
THE CONCURRENCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITION IN THE HUNTING OF
DUGONGS AND SEA TURTLES IN THE SIR EDWARD PELLEW ISLANDS

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The Yanyuwa group of Aboriginal people who live in and around Borroloola in the south-western Gulf of Carpentaria pride themselves **on being** hunters of dugongs and sea turtles. This pride is based on both an **historical association** and the continuing management and spiritual identification with these two marine animals.

In Yanyuwa society, certain people are regarded as being maramaranja, which can be translated as "a dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence". It is a title of which individuals and their associated families can be proud.

The Yanyuwa hunt the dugong and sea turtle in the shallow waters which are found around the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, **the** mouth of the Carrington Channel and the mouths of the **McArthur**, Crooked and **Wearyan** Rivers.

It is in these shallow waters that various species of **seagrass** can be found. Both the dugong and sea turtle feed on seagrass. The Yanyuwa classify the **seagrass** into that which is eaten by the dugong and that which is eaten by the turtle. In actual fact both animals feed on a large number of different species which exist in the Gulf. The Yanyuwa classify the **seagrass** as follows:

maraman/ma-lhanngu:- Halodule univervis and Halophila ovalis; eaten by the dugong.

na-wirrilbirril/na-julangal:- Enhalus acoroides which is eaten by the sea turtle. A general term **for** all sea-grass beds is Ki-maramanda.

The knowledge the Yanyuwa hunters possess in relation to the dugong and turtle is rich and complex. This knowledge concerns **both the** factual details concerning the sea turtle and dugong, and the deep spiritual significance which deals with how the Yanyuwa must act towards these animals. The Yanyuwa classify the dugong and sea turtle into a number of different categories. These are given below:

GENERAL

Walya - general term for both dugong and sea turtle

waliki/nhabal - general term for all dugong

wudanyuka - general term for all sea turtle

li-waliki/a-waliki - a herd of dugong

FEMALE DUGONG

- a-banthamu - old cow with small tusks visible
a-bayawiji - mature cow, capable of breeding (no tusks)
a-ngayiwunyarra/a-kulhakulhawiji - pregnant cow
a-lhumurrawiji - pregnant cow with a calf still following her
a-miramba - non-lactating cow, but with a large calf still following her
a-ngarninybala - cow with her calf riding on her back
a-wuduwu - young female dugong
li-milkamilarra - small group of cows with calves
nyankardu - dugong fetus

MALE DUGONG

- bungkurl - very fat, small male dugong
jiyamirama/jiwarnarrila - male dugong which travels away from her during times of threat
mayili - bull dugong with small tusks
rangkarraku/rangkarrangu - bull dugong travelling by itself
wiriji - large old bull with a mottled hide, considered to be the offspring of the Rainbow Serpent
wirumantharra - bull dugong whistling, often said to be the leader of the herd
ngumba - very young dugong

SEA TURTLE

There are three species of turtle in the area of the Pellew Islands. The most commonly hunted is the Green Turtle.

MALURRBA - green turtle

- warrikuliyangu/ngululurru - male green turtle
rra-tharra/lhathanka - female green turtle
wandangumara - very large female green turtle
bankiba - very large male green turtle
ngajilingajili - green turtle with a light coloured shell and a lot of yellow colouring on the underside
lijalijangulyanda - young green turtle not considered big enough to eat

limarrwurrirri - green turtle which is considered to have a big head

a-wathawayawiji - female green turtle containing unlaidd eggs

yabalarla - green turtle hatchling

ngarrangarra - green turtle 'which lacks a lot of' body fat

wunakathangu - green turtle 'found with ulcerations' in the stomach (is not eaten)

WIRNDIWIRNDI - flat-backed turtle

jadawangarni - male flat-backed turtle

a-karninja - female flat-backed turtle

Note: This species of sea turtle is occasionally captured by Yanyuwa hunters.

'KARRUBU - hawksbill turtle

yibarriwuna - male hawksbill turtle

a-ngurriin - female hawksbill turtle

Note: This species is not captured by the Yanyuwa as it is considered poisonous.

General Terms relating to turtles:-

ribankuja - mating turtles

rujurru - turtle hatchling

ngangkurrurru - female on the beach laying eggs

The hunters of dugongs and turtles know that it is the tides which primarily affect the movement of their prey. Both animals feed on the coastal sea-grass beds at high tide (ngakan) and move out onto the off shore beds at low tide (**mangkuru**).

A turning tide (**jalababa**) is often considered a good time to hunt dugongs especially if the tide is on the inward turn, as the dugongs will be travelling in towards the sea-grass beds. If the sea is calm both dugongs and turtles can occasionally be seen feeding on the sea-grass beds along the more exposed coastal and reef areas.

