this period. Its original, animal-focused logo was replaced with a human hand when working in the Kimberley, and more recently to a new national tagline of ‘Life. Support.’ removing an explicit focus on flora and fauna.

Despite this, many Indigenous activists took affront to these white environmentalists and their prioritisation of environmental protection over the possibility of new finance and facilities for Indigenous communities. There was no simple Indigenous–environmental division; rather, there were competing political narratives: Indigenous advocates for economic development; environmental groups’ vision of ‘saving’ the environment; Indigenous visions of a sustainable environmental, social and economic future; and environmental groups’ negotiating and seeking compromise (Pickerill, 2018). EK and the KLC endured internal discord as members split between these positions, and several Indigenous leaders attacked environmental organisations for getting involved in what they considered to be an Indigenous issue: ‘Their [environmental groups] approach to attack Indigenous people was the wrong approach, because we’re the victims in this process and they should have supported us ... on access and land management for this Country, and protecting the Country’ (Anthony Watson, Nyikina Mangala and Chair of KLC, Broome, Indigenous

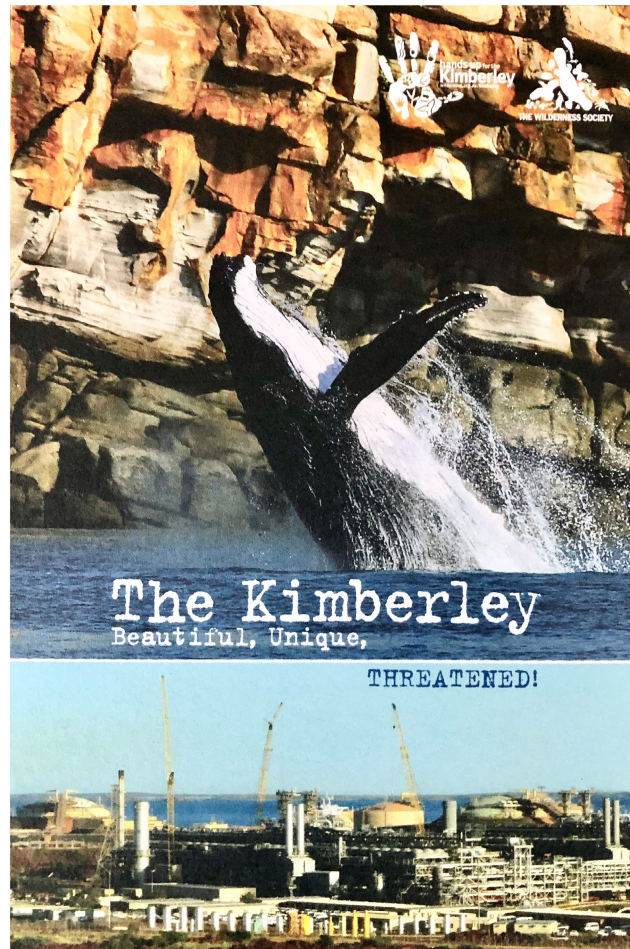


FIGURE 2 Wilderness Society 'Hands up for the Kimberley' flyer distributed in 2011.

interviewee). Yet, others noted that there was not a neat split between Indigenous and white environmentalism, rather discord within various groups:

[there has been a] nurturing a dislike of the Greens, of the green movement ... saying that ... they don't know of anything about Country. It's been a very contrived way of separating green politics from Aboriginal issues, ... so basically green groups are looking for leadership from disgruntled blackfellas who are prepared to step outside of those old networks.

(Ian Perdrisat, Madjulla Inc., Broome, Indigenous interviewee)

In the context of this contentious environmental issue and competing politics, it is useful to analyse more closely the everyday spaces of encounter.

## 5 | EVERYDAY SPACES OF ENCOUNTER

In Broome and the wider region of the Kimberley, there were mutual encounters between white environmentalist and Indigenous activists in various spaces, through neighbourhoods, in local campaigns and in questions of economic livelihoods.

