

INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CO-MANAGEMENT: LAND CLAIMS BOARDS, WILDLIFE MANGAGEMENT, AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION. By GRAHAM WHITE. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020. ISBN 9780774863025. xviii +379 p., map, bib., index, notes. Softbound. Cdn\$34.95. Also available as an e-book and pdf.

As Indigenous peoples across Canada have increasingly entered into comprehensive land claims agreements, co-management boards have arisen with a mandate to manage wildlife, fisheries, plants, and the environment. In his book, *Indigenous Empowerment Through Co-Management*, Graham White explores the central question of whether or not these boards have empowered Indigenous peoples in the management of their lands and resources or have merely doubled down on colonial control. White limits the scope of the book largely to only co-management boards arising in relation to territories, notably Nunavut, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories, conducting a comparative case study approach to address the central question.

The book is composed of three sections. In the first section, land claims-based co-management boards are introduced, and the concept of treaty federalism is explored. The second section discusses specific boards, dedicating a chapter to each of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB), the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB), the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (MVEIRB), and the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board (MVLWB). The final section reviews the barriers each board has confronted, focusing on issues of independence, information use, and influence.

The book begins by problematizing the necessity for political “accommodations” for Indigenous peoples across Canada. This necessity arises from the unique constitutional framework upon which Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples is founded, a framework with treaties at its foundation. This notion of treaty federalism—that the Canadian federation not only deals with relationships between federal and provincial governments but also treaty-delineated relationships with Indigenous peoples—is what White suggests offers the means and opportunities for accommodating the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples.

Modern-day treaties, also known as comprehensive land claims agreements (LCAs), have been initiated across northern Canada for the past five decades. Each of these LCAs has articles and text around the management of lands and resources within the claim territory. In all cases, co-management boards have been created out of these agreements to offer a means of shared governance. Comprised of appointees from land claim governing bodies and from federal and provincial/territorial governments, claims co-management boards provide oversight and advice on a particular jurisdiction. The composition and

responsibilities of co-management boards varies depending on the region, but authority is generally limited to providing recommendations to the relevant federal minister. Boards also conduct science and policy research to inform their advice (Cadman et al., 2022).

White recognizes a central question in the co-management literature: whether or not the implementation of co-management boards has brought more power and influence for northern Indigenous peoples over their lands and resources. First acknowledging both sides of the debate, White then chooses to focus on several case studies from co-management boards across the Arctic to provide an empirical answer to the question. These case studies form the second section of the book, which is the heart of the exposition and provides perhaps the book’s most significant contribution, namely, the highly detailed description of the activities and history of each board. These case studies are assembled from a wide variety of sources, everything from academic literature, policy documents, meeting notes, and interviews. These details are usually recorded in piecemeal fashion, in resources not generally available to the public, or they exist only through the memories, experiences, and oral histories of those who helped to build the institutions (i.e., the boards themselves). White assembles and orders these histories into rich case studies, which will be a significant resource for political science on co- and Indigenous management.

Chapter three is dedicated to the NWMB, where one of us (MB) previously worked supporting revisions of the commercial fisheries allocation policy between 2018 and 2019. White begins by introducing the NWMB as an institution with competence and professionalism, arguing it stands out amongst other institutions of public government arising from the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. The paramount importance of Inuit being at the centre of decision making in wildlife and fisheries management in Nunavut is stressed, with White describing how this particular article (Article 5) of the agreement was deemed so important, negotiators began implementing it a decade before the agreement was even finalized. The chapter goes on to discuss how appointees to the board are made, where the board has advisory versus decision-making powers, and celebrates the large research mandate that the board has taken up. One particularly interesting section of the chapter discusses Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), roughly translated to Inuit knowledge but more accurately it describes an ontology and epistemology present in Nunavut that speaks not only to knowledge but also to values and relationships.

Chapter four explores the history of the YFWMB. The chapter is quick to point out a tension arising in Yukon co-management that differs significantly from other co-management boards: the emphasis on the rights of non-Indigenous residents of Yukon. White notes several conflicts and difficulties, particularly in the board’s early years, to overcome the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives and suggests that this may have limited the influence of Indigenous residents of Yukon

to influence recommendations according to their principles. In his observations of contemporary meetings, however, these disagreements are handled through deep and respectful conversation, and White celebrates the level of expertise available. In contrast to the NWMB, most of the activities undertaken by the YFWMB focus on territorial wildlife policies.