The Yanyuwa men who are familiar with the dugong say that it is a migratory animal. Its migratory path seems to range from just south of the Limmen River mouth, down through the Pellew Islands and continuing eastward to the region of the Robinson River mouth.

The Yanyuwa classify the dugong into two groupings; there are those that are continually moving and those which tend to more remain in particular localities. In Yanyuwa the migration of the dugong is known as **muyu**, and those dugong which remain in one area are called **jibiya baji** or "countrymen belong 'to' that place".

In the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands the dugong migration path would seem to run south of **West Island**, to the north of South West Island and then into the small strait **between South West Island and Centre island** and eastward past the mouths of the **McArthur** and **Wearyan** Rivers.

Both the dugong and the turtle frequent areas of sea-grass beds. The Yanyuwa do not view the turtle as a migratory animal, though research has shown that the green turtle does migrate large distances to nest (**Limpus, 1985, pers. comm.**).

The localities at which dugong and sea turtle are known to frequent, and often stay, are the south-west and central west coast of West Island (Mamadathamburu), the area in the vicinity of the central west coast of South West Island (Mangurrungurru) the **McArthur** River mouth and Dugong Creek (Wuthanda), an area around the mouth of the Crooked River mouth (Liwujujuluwa), and area to the north-east of Sharkers Point called Lidambuwa and an area to the north of the **Wearyan** River called Bulubuluwiji.

At most times of the year dugongs and turtles can be found at any one of these localities in varying numbers (Figure 1).

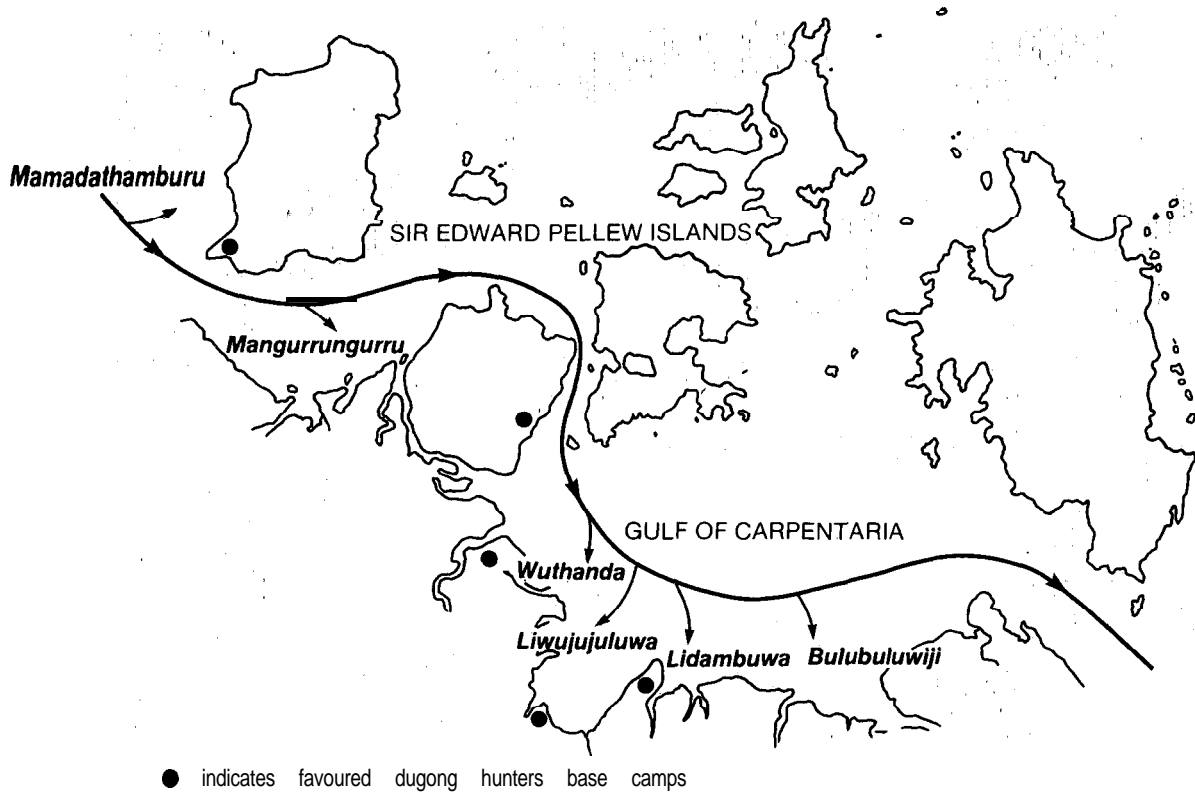
The largest numbers of dugong are found in the vicinity of the Pellew Islands in the mid dry season, usually around June, July and August. It is during this time that the Yanyuwa do the greater part of their dugong and turtle hunting, though people will hunt at other times of the year. During the mid dry season however, the sea is usually calm and the strong south-easterly winds (rra-mardu) have ceased to blow.