### 5.1 | Broome as Indigenous neighbourhood

Broome is a small town with one commercial street surrounded by residential housing. It is limited to the west by the Indian Ocean and to the east by Roebuck Bay. It has a permanent population of just over 14,000 people. Those who have

lived and worked in the environmental sector in Broome for a long time noted how impossible it was to do anything without everyone else knowing about it. In a small town like Broome, life is about interactions with fellow residents and lives constantly overlap. Friendship networks and gossip made information travel quickly and white environmentalists and Indigenous people had numerous encounters. Reconciling the identity of being an environmentalist with this largely Indigenous town tested activists' values and their sense of place in productive ways. Rescaling environmentalism from national slogans into the place-based micropolitics of Broome shifted how Indigenous politics were understood by white environmentalists, which required them to adjust their discourses and practices, and for Indigenous activists to challenge the implications of environmental campaigns.

Those white environmentalists based in Perth 'justify being down here saying our audience is the people who are going to change things, are people in Perth' (Maria Mann, Former Director of Environs Kimberley, Perth, non-Indigenous interviewee) but 'unless they visit frequently they don't really have up to date understanding of the situation, ... people down here [Perth] have a very city centric way of doing things and also they're kind of not taken seriously in that they can always bolt back home if all goes wrong and people up there are left to carry the can' (ibid.). There is a 'total disconnect between here and the Kimberley' (Rachel Siewert, Federal Senator, Australian Greens, Perth, non-Indigenous interviewee) where 'the problem you've got with a lot of these paid conservationists [is] ... very often they haven't been to an area, and they don't know what they are fighting to protect' (Hugh Brown, Save the Kimberley, Perth, non-Indigenous interviewee).

TWS deliberately built coalitions with Broome-based environmental groups like EK and STK, but maintained being in Perth is:

not really a big issue for us, the fact that we don't have staff on the ground is not really a problem ... If that means that we do come to a different view on things from the [Kimberley] Land Council then ... we will just have to agree to disagree.

(Peter Robertson, TWS)

More local environmental groups benefitted significantly from 'networks on the ground. We talk to communities, we know of individuals who have particular projects, ... we can see what the opportunities are, but also we can actually talk to the people on the ground'. (Martin Pritchard, Environs Kimberley, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee)

Being in place was vital in understanding the different languages and ways of communicating in the Kimberley; 'many Indigenous people speak several languages and English may be the second or third. ... The wider community has not respected the role that language plays in the Kimberley. Essentially it's like a different country' (Martin Pritchard, EK). Consequently, 'a lot of people don't realise that Aboriginal people can't understand what you're saying. You speak English to someone who can only speak pidgin or the Kimberley creole and because it's sort of the same everyone thinks that they're talking the same language, actually you're not' (Maria Mann, EK), rather 'you're talking to people who cannot read and write, don't understand western science, and don't understand industry knowledge' (Anne Poelina, Madjulla Inc., Broome, Indigenous interviewee, see also Poelina et al., 2020). As a result, misunderstandings abound (Poelina et al., 2020):

some of the misunderstandings between green and black are because words mean different things. Translation is different and they have no capacity to translate. ... 'yes' from Indigenous means 'we understand', not that 'we agree', yet to non-Indigenous people it means approval. You need the language to share knowledge. It is an oral tradition, it is not written down. Environmental NGOs don't want to take the time to sit down and listen. But you need the language to understand the relationship.

(Bruce Gorrington, Nulungu, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee)

For the white environmentalists, the complexity of the reality of Kimberley lives and politics, especially concerning livelihoods, made it difficult for them to assert simple slogans. While the national environmental campaigns were centred on slogans such as 'Save the Kimberley Whales Coast', those activists based in Broome recognised the colonial and racist implications of how such slogans prioritised animals over Indigenous people. Emma Belfield, a recent arrival, noted that 'I really enjoy the sorts of conversations you have around what conservation looks like up here and who is part of that' (Environs Kimberley, non-Indigenous interviewee). Crucially, local opposition to the gas hub was rooted in 'how things will change about the place or the places they love, and that's absolutely at the heart of people's concerns' (ibid.).

