

Take on Board Podcast – Episode 242



Transcript – Broads on Boards: Michelle Deshong explains how to apply best practice on Indigenous governance and leadership models

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today is episode one of the Broads on Board special series of the take on board podcast. This series explores the history of women on boards on the continent that we now call Australia. So it's fitting to kick off that discussion with an exploration of Indigenous governance. So today I'm speaking with Michelle Deshong about Indigenous governance.

Before we start that discussion, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we record today. For me, I am on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and I pay my respects to Elder's past and present and any First Nations people that may be listening today. I acknowledged continuing connection to land, waters and culture. The first footprints on this continent were those belonging to First Nations peoples, and sovereignty of this country has never been seated. In acknowledging country. I also acknowledged the custodianship or the governance of this land for many years before white man came along. I acknowledged that in this series, I'm mostly talking about governance with a very western lens. It's part of the story of governance, yet we have so much to learn from and about indigenous governance always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

Now, let me introduce Michelle. Michelle is a Kuku Yalanji woman with extensive experience in governance. She is currently co chair of Supply Nation, and a council member for the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. In 2017, Michelle was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to research and apply best practice on Indigenous governance and leadership models. Her study involves immersive visits to diverse First Nations, communities and institutions. The primary objective was to investigate and analyse various leadership and governance models. The research project uncovered a spectrum of self government sovereignty and development approaches within these communities, and provided insights into the potential adaptation and implementation of research findings and best practices within the Australian context. The research also included concepts of nation building, cultural governance, sovereignty, and identity, all of which were explored in detail within the report. Following the study Michelle, integrated key findings from

the fellowship work into the work of the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute where she was CEO. As you can hear, Michelle is an expert in First Nations governance. In asking around who I should speak to about this topic, everyone pointed me to Michelle. So Michelle, welcome to the Broads on Boards series of the take on board podcast.

Michelle Deshong 2:33

Thank you. Helga. Nice to be with you today. And that's a wonderful introduction. It's always nice to hear that I'm still relevant in the sector and that people think of me on such an important topic.

Helga Svendsen 2:43

Oh, absolutely. You're, as I say, all the roads pointed to you. So, Michelle, before we dig into Indigenous governance, as always, I would love to dig just a little bit deeper about you. Can you tell me Where were your parents born? And tell me about where your ancestors are from?

Michelle Deshong 3:00

Yeah, thank you. I am a Kuku Yalanji woman and Kuku Yalanji nation is just north of Cairns, salt, water and rainforest country. So you know, being quite biased and saying it's part of the best place on earth. But I was actually born on Bindal and Wulgurukaba country here in Townsville, which is also where I'm joining you from today, I've actually spent most of my life living on the lands of the Bindal and Wulgurukaba people and have a really strong affiliation with the traditional owner groups here as well as you look through any maps across North Queensland, you'll see how closely aligned a lot of the tribal nations are all the way along the east coast. And there's very strong connections all the way through Far North Queensland, as well. So for me, that's been an interesting part of my journey. My father is Indigenous and my mother is non-Indigenous. So even cut through my life. There's been some really interesting, I guess, challenges and experiences that come with living in a regional area, but also from that particular background.

Helga Svendsen 4:08

Foot in both worlds and managing that line between managing auto navigating maybe that's a better way of putting it the line between the worlds.

Michelle Deshong 4:16

And I think obviously, my father had some really interesting experiences growing up in far north Queensland in a lot of ways. He was a laborer for most of his life before. He sort of made a bit of a transition into the Indigenous Affairs arena and got involved in legal and political stuff. And so that

very much is the shaping of me where my political seed was sown in North Queensland and having a father who had an opinion on everything. I think sometimes he used to think he was a magistrate without the legal qualifications, sometimes very strong advocate for Indigenous affairs.

Helga Svendsen 4:52

What about siblings? What was the family group view?