The Yanyuwa still hunt dugongs and turtles with a harpoon which has a detachable head to which is attached a long rope and float. Most senior Yanyuwa men possess at least one harpoon which is called either na-ridiridi, yirlakungka or ratharr. They are usually made out of young 'messmate' trees (**Eucalyptus tetradonta**) and are from 3 to 5 m in length. The harpoons are usually well cared for, being rubbed with the sap of certain trees, red ochre and sugar-bee wax to help preserve them.

Into the larger end of the harpoon is carved a hole in which the harpoon point rests. This hole is called the na-wuthula or **na-balalarra**. More commonly however it is called na-mulu or 'its mouth'.

The harpoon points are called na-malbi or na-wulukayangu and are today made of metal, usually a piece of steel rod approximately 15 cm in length and 1 cm in diameter. In past times these points were made out of an unidentified hardwood species which in Yanyuwa is called na-wubulu. These wooden points were warmed **slowly** in the hot white ashes of a fire to temper them. In past times the wooden points used for hunting turtles were barbed **because the** hunters had to spear the turtle in the neck or flippers, as the wooden points could not penetrate the shell. These barbed wooden points were called **na-ngalhinbiji**.

Figure 1. Map showing dugong migratory path and **favoured dugong** hunters base camps.



The top of the harpoon point is wrapped in cloth or paperbark and then tightly bound with string; this ensures that the harpoon points rests firmly in the harpoon.

The harpoon point is attached to the harpoon ropes called **ma-ngarduku** or **ma-yinymathu**. In past times these ropes were made out of the shredded bark of the kurrajong or banyan tree. Today commercially made nylon or hemp rope is used.

At times the kurrajong ropes are still made for sale to Aboriginal art and craft organisations.

Two ropes are required, each about 20 metres in length. The harpoon point is attached to the rope by way of the nungawa, **which** is a small loop made in the end of the rope through which the harpoon point is passed. The bound end of the harpoon point is pushed firmly against the loop and then both are tied together with string.

The other end of the ropes are attached to a wooden float called mawarl. This float is made from a light piece of wood and is usually about 60 to 70 centimetres in length and about 20 centimetres in diameter. The float is thrown out when a dugong or turtle is harpooned, to mark the course the harpooned animal takes and to tire it out. This float was of more importance in the days of bark and dugout canoes when men had to paddle to catch their prey but with the advent of the motor boat the hunters can usually keep up with the turtle or dugong and the **float is only rarely required**. However, it is **always carried** and kept attached to the ropes. The float is still useful if the engine fails, the rope becomes tangled, if the hunter falls overboard when he spears the dugong, or loses the harpoon.

It is the law of the Yanyuwa that the dugong and turtle be harpooned twice. The first harpoon point into the dugong is called na-walangkarramba or na-walangkarrangu, and the second harpoon point is called na-nyirriwa or na-nyirriwangu.

Most of the equipment mentioned above is prepared or repaired by the Yanyuwa hunters whilst still at camp or while travelling on the river on the way to the sea.

Yanyuwa dugong hunters must follow strict rules before leaving the land to go hunting. Hunters try to keep their noise level to a minimum; they will not break sticks, burn string or sugar bag wax or handle greasy food. The reasons for these restrictions are not known but the restriction on making noise is said to be because the dugong is keen of hearing. In Yanyuwa the dugong is said to be **lingi**, a term usually reserved for a person of high intelligence or keen hearing. It is believed if too much noise is made the dugongs will hear and travel to deep water where they cannot be hunted. The above rules are only followed for dugong; there are no such rules associated with the hunting of turtle.

However, the rules are followed the majority of times as the hunters do not know which of the two animals they are going to get unless they have a specific intention in mind.

Men will not handle greasy food before hunting as they believe, if it gets onto the harpoon points it will make them smooth and they will come out of the harpooned dugong or turtle.

Any person who disregards these restrictions and others concerning the law of the dugong have the following phrase directed at them; Wardiwiji angkawangu or "You are filled with badness you are a mainland dweller". Needless to say this is a very insulting remark to people who class themselves as sea people and the hunters of dugongs and turtles.

When hunters reach the area in which they wish to hunt, they scan the water for dugong and sea turtle surfacing to breathe, muddy water which has been caused by these animals feeding, broken pieces of floating sea grass and excreta. It is these signs which make visible and meaningful tracks to the hunter.

When an animal is found, the skill of the driver (wuliyi) is crucial. He has to follow hand signals given by the harpooner and get him in range to spear the animal. He quite often has to keep up with the dugong which can swim at speeds up to 12 knots for short periods. Turtles are also capable of short bursts of speed. The driver has to watch and follow hand signals as to where the dugong or turtle goes. In shallow water, a dugong can be tracked by the wake which is caused by the upward and downward movement of the tail which causes a series of flat circles on the surface of the water (Marsh, 1981). Turtles are always tracked through the water by sight.