## 5.2 | Campaigning together

EK is an environmental group based in Broome. It has been working on a number of environmental campaigns since 1996 and has always explicitly collaborated with Traditional Owners and Indigenous activists. This collaboration included a Memorandum of Understanding with KLC ('we've had a very good relationship with them and we've done joint projects together' [Wayne Bergmann, KRED Enterprise Charitable Trust and ex-KLC Executive Director, Broome, Western Australia, Indigenous interviewee]).

EK understood that they could not operate as an environmental group without Indigenous collaboration, 'they work bloody hard on making sure that what they're doing is culturally appropriate, and getting advised by the right people, and helping priorities get set by the mob,<sup>1</sup> and they wouldn't still exist if they hadn't done that' (Scott Ludham, Federal Senator, The Greens, Fremantle, non-Indigenous interviewee). Yet, there was also a simplicity in this relationship in the initial years—'at that stage of course there was no conflict; we all wanted to protect the Country' (Pat Lowe, Environs Kimberley, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee) and 'in Environs Kimberley there were a lot of Aboriginal people as well as white people who didn't want the [Fitzroy] river to be dammed and didn't want the cotton industry to be established ... there was a very, very comfortable synergy between the two' (Maria Mann, EK).

As Indigenous autonomy and power grew, especially with Native Title determinations, yet Indigenous economic marginalisation was sustained, a rift emerged with EK. This rift crystallised around Indigenous economic opportunities, particularly the growth of mining development across the Kimberley. For some early members of EK, Indigenous support for mining undermined environmental commitments—'I kind of thought that we were all going down the same track and that my view of utopia was the same as everyone else's, but clearly it was not' (Maria Mann, EK). There is a danger here, evident in Maria's words below, that Indigenous 'way of life' and 'culture' are assumed by white environmentalists to be synonymous with anti-development. Yet, this locks Indigenous people in a colonial stereotype. The opposition to the gas hub at Walmandan further aggravated these tensions between EK and, particularly, the KLC; 'we've really worked cheek by jowl with Aboriginal people. Now, with the KLC taking a very pro-development position, it kind of makes it difficult' (Pat Lowe, EK). This 'led to a breakaway group forming ... the No Gas community group, that they're people who didn't think EK was doing enough' (Kate Golson, EK) to advocate against the gas hub. This disjuncture is, unfortunately, not uncommon in white environmentalism that when tested by such encounters, drops their commitment to social justice:

what Environs Kimberley is trying to do in the Kimberley is really very much around protecting the natural environment, protecting a way of life and encouraging some developments that are less harmful or have a benign effect on the local community and the local environment ... in the olden days when Environs Kimberley was first getting established we had as our objective to protect the environment and the culture of The Kimberley ... that hasn't changed, however the way that we think of culture now might be at odds with what we thought of culture then.

(Maria Mann, EK)

EK, in what remained of the group, sought to carefully work through what a more social justice-orientated environmentalism meant in practice, 'the relationship with the Land Council has been our priority, to retain that publicly and we would never speak out against the KLC' (ibid.), and 'Environs Kimberley ... don't want to rock the boat, ... they work with us. They do a lot of projects, they work with Aboriginal groups, and they're part of the community here' (Howard Pederson, Yawuru Corporation, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee). This involved slow careful work:

EK as an organisation has I think really strong and constructive relationships with Aboriginal communities and with Aboriginal organisations ... because we're local and because those relationships have been built upon over a long period of time, we've been able to weather a lot of the difficulties ... It's not uncomplicated, it's not easy, but all of us in EK are proud about the work we put in to have really constructive relationships and in a really meaningful day-to-day way, respecting cultural heritage past and present.

