

An ecosystem services economy can build a Forever Economy with and for Martuwarra Living Waters

Abstract

The north Australia economy often exports benefits from while internalising costs to local communities. This research investigates ecosystem serviced (ES) economies for development at a catchment scale. It uses a case study, two-way approach with the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council (MFRC; Kimberley, WA) that builds on a literature review with dialogue, workshops and system modelling to weave diverse worldviews, knowledge, and values. In stages, first is to understand the current pastoral and extractive economy supplemented by conservation and tourism; second, how Martuwarra might co-deliver benefits via ES-based industries versus expanded extraction, and third, that ES initiatives be supported by verifiable measures and indicators. Findings to date are that (1) work impacting Indigenous peoples is legitimate only when it is collaborative with free, prior, informed and continuing (FPIC) consent; (2) pastoralism across the region becomes uneconomic if enteric methane greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions costs are internalised at \$14 to 35/tCO₂-e; (3) while few projects are operating within Martuwarra, proposed and potential pastoral, agricultural, minerals and energy projects are extensive and sometimes overlap aquifers, environmental and cultural assets that may be irrevocably degraded while increasing GHG emissions for limited local benefit. Remaining work is to engage and understand aspirations of the people of Martuwarra to address risk and model desirable economic futures to inform public policy, self-determination, and investment. A hybrid approach is desirable because the opportunity cost of business as usual may be healthy Country and to preclude ES opportunities that offer durable long-term local benefits to people and Country.