Much of the Kimberley coast and its waters are part of existing or proposed marine parks (Figure 1). In addition, the majority of this area is also subject to native title determined or claimed areas. To-date, little attention has been paid in Australia or elsewhere to the social values associated with marine parks. However, understanding peoples' needs and values is essential for effective planning and management. Without knowing what people value, conservation efforts such as marine parks may fail. We need to know what people's social values are, and why they consider the Kimberley coast important.

Social values: the importance of places, landscapes, and the resources or services they provide as defined by individual and/or group perceptions and attitudes towards a given place or landscape.

**Methods and results**

We interviewed 232 people across the Kimberley to explore the range of values held for the coast. We asked people to show the places they valued on paper maps so that we could link information on social values with specific geographic locations. We interviewed people representing different groups: Aboriginal Traditional Owners; Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents; tourists and the tourism industry; commercial and recreational fishing, and aquaculture; federal, state and local government; mining, oil, gas and tidal energy interests; marine transport and aviation; and environmental non-government organisations.

Seventeen different types of social value associated with the Kimberley coastline and marine environment were recognised. These included non-consumptive direct use values, direct use consumptive values, indirect use values, and non-use values. Non-consumptive, direct use values dominated the interviews (Figure 2).

We generated ‘hot spot’ maps for each value type. These maps show areas where a number of people indicated the same values, i.e. the places most frequently identified and mapped in the interviews (Figure 3).
Management implications

1. All of the Kimberley coast is valued. Thus, no part is ‘value-free’ and people must be consulted regarding its future, no matter if the location appears to be used (i.e. ‘direct use, consumptive values’ and ‘direct use, non-consumptive values’) or not (i.e. ‘indirect use values’ and ‘non-use values’).

2. Biodiversity is widely and intensely valued, both on- and offshore. This valuing provides an important base for societal support for marine parks and their nature conservation role.

3. Physical landscape values dominated the interviews and were pivotal to peoples’ experiences of the Kimberley. Recognition of the importance of this value must underpin all planning and decision making. Future tourism efforts must protect this coast’s ‘wildness’ while also capitalising on it.

4. Aboriginal peoples’ values for the Kimberley coast and marine environments extend well beyond cultural values and as such Aboriginal people must be included in decision making associated with all the values of the Kimberley coast.

5. Careful consideration of the social impacts of developments associated with access to the Dampier Peninsula and Buccaneer Archipelago is essential given the range of values held for these places and the number of people expressing these values.

More information

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