Michelle Deshong 4:55

Oh, so my father was one of 12 children and my mother was one of five siblings, but ironically, both of them then only had myself and my sister. So a pretty small family in, in the scheme of indigenous families really in many ways. But obviously my sister and I have always had a really close relationship. She's a few years younger than me. And she's had some different experiences and not for profits and other governance roles as well throughout her career. But we were both certainly tarred with that same political intention. And that advocacy role was really strongly embedded for us. So I'm not sure how many languages do you speak, I only speak English, I pick up a little bit of language from different areas, of course, Kuku Yalanji, there's language program language revitalisation program that's existed, and I try to dabble in that they've got a great app that teaches you a little bit about language. But I guess, I've also been fortunate to travel around the country and spend a lot of time in places like the Kimberley and the Torres Strait. And being exposed to different languages is always really exciting, because you kind of pick up the nuances of different dialects and meaning and interpretation of language. Unfortunately, though, I think it's the story for many of us that we don't speak our own language. And in actual fact, we are guests running against the clock to maintain and to revitalize language before many of our speakers are no longer with us. So I think it's a really important part of who we are as indigenous people.

Helga Svendsen 6:31

So I'm wondering, Where's your place or your home? Where do you consider your place to be?

Michelle Deshong 6:36

but I guess, my place is twofold. Obviously, being born here in Wulgurukaba country, this certainly is my grounding space, it's the place that I'm most familiar with. It's where all my relationships exist. And it's also where I've now raised my children for a large part of their lives, I did have a life in Canberra as a public servant, as many people do. But I've now probably been back here more than I've been away. So that's really nice for me. And then of course, there's always the moments where you go back on country, where you get to put your feet in the waters of the beautiful Mossman Gorge, where you get to just, I think, be still sometimes and even though it can be considered quite a tourist location, it still is a place of really important connection. As I said, the stories and just the

grounding piece, that's really important. So that's probably where I see myself. Anything besides the water's always really important for me.

Helga Svendsen 7:44

There is something about feet on the ground, isn't there like feet, actual feet, not shoes, but feet on the ground, or feet in the water, whatever it may be, there is something grounding. There's probably a better adjective for it than that. But there is something very beautiful about I think, yeah.

Michelle Deshong 8:01

Maybe that's what it does. It takes the crazy away from whatever you've done that week. And whatever the politics is, even here in Townsville, beautiful beaches and tropical islands only a few minutes away from us.

Helga Svendsen 8:15

So yeah, well, thank you. Thanks for letting me delve a little bit into your story. I know it's only a little bit into the story. But it's always great to get a bit of a picture of the people that we are hearing from let's turn then to Indigenous governance. As I say, this is the first episode in a series about women in governance in his land that we now call Australia. And you know, so much about indigenous governance, I'm not sure that we'll be able to Well, I am sure we won't be able to download all of what you know, in this short episode. But I'm hoping we can at least download some of that and get here and understand that governance in Australia didn't start with colonisation, governance started long before that. So where should we start the story of indigenous governance on this continent?

Michelle Deshong 8:59

Yeah, look, I think it's a really important place to start first and foremost. And I think the other thing I'd say is, I do know a lot about governance, but I'm certainly not a person who knows all about it. And I've been very intentional about the work that I've done to kind of reclaim a conversation around cultural governance in many ways. But one of the fundamental principles of Indigenous governance really is the collectiveness. And that's really embedded in a cultural ideology, around not necessarily thinking about the individual, but thinking about the collective and anything in Indigenous affairs demonstrates that intention. So in regards to Indigenous governance, to me, that's the founding principle of it. But as you say, we are talking about a time pre colonisation. And so even the language of governance isn't a new concept to Indigenous people. We just didn't call it that right. So, but the practices of the way we govern were very much embedded in cultural integrity with a value system, which created certain laws, symbolism, and meaning to a whole range of things that were happening in our communities. But one of the things I like to kind of talk to people about around this is that our societies would not have existed without some level of governance, right. So