Chapters five and six examine two claims boards based in the Northwest Territories: MVEIRB and the MVLWB. White contrasts the wildlife management boards of previous chapters with these boards to show how their focus on managing natural resources deemed “valuable” by the federal government may provide the MVEIRB and MVLWB with an opportunity to wield significant influence over Canadian governance. Chapter five reviews the histories of the boards from their formation to the biggest hurdles they have faced. Chapter six uses these two boards as a test for the central question of the book, whether co-management boards have significantly increased the influence of Indigenous peoples over natural resource management. He concludes that the boards have managed to propel Indigenous influence over decision making, and that their influence has grown as the boards have grown more organized and experienced over time, with the important caveat that, while there is greater sensitivity and respect paid to Indigenous opinions and traditional knowledge, their legal position may remain vulnerable to the whims of Ottawa.

In White’s introduction to the book, he opens with the accommodations necessary for Indigenous peoples within the Canadian political system as a contemporary national imperative. He again returns to this notion in the final book section, characterizing the boards as places where the different aims of federal and territorial governments and Indigenous peoples are to be accommodated. In this final section, White brings together the previous case studies to discuss three overarching issues with land claims-based management boards: independence (Chapter 7), traditional knowledge (Chapter 8), and influence (Chapter 9). White stresses the tension between the imperative of independence itself and the very character of co-management (something he refers to as a “pervasive co-management ethos” [p. 247]). He draws his conclusions on independence from studies of the appointment process, staffing and support, and financial management. White argues that while breaches of independence occur, these are rare, and yet must be recognized because of the impact to trust that ensues when breaches do happen. This link between tacit independence and fleeting trust, White argues, risks serious harm to the spirit of co-management (see also Snook et al., 2020 for a discussion on spirit and intent of co-management across the Eastern Arctic).

In analyzing the role of traditional knowledge (of IQ in the case of Nunavut), White touches on two major points, firstly efforts at acquiring TK/IQ and the tensions (which he states are perhaps overrated) between traditional knowledge and Western science. Secondly, he explores

a more fundamental issue, that being, the “extent to which board processes are compatible with or antithetical to Indigenous culture” (p. 267). In defining TK, White speaks to the difficulties in doing so, but offers a broad conceptualization by Fikret Berkes whereby TK is both not only knowledge, but also practices and beliefs which evolve and are handed down through cultural transmissions. White also clearly reiterates the notion held by others that “TK is inherently political” (p. 268). It is this political nature of TK that guides much of Chapter 8, with White lauding claims boards’ efforts at making genuine strides forward to use TK/IQ, but notes that TK/IQ is not always accepted as equal by Western scientists. He draws extensively on the work of the NWMB, for example, in having all online materials available in Inuktitut; although White also acknowledges that these reports “reflect Western bureaucratic rather than IQ principles” (p. 282), just one example of the limits of how far efforts to use and incorporate TK/IQ can go.

In Chapter 9, the book’s final chapter, White goes into a particular topic that we, as researchers and partners on co-management board-led projects, have encountered often in our work in the Eastern Arctic, that of the actual influence co-management boards have on decision making. And in fact, White positions this as the “central question animating this book” (p. 297). In building his argument, he distinguishes between the influence the boards hold in their entirety and the influence of Indigenous peoples in board activities. A board may be influential over decision making but it does not necessarily follow that the creation and operations of the board have led to an increase in Indigenous peoples’ power within the co-management system. White weighs a variety of evidence including his own interviews with and observations of Indigenous board members and employees. Much of the literature criticizing co-management’s ability to empower Indigenous peoples bases its assessment on analysis of political theory, and in this respect White’s book takes a novel approach; he asks board members, land claim negotiators, and others involved in the land claim process their opinion on the question.

Interestingly, most of the chapter is devoted to acknowledging the weaknesses of co-management system—that boards struggle to include participation from community members, that processes for including TK/IQ are limited—but White still concludes, based on the evidence in his data, that co-management boards have enhanced Indigenous influence. This is an important balance in this ongoing debate and one that broadly aligns with our own experience working with co-management boards. Though members acknowledge the limited capacity for empowerment within a state system, many still feel that they have been able to advance Indigenous interests through co-management. What remains essential in all of this, is that respect is due for the skills and efforts devoted by those who have managed to work within, and in many ways manipulate, a system that was not built for them. This work is not finished and probably will not be finished within our lifetimes. As researchers, one lesson we take

from this book is to think about our own contributions to the journey of Indigenous influence and empowerment through co-management, with attention paid to the ways in which academic research can support the overall effort.

#### REFERENCES

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Reviewer positionality: We both identify as white settler academics, one a student (RC) and one a professor (MB). Our own experiences working with co-management boards and researching co-management implications are with the Torngat Joint Fisheries Board (RC, MB) and the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (MB) and the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (MB).