When a dugong has been speared once it usually tires quickly, and can be brought into range once more and speared again. The hunter usually tries to place one harpoon in the region of the neck and another in the lower back or tail region.

After it has been speared twice, the dugong is pulled alongside the boat. In Yanyuwa this action is called lhungkayarra. The dugong is then grabbed by the tail and a noose is placed around it, just below the flukes. The dugong is then turned around so its stomach is facing outwards, the tail is braced against the gunwhale. This causes the head to hang down under water and in so doing, drowns the dugong.

In past times when the Yanyuwa hunted dugongs from bark canoes, the dugong was not drowned alongside the canoe for fear that the struggling animal would damage the frail craft. Instead, the dugong was brought within a short distance of the canoe and then the hunter swam out to the dugong and plugged the dugong's nostrils with paperbark or even his own fingers, and he stayed with the dugong until it drowned.

From the moment a dugong is speared until it is drowned, no talking takes place. It is believed that to talk while the dugong is dying is a sign of great disrespect and if someone does talk while the dugong is being pulled alongside the boat the spirits who guard the dugong will come and remove the harpoon points.

The hunters usually try to spear young male dugongs and occasionally a cow, as long as it has not got a calf or does not appear to be pregnant. The Yanyuwa dugong hunters say that they can tell the difference between a male dugong and a pregnant cow by the way in which it dives after surfacing; a pregnant cow is said to dive quicker and at a sharper angle.

Large old bull dugongs are avoided because they are said to be the offspring of the Rainbow Serpent and are therefore to be feared. They can be killed, but only with the assistance of special power songs which are said to weaken the animal and break its back. Quite often, however, if one of these dugongs is harpooned the rope is cut. There is a lot of sense in this act. These large dugongs are powerful, and trying to kill one by drowning would be much more hazardous than it usually *is*.

When the dugong is drowned it is tied alongside the boat. A rope is tied around the tail which is then fixed to the back of the boat, a harpoon point is passed through the **dugong's** nostrils and to this a rope is attached. This rope is tied to the front of the boat. The dugong is then taken back to land for butchering.

During times when groups of Yanyuwa people are camped on the islands they will often hunt dugong at night. The animal is located by listening for the sounds of it surfacing to breathe. Dugongs are followed through the water by their phosphorescent wake known to the Yanyuwa as balirrka. This type of hunting is seen to be much more dangerous, so there is very careful preparation of the hunting equipment before going out onto the sea.

Sea turtles are hunted in a similar fashion to dugongs. However turtles can at times prove more difficult to catch due to the length of time they can stay submerged. Quite often a harpooned turtle will swim under the boat which makes it very difficult for the driver of the boat to place the harpooner in an ideal position to harpoon it for the second time.

When the turtle has been harpooned twice it is pulled up alongside the boat, and taken hold of by the front flippers. If the turtle is relatively small it is tied by its front flippers to the side of the boat, so that it hangs vertically in the water with its head above the water line. This is to ensure that it does not drown. The Yanyuwa believe that if they let a turtle drown they will have great difficulty in finding and hunting turtle when they go hunting again.

With the turtle secured either in or alongside the boat it is taken back to land for killing, cooking and butchering. The turtle is killed by hitting it hard on the head with a stone or an axe to break the hard protective covering plates. A long sharp stick is then thrust into this hole to 'mangle the brains'. This act must be performed by a person who stands in the position a ritual guardian of the sea turtle.

When dead, the turtle must be laid on its back and the first cut is made to begin the butchering. This cut is made in front of the lower frontal shell (na-ngundawa). The act of making this cut is called ngunduwamantharra,

The person butchering the turtle then reaches into the turtle through this cut and removes a number of organs. The organs removed and their order of removal is listed below.

ugundurrngundurr - section: of the bronchial tube .

na-widiri - liver [eaten].

rra-ngawa - bladder.

ma-mulka - stomach [eaten] Occasionally severe ulcerations are found in the stomach of old turtles; these are known as wunakathangu.

wunakakd - "large intestine's [eaten] .

ma-karriyalu - small intestine [eaten].

After the turtle has been gutted, paperbark is folded into small rolls and pushed into the bronchii remaining inside the turtle. The reason given for this practice is so that the turtle in the sea will not become ngarrangarra or without fat.

The heart of the turtle is removed with the bronchial tubes and is also called ngundurrngundurr.

The liver of the turtle is also called **na-manyi**.

The stomach of the turtle is also called **yalajala**.