(Emma Belfield, EK)

EK argue they 'do our best to put a nuanced line in our advocacy ... I'm not a fan of easy rhetoric, because it's hollow, and it also comes back to bite you ... it's important that language and sensibility reflects the fact that Traditional Owners are the principal land agents in practical terms across most of the land' (Emma Belfield, EK). This was attempted by acknowledging the centrality of cultural heritage, by populating the campaign map with Indigenous names:

we're trying to show people ... that even though you may think that this is an area that is a wilderness and there is nothing there, actually these places are all named.

(Martin Pritchard, EK)

This complexity is an outcome of the lived experience of environmentalists working in Broome, an acceptance of the need for holistic environmental approaches:

the way that we portray the importance of species is to provide people with something recognisable, and the reason we do that is because capturing [the attention of] people with ecosystems as a whole is really difficult. It's not something that is immediately understandable to the person, whereas you've got a snub fin dolphin or a turtle, people immediately have warm fuzzy feelings. ... we're not focused on species, we are focused on ecosystems and landscapes as a whole ... when you look at the Kimberley, the only approach you can take is a holistic landscape scale approach.

(ibid.)

Yet, some white environmental groups like TWS were openly oppositional in their rejection of the gas hub and only sought relationships with Indigenous allies, rather than adjust their campaign position:

There are business people in the region who are opposed to what we want. There are pastoralists in the Kimberley who are opposed to what we want ... we've also got a very good relationship with a number of Traditional Owners who support what we're doing, so we just have to work through those disagreements that we have with some Indigenous groups or individuals.

(Peter Robertson, TWS)

Environmental groups who were considered by Indigenous activists to be useful allies shared three approaches: working with Indigenous people without seeking publicity for that work, focusing on practical projects that supported Indigenous people on country, particularly in livelihoods and conservation-based economies, and sustained engagement over time. The private conservation sector, such as Bush Heritage and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, has long done this by buying old pastoral leases and environmentally restoring them with Indigenous communities.

In the Kimberley, WWF-Australia was well thought of for its grounded conservation work:

most of our work actually in The Kimberley is work that has never been publicised. ... It's very detailed work that we've been doing around thinking about the future for various important parts of the Kimberley. ... We do that kind of work and near 95% of that is done directly with people on the ground quietly.

(Paul Gamblin, WWF-Australia, Perth, non-Indigenous interviewee)

Yet, developing collaborative practical projects has not been of central importance to many white environmental campaign groups. EK and Pew Environment Group Australia have gradually shifted to this more practical approach, 'at that stage [when had just formed] we were almost entirely an advocacy organisation, ... But now we're doing much more on the ground stuff' (Pat Lowe, Environs Kimberley, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee). This shift represents what Moorcroft (2016) has also articulated as a new conservation paradigm of practical projects which employ Indigenous people. For EK combining advocacy and practical work enhanced the possibilities of collaboration, incorporating Indigenous ontologies and consequently developing more complex environmentalisms:

that feature within our advocacy work ... that's practical in terms of working with rangers and developing programmes ... that brings together traditional and political knowledge with Western science. There's that part of our work that integrates those things and the work that Martin and I do as environmental advocates, they lead very much to respect Traditional Owners views on things, find out what they are, work out how our advocacy can reflect a respect and understanding of what those views are in relation to issues. It's not always straightforward.

(Emma Belfield, EK)

This built on a broader recognition, learnt through these encounters with Indigenous activists, of the need for people to be on Country to enable good environmental outcomes; ‘coming at it from a white perspective of undisturbed landscapes that need to be protected from humans is deeply offensive to people who take a high measure of responsibility for how the Country is. They put back to us, us collectively, that it’s not undisturbed ... we’ve been managing it, it’s the way it is because we’ve managed it’ (Scott Ludham, The Greens), and:

environmental groups traditionally [were] very focused on campaigning and advocacy for the environment ... [now] we move into a new space, which is about how people are part of a landscape. ... So we have to start really thinking about how do you weigh up both social, cultural and, particularly for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, environment, and economic development because people want to be living on their Country, they want to be having a good livelihood, they want futures for their kids.

