

# A Learning Experience: engaging traditional owners in dugong research in Torres Strait



# Dugong research in Torres Strait

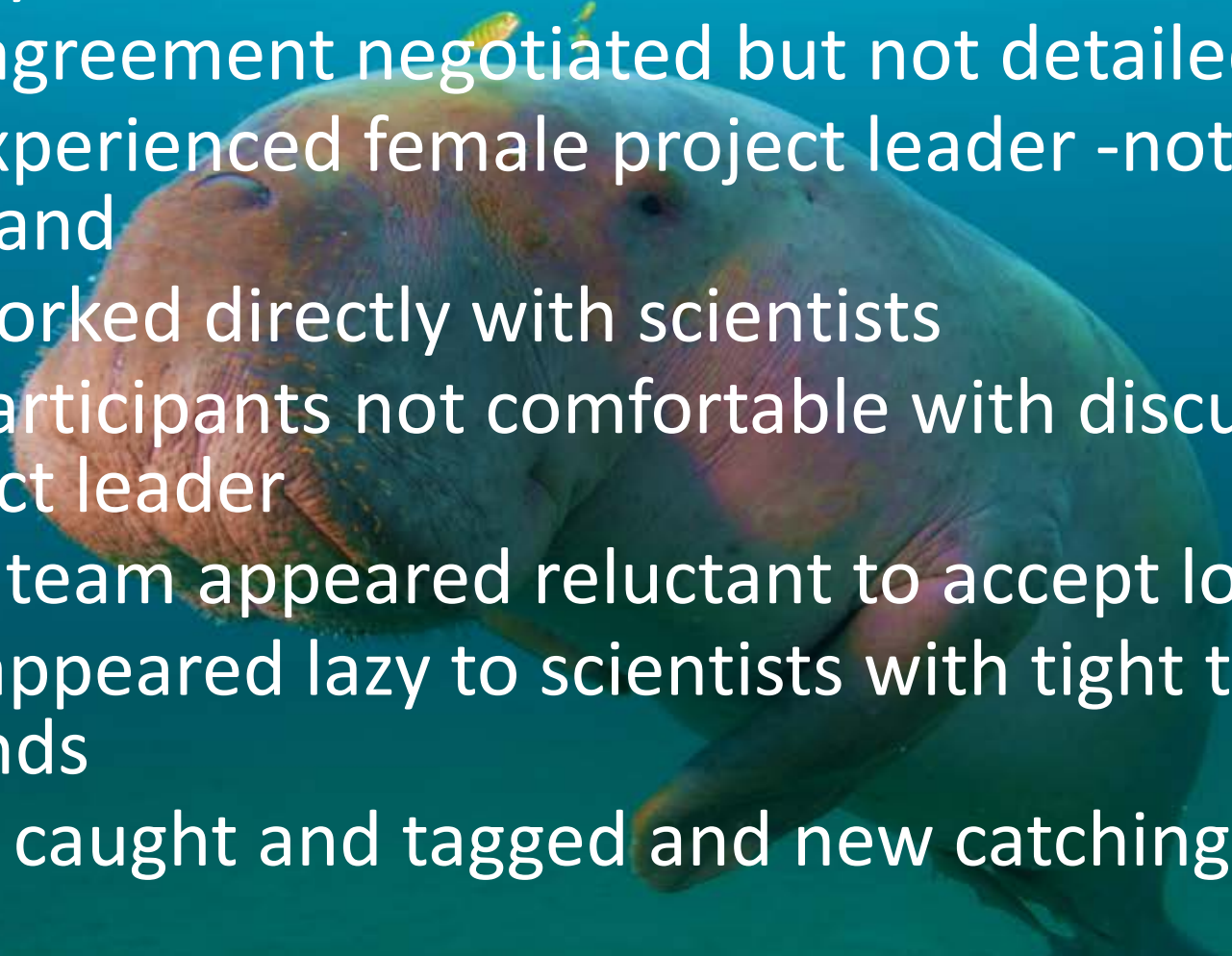
## Aerial surveys



## Satellite Tracking



# Mabuiag

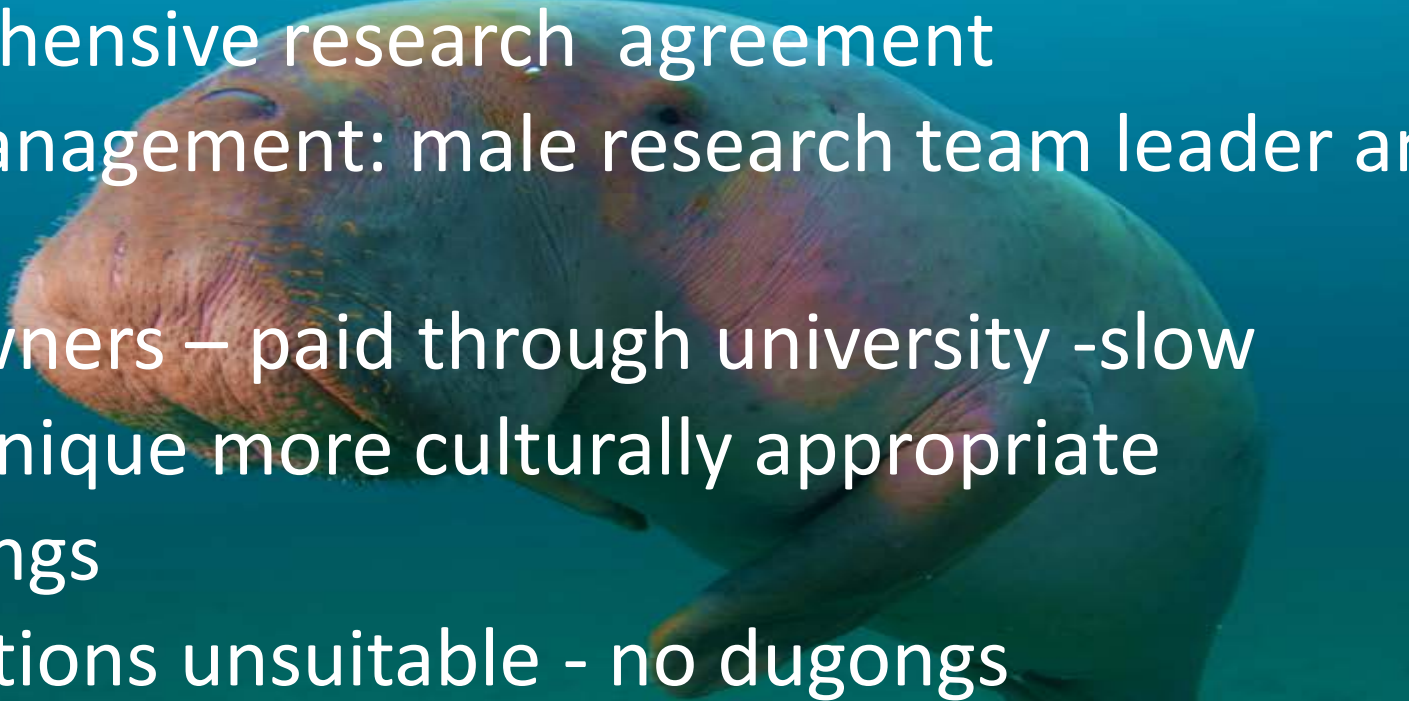
- Community asked to be involved
  - Research agreement negotiated but not detailed
  - Young inexperienced female project leader -not Indigenous or from island
  - Rangers worked directly with scientists
  - Islander participants not comfortable with discussing issues with project leader
  - University team appeared reluctant to accept local advice
  - Islanders appeared lazy to scientists with tight timeline and limited funds
  - 5 dugongs caught and tagged and new catching technique developed
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- A photograph of a dugong swimming underwater. The dugong is the central focus, shown in profile, moving towards the left. Its body is a mottled brown and grey color, and its head is slightly above the water surface. The background is a clear, blue-green underwater environment.

