

A SCOPING REVIEW PROTOCOL ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUSTAINABLE INDIGENOUS SEAFOOD SYSTEMS

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Abstract: Indigenous populations mainly utilise natural resources to survive and those living along coastlines will depend on seafood for sustenance and income. Their diet and lifestyle are rooted in cultural spiritual and environmental connections. Today, modern development has posed sustainability risks to native communities due to environmental degradation, overfishing, and climate change. This scoping review protocol was developed and registered in the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/sj4bn>) and aims to assess the current state of Indigenous seafood systems, focusing on their strengths and challenges in advancing food sustainability. Based on the Population-Concept-Context (PCC) framework, the study will systematically compile articles from electronic databases like MEDLINE, EMBASE, and Web of Science, alongside grey literature, examining aspects such as food security, environmental impact, economic viability, and social dimensions. The review analyses seafood systems by geographical location, population, and production process, identifying factors that influence Indigenous livelihoods. Findings will highlight key aspects of Indigenous seafood systems and provide a balanced view of their positive and negative aspects. This review will offer insights valuable to policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to promote sustainable practices, addressing current gaps and opportunities within Indigenous food systems. Ultimately, the study aims to support sustainable management practices that strengthen the resilience, knowledge and well-being of Indigenous communities, besides promoting food security.

Keywords: Indigenous people, seafood system, sustainability, food security, scoping review.

Introduction

Indigenous peoples are diverse ethnic groups with distinct cultures, languages, and lifestyles with strong connection to their native environments (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023). It is estimated that there are 476 million Indigenous people living in more than 90 countries (World Bank, 2023). With ancient knowledge passed down from their ancestors, these communities utilise a wide range of natural resources, with coastal groups depending more on aquatic resources, whereas inland communities will harvest terrestrial ones (Kuhnlein, 2014; Kuhnlein & Chotiboriboon, 2022).

Seafood is an important part of many Indigenous diets and plays a critical role in meeting the nutritional needs of many communities because it is an essential and relatively assessable source of protein, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals, especially for underserved communities (Tacon *et al.*, 2020; Sen & Naveena, 2022). Fishing and harvesting seafood have traditionally been primary sources of food and livelihood for Indigenous people. Approximately 30 million coastal Indigenous people consume seafood nearly four times higher than the average global consumption in their countries and 15 times higher than non-

Indigenous people (Cisneros-Montemayor *et al.*, 2016).

Indigenous seafood systems have the potential to contribute to food security besides creating job opportunities and preserving natural resources (Fleming *et al.*, 2015). Indigenous fishing and harvesting practices that follow seasonal fishing bans, employ traditional fishing gear and manage protected areas are more sustainable than modern methods such as trawling (Atlas *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, Indigenous seafood processing is known to reduce post-harvest losses, producing value-added products with improved seafood quality, and increasing food availability (Bajželj *et al.*, 2020; Kuyu & Bereka, 2020).

However, Indigenous seafood systems now face multiple challenges, including environmental degradation, overfishing, and climate change, threatening their sustainability, livelihoods, and well-being Indigenous (Carrasco-Torrontegui *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to examine the sustainability of Indigenous seafood systems from a food system perspective. This study protocol outlines a scoping review that aims to investigate the sustainability of seafood as a critical component of the food system of Indigenous people. This review will identify the strengths and weaknesses of current Indigenous seafood systems and their potential for transitioning to sustainable practices.

Discussion

The study was designed to compile and summarise evidence from heterogeneous literature relating to Indigenous people and traditional seafood using the scoping review method. This comprehensive method would intensively explore published literature from various fields relevant to the research question. The review protocol was registered in the Open Science Framework database (<https://osf.io/sj4bn>). It was disclosed according to the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items

for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco *et al.*, 2018) and extension for protocols (PRISMA-P) (Shamseer *et al.*, 2015). The methodology that would be used to conduct this scoping review was guided by a proposed five-stage framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and based on updated recommendations by Peters *et al.* (2020). In brief, the framework for the scoping review comprised five steps:

- (1) Developing the research question.
- (2) Exploring and identifying relevant materials.
- (3) Selecting the pertinent studies to the research question to include in the analysis.
- (4) Charting the data.
- (5) Collating, summarising and reporting the results.

Developing the Research Questions

The primary objective of the present scoping review was to explore the role of seafood in promoting food sustainability among Indigenous populations. The research question would incorporate the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework for developing specific inclusion criteria and provide an effective structure for conducting this scoping review, as recommended by Peters *et al.* (2020). Therefore, the literature search would be conducted using these criteria and other relevant keywords related to Indigenous communities and their reliance on seafood. This scoping review aimed to address the following research questions:

- (a) How do fish and seafood affect the food sustainability of Indigenous people?
- (b) What are the challenges associated with fish and seafood sustainability?

