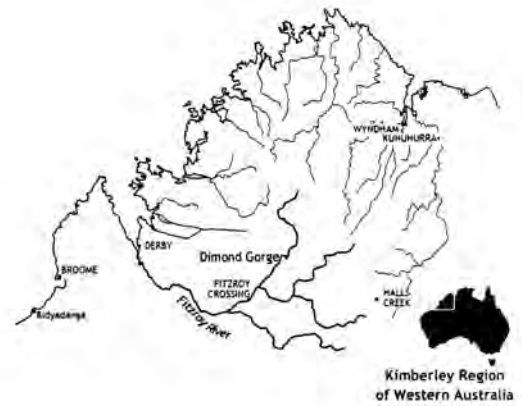




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**Bulletin 51 • Sept 2009**

# THE DIRT ON THE SPILL

Since 21 August, gas and oil condensate have been gushing into the Timor Sea from the West Atlas rig, about 250km off the Kimberley coast. The Federal Minister for the Environment says that between 300-400 barrels of oil is escaping each day and NASA satellite imagery shows the spill to have spread over 15,000 sq km. Journalists and other observers describe it as a national emergency and one of the largest oil leaks in Australia's history. The spill's contribution to the atmosphere of greenhouse gasses can only be guessed at.

Within days of the disaster occurring, environmental organisations were calling for a judicial inquiry into its causes — the Thai-based owner, PTTEP, has so far been unable to provide any explanation — and the company's rescue plans.

A main concern was that PTTEP, with the approval of the Australian Government, chose to deploy a drill rig that had to be towed from Singapore, rather than a local one, resulting in a three-week wait before efforts could begin to plug the leak. Further delays were caused by towing problems, and PTTEP has announced that it will take at least 4-7 weeks of drilling before the leak can be capped.

Meanwhile, high-grade detergents known as dispersants are being used to 'clean up' parts of the slick, which is moving towards the coastline. These substances are highly toxic, with potentially devastating effects on marine animals and plants.

In recent days, oil industry insiders have contacted EK to say the disaster probably occurred because the West Atlas rig was not equipped with a blow-out protector, which could have prevented the oil slick, and that similar accidents could occur at other wells.

The Australian Government response to the emergency, in particular the lack of clear and reliable information about the size, rate of flow, location and spread of the spill, the response plan, and the extent of environmental monitoring, including the current and likely damage to marine life, has been seriously inadequate.

All of this again raises questions that EK and others have been asking since the 500-litre oil spill off the Broome coast in July 2009.

In that case, the Broome Port Authority was notified of an accident on the afternoon of 17 July but did not respond until the following day, reportedly because it does not have a 24-hour accident response strategy. By the time action was taken, the spill could not be located, and 12 days later, thick globules of oil were washed up along 7km of beaches from Cable to Reddell.

A clean-up was undertaken by local authorities, businesses and residents. Community members helped to mobilise Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), which was then contracted by the Port Authority for a morning's work. This is the first time CVA has assisted in such an operation, probably because of the risks. The Port Authority is now seeking reimbursement of \$35,000 from the insurers of the Belgian-owned ship, 'Devon'.

With Woodside's plan to put a rig over Scott Reef, together with the 700% increase in sea traffic along the Kimberley coast over the past two years and the Port Authority's forecast of a doubling again over the next two if the Browse hub proceeds, the Kimberley and wider community have good reasons to worry.

The inquiry into the West Atlas accident, which the Federal Government has now agreed to, could provide a forum for such concerns to be raised.

Both accidents have led to demands for improvements to contingency plans so that spills are responded to more speedily. These plans must be publicly released.

EK and other environment organisations are lobbying for more reliable and detailed information to be made available about responses to accidents and how the effects of spills on marine life are monitored and assessed.

EK supports calls for regulatory reform. At present it is rare for companies to face prosecution if they report accidents, and their insurers are left to cover the costs of the clean-ups. This has not stopped furious commercial fishermen from threatening PTTEP with legal action.

Above all, a moratorium on oil and gas developments must be declared to enable the Kimberley community to be consulted and make informed decisions about the future of the region.





## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

*Welcome to our September newsletter and a change of season. I for one look forward to the higher temperatures, which signal the start of a new growing season and many pleasurable hours in the garden.*

Premier Barnett continues to extol the values of natural resources, especially in the Kimberley. In the last month alone resource companies have expressed interest in mining coal at Liveringa and bauxite on the Mitchell Plateau. A gas plant at Price's Point will only be the thin edge of the wedge in the Kimberley. I think a timely reminder of the short cuts mining companies will take in the quest for the almighty dollar is the oil spill in the Timor Sea and the length of time it is taking for their Emergency Response Plan to come into effect. And a viewing of the Exxon Valdez disaster on the ABC recently should be more than enough to make us wary.

