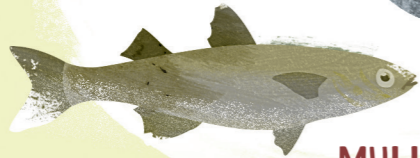
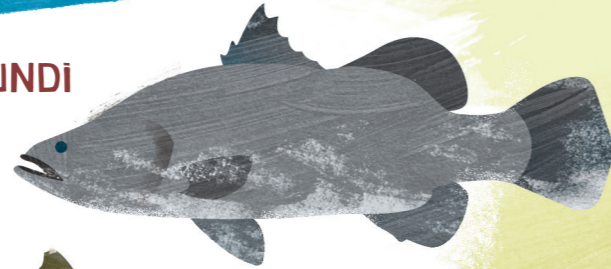


INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN FISHING

PAST & PRESENT

NORTHERN TERRITORY

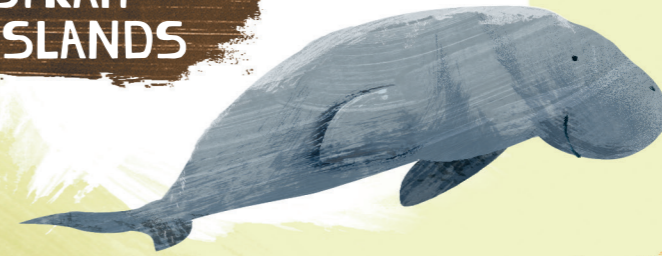
BARRAMUNDI



MULLET

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS

DUGONG



QUEENSLAND



SPEARS

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BRANCHES



NEW SOUTH WALES

HOOKS



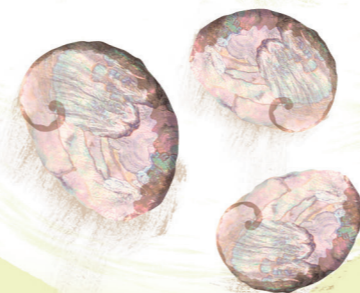
SOUTH AUSTRALIA



CANOE

TASMANIA

ABALONE



VICTORIA

EEL TRAP





PAST & PRESENT

Indigenous Australians have lived on the Australian continent and neighboring islands for thousands of years before European settlement.

Resources such as fish were sustainably harvested and monitored through clan law and customs enabling future availability of food and materials. Over time European settlement forced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to adapt to western ways of life. Traditionally made tools have been replaced with modern fishing gear.

- Bark, reed and mangrove canoes > motorised aluminum, fiberglass or plastic boats and Kayaks
- Hand woven fishing line > synthetic line
- Handmade wooden and shell hooks > plastic lures and metal hooks

Indigenous people located near water identify land and water as the same, with each providing valuable resources. Men, women and children all fished using knowledge of the habitats to capture aquatic food. Fishing is an important activity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples link fishing to everyday life through;

- Source of foods
- Ceremonial occasions
- Exchange through trade or barter with neighbouring tribes
- Social interaction
- Exchange of knowledge from adults to children

Throughout Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, specialised tools and methods were used to harvest aquatic foods in the past. Many of these traditional methods are still used today.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Tribes of the Sydney area used hooks and lines for fishing. Bark from the Black Kurrajong tree was made into string and the hooks made from either shells or kangaroo bone. Chewed shellfish was used as bait or the shiny surface of a shell acted as a lure. Large hooks caught larger aquatic animals like cod, golden perch, catfish and turtles. Small hooks caught smaller aquatic animals such as bass and bream.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Many Aboriginal people within Arnhem Land wove a barrier net to trap fish in small creeks and streams. These barrier nets were similar to a loosely woven mat to allow water to run through holes but not let fish get through. Sometimes these mats would be used as a drag net in rivers and the sea. Some types of fish that would have been caught included barramundi, catfish, mullet, flathead and shark.

QUEENSLAND

Throughout Queensland, Aboriginal people made and used many different types of spears for fishing. Some spears were one single piece of wood, others were multi-pronged, and some were barbed. Barbed spears were made by attaching bone and wood shaped pieces or even a stingray barb to the end of a long spear. Some other materials used to make spears are; resin, reeds, plants and human hair.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Watercraft used for fishing included simple bark canoes and rafts. Simple bark canoes were made from a single piece of bark removed from a tree using stone axes. Rafts were made from bundles of branches and reeds tied together. Women used rafts on lakes to find and collect freshwater mussels, moving about using a pole. Some rafts were so big that up to ten women could fit on them. Men used bark canoes to access waters where they could spear larger fish like the Murray cod.

TASMANIA

The importance of fish to Tasmanian Aboriginal people appears to have changed over time. Around 3500 years ago Tasmanian Aboriginal people stopped catching fish but continued to collect shellfish. Even today Aboriginal People living in Tasmania still gather shellfish. In the warmer months tribes would have collected shellfish from the coast, carrying their catch in small woven baskets hung around their necks. Abalone, limpets, oysters, mussels and marine snails were gathered in the shallow waters or dived for in the deeper water.

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS

Harpoons were used to hunt for larger marine animals like the dugong or turtle. The traditional harpoon was a long wooden pole with a removable head made from a stingray barb or wooden piece that was tied to a long line of woven rope. Fishing using a harpoon was carried out by small groups of two or three men in a canoe or one man on a platform over seagrass beds.

VICTORIA

Many coastal Aboriginal clans of Victoria wove long cylinder-like traps from plants such as the spiny-headed mat-rush to catch eels. Depending on the region where they were used, eel traps may have been over 2 metres long, have a wide lip, or an end that could be opened on a hinge. The trap was placed between stones arranged into a weir or between branches pushed into a watercourse, directing and trapping the eels as they made their way along the rivers and streams.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal people of northern Western Australia utilised branches or bark from trees and bushes that contained natural poisons to stun or disorient fish for collection. Different plants were used depending on whether fishing was in freshwater or marine environments. For the poison to have the most effect on the fish, the bark may have been hammered between stones before being placed into the water, or some branches needed to be left over night for the poison to develop.