we've really been doing this since time immemorial. Because without governance, you have chaos. And if we think of governance as the art of like steering organisations, or communities, with systems and processes, then for me, our governance is in actual fact, our systems and processes of things like kinship of knowledge, holders of inclusivity, and social relationships, that those systems and processes are the things that inform the way we make decisions, that people held roles and responsibilities that guided their community. And we were pretty clear about those things. And then ultimately, elders, elder' councils, or the senior knowledge holders, were the people that ultimately acted as I guess the board in many ways is that they had the authority to control all the outcomes. But they also were the keepers of that knowledge that enabled our systems to work. And so for me, when I think about the pre-colonised version of our governance, and that's what it looked like, right. And if you consider some of the history around, people moving to different lands, being transient with the seasons, all of those sorts of things, a lot of people will think about a welcome to country as a symbolic gesture these days, that depending on the audience will decide whether it's important or not. But I actually talk about that as being one of the very fundamental governance principles as indigenous peoples, right, that we kind of, again, it goes into those systems and those processes about moving between different lands. And nations also required respect and clarity about expectations while you are on country. And that there was trade and negotiation about the time that you were there, but also, that we would honour the processes of the people whose country we were on. And so when you kind of look at it from that lens, it's a really important governance process, but also respect to the people whose nations you visit, that you are seeing and hearing them just as we do in organisations that we currently are involved in that each organisation will ever have its own uniqueness to the way that it governs to the culture of its governance. And so that's for me some of that insight that I think about when talking about pre colonial governance, I think, as a continuation of that conversation, right now governance was strong. And I'm sort of spoken about all the ways that that existed, then you have political interference in many ways, and colonialism diverts our attention from the things that we know to be true. And if you think about, say, a constitution right now, most of our organisations and of course, our our nation, has a constitution that talks about the rules of the way that we govern. But if you put this in an in a cultural lens, a constitution doesn't necessarily need to be written for us as indigenous people, because being born into the community or the nation, at the point at which we are born. So we might be the eldest grandchild, we might be the third in line for knowledge holding all of those sorts of things that depending on where you're born into, it automatically comes with an innate understanding of your cultural responsibilities, but also, where you may exist in decision making. So for me that kind of political diversion, which really talked about moving indigenous peoples off their lands, disconnecting from country from language, from ceremony by putting us into a developed system not made for us as being problematic, and so even through the late 1970s when we started to reclaim a conversation around indigenous organisations, and having governance models that those governance models were created by others for us to fit into. And then we had to, I guess, be colonized into the thinking of a westernized governance model that says there's a hierarchical model here that exists, that you can only have this many members on our board, that each person has these particular portfolios, all of those sorts of things that send us down a path where actually, for a long time, that has been what's encompassed Indigenous Affairs, and the way we govern. And in that process, what we have minimized is actually the value of our cultural governance Foundation, which is why sometimes those two things have not coexisted well seen lots of problems exist in various ways through organisations, but also the decision making because you've kind of got these

two things about an imposed westernized authority against a cultural authority, and how to bring those two things to the table in a way that obviously meets your fiscal responsibilities and all of those sorts of things. But also, importantly, does business the way that indigenous people want to do business?

Helga Svendsen 16:22

Yeah, it's certainly from my perspective, that's how it feels like there's you've referred to the systems and processes and 60,000 years of continuing connection to culture doesn't come about because you don't, doesn't come about in a vacuum. Of course, you must have strong systems and processes around that to have made that be the case. And it feels like again, great, but now we've colonized and you now need to fit into this box. Thanks very much. This is the box. And you know, you might be able to bring a little bit of your indigenous governance principles with you. But really, you have to fit into this box and fit into it in the way we say it should happen. What if we hadn't we, you know, the colonizers had come in hadn't said that? How would you see governance, if Indigenous people, the First Nations people were able to govern in a way that works for them? And, as you say, ticking those boxes that have to be taped? What would it then look like? If it wasn't, you must fit in this box? What would governance look like today? If we'd started with the story of indigenous governance, rather than starting with section 27 of the Constitution of the organisation, or whatever it may be? What would it look like, then?