At a recent Committee meeting we were lucky enough to hear Fiona Bishop to give a detailed presentation on the Seagrass Monitoring Project. The valuable work carried out by Fiona and her band of dedicated volunteers assists in the gathering of scientific data, which can be added to the body of evidence building against the construction of a gas plant. I expect many of you attended the Gas Plant Forum held at BRACs on 17 and 18 September, and learnt more about the proposal and our reasons for opposing it.

Science Week has come and gone and congratulations must go out to Kerry Marvel and Chris Donnan for an extremely successful week. Their choice of guest speakers and event coordinators was superb and it was wonderful to see that all activities were attended by large numbers of enthusiastic and inquisitive participants (you can tell the quality of an event when your children give it the seal of approval.) It's pleasing to know we have so many in the community who wish to be informed about aspects of the environment.

EK is about to see the commencement of an exciting new project, which has the potential to grow our relationships with indigenous organizations and community groups whilst at the same time carrying out highly important conservation work. Having seen the success of Louise's Weed Project I have no doubt that in her role as West Kimberley Nature Project coordinator she will continue to set high standards in nature conservation.

The Kimberley seems to be the flavour of the month, and with the recent visit by Chris Ellison's impartial Science and Conservation Strategy committee, Landcorp's Broome North Summit and visits by other VIPs including Dr Lyn Beasley, WA's chief scientist, the EK staff are inundated with requests on top of their daily business. We are extremely fortunate to have such dedicated and competent staff and it's important that our organization continues to support them in any way we can.

Stay informed, get involved, lobby a politician or two and I hope to see you all at our AGM on 31 October!

# Open day shambles at DSD

Following a series of what can only be described as secretive meetings in Broome held in the name of the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of the Browse Basin gas hub development, the Department of State Development (DSD) held an Open half-Day at their offices on Thursday, 17 September.

I was anticipating a poor show, but the reality far exceeded my expectations. We had been promised 'presentations'. About 50 people tried to cram themselves into a tiny room furnished with no more than ten chairs, only to be presented with a rolling DVD of four presentations previously held in Broome for those important enough to have been invited. The first was by a Woodside representative. The information he gave seemed straightforward enough, but he pointed to maps and charts that gleamed blank on our screen. At the end of the rolling film, a member of the audience shouted at the fading image: 'Now can we ask questions?'

The second DVD 'presentation' was about the SIA. We were shown meaningless charts, and at this stage most of us left, moving into one of the adjacent rooms, where human beings stood in corners ready to be quizzed. The corners were held by Woodside, Tourism, DSD. DSD, being responsible for this non-event, attracted the largest crowd. Frustration about the closed-door process had been building for weeks, but these non-presentations were the last insult. People were angry; voices were raised. There was shouting.

Your EK representatives, always ready to engage, attempted to ask questions, but came away without coherent answers, and not only because the interjectors drowned them out. I had been expecting to stay for most of the afternoon but it was clear I was wasting my time, so I left and found something more productive to do.

# DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Kimberley is where it's at right now. The recent articles 'Battle looms over Kimberley development' and 'WA to change the face of the Kimberley' by Paddy Manning in The Age newspaper on August 29 and September 5 illustrate the threats we are facing.

The Premier, Colin Barnett, is quoted as saying WA has always been driven by big projects: 'Just as the Pilbara was critically important to the development of WA from the '60s, over the next 50 years the Kimberley will play a similar role.'

It is exactly this frontier mentality that has led to unsustainable, dysfunctional communities and environmental and cultural destruction in the Pilbara. It is last-century thinking, a lazy vision devoid of imagination and care for social, economic, cultural and environmental justice at a time when the world faces unprecedented environmental threats affecting all of us. It is not Environs Kimberley's vision for the Kimberley.

Matters we are dealing with now include Browse LNG, Rey Resources' coal-mining proposals for the Fitzroy Valley, the West Atlas oil spill, Broome North, and uranium mining. We are also engaging with the Commonwealth on setting up significant marine sanctuaries.

