

Chapter 6

North to south?

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Is the experience of Indigenous ranger groups in northern Australia relevant in south-eastern Australia? The vast majority of Indigenous people live not in the remote north but in the towns and regional areas of Australia. New South Wales is the State with the largest number of Indigenous people; some 153,000, comprising 2.2 per cent of the State's population. In parts of New South Wales levels of Indigenous disadvantage are as high as in remote Australia.² The suggestion that ideas about Aboriginal engagement in environmental management are being transferred from north to south is anathema to many in New South Wales, as the developments I describe below have occurred simultaneously. Indeed, the earliest declared Indigenous Protected Areas were in South Australia and Tasmania, and the first in New South Wales was established as early as 2001, some years before many of the examples from the Northern Territory discussed in Part 2 of this book.

Since the early 1980s I have been involved with Aboriginal people who are trying to engage with environmental issues in New South Wales. This has given me some very personal experiences of how passionately many Aboriginal people in New South Wales – even those living in urban settings – feel about their country. Yet in New South Wales it is currently considerably harder for Aboriginal people to have a say over the management of country than in the Northern Territory. The circumstances in New South Wales are very different to the northern situation and, therefore, different strategies and approaches have to be pursued.

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- 1 I would like to acknowledge members and staff of Banbai Business Enterprises, the Nyambaga Green Team, and Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council for their research cooperation, and the many other Aboriginal people of New South Wales whom I have spoken to and learned from in the course of this study. I am grateful for valuable feedback on an earlier draft of the chapter from Caroline Ford and Russell Couch of the Office of Environment and Heritage in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, New South Wales Government.
 - 2 J Taylor (2006) Population and diversity: Policy implications of emerging Indigenous demographic trends, *CAEPR Discussion Paper 283*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, <<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/DP/2006DP283.php>> viewed 15 November 2011.