The turtle is cooked whole, in its shell, before it is butchered. Laid in a shallow pit containing hot coals, the turtle is covered over with wood which is set alight.

It is then left for two to three hours. As the turtle cooks it is watched to make sure that the fire does not burn through the shell, resulting in the loss of the mathulmathul. This is a rich "soup" which is composed of meat and fat particles, meat juices, and blood. It is much sought after by older people who believe, that it has medicinal value. After the turtle has cooled down it is butchered.

na-buyurru - upper shell

ma-yajbarla - main portion of the hips

ma-rawurr - central hip portion

na-manda - flippers

na-wirlibirli/na-milimili - lower and frontal shells

na-ngabala - skin, meat and fat

na-yalarri - shoulder and chest muscles

na-lakalaka - meat in the ventral area sacred to the sea turtle

na-wuthula - meat and fat

na-lhundu - fat

wurrunthulburrnthul - tail piece, fat and meat

na-narrngu - main tail piece, fat and meat

wulaya - head

na-mulngu - neck

na-yinjii - lungs and bronchii

na-rurru - green fat lining the shell

lhuwayngul - yellow fat

wundumutha - green fat and meat

When a dugong is brought back to the land for butchering its head must be faced back in the direction of the sea. This is so the spirit of the dugong can return to the sea. This is an act of great importance to the Yanyuwa people and is called **ki-maramanngku**, which can be literally translated as "returning the one belonging to the sea grass".

There are two methods which can be used to butcher a dugong. One method, which is called yingkurra (Figure 2), is used for large dugong. The other is called munbul. This method is used for smaller dugong or if the hunters are in a hurry for some reason. The only internal organ of the dugong which is eaten is the small **intestine** (mura ju ju). It is cut into short lengths of about twenty centimetres. The mura ju ju is then washed in **saltwater** and boiled or cooked in a ground oven.

Other organs and body parts removed are:

rra-mayngul - white fat

ngundurrngundurr - heart

na-yinji - lungs

na-widiri - liver

murajuju - small intestine

wilawila - stomach

rimi/rirrkukilwalkarru - large intestine

ma-minji - skin and meat; it also contains the genital organs of the dugong

nawalkirrirri - uterus

rra-wumumu - kidneys

lubala - part of backborie without ribs

a-mardanbangu - short ribs

kurruru - backbone

a-lardurr - ribs

Dugong meat is cooked in a ground oven. The ground oven (**rabarr**) is approximately 1 metre deep, 1 to 2 metres in width and 2 metres in length. The ground oven is filled with wood which is set **alight**. While the wood is burning stones are thrown into the fire to get hot.

When the wood has burnt down to hot coals the heated stones are removed. Green mangrove branches are laid on the bed of leaves and the hot stones placed on top of the meat. The oven is then covered with dirt to seal in the heat. The meat is left to cook for **several** hours.

During **certain** ritual occasions parts of the dugong and turtle are kept exclusively for the senior men. This meat is cooked separately and within the confines of a restricted sacred area called a na-manda. The ground oven is placed within the **confines** of this area.

After the meat has been eaten, all the scraps and bones are thrown back into the ground oven and burnt. The belief is that failure to dispose of the bones correctly will result in a cessation of successful hunting. The rib-cage sections, head, and **flippers** of the dugong, and the hip and back flipper section of the turtle, are considered sacred. These are the sections **which** are placed into the ground oven.

When the head of a dugong is removed from the ground oven the flesh is removed, and the **jaw** is separated from the skull. The jaw, skull and flesh is cooked once more. The skull of a dugong is usually thrown back into the sea or river. This is why few dugong skulls are ever found at camp sites; the head of a human or animal is deemed sacred by the Yanyuwa.