Michelle Deshong 17:29

Oh, I'm gonna be a bit facetious here and say, well, we probably would have had a treaty, and we might not have been in the situation we are currently in. But fundamentally, if people had recognized our governing principles, and valued them in the same way that perhaps they valued some other indigenous nations or world, then our course in history would have been different. Now, there are lots of coming to play around that. And I want to, I want to be really clear that in many ways, we have not lost our cultural ways of governing. And in fact, they've continued alongside this transition. But importantly, it's been almost like a forced intention that the system is built for us to work in this particular way. Because that satisfies government, and others regulatory bodies and other things. And so we've got this kind of complex situation where those two things, and they are working in parallel with each other. And what I think we've seen over the last probably 40 years, maybe even 30, particularly as part of the outcome of the Mabo decision, in enabling the recognition of continuing existence, to land and waterways, our connection to country being seen as country and to have continuing responsibility to make decisions for the betterment of our communities and our country. If those things now are being reclaimed, right, they're being re invigorated. And we have some fantastic examples across the country about how people are kind of, I guess, flipping it on its edge almost in saying, we'd done it this way for such a long time. But now we're kind of, you know, we're bringing the pendulum back for a bit of balance between what's right for us and a cultural perspective, and for the future of our people in our country. And in some ways, also, these provide valuable lessons for other people who are working in governance, that there are really fundamental things that have existed for indigenous peoples that often were seen as the other one

actually, we've got some pretty good ways of doing our business right. And it wouldn't be a bad thing if others took some notice about that. I guess there's always this adage of who does governance better? And I'm kind of like, well, there's been a few royal commissions about westernised governance models that didn't actually meet the needs of the people and leave us with many questions about that. So I'm not saying that our governance is without challenge. But I do know that when it's fundamentally founded in a cultural value set, that we understand our roles and responsibilities with each other, that we work from a collective governing piece, then the outcomes look a whole lot different.

Helga Svendsen 20:34

Michelle, I could not agree more I have about all of that, and particularly your reflection about the royal commissions, I have made a similar comment myself a number of times, and I think governance is around kind of stewardship and long term stewardship. And therefore the long term stewardship of, of the lands, you know, 60,000 years continuing connection to country to waters to culture, that is strong governance, because it's long term stewardship. And there is so much that can be learned by us Western governance, from indigenous governance, values, collectiveness, all of those things.

Michelle Deshong 21:10

Yeah, I think even if you think about some of the topical issues of the day, at the moment, you know, we've seen so many examples of traditional knowledges traditional science being overshadowed by Western models as an authoritative piece, right? But you can't get better Intel than from traditional owners who have responsibility for their land and waterways and the protection of country for generations, right. And so we've seen, and this is where this thing about knowledge holders comes in is that we all within our communities, and depending if they're matriarchal or patriarchal, there are particular people who are afforded intense knowledge and historical context to what they know and what they understand. And they're the people that we all look to for guidance and advice. And I think about that, in terms of some of I've seen some of our communities in North Queensland where there's been different infrastructure that's been required to support the community, it might be a dam or, or something like that. And the community, the indigenous people are saying, we need this placed over in this location, because this is where we know, runoff happens. This is warming up through our history, these things. This is important about our songlines isn't important about our seasons. And yet non Indigenous entities, make decisions and put it elsewhere and then wonder why it fails. So it's this knowledge piece about honouring the fact that one person might not have all of the answers, but through a collective knowledge bank, people have authority to speak on matters that impact the community in a way.

Helga Svendsen 22:51

Which is exactly I would say how strong governance should work. It's a, if it's a board, even if it's the board of through the Western lens, it is a group of people that I'm making a group decision, where things should be tested, and different perspectives shared and all those sorts of things so that we make the stronger decisions, not just our record, we go that way. It's like, have you thought of different perspectives?

Michelle Deshong 23:13

I think that's really important, because obviously, I sit on a number of boards, and we only mentioned to in the introduction. But it's been a 30-40 year journey for me in community organisations, to big corporates and national institutions. But importantly, again, I'll move to this kind of cultural positioning piece, the thing that I'd asked a lot of people is what do you really know about the people you sit around the table with? So we do this thing as indigenous people, when we come together? What's your name? Who's your mob? Where are you from? All of this sort of stuff that gives us a cultural positioning piece? A because it immediately tells us who we might be related to? What are some of the historical kind of contexts and relationships that might exist in the room? What does that tell me about some cultural nuances about that person, but also, its framing up? Who I'm gonna sit at the table with and make some really important decisions, right? And as an extension of that, how much time do we take to do that on boards? Because we might do it on the first meeting of a new council or a new committee, but then we stopped doing that, and then the in the business, right, but what we don't understand is what's motivating someone to think, in this particular way. What are the unseen values or the meaning behind some of these discussions that are important to understand before we make decisions on behalf of others that we haven't given space to? So when I talk about that cultural governance system is what we'll that the Indigenous governance Institute has on its website, but you know, for me, it's a really good framing thing because it does talk about law and meanings and symbols and totems and all of those sorts of things that when you're making decisions about particular habitats that impact an animal that might be someone's tone. Well, that's going to require a different conversation and some different engagement about that want to honour what the intention of governing for the betterment of the organisation or community that you're sitting there for, then that means respecting us and hearing and creating space for that.