The recent flurry of activity in Broome on Browse and the Social Impact Assessment has highlighted the government's anti-democratic consultation processes, which flout their own civic engagement guidelines for transparency and trust. Several 'workshops' have been held in Broome with selected stakeholders. Questions asked in Parliament have failed to reveal who attended these meetings and how 'stakeholders' were identified. EK was not invited to any meetings and we know of other key groups that were not on the list. With the government



The West Atlas oil rig is still leaking tonnes of oil into the Timor Sea.

as proponent for the Browse we would expect the highest standards of consultation and accountability; instead, we have seen a heavily biased process.

The West Atlas oil spill has been a significant recent event, with hundreds if not thousands of tonnes of oil polluting the Timor sea and an unknown quantity of gas emitted into the atmosphere. We are concerned about the impacts of the oil and dispersant on marine ecosystems in that rapidly expanding area, including threatened species of turtles, whales, dolphins and fish. The difficulty in getting information on the spill from the Federal Government has also been a serious concern, along with the playing down of the significance of the spill by both governments.

On a more positive note, EK has received confirmation of funding from Rangelands WA for our new West Kimberley Nature Project, which will take a holistic approach to looking after Monsoon Vine Thickets and wetlands in the Dampierland bioregion. This is a really exciting project for EK working in partnership with Traditional Owners.

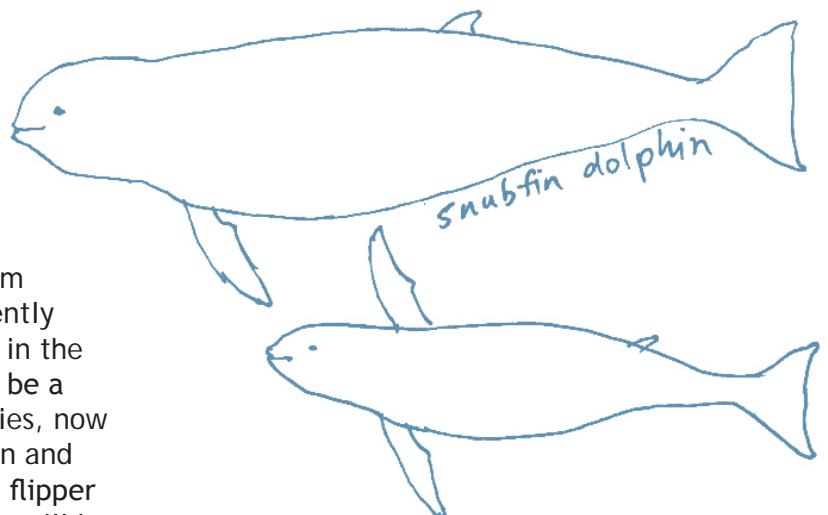
EK welcomes to Broome the new ACF Kimberley campaigner, Paul Marshall, and we look forward to continuing our longstanding working relationship with ACF.

Our AGM will be held on 31 October and I encourage you to think about how you might be involved with EK for the next year.

Martin Pritchard

## snubfin dolphins

*Orcella heinsohni* – the snubfin dolphin – is an extraordinary marine mammal that is endemic to Australia and the first new species of dolphin to be discovered in 56 years. This shy, bulbous-nosed creature is found only in warm shallow waters in northern Australia and is currently the subject of much-needed research right here in the Kimberley. The snubfin was originally thought to be a southern member of the Irrawaddy dolphin species, now critically endangered through habitat destruction and human impact, but it has different skull, fin and flipper measurements. What was that, Colin? No wildlife will be harmed in the establishment of a gas hub?



# bird notes

It's great when you can see an unusual bird without binoculars or telescope, and even better when it is right here at Town Beach. An albino Silver Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*) has been seen at Town Beach on several occasions and in Roebuck Bay during August and early September. It is distinguished from the regular Silver Gulls by its all white plumage and pale pink legs and bill.

Many migratory waders have made the long journey back to Roebuck Bay and Cable Beach, some still wearing the remnants of their reddish breeding plumage. Young birds hatched in the Arctic are also arriving, their instincts bringing them here without assistance from the adults: a truly remarkable journey.

September brings Little Curlew to the ovals in Broome before the rains come, when they move inland to freshwater lakes. Dollar Birds will also arrive. They nest in hollow trees and are great insect hunters.

Male Great Bower Birds are very inventive when decorating their bower to show the females what a great mate they will make. I have had several reports over the last two years of them pinching shiny things, such as washers and broken green glass, from building sites.

If you haven't yet got your copy of 'The Life and Tides of Roebuck Bay', I urge you to contact Broome Bird Observatory to get one. This is a great DVD, demonstrating how important Roebuck Bay is.