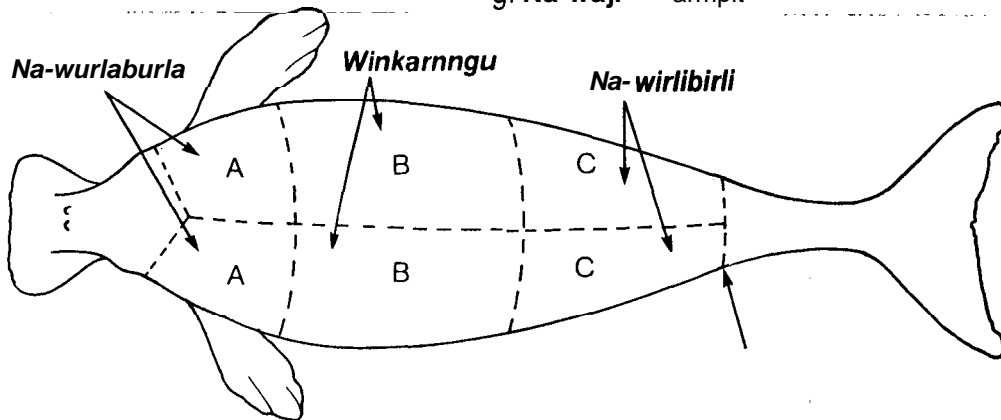
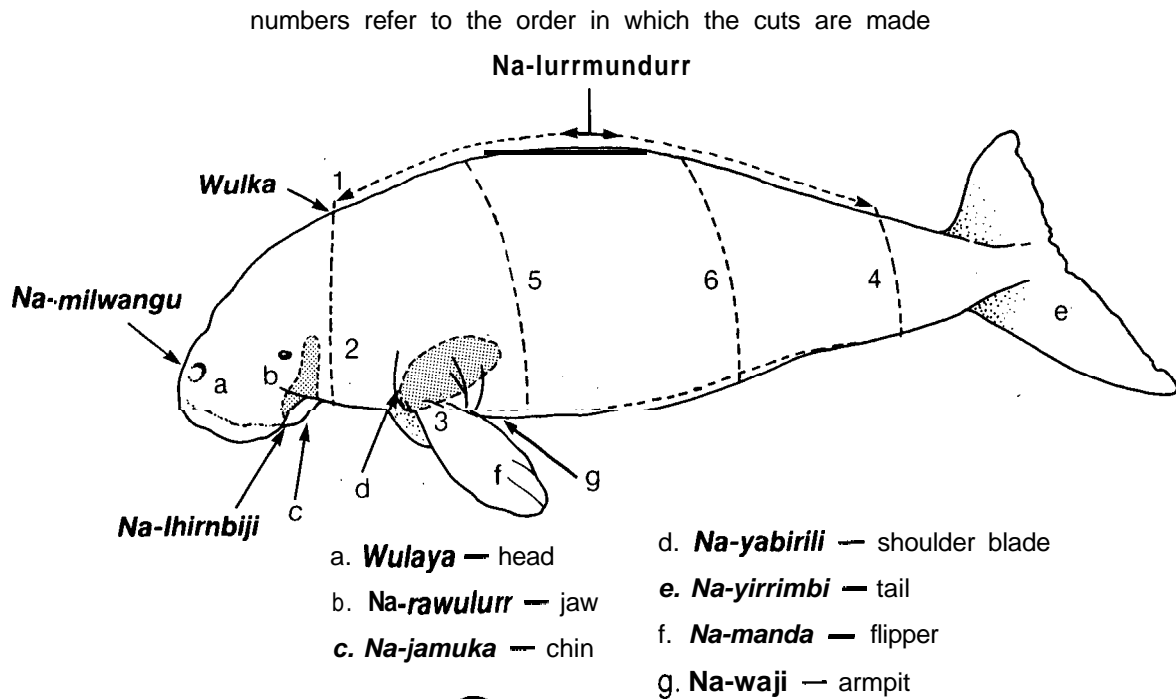
If a female dugong is killed and found to be pregnant, the foetus is taken with the rest of the meat and cooked. It can only be eaten by senior men who fall into either of the following categories; those men who have the dugong as their Dreaming, or those people who by Dreaming relationship call the dugong mother.

The act of distributing the meat from the dugong and sea-turtle is governed by Yanyuwa law. What each person receives is usually based on his relationship to the hunters and at times by his relationship to the creatures by Dreaming.

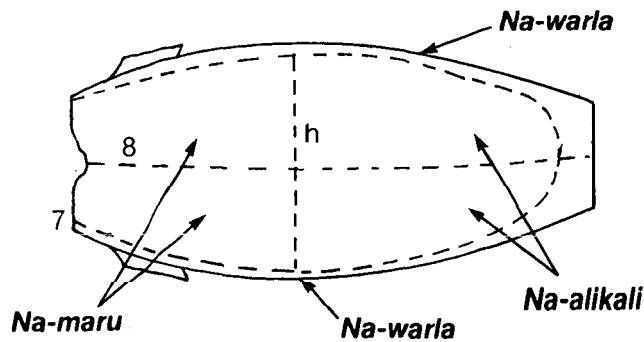
The division of turtle and dugong meat is called by the Yanyuwa wangkamantharra, and Yanyuwa law, in terms of song and ceremony, says that the meat from these two animals must be shared. It is not viewed favourably if a hunter does not distribute the meat. In past times such an action was enough to incite heated arguments and even physical violence. This can still be the case today.

In the division of dugong meat the hunter receives **some** of the belly meat and the head, and if the dugong has no ritual use (in terms of na-manda cooking), he takes a small portion of the ribs and some of the intestines. **The driver of the boat** receives the tail, some shoulder meat and ribs.

Figure 2. Method of butchering dugong known as YINGKURRA.