Helga Svendsen 25:25

I want to turn to if I can, the role of women in Indigenous governance Boards on Boards is the series about women in governance in this continent, we now call Australia and the post colonial chapters have all been about women on boards tell me in indigenous governance, what's the role of women? How does that play out?

Michelle Deshong 25:43

Well, again, I think it goes back to the fundamental principles of matriarchal or patriarchal societies, though that in of itself will already define a level of responsibility, or authority, depending on that circumstance, but even still, in all of my travels around the world, and they have been quite extensive into other First Nations communities. The reality is that women are the majority of the decision makers. But the interesting thing is that they might not be the ones at the board table. So again, this westernized governance model will see lots of men having so called leadership responsibility. But in actual fact, it might be the clan mothers, or the matriarchs of that particular family line that are inevitably the people who have control. And I think that that's really important, because we are also seeing a shift back. So as I talk about recombination of cultural governance, there's a shift back as well to reclaiming women's space, in politics and in governance. And I think those two things are acutely connected, in many ways. And there's this terminology that we're sort of using at the moment, but there's been a feminization of indigenous leadership. Because for a long time, even through feminist movements, we were marginalised out of the process, we were getting on with it. But it was a much more difficult conversation, even when gender equality was being discussed. And the waves of feminism were trying to tackle all of the discrepancies and marginalisation. The reality is, for a lot of Indigenous women, we were still on the margins of that was the too hard basket. But I do think in the last 30 to 40 years, we have seen a phenomenal transition by women taking on many of those governing and political roles again. And actually, just recently, here in North Queensland, there was a workshop a few months ago, held in Cairns, and it was sort of supporting women in governance and inviting a lot of the women from the local councils, right. So we've got a lot of the discreet communities remote communities up here. And it was really wonderful to be in that room and see the number of women that were on those councils, and also the number of women that were holding the chair roles. So this is a big shift from 12 years ago, when we had a situation where nearly all of those regional councils were 100% male. So I think women have been silently manoeuvring, getting our ducks in a row or whatever it is, but doing all of the work that's necessary to then be able to stand as equals in a lot of these election processes. But also, I think we just know, generally that women make better leaders, better decision makers, better politicians, because we're more inclusive, right. And so from a cultural standpoint, that holds very true. And so the role of women has always been at the forefront of our communities. But I think more so now we're seeing many more women participating in really high levels of governance, both in our models, but also in other places and spaces.

Helga Svendsen 28:56

Historically, it's not been women necessarily in the boardroom, however, that boardroom is kind of made up whether it's called a boardroom or otherwise, because the women are just out there getting on with it. They're not necessarily fussed about who's there. And as you say, Now, I would say quietly, organising in the background and getting things sorted so that they can hold those positions of both. How would I put it? It's the authority power and the soft power. It's those things coming together. In a way.