Eligibility

By reviewing previous research literature and applying the PCC framework, the eligibility criteria would be established based on the study objective and research question as follows:

Population

This review would consider the Indigenous population identifiable at an individual level or by geographical proxy with no restrictions on age, sex, and location. Studies that did not identify Indigenous people as the primary focus (e.g., studies with area-based estimates where they made up less than 50% of the total population) would be excluded. This approach would allow for a comprehensive assessment of research related to Indigenous populations to provide an accurate representation of their experiences and needs while ensuring that only relevant information was included in the review process.

Concept

The present scoping review would focus on the sustainability of seafood and how this concept had been addressed through the Indigenous food system. Studies that included findings related to four key aspects—food and nutrition security, environmental and natural resources, economic viability, and social aspects—would be considered a gain of comprehensive understanding of this topic. However, any studies that used “sustainable” in reference to interventions or programmes rather than the characterisation of food or consumption patterns would be considered to have fallen outside the scope of this study.

Context

Indigenous community food systems included seafood for human consumption across marine and freshwater systems. This study would focus on commonly recognised categories, such as fish and shellfish, as well as other aquatic animals not traditionally classified under these terms. Previous studies had also explored similar categories in the context of Indigenous diets, providing examples of how specific species were categorised and consumed (Thomsen *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, research by Brockington *et al.* (2023) highlighted the broader roles of fish and seafood terms in global food systems. Therefore, the research context

was defined and the procedure would be carried out as follows:

- (a) This study focuses only on marine and freshwater seafood; it excludes mammals and reptiles (e.g., seals, turtles, whales, and other marine animals).
- (b) Seafood refers to various forms of sea life such as fish and shellfish, regarded as edible and aquatic animals.
- (c) Shellfish include various aquatic molluscs (e.g., clams, oysters, squid, and octopus) and crustaceans (e.g., crabs, lobsters, and prawns).

Although studies concerned with seafood as a craft, sport fishing, tourism, and other activities could contribute to Indigenous people’s sustainability, they were unrelated to food processing, and was excluded as the primary focus of this review was on food production systems.

Identifying and Collecting Relevant Materials

The current review would involve identifying and collecting relevant publications through a systematic search strategy. To ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature, the process followed Shafiee *et al.* (2022) by appointing a professional librarian to assist in designing a search strategy that included Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms and keywords. The search strategy would incorporate keywords related to Indigenous populations, namely “Indigen*”, “Aborigin*”, “Native*”, and “First Nation*”. Additionally, the search would also encompass terms associated with sustainable seafood such as “sustain*”, “fish*”, “seafood*”, and “shellfish” to identify studies that met the criteria for inclusion in this review. The search would be performed on relevant academic databases, i.e., MEDLINE, EMBASE, Web of Science, Agricola, and iPortal. The databases encompassing various fields, for instance, MEDLINE and EMBASE, would contain more studies on health and life sciences, whereas other databases were multi-

disciplinary and covered non-clinical studies like social, environment, and economic aspects. The multi-disciplinary databases could provide diverse and comprehensive sets of information (Chong & Basu, 2024). A manual search for grey literature would be conducted through relevant websites, reports and conference papers to supplement the primary search (Table 1). The inclusion of both published and unpublished materials would ensure a comprehensive and rigorous review of the literature.

Selecting Relevant Studies

Studies retrieved from databases would be imported into the Mendeley software, where duplicates could be eliminated. The research team would comprise experts in sustainability, marine biology, Indigenous studies, and public health, which ensured a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Two independent reviewers would be assigned to review each document to ensure that the included materials met the eligibility criteria. During the screening process, the Rayyan platform would be utilised to facilitate the independent screening process. The Rayyan

platform was chosen because it allowed reviewers to efficiently collaborate, organise, and filter the articles during the screening process (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016).

In brief, the titles and abstracts of relevant studies would be screened for eligibility to ensure that they contained relevant information to the study objective. The inclusion criteria would be applied during the screening process, the new findings were discussed and modified for the eligibility criteria. Studies that met the eligibility criteria would then be forwarded to the second phase screening process to scrutinise the full-text version. Any materials that failed to meet the criteria during each screening phase would be recorded and excluded from further consideration. The review also involved snowballing, which referred to screening the reference lists of relevant studies to identify additional sources. This allowed for the discovery of further relevant literature that might not have been captured in the initial search. The screening process would be conducted independently, after which a meeting would be scheduled to compare the outcomes.