(Ariadne Gorring, Land and Sea Unit Manager, Kimberley Land Council, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee)

Pragmatically, white environmental groups have also understood the value in using different strategies to achieve a shared goal; ‘they [Indigenous people] tend to come at it from a cultural perspective, and we’re coming at it from a greeny perspective and you meet in the middle and try and save the same spot’ (Scott Ludham, The Greens). This is sometimes expressed in ways that can be misunderstood; ‘you could tell that there’s a commonality about what sustainability means, but the language in which they express things can be very different, even with the Land Council talking about jobs coming out of the gas refinery, every statement’s qualified by talking about protection of the environment’ (Kate Golson, Environs Kimberley, Broome, non-Indigenous interviewee).

### 5.3 | Co-creating economic alternatives

White environmentalists in the Kimberley have long understood the inseparability of environmental threats from the need to build economically sustainable livelihoods even if they have struggled to align these goals:

just making something a park or a protected area doesn’t protect it in my mind. *What protects it is the building of a relationship between people and Country*, and an understanding among people that they can actually live in a reliably prosperous way without having to trash every piece of their Country. You do that by creating alternative models of development.

(Ian Gill, ex-Director of EcoTrust Australia, Sydney, NSW, non-Indigenous interviewee, emphasis added)

Acknowledging the economic needs of Indigenous people led to the Kimberley Appropriate Economies Roundtable driven by Rosemary Hill of the ACF, but collaboratively organised with EK and KLC, and held in 2005 in Fitzroy Crossing in the heart of the Kimberley (Hill et al., 2005). It ‘was an attempt to provide an economic blueprint for the region that was an alternate to the extractive economy’ (Scott Ludham, The Greens). It produced 11 principles on how development should proceed in the Kimberley which centred the importance of Indigenous culture to economic futures, recognised conservation and cultural management as economically and socially important, and sought to ‘establish systems and structures to promote, assist and support new and existing sustainable and appropriate enterprises supporting culturally appropriate conservation areas as long as co-managed by Indigenous people’ (Hill et al., 2005, p. 10).

This explicit attempt by white environmentalists to tackle economic challenges was a vital space of encounter. It educated environmentalists on the complexity of Indigenous economics (principally the lack of state provision of basic infrastructures that means leasing their land to extractive industries often becomes a necessary choice), ‘this outsourcing of service provision to mining companies is really problematic’ (Emma Belfield, EK), and:

What I regret is that we come into contact with [Indigenous] people only in emergencies, ... we tend to get brought in when things are on fire. ... What had brought people there was the desire to stop a particular thing, and then of course all roads lead back to what else you need to, we need to work on providing alternatives so that people aren’t forced into these things.

(Scott Ludham, The Greens)

Likewise, these discussions made visible environmentalists' lack of economic expertise:

we need economists and specialists to actually do the work for us, because that's not our expertise. We realise that without that, without that backing of an understanding of what an economy based around protecting the environment and culture could be it's really hard for us to knock back or to oppose developments as they arise here.

(Martin Pritchard, Environs Kimberley)

Outcomes from the Roundtable included the creation of the Fitzroy River Aboriginal Tourism Association. While environmentalists 'see nature based tourism as a really important part of our potential nature based industry that's non-extractive and it has a whole lot of potential to promote culture heritage and respect culture significance' (Emma Belfield, Environs Kimberley, non-Indigenous interview), Indigenous groups noted,

I wouldn't say the environment movement has really grasped the capital requirements. You can have an Aboriginal owned charter business, but the capital required to do that is \$20,000,000. It's not just about advocacy. It's actually about investing in the resources for people to make the agreements to make those options become a reality.