# ABC 7.30 Report on Indigenous hunting

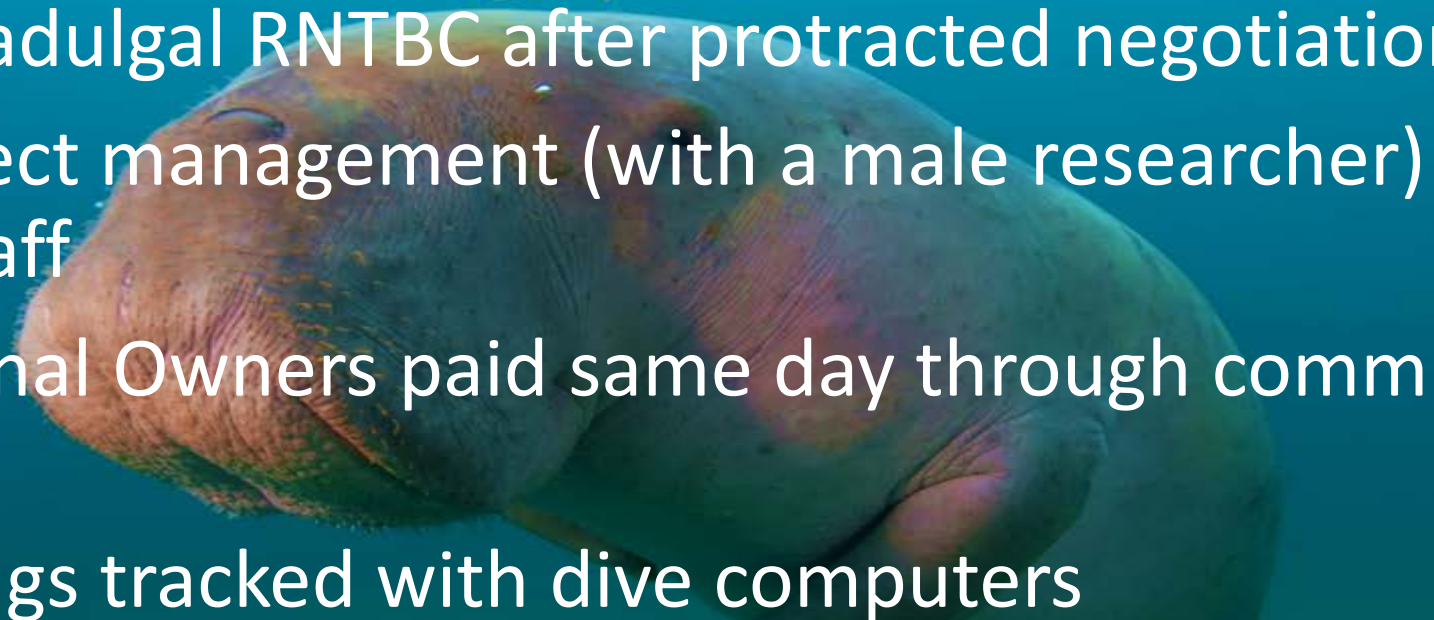
- Lead reporter masqueraded as scientist with hidden camera
- Mabuiag did not wish to collaborate further with scientists



# Boigu

- More comprehensive research agreement
  - Co-project management: male research team leader and TSRA staff
  - Traditional owners – paid through university -slow
  - Catching technique more culturally appropriate
  - Daily debriefings
  - But sea conditions unsuitable - no dugongs
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- A photograph of a dugong swimming underwater. The dugong is the central focus, shown in profile, moving towards the left. Its body is a mix of brown and grey, with a lighter patch on its head. The water is a clear, deep blue. In the background, a few small yellow fish are visible near the surface.

# Badu

- Even more comprehensive research agreement with Mura Badulgal RNTBC after protracted negotiations
  - Co project management (with a male researcher) with TSRA staff
  - Traditional Owners paid same day through community council
  - 6 dugongs tracked with dive computers
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- A photograph of a dugong swimming underwater. The dugong is the central focus, shown in profile, moving towards the left. Its body is a mix of brown and grey, with a prominent, rounded snout. The background is a clear, blue-green underwater environment with some light rays and small fish visible in the distance.

# Collaboration between Mura Badulgal, TSRA & JCU



# Islander Learnings



- Hunting is male business – male project leaders important
- Co-project management with TSRA staff



# Learnings JCU

- Negotiating detailed project agreement with ‘right’ people essential
- Needed to trust outcome of Islanders’ insistence on right to veto release of results
- TOs must be paid quickly
- Multiple communication products required:
  - Islanders
    - Posters, local media, TSRA Board (dinner), community presentations by rangers and researchers
  - Reports to all relevant government agencies
  - Academic journals



Questions?