Table 1: The search strategy includes MeSH terms, subject headings, and keywords*

Area	Keyword	MESH Terms
Indigenous peoples	Indigen* OR aborigin* OR [Native AND (American* OR Alaska OR Canadian* OR Hawaiian* OR Hawaiian* OR people* OR population*)] OR “First Nation*” OR “First People*” OR “American Indian*” OR amerind* OR Aymara OR Aimara OR Chukchi OR Eskimo* OR hmong OR Inuit* OR Inupiat OR Khanty OR Maori* OR Mapuche OR Metis OR Miao OR Navaho* OR navajo* OR Nenets OR “pacific islander*” OR Sami OR Tribe* OR yup’ik OR yupik OR zuni	“Indigenous Peoples” [Mesh] OR “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” [Mesh] OR “American Native continental ancestry group” [Mesh]
Sustainability	sustain*	“Agriculture” [Mesh] OR “Conservation of Natural Resources” [Mesh] OR “Environment” [Mesh] OR “Ecosystem” [Mesh]
Fish	fish* OR seafood* OR shellfish	“Seafood” [Mesh] OR “Fish” [Mesh]

*Databases: Academic databases: MEDLINE, EMBASE, Web of Science, Agricola, and iPortal. Grey literature: Open website (FAO, WHO, etc.), Google Scholar, and conference papers.

If any disagreements arose, they would be resolved through discussion until a consensus is reached. Otherwise, a third reviewer would be consulted for a majority consensus. Since this scoping review aimed to identify relevant and existing evidence from previous studies, no quality assessment on the selected studies would be conducted. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines used in this study (Figure 1) was based on updated procedures by Page *et al.* (2021).

Charting the Data

The following data extracted from each document would be recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The data would follow the methodology outlined in Yusoff *et al.* (2024). The authors would conduct a bibliometric analysis to illustrate the current research landscape on the topic and present using software such as VOSviewer. The data would be collected as follows:

- (a) Study identifiers, including the authors' names and year of publication.
- (b) Study objectives.
- (c) Setting and geographical location.
- (d) Study population.
- (e) The study fields.
- (f) Key findings and conclusions (e.g., food and nutrition security, environmental and natural resource sustainability, economic viability, and social considerations).

Moreover, an iterative process would be employed alongside data charting, following the approach used in previous studies (Kenny *et al.*, 2020; Myette & Riva, 2021). Reviewers would also discuss any additional themes identified with the research team to ensure that all relevant information was considered comprehensively and accurately. This collaborative approach was expected to foster a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the findings, allowing the team to build upon each other's ideas.

Collating, Summarising, and Reporting Results

The descriptive tables would be developed to generate a numerical summary of the findings such as the number of studies focusing on specific topics, the geographical locations studied, and the year of publication. This approach could provide a wide overview of the literature in the field of study as suggested by Peters *et al.* (2022). However, the authors also emphasised the data should be consistent with the review questions and the inclusion criteria. In addition, descriptive tables will also be used to support a thematic analysis.

Moreover, this involves grouping the findings into meaningful themes and identifying patterns and relationships between the data. For example, previous studies applied thematic analysis and revealed particular aspects of Indigenous seafood such as food security, cultural significance, social equity, economic value, and ecological impact (Brockington *et al.*, 2023; Cubillo *et al.*, 2023). In detail, the thematic analysis enabled an understanding of the cultural meanings and values attached to seafood and their use in daily life. This could also provide insight into the social factors affecting the distribution and access to seafood, the economic benefits derived from fisheries activity, and the environmental impacts of seafood harvesting. The knowledge gained could help inform the development of sustainable management practices and policy decisions related to seafood resources and Indigenous communities.

To ensure adequate classification of research areas, information tables would be used to summarise the available data. This summary would enable us to differentiate between research areas that had been studied sufficiently and those that still needed more attention as suggested in the literature (Levac *et al.*, 2010). Tracking historical trends was a powerful tool when identifying emerging concerns like food security—where increased attention had been placed on this issue due to shifting public awareness, governmental priorities, technological advancements, and other challenges to the food systems. By analysing

