

SEMINAR SERIES

Communication, Health, and Social and Cultural Well-Being



Seminar 42: Who cares about coral? The biological species concept and 'cumulative intrinsic value' in cross- cultural perspective

This multidisciplinary seminar series aims to create a forum centered in Jawun. It is for researchers at CQUniversity, across Queensland and all over the world, as a forum to share their research findings and establish potential synergies, leading to joint grant applications, and partnerships that endeavour to advance knowledge in various disciplines.

Date and Time

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

3:00pm – 5:00pm QLD time

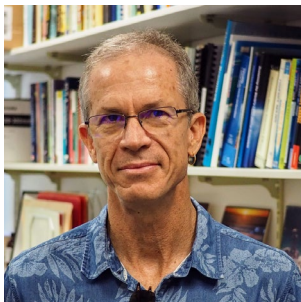
Light refreshments provided.

Locations

Room **3.06**, CQUniversity Cairns Campus

Corner Abbott Street and Shields Street

Or via [Zoom](#) Passcode: 543342



Speaker: Associate Professor Simon Foale

BIO

Associate Professor Simon Foale is Principal Research Fellow within the College of Arts, Society & Education at JCU. His expertise lies in

researching the interface between different knowledges and resource management, while teaching anthropology. Having worked for several large conservation NGOs, Simon has also developed an interest in the relationship between power, science and transnational conservation projects, and has written a number of papers on this topic. He has also become increasingly interested in the use of secrecy jurisdictions by transnational resource extracting corporations, and the extent to which this facilitates enormous flows of wealth out of resource rich but economically poor countries in the tropics, stymying both economic and human development.

Abstract

This paper examines the intrinsic and instrumental value of corals, and coral reefs, from the epistemological perspectives of Western conservation biologists and Pacific coastal fishers. It uses data on local language names ('folk taxonomies') from several language groups to understand the salience, or perceived value, of corals and coral reef fishes for the speakers of those languages. In all the folk taxonomies examined, there are very few local language names for corals or reef-associated fishes in the most species-rich families (gobies, blennies, damselfishes, and butterflyfishes). This is interesting particularly because one of the primary rationales for Western conservation interest in Indo-Pacific coral reefs is the 'cumulative intrinsic value' of the large number of biological species associated with these ecosystems, irrespective of their other values, including fishery production. The 'weight' of this cumulative intrinsic value underpins a moral mandate for transnational conservation intervention, typically in the form of marine protected areas, most of which impose a short- to medium-term economic cost on people who are already very poor. The related and widely used Western cultural construct of 'iconic' is also investigated. The paper examines various implications of the large differences between Western scientific and Pacific Islander attributions of value to corals and coral reef ecosystems, including in the context of their importance for fishery production and food (or nutrition) security. I also discuss the apparent lack of (a) reflexivity about the social construction of science and (b) curiosity about the environmental knowledge and values of Indo-Pacific coastal fishers, among many in the Western transnational conservation community.

RSVP to JRC Administration via email:
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