The slabs of meat A, B and C are called **Wungal**
The hide of the dugong is called **Yanjurr**



The belly section, when cut in half, is called **Na-yalari**
h. **Na-wurdu** — belly section

If a woman's brother or sons participated in the hunt, she may not eat meat from the spine or ribs, so she is given a large portion of the intestines. The hunter's sisters, sons and daughters are not allowed to eat any of the tail portions. The hunter also makes a presentation of meat to his mother-in-law. This is done through a second person because of the strong avoidance taboo which exists between son-in-law and mother-in-law. This presentation is seen as an on-going payment in return for the man being allowed to have his wife.

The driver of a boat in a turtle hunt receives some meat and associated green and yellow fat from the hip section of the turtle. He also receives some of the chest meat, intestines and green fat which lines the shell.

The head and neck of the turtle goes to the senior ritual, guardian for the animal. The hunter's mother and sisters are not allowed to eat the intestines of the turtle so the stomach is saved exclusively for them. As with the dugong, the best meat is given to the hunter's mother-in-law.

The oil (na-ngilili) which the Yanyuwa obtain from the hide and meat of the dugong during the cooking process is said to have medicinal qualities and is rubbed onto the body and hair. The Yanyuwa say that it makes their hair grow strong and when rubbed on their bodies it keeps them warm and free, from pain.

Both the dugong and the turtle are important mythological beings for the Yanyuwa people and neighbouring groups to the north. The Mara people, whose country lies to the north-west of the Yanyuwa, have a very important Dugong Dreaming centre. The site is known as **Wunubarryi** (Mt. Young) and lies some seven kilometres south-east from the mouth of the Limmen River. The Yanyuwa people also recognise the importance of this site and they share in the control and use of the Dugong Dreaming power which is centred there.

Just to the east of the hill which comprises **wunubarryi** can be found a number of quartzite outcrops. These rocks are viewed by the Mara and Yanyuwa to be metamorphosed dugongs and a single dolphin which were stranded on dry land by a receding king tide (**bambiliwa**) during the Dreamtime. It is interesting to note that there was a similar occurrence in 1984 during Cyclone Kathy; a number of dugong and sea-turtle were stranded after a storm surge carried them up to eight kilometres inland in the vicinity of the **McArthur** River delta area.

The Dugong Dreaming is in fact seen to be a herd of dugongs. Two of the rocks are seen to represent male dugongs, while the others are seen to represent females. It is one these female dugongs that the Yanyuwa and Mara custodians for this site use to carry out dugong increase rituals. When men wish to perform these rituals they approach the Dugong Dreaming herd and brush down the 'female dugong' they have selected for use in the ritual.

Surrounding the 'female dugongs' are a number of hammerstones. One of these hammerstones is taken and the 'female dugong' is struck and at the same time the names of dugong hunting localities along the coast and in the area of the Pellew islands are called out. A translated example of this calling out is as follows:

you dugongs, listen to me, you will come out from here
and you will travel to Wuthanda [**McArthur** River mouth],
Liwujujuluwa [Crooked River mouth], Lidambuwa [Sharkers
Point] and Bulubuluwiji [**Wearyan** River mouth]. Listen to
these words that I am telling you!

Some of the 'female dugongs' have deep grooves and depressions in them indicating that the rites of increase are of some antiquity.

In 1976 this Dugong Dreaming site at Wunubarryi was desecrated. The owners of the Nathan River Station, where Wunubarryi is located, dug out two of the 'female dugongs' while constructing a four wheel drive track through the area. The Yanyuwa and **Mara** people were extremely upset over this incident and they believe that because of this desecration the dugong population in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands has suffered.

The Yanyuwa people have a Dreaming site for the Lone Male Dugong (jiyamirama) at Wungunda on the southern bank of the mouth of the Crooked River, and at Wirdiwirdila, a small island in the **Wearyan** River, is a Dreaming site associated with the rib-bones of the Lone Male Dugong.

During the singing of their ceremonial song cycles the Yanyuwa also sing of the dugong. Some of these verses are given below. The following songs are associated with the dugong hunting locality of Bulubuluwiji at the mouth of the **Wearyan** River. These song cycle verses belong to the Yanyuwa Rrumburriya semi-moiety.

Wabarrkuramba
jirrimbi ramba

"The tail of the dugong
strikes the water"

Yarakiyara
lhungkarrmi
lhungka

"**The** cows are gathering,
they travel with their calves"

Narnawirijarra
yumbarrimajarra

"**The** bull dugong thrashes,
it tires" [It has been
harpooned]

The song of the Lone Male Dugong is sung in the song cycle of the Yanyuwa Wuyaliya semi-moiety.

Jiyamirama
wukuwarrima

"The back of the Lone Male
Dugong is clearly showing".