Pied Oystercatchers have been nesting on Cable Beach and at Coconut Wells, but unfortunately no chicks have survived more than two weeks. Many eggs at Coconut Wells have been predated by a feral cat(s). Talking of beaches, please be aware of our wildlife. Red Cap Plovers nest in small scrapes at the high water mark, and the eggs are easily trodden on. Turtles too will be coming to lay soon. Please, no lights at night and no vehicles.

Keep your eyes and ears open and your dogs under control on the beach. Happy birding and wildlife watching.

Liz Rosenberg

agm

EK ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Saturday  
31 October 2009  
3.00 pm**

Lotteries House  
Cable Beach Rd Broome

Light refreshments provided.

We are seeking new  
committee members.

To contact the office for more  
information, call Christine on:  
9192 1922

**ALL WELCOME!**

## thank you

to our (mostly local) photographers who have been VERY generous in supplying us with eye-catching images for our informational material. We would especially like to thank: Rod Hartvigsen, Annabelle Sandes, Nigel Gaunt, Deb Thiele, Josh Coates, Martin Pritchard and Marguerite Tarzia.

Congratulations to Damian Kelly for winning the 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the People and Planet Diary photo competition and for raising awareness of the LNG threat. This Social Justice & Environment diary will be on sale at the EK stall or in the EK office very soon.

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# WETLAND WONDER

Ephemeral water systems (lakes, marshes, swamps, wetlands) are so called for their cycle of filling and drying with the seasons. These areas are important habitats for a host of plants and animals – some of which may not survive without this water.

The Society for Kimberley Indigenous Plants and Animals (we're a local group of native plant enthusiasts) went chasing ephemeral lakes in the central Dampier Peninsula recently. We started east of Beagle Bay. A short walk through tall dry cane grass, startling a family of quail and a few donkeys on the way, revealed a wetland wonderland.

Creamy flowered marshworts speckled the silvery water, grasses and herbs thrived, paperbarks and freshwater mangroves were in bloom, while the air hummed with insects and bird-song. The claypan was alive. And by looking closely you could find tiny treasures growing in the spongy ground.

Peppered through the grass were delicate flowers, which looked as if they had escaped from an English meadow but in fact were deadly hunters; *Byblis liniflora* and *Drosera petiolaris* have sticky leaves perfect for catching and digesting insects. Another treasure was the pretty *Nymphoides beaglensis*, an aquatic marshwort, which can be found only at waterholes close to Beagle Bay.

The next lake we visited was much more substantial and permanent. It was as big as a footy field. At first glance it was as green and grassy as one and in a trompe l'oeil it looked as if

small sheep were grazing too. It turned out to be a lake of grassy water chestnut, with grey-blue waterlilies above the green!

It didn't take long for a few keen SKIPAs to pull off shoes and socks and wade into the cool clear water to a chorus of Red-Tailed Black Cockatoos and flocks of ducks.

River red gums, complete with tide marks, some with unusual aerial roots, paperbarks and Freshwater Mangrove *Lophostemon grandiflorus* dominated the lake edge, along with Nardoo (*Marsilea mutica*), a fern masquerading as a four-leaf clover, which enjoys wet spots.

This area would have been very important to Aboriginal people living off the land, as well as to animals, during the hot dry season, as it offers both refuge and sustenance.

We visited another two seasonal wetlands and enjoyed identifying the range of trees and small plants. The sheer volume of water still around at this time of year surprised us.

Donkeys are clearly prevalent in this region, judging by the amount of dung and number of animals we saw. Further south, towards Nillabubicca, wetland systems accessible to cattle showed significant signs of hoof damage. Some SKIPAs members expressed concern about the damage feral pigs would cause in these fragile wetlands – not to mention the Cane Toad.

In a few months, all that will remain of some of these wetlands will be dry grass and cracked earth, but when the rains arrive they'll burst into life again, continuing a cycle that's been unbroken for centuries.

Vanessa Mills



# CLIMATE CHANGE INQUIRY BY THE FEDS

The House of Representatives team conducting an Inquiry into Climate Change and Environmental Impacts on Coastal Communities came to Broome in August, and Environs Kimberley was there.

Martin and Louise gave strong, well-informed presentations and answered questions as if they knew what they were talking about: as of course they do. Pat had a walk-on role.

After we had introduced EK and explained our role in the Kimberley, Martin briefly described the Kimberley environment and what it is we are trying to protect, pointing out that so little of it is under statutory protection. He went on to describe the existing threats.

