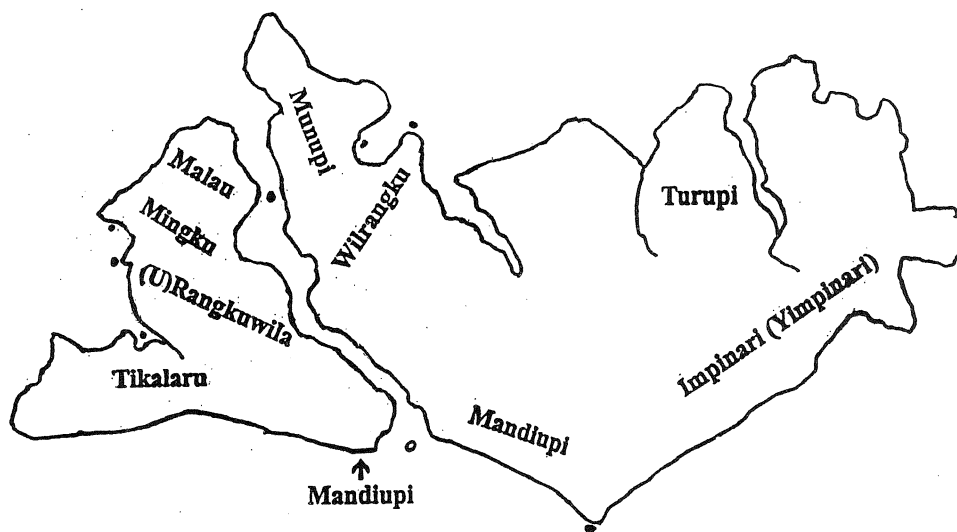


Islanders or Bathurst Islanders, terms that were popularly used well into the 1960s. As for their homeland, the nearest to a vernacular name the Tiwi have for Bathurst and Melville Islands is “*Ratuati Irara*”, which means “two islands”.

The long period of isolation led to the evolving of a social structure which is, in a number of ways, different to those of other tribal groupings. In contrast with mainland groups, the Tiwi community lacks moiety and section structures. Their kinship system is uniquely developed, certain aspects of it not conforming with the mainland patterns. They introduced terms into their system to overcome potential confusion caused by their marriage system.<sup>17</sup> While Aboriginal groups traditionally maintained a strict marriage system operating within an inflexible kinship structure, Tiwi rules varied. Islander law required that all females must be married, no matter their age, physical condition, and attitude to marriage, a requirement not existing in mainland tribes.<sup>18</sup> As a result, there was a higher proportion of plural marriages among the Islanders than on the mainland.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Tiwi were the only Australian indigenous people to allow marriage between half-brothers and half-sisters. This practice was still evident as recently as the 1960s. The Tiwi marriage arrangement was such that in their polygamous society some men were able to build up their prestige and standing by obtaining a larger number of wives than was possible on the mainland. Hart records three elders who late in the nineteenth century had 29, 25 and 22 wives respectively, while in the 1930s, there were a number of men with 10 to 12 spouses each.<sup>20</sup> In the 1960s, a man on Bathurst Island was known to have had at least 15 wives, although some were by then deceased.



MAP 4

THE TIWI BANDS OR POLITICAL SUB-DIVISIONS  
(as in anthropological and wider use.)

**Note:**  
The sub-divisions as shown on this map were recorded by Hart in 1928-29, and have been also used by later anthropologists and linguists with occasional slight variations.