(Ariadne Goring, Kimberley Land Council)

These financial resources have not been forthcoming, despite initial discussions at the Roundtable about building an economic development fund. Indeed a tension remains between the growth of a new conservation economy and its reliance on private capital (or public-private partnerships) to purchase swathes of land relying on a conceptualisation of property that Liboiron (2021) argues is actually problematic for Indigenous people, and then, the use of government-funded Indigenous ranger programmes to enact natural and cultural resource management (Moorcroft, 2016). This largely state-funded process has not improved Indigenous economic self-determination; it has measurable environmental outcomes but fewer lasting gains for Indigenous Australians. Yet this quest persists, 'as greenies, as conservationists, as ecologists, we believe that green economics is really the way that we should be providing the development of this Country and this nation' (Anne Poelina, Madjulla Inc.). This is being advanced, primarily by Indigenous activists through the Kimberley Transitions Project—'the solutions to Kimberley problems are in Kimberley-based knowledges and ways of knowing, doing and being ... this focuses on the future cultural, economic and social sustainability of remote life' (Wooltorton et al., 2019, p. 4). Environmental groups, through these mutual encounters, have understood the vital need to generate economic alternatives but have struggled to develop the capacity to do so.

## 6 | LIVED ENVIRONMENTALISMS

Analysis of white environmentalists' lived everyday experiences in the Kimberley demonstrates how encounters with Indigenous activists challenged and reshaped their values and practices. The critiques of white environmentalism—of nature-society dualism, colonial-capitalist frameworks and racism—became more obvious, meaningful and tangible when encountered repeatedly in place, and remained abstract and disconnected for white environmentalists who remained based in Perth.

Through interactions in the Broome neighbourhood, the consequences of settler colonialism—specifically on knowledge systems, languages and Indigenous Country—were made visible, and the reality of what living in a 'sacrificial zone' entails revealed. Similarly, opportunities of campaigning together tested the simplistic assumptions of some white environmentalists that Indigeneity is synonymous with environmental preservation. Environmental groups like EK, however, committed to working with the complexities of Indigenous needs and WWF-Australia focused on practical conservation projects with Indigenous activists.

While these mutual encounters led to visible and practical shifts in how some environmental groups operated in the Kimberley, and therefore to the possibilities that lived environmentalisms offer, it is less clear whether these changes adequately respond to the interventions advocated by Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx authors and environmentalisms. EK, ACF and WWF-Australia recognised their interdependences with Indigenous activists and the ethical and practical need for collaboration. However, they stopped short of advocating for the dismantling of colonial-capitalist systems, and their support for economic regenerative alternatives lacked robust business plans, financial resources and

relied upon state-funded resource management programmes or on the large-scale investment of private capital. This does little to untangle the root causes of environmental degradation. White environmentalists were ill-prepared for supporting economic alternatives and this was eventually advanced by the Indigenous-led Kimberley Transitions Project, where the roundtable and EcoTrust Australia had failed.

White environmental support for Indigenous self-determination was evident in environmental practices in the Kimberley, particularly for land rights, Indigenous-led decision-making, cultural resurgence and in seeking multispecies justice. There was recognition of the need for a whole-systems approach to the environment that did not just focus on iconic species, but instead understood all its interdependencies. But few white environmentalists went as far as to acknowledge a reciprocal ethics and relations, or that nonhumans have agency.