We then discussed the likely effects of climate change and rising sea levels on our coast: higher rainfall leading to more plant growth, increased fuel loads and more intense fires, more erosion and more run-off into Roebuck Bay bringing increased nutrients, which in turn cause toxic algal blooms; changes in habitat for plants and animals; unpredictable effects on offspring of reptiles such as crocs and turtles, whose gender is determined by temperature; increase in feral species and disease; loss of turtle nesting places; saltwater intrusion into our freshwater wetlands and endangered remnant monsoonal rainforests;

saltwater intrusion into rivers such as the Fitzroy; retreat of mangroves up the estuary and in Roebuck Bay as sea level rises, with the need for space in which new mangrove populations can become established (ie no coastal or near-coastal development).

Besides these direct threats, there are indirect ones from pressure to establish broadscale agriculture as it fails in the south, and from growth of the human population in an area already growing several times faster than the national average.

Although the gas hub was not part of the House of Reps team's brief, we had been asked to comment on it. Amongst other things, Martin talked about the flaws in the strategic assessment process and the absurdity of putting out the environmental reports in January with only 28 days to comment on 69 reports consisting of thousands of pages.

At the end of the presentations the Chair, Jenny George, congratulated EK on our informed presentations, as well she might. As board member, I felt proud of our two staff members, who acquitted themselves so well.

The above is but a brief outline of what was discussed. We have the uncorrected proofs of our discussion, sent to us before it all gets filed in Hansard, so in the unlikely event that someone wants the detail, give one of us a call.

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## SCIENCE WEEK SCHOOL COMPETITION

### why I love the river!

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CATEGORY 1:

Yakanarra Community School—Upper Primary/Sec Class: \$500

Kulkarriya Community School— Upper Primary Class: \$500

CATEGORY 2:

Fitzroy Crossing District High School — Years 4-7

Crocodile Literacy Class: \$300

Jungdranung Remote School— Room Two Class: \$300



National Science Week, now in its 12th year, is an annual nationwide celebration of Australian achievements and capabilities in science. It aims to increase community awareness and understanding of the role of science, engineering, technology and innovation in maintaining and improving our society, economy and the environment. Environs Kimberley has been hosting Science Week in Broome since 2006, when Broome Shire gave us a \$1000 grant.

## along the river's edge...

This year we focussed on the Fitzroy River, one of the most important and relatively intact free-flowing rivers in Western Australia.

For National Science Week in Broome we held three distinct events. Firstly, we had an interactive display at the Courthouse markets intended to appeal to a younger audience. This was hugely popular, and several hundred people actively took part. Mark Pager, a specialist science teacher from Cable Beach Primary School, provided excellent science-based activities for both young and old. Peter Croll, an expert snake handler, had the crowd aghast and linguist of Nyikina, Colleen Hattersley, told traditional ecological stories from the Fitzroy River country.

Secondly, a vibrant display about the Fitzroy was set up for four days in an empty shop at the Boulevard. Thirteen science classes from Broome Senior High School and members of the general public were able

to develop information about the river and its ecosystems and discuss career options in science. Dr David Morgan and Dr Steve Beatty from Murdoch University Centre for Fish and Fisheries Research joined us for this week, and were most inspiring and approachable. Each class had the opportunity to age a Barramundi by examining the growth rings in its ear bone under a microscope, and identify the Fitzroy fish fauna with the Fitzroy Fishing Fun game. There was a great deal of positive feedback, even from high school students, who can be quite taciturn.

Lastly, a weekend event was held on the banks of the Fitzroy River at Udialla Springs, which allowed people to experience the river first hand.

All in all, 'Along the River's Edge' was very successful and exceeded our expectations. Many thanks to all involved, and see you at Science Week 2010!

Kerry Marvell and Chris Donnan



### Udialla Springs Oongkalkada wilderness camp

As part of National Science Week, 28 intrepid people were lucky enough to spend a weekend on country at the Udialla Springs Oongkalkada wilderness camp. Our Nyikina guide, Neville Poelina, began the tour with a traditional smoking ceremony, using the leaves and wood of the Gungkara (*Carissa lanceolata*) tree. The smoke has a cleansing power and helped us to connect with the country we were visiting. Neville provided many insights to the traditional knowledge of his country, and he and his family opened our eyes to many easily overlooked facets of the mighty Fitzroy — Freshwater Sawfish, huge goannas, Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens and fossils. We also enjoyed freshly cooked catfish.