The turtie is associated with a number of areas over the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. The west coast of West Island and the coastal margins of Bing Bong Station are associated with the Dreaming path of the flat backed turtle (wirndiwirndi). This turtle completed its travels on a reef called Liwintha, which lies just to the south of West Island.

Watson Island and the northern section of North Island are,, associated with the path of the Green Turtle Dreaming (**malurrba**). Various rock formations along the Dreaming path of this turtle represent the shell, internal organs and segments of meat which the hunters of turtle find important.

There are a number of song cycle verses relating to the turtle but they cannot be reproduced as they belong to secret and sacred rituals.

The Yanyuwa people still class the dugong and turtle as a very important part of their economy, and cannot conceive of a time when they would not be able to have dugong and sea turtle as a part of their diet. There is still distinction given to those men who in Yanyuwa society are called **maramaranja** or "a dugong and turtle "hunter of excellence".

Within the region of the Sir Edward Peilew islands the turtle always has been, and continues to be, present in large numbers, but the Yanyuwa have in recent times begun to fear for the, safety of the dugong.

With the increased use of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands as a fishing and tourist area, signs are becoming more and more evident that the dugong, and perhaps the turtle, population will be more threatened as development increases.

In November of 1983 two dugongs were found dead on the mud flats at the mouth of the Carrington Channel. Both dugongs showed signs of having been shot by high powered rifles. On arriving at a beach on the north-west coast of South West Island another two dugong were found; again they showed signs of having suffered death from the use of firearms.

Continuing around the island on the following day another dugong was found on a beach on the east coast of South West Island. Y e t another was found on the same weekend on Sharkers Point; it also showed signs of being shot.

It should be noted that the number of dugongs found (six), represents approximately half the number the Yanyuwa men kill per year using traditional methods.

Yanyuwa men and women are continually finding more dugong which have suffered at the hands of visitors to the islands. Dead dugong have been found with their heads cut off or showing signs of being slashed with sharp objects. Other dugong are found showing severe abrasions and cuts which have been caused by fishing nets.

In April of 1984 a group of Yanyuwa men travelled to South West Island, and while there they found the dismembered carcass of a dugong. Attempts ha'd been made to cover the butchered remains with stones.' The method employed to butcher the dugong and the amount of waste meat found did not correlate with the traditional methods employed by the Yanyuwa. It is reasonable to 'infer,, therefore, that this dugong, too was a victim of white Australian hunters.

In 1984 the Northern Territory Government announced that it would be subdividing Camp Beach on Centre Island (in the Sir Edward Pellew Group) into eleven allotments suitable for the building of 'fishermen's huts'. In July of 1985 it was announced that these blocks would be auctioned. Both green and flat-back turtles have been observed nesting on camp beach. Any human occupation on the fore-dune system can only have detrimental effects on the breeding success of the turtles. Turtles are considered to be an endangered species, and as such every effort should be made to protect their habitat and nesting grounds.

An increase in the use of motor boats through the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands can only lead to the damage of the extensive sea-grass beds which are to be found along the coastal margins on this part of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Once it has been removed from an effect **on** the resident populations of both dugongs and turtles.

The continuing episodes of damage to the dugong and turtle populations upsets the Yanyuwa people. The dugong and turtle are Dreamings for certain individuals and groups of people. The continuing episodes of dugong slaughter, damage to important areas for turtle and the desecration of important ritual centres causes unrest in terms of the functioning of a traditionally based society.

There is sadness and sometimes sickness and death caused to those people who stand in a Dreaming relationship to the dugong and **turtle**. There is also concern that **those** people who stand in a 'mother' guardian relationship to the dugong and **turtle are not** fulfilling their duties and obligations towards the species, an **offence** which is punishable under the dictates of traditional law.

It becomes clear, then, that to the Yanyuwa people the problem does not concern only conservation of the dugong and sea-turtle. There is also a serious difficulty concerning the need to maintain the integrity of their own traditional law system.

The Yanyuwa people are justifiably proud of their dugong and turtle hunting heritage. **In** terms of their oral history, certain men are mentioned over and over again as being 'dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence'. Younger men will say with pride that they were 'trained' by these skillful men. Certain old men amongst the Yanyuwa who were once skilled hunters, but can no longer hunt, are spoken of in high regard and their advice is still sought in terms of traditional law and practical knowledge concerning the dugong and turtle.

The dugong and turtle are still of great importance to the Yanyuwa in terms of spiritual attachment and economy. In a world where values are changing quickly, the continuation of the hunting of these two marine animals remains one way in which the **Yanyuwa people** can **continue** to identify themselves as "Saltwater People", a title of which they are proud.

But with incursions into the marine environment from outside and uncontrolled sources, the Yanyuwa do indeed wonder for how much longer the dugong and turtle will be of continuing economic importance and for how much longer their rituals will have any relevance in terms of these animals' physical survival.

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