Although environmental groups sought to work with, and on, priorities determined by Indigenous activists, many were hesitant to consistently support Indigenous-led quests for self-determination. This was in part because of the complexity of Indigenous politics at Walmadan. TWS chose to just work with Indigenous allies who already supported the anti-gas hub campaign (particularly Goolarabooloo activists), whereas EK in its enduring relationship with the KLC (itself an institution created and funded by the settler-colonial state to govern Indigenous affairs) struggled to navigate Indigenous and environmental demands. This struggle challenges the simplistic narrative that white environmentalists should simply support Indigenous self-determination. As Denzin Gergan and Curley (2023) have identified, Indigenous governance processes are now shaped by settler-colonial frameworks, contested land claims, disputed Traditional Owner status, and deeply embedded in state processes of recognition and control. White environmental groups can be accused of complicity with colonial-capitalist frameworks (by working with the KLC), supporting Indigenous self-determination (either by working with the KLC or against it, as TWS was), and/or against Indigenous self-determination (again depending on which Indigenous activists they aligned with).

It is also unclear how the role of the state was understood in relation to self-determination. The WA state remained heavily embroiled in funding environmental projects and Indigenous governance and was drawn upon in legal challenges to the gas hub. Some Indigenous activists considered state support for the industrialisation of the Kimberley as a path to self-determination, while others considered it an abdication of the basic infrastructural and welfare support that Indigenous people were due from the state. The unwise reliance upon state intervention (and funding) in environmentalism, and Pellow's (2016) call for more anti-authoritarian and anarchist approaches are also relevant to Indigenous self-determination. Following Pellow, TWS in its rejection of the KLC and embracing what Ian Perdrisat called the 'disgruntled blackfellas who are prepared to step outside of those old networks' might, therefore, have actually adopted the most radical stance for self-determination, despite often being perceived as the least in-touch with local Indigenous micropolitics. Supporting Indigenous self-determination is a highly complex and contested endeavour.

## 7 | CONCLUSIONS

This reconfiguration of environmentalism through everyday experiences—lived environmentalism—facilitated the entwining of social justice into white environmentalism. But these shifts remain fraught with complexity when engaging with Indigenous politics. In campaigning together in Broome, and navigating compromises, environmentalists have moved past the notion of a 'pristine wilderness' and readily (in the main) acknowledged cultural heritage, traditional Indigenous knowledge, careful use of language and the value of a diverse range of natures. Such an approach rejects the notion of a stable or fixed pure nature, rather the environment is understood as a hybrid co-production of human and nonhuman relations, which 'lives among us' (Lorimer, 2015, p. 7), with an unknown and nonlinear future. Such opening up of what constitutes nature shifts what environmentalism is acting on behalf of and to what ends. The work being done in the Kimberley is incomplete in this aim but offers hopeful signs of a changing form of white environmentalism.

By acknowledging, and working with, the complex messiness of what it means to be a white environmentalist it becomes easier to privilege place-specific ways of belonging, knowing, being, doing and caring, and respond to critiques of white environmentalism. Through these encounters, as Whatmore attests (2013) in her work on flooding and through other emerging examples such as Standing Rock (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019), new relations are made which transform how an 'environmental' issue is understood.

This lived environmentalism, however, remains partial, incomplete and always in the making. The recognition of the need to develop more complex forms of environmentalism exists far from the headquarters of environmental organisations in the southern urban centres of Australia. Although there are some changes in some of these groups—such as the shifting iconography and language of TWS—the extent to which national environmental practices are successfully



moving away from colonial-capitalist and racialised forms of white environmentalism, or indeed the ‘best’ way to support Indigenous self-determination, remains unclear.

There remain questions about whether the recognitions and changes lived environmentalisms enable are enough. They do make visible what these political differences are and unsettle white environmentalists’ ontological assumptions, but how in practice to navigate and support Indigenous self-determination remains contested. Analysis of lived environmentalism reveals how white environmentalists are opening avenues for different approaches and exploring ways to create more space for fluidity and the co-creation of environmentally sustainable futures. But these changes remain small seedlings of possibilities and are perhaps too partial, fragile and place-based to be adequate unless further propagated and cultivated. There is hope here, but also significant work yet to be done, and it is only by closely examining these spaces of contestation and carefully working through their implications that we can challenge and change problematic white environmentalisms.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> ‘Mob’ is a colloquial term used to refer to Indigenous Australians.

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