

Chapter 2

Caring for Country to Working on Country

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The title of this chapter, Caring for Country to Working on Country, refers to two idioms that you often hear when working with Indigenous Australians in the field of cultural and natural resource management. The first, ‘caring for country’, is an Aboriginal English expression that I expand on below. The second, ‘working on country’, has recently been adopted by the Australian Government as the name of a program that ‘provides sustainable employment for Indigenous people in protecting and conserving the environment’.¹

Both caring for country and working on country form part of the discourse of Indigenous policy in Australia. Discourse has been described as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that shape reality by systematically constructing the subjects and the worlds of which they speak. Discourse plays a role in wider social processes of legitimation and power; emphasising the constitution of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them.² Those who have the ability to shape discourse define what is possible to think, while suppressing other ways of thinking. The ability to shape discourse, legitimatise and reproduce it builds power. By defining what is possible to think and suppressing others, those with institutional power – like government agencies – do not need to draw on coercive force to change people’s behaviour because the dominant discourse has established a framework, or ‘rules of the game’, that individuals and groups must ‘play to’ in order to be recognised and participate.³

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- 1 See Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (2012) *Working on Country*, <www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/workingoncountry/index.html> viewed 3 March 2012. ‘Working on Country’ was first used as the title of a book on Indigenous cultural and natural resource management, see R Baker, J Davies and E Young (eds) (2001) *Working on Country: Contemporary Indigenous Management of Australia’s Land and Coastal Regions*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
 - 2 M Foucault (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Pantheon, New York.
 - 3 M Foucault (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York.

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