Michelle Deshong 29:23

Yeah, look, I think the other thing that's really important to think about now is our point in time, right? We are on a precipice of change. Now, unfortunately, some of the change that we've advocated strongly for has not necessarily come to fruition. But despite that, if I just kind of take a step back to thinking about acting as sovereign peoples in governance, right, that at the end of the day, we might have to comply with certain regulations, but the way we do our business, the way that we act as sovereign people the way that we decide on our priorities is a really important foundation for us to be coming into this precipice of change. Right. So if I think about treaty, for example, treaty negotiations in different states and territories are taking on various models, but regardless of any of that governance is going to be at the heart of what successful negotiation looks like. But also important organisation. Beyond the day, you know, you make the agreement right. Now, for a lot of our communities, that is a fundamental process that we probably haven't spent the time doing. So we now are recognizing that we need to get our stuff in order, we need to understand what we want it to look like a sovereign peoples, and we need to act accordingly. And what that means is, I'm not going to be beholden to a government agenda, that takes me down a road that isn't a priority for my nation, and that people need to be comfortable in asserting that kind of sovereign decision making based on that collective modelling that we were talking about before. And that some of the stuff in the Churchill fellowship because I also did a Fulbright, prior to the Churchill, which was based in Arizona and at the Native Nations Institute. And this concept of nation building is something that Native Americans have been doing for 40 years. And I feel like we're catching up on what some of the principles of that are right? Now, some of it is different, because jurisdictions are different. But when we talk about sovereignty by stealth, in some ways, is start to act as sovereign nations because that's what we're actually asking to be able to do once we negotiate a treaty, right, we come to the table as equals. But in saying that it also helps us to think about economic viability beyond the reliance on government, for example. Now, that takes important leadership and intentional decision making, to be able to invest in things that are aligned with the priorities of the community and not aligned with what, as I say, governments might want us to do. And again, that's one of the places that we are seeing many women participating very strongly and leading some of that work. And we've got some fantastic academics in this country that have done a lot of work around that as well. So this is the, from the global to the local, and back again, what do we learn as First Nations people around the world and the commonality comes straight back to this cultural governance, community responsibility, investment in generation or features, and protections of land and sea country? So those things are very important and why we've got to keep our eye very clearly on those things.

Helga Svendsen 33:01

Michelle, I knew this would be such an amazing yet broad conversation, a catch all question, what should I have asked you that I haven't?

Michelle Deshong 33:10

I think one of the things well, I've talked a lot about the ideology of cultural governance, my experience in many governing roles has been varied, frustrating, challenging, inspiring, and brings me joy. I'm one of these crazy people that I think governance is interesting, right? And I'm kind of I go, I go, Oh, my God, I got a whole group of people in the room for two days. And all I got to do is sit down and listen to me talk about governance. But importantly, I want to turn the governance conversation into one that governance shouldn't feel like a burden. Governance should be exciting, because you're making a really valuable contribution to stuff that's important. But I'd be lying if I didn't say this, the boards I've sat on that absolutely have made me feel like a burden. So I want to sign up to this right, the frustration, and I guess some of that is partly because of the skill set around the room. And I think this is one of the things that we have to be honest, probably one of the biggest threats to any organisation is in fact the board. Anything else in the organisation, we set out a job description, and we go through a bit of a vetting process and we kind of go Yeah, you'd be well suited or these things might need to be addressed. But we don't do that in governance. I mean, yes, obviously, there's a bit of a process sometimes. But really, when you're talking about community and not for profit sectors and others, it's people who want to be involved in something because they feel really connected to it. But in the process, you're almost dragging them along with the process, rather than them being able to feel fully informed about the process. So part of that goes to the skill set the induction, the questions we ask of people before they join a board, because one bad board experience can actually take in for a whole lot of others that might come up, then I think the other thing is probably my inability to say no. So at some point in my life, I've probably held five or six board roles at the same time. And again, for all those reasons. And that's been challenging, because even though we say I'd only have six meetings, or whatever, a year, the reality of investment of time that you have to put into that we've really got to be truthful about. And then finally, probably the other insight, and again, I guess it speaks to the very topic I've talked about here is in a lot of ways, and on many occasions, I've been the only indigenous person on a board. And that has its own challenges. One about the oscillation, of trying to constantly articulate a cultural governance, intention, and to ask people to think differently about their governance with that lens, but also to, again, this kind of ideology that, you know, I would frame it as Whitefella governance is the best, right AICD course. Because once you've done that, you're so good at governance. And I like to remind people that Indigenous people have been doing this way longer. We have amazing examples of Indigenous cultural excellence in governance. In fact, we have Indigenous governance awards, we recognise that all the time, and yet we are still seen as not as good as and me it goes back to that kind of education piece and constantly having to remind people that that way, is not the only way. And that so much can be gained from having insight from other perspectives, and which is why we advocate so strongly for diversity on boards, right? So I'm talking as an indigenous woman, but equally, having the diversity on the boards of the community, or the organisation you represent, is absolutely imperative to their currency, but also the successful outcomes as a result. So yeah, my governance journey has been a very interesting one. So I recommend I could write a book on all of the interesting, and I say interesting, very loosely, but all of the interesting governance opportunities I've had in my lifetime.

Helga Svendsen 37:31

Oh, my God, I have no doubt you could write a book and please let us know when you do. Like I said earlier, at the top of the episode about when I was hunting around or fishing around for women to speak to about Indigenous governance, all of the, you're going to talk to Michelle Deshong, you've got to talk to Michelle Deshong, everybody kept saying and hearing some of those reflections there about, you're a bit of a governance geek, but you want to make governance interesting and fun. Woman after our own heart, you're a woman that finds it hard to say no. Well, yeah, that's feels like every woman ever woman after our own heart. And thinking about being able to really, it's gonna say value Indigenous governance. But even as those words come out of my mouth, that almost sounds a bit patronizing as well. And it's absolutely not meant to be I think it's about yeah, Western governance is not the be all and end all. It's just another form of governance. And what would happen if we really just brought together the best of governance, wherever it came from? And all of the evidence is diverse groups make better decisions. So what would it look like if we really brought that into play? And if we were really making collective decisions, all of those things? It would be stronger governance all around?

Michelle Deshong 38:39

Agreed. I'm just not sure they'd probably read a whole book about it.

Helga Svendsen 38:44

The Take on Board community would we're here for you.

Michelle Deshong 38:49

Absolutely true. We hear these in many ways, but but I think if I said what's the three key kind of takeaways from my messages today would be just as we began, that governance is not a foreign concept to Indigenous people. And in fact, our history would tell us we've been doing it better than anybody else anywhere, for longer and with greater success. The other thing is that I think the inclusion and the recognition of Indigenous women in politics and governance and leadership is on the rise. And that that will only continue to create opportunities for Indigenous representation on boards and committees. And importantly, I think we'll also see more Indigenous people on the boards of ASX companies and all of that sort of stuff because our governance isn't just about one sector or one piece of work but it it has developed into a very broad and capable kind of remit for many Indigenous women. And then probably the last thing is, again, governance like everything else, continues to evolve and change. But we always have to remember what we're there for. Right? Why don't we sit around the table? And who do we sit around the table with? We get those couple of things, right? Then governance in all its forms, does what it needs to do. And that's the part that I get really excited about when I run governance workshops and things because a lot of people will kind of go, you know, what, what governance, but then you start to, okay, each of you tell me what the

vision of the organisation that he told me what you, you know, like, and then you started going, oh, so actually, there's this collaboration point that we need to kind of make sure that everybody focuses in on to get the best off people's time, but also to use their expertise in a way that's most valuable to their governing roles.

Helga Svendsen 40:49

One final thing, is there a resource that you would like to share with a take on board community? I mean, hopefully, in years to come, there will be the Michelle Deshong book of governance, at the moment that's not available. So is there a resource or some resources you would like to share with the take on board and the boards on boards community about indigenous governance and the role of women in Indigenous governance?

Michelle Deshong 41:10

I think there's a quite a few resources out there, certainly between Reconciliation Australia and Indigenous Governance Institute that there are the toolkit and other fact sheets. But I'll also be happy to share with you a couple of different articles that have been written research and stuff. And of course, you know, share wildly my Churchill report or anything like that. But yeah, I'm certainly happy to provide some resources.

Helga Svendsen 41:35

Fantastic. Well, we will make sure links to all of those resources are in the show notes. And in the chapter fact sheet that will go along with this, which will be on the website as well. I'm Michelle, thank you. Thank you so much for taking the time to share and to contribute to this special series of so enjoyed our conversation. I've learned an enormous amount and I have no doubt that others are listening in as well. So thank you for taking the time. Great.

Michelle Deshong 42:00

Thanks for having me.

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