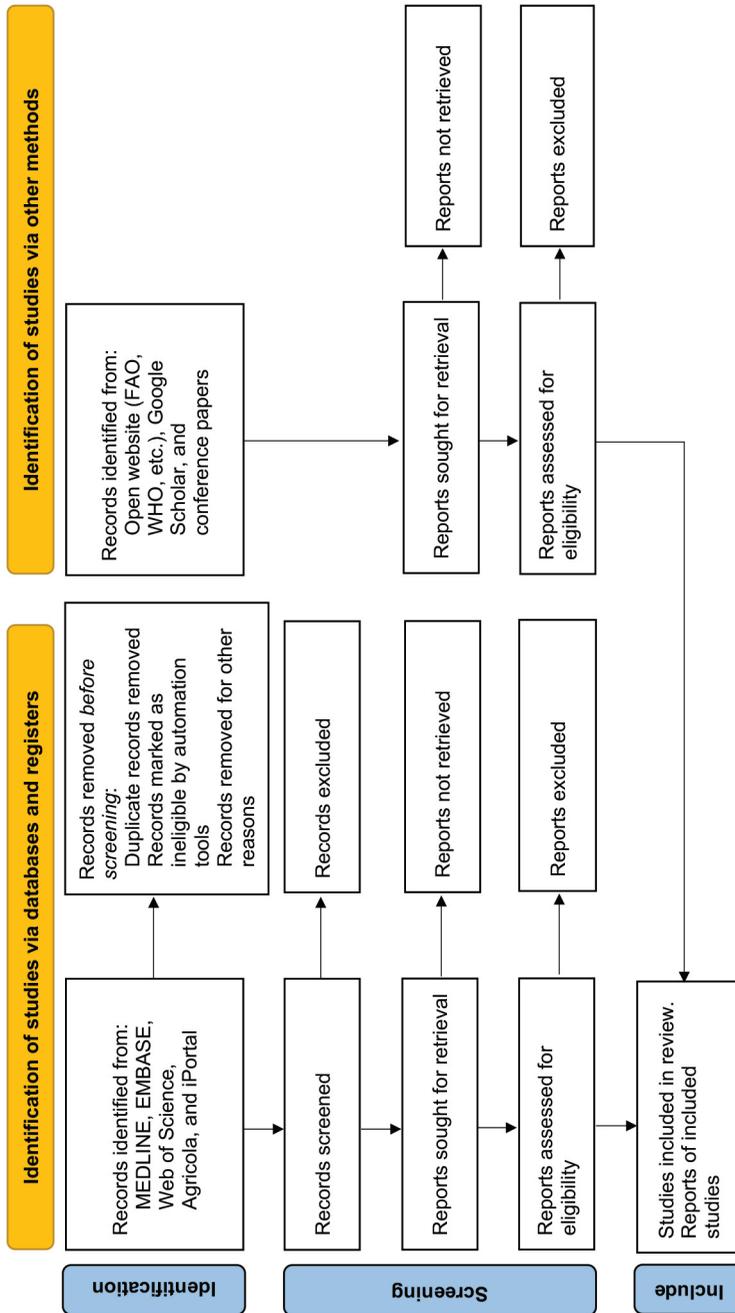


Figure 1: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart adapted from Page *et al.* (2021). This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0

literature studies that took into account both frequency and patterns observed over time, we could gain valuable insights about levels of interest likely to prompt further exploration or indicate areas where existing knowledge needed strengthening, with additional study and more focused analysis.

Finally, tables, figures, and diagrams would be prepared to illustrate the key findings, making the information easier to understand and interpret. The results will be discussed in detail, and the findings' significance and implications for food sustainability will be explained. A completed copy of the PRISMA-ScR checklist could be found in the publication by Tricco *et al.* (2018).

Conclusions

The current scoping review could provide valuable information from the literature on sustainable perspectives based on Indigenous seafood systems. Accordingly, it would be possible to map out the evidence of the effect of Indigenous seafood practices on the environment, economy, society and food security aspects. In addition, the barriers and enablers of transition to food sustainability was also highlighted. The present review would be useful for giving insights and recommendations to stakeholders in developing sustainable support strategies for Indigenous seafood systems. This review could also assist in prioritising and guiding future research studies to improve Indigenous seafood systems by identifying knowledge gaps in this research area. However, the risk of bias in individual studies was not assessed, which was more applicable to systematic reviews of interventions.

Despite the search strategy being articulated in detail, this scoping contained limitations such as database restrictions and a limited number of studies on specific Indigenous groups. Given the numerous tribes, the search strategy cannot include all of the world's Indigenous population. Besides, the database system only allowed a certain number of keywords; therefore, it might

also not be possible to search for all existing tribes. However, this review had attempted to gather more evidence by including specific tribe keywords from specific regions (e.g., the United States, Canada, and New Zealand), where extensive research on Indigenous populations had been conducted. This strategy could further improve the search accuracy in research topics specifically targeted at Indigenous seafood.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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