Wildlife Coordinator Phil Palmer, from the KLC Land & Sea Management Unit, conducted macroinvertebrate and fish sampling workshops and gave a most illuminating fireside talk. He had the kids and adults enthralled sorting, observing and identifying the samples, with the aim of producing a baseline species list for Udialla. The time spent on the river was a highlight for everyone there. Relaxing in the cool, clean water and an amazingly peaceful ambience made it difficult to leave.

# celebrating the mighty Fitzroy!

# COMMUNITY FORUM ON BROWSE

On Friday September 18th and Saturday 19th, Broome Shire finally came good and put on their Community Forum at BRAC, which had been postponed for six months as directed by the State Government.

All players held stalls for two days, including Woodside, the Department of State Development (DSD), Chamber of Commerce and others on the dark side, KLC and environmental groups including Save the Kimberley, Wilderness Society, EK.

The first day was a bit of a fizzer, with almost no one there besides the stall holders. Saturday was different, especially for the two hours of presentations. In contrast with the so-called presentations at DSD on Thursday, these were given by real people, some more real than others. We began with a stirring Welcome to Country from Doris Edgar and her daughter Di Appleby. Then Woodside told us what they are planning to do (see previous editions of the Newsletter and Gasbag), the Port and Airport explained how we will all benefit from the huge increase in population and traffic, aerial and sea-borne, and Chamber of Commerce explained, somewhat irrelevantly, that

we don't live in the Kimberley at all, but in a newly imagined region known as the Canning Basin. Call it what you will, James Price Point and the rest of the coast is what we are out to protect.

Neil McKenzie's speech on behalf of STK and as a Traditional Owner was superb: with no Powerpoint, no microphone, and no written notes, Neil held our attention with his appeal to preserve his country. In contrast with the State Government's rhetoric about the LNG hub being the saviour of indigenous people, Neil described how white settlement and development had undone his people's culture and brought them to their present pass.

We admit to some bias, but our Director's presentation was sharp, clear and telling, contrasting statements made by our Premier with the facts. Martin received rousing applause.

No public question time was allowed following the presentations; the public was fobbed off with advice to ask questions individually at the booths — not the same thing at all. Nevertheless, we had reason to feel buoyed up at the end of the day.

Much appreciation to Christine and Martin for setting up and running our stall for two long days, and for our volunteers who assisted them.

## MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

### e-mail database

For some months we have been e-mailing our media releases to our membership in order to keep you even more up-to-date with environmental matters. If you haven't received an e-mail from us for some time, and would like to be kept informed more regularly, please send an e-mail to [envrkimb2@westnet.com.au](mailto:envrkimb2@westnet.com.au) and we'll include you in our mailing list.

### newsletter now available electronically

In an effort to reduce paper usage we would like to offer you the option of receiving our newsletter electronically as a .pdf file in full colour. The size of the file is usually around 1 MB. If you would like to accept this offer send an e-mail to [envrkimb2@westnet.com.au](mailto:envrkimb2@westnet.com.au) with 'Yes to Newsletter electronically' in the subject line and include your name and postal address in the body of your e-mail.



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# RUMINATING with MAD COW



## Grasshopping

When I was a Public Servant, each office used to be provided every year with one of those small, free-standing desk calendars that display just one day at a time; the page flips over to reveal the next day underneath. Every day-page has a witty saying inscribed in small print under the large printed number, like a horoscope or a Christmas cracker motto, usually attributed to someone obscure.

Most of the sayings are mildly clever or humorous, while some are 'wise' and others smart-alecky

or disappointingly hackneyed or dull. Even so, I used to read my calendar's motto religiously, and tried to restrict myself to the day's offering and restrain myself from reading ahead.

Just occasionally, one of the sayings, not necessarily brilliant or even original, stayed with me, coming into my mind unbidden from time to time. Here is such a one: 'There are no perfect endings, only perfect moments.'

This, it seems to me, is just as well, since moments are all we have time for nowadays. Often, when you meet someone on the run, so to speak, and say: 'How are you going?' the reply comes: 'I'm getting there!' When you ask where it is they are getting to, they look at you with a puzzled expression for a brief moment before they hurry away, still intent on getting to wherever it might be, leaving the question in the air like a dangling participle. They remind me of the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland, always rushing, always singing: 'I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date. No time to say hello. Goodbye, I'm late, I'm late.'

Not that I'm any different; nowadays, there seems to be a White Rabbit in all of us. Doris Lessing once remarked that the technological world we live in has given us all 'grasshopper minds', