

Chapter 14

Indigenous futures on country

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This book tells a story about Indigenous Australians who have seen their ancestral lands returned to them under Australian law. But this restitution has not returned land to them in its precolonial condition or free of a diversity of environmental threats. The chapters here reveal the 21st century effort by land owners (and their Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies) to rehabilitate and protect the natural and cultural values of their lands that are of fundamental significance to their material and spiritual wellbeing. This quest is a politically charged social movement that has developed over the past two decades in parallel with a global struggle by indigenous peoples to ensure that their values are retained in their remaining land assets, while also being in a position to make a living from such assets.

The idiom *People on Country, Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures* is deployed to divide this particular systemic phenomenon into three parts. The *people on country* are those communities of Indigenous people who both live on or proximate to their land in small scattered communities and engage in management through active resource use; or else they are community-based ranger groups who have formed because of a commonality of explicit purpose to care for country. The adjective ‘vital’ is carefully chosen because of its many possible meanings: relating to life, essential to life, extreme importance to the success or continued existence of something, in this particular case, landscape life and biodiversity. The delivery of services by *people on country*, caring for country is essential to the vitality of the landscape which is in turn of vital importance to future Indigenous livelihoods and wellbeing.

This is, at least, the unanimous contention of the contributors to this book, divided only for the purpose of perspective between direct action university-based researchers in Part 1 and those directly involved in the Indigenous natural and cultural resource management movement in Part 2. These voices are clearly in a dialectical relationship; the researchers’ evidence collected over several years

¹ I would like to thank Melinda Hinkson, Dan Gillespie, Sue Jackson, Peter Kanowski, Seán Kerins and Elisabeth Yarbakhsh for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter; and Peter Cooke for inputs via robust email exchanges while I was writing.

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