

Day 2 Session 3: John Morton (consultant): *What is 'The Indigenous Estate'?*

Despite its recent popularity, the idea of an 'Indigenous estate' might be said to have a lengthy history – at least for anthropologists, since the 'estate jargon' goes back at least as far as Radcliffe-Brown.

In the contemporary context, the phrase is mostly used to describe a global or pan-Australian entity created through land rights and native title claims; but in academic anthropology, the term 'estate' has mostly been used to identify a far, far smaller entity – the country of a 'local group'. What relationship might there be between these two notions?

Bill Gammage and, more particularly, Bruce Pascoe, might be taken to say that the relationship is profound: traditional Aboriginal people created 'the biggest estate on earth'. Keryn Walshe and, more particularly, Peter Sutton might be taken to have replied, 'Well, not so much. That's playing hard and fast with the ethnography'.

Without going too much into the rights and wrongs of these positions, John suggests an interpretive framework for reconciling these different positions. He illustrates the framework with a brief discussion of the problem which Ian Keen labelled 'The Western Desert vs the Rest'.

John Morton discusses whether the 'Indigenous estate' is a political/post-colonial construction or has its basis in traditional law and custom. He uses the concepts of 'underlying title' via 'the Dreaming' and the notion of 'corpus Australis' to unpack Indigenous relationships to land. He then suggests that anthropologists might be too conditioned by the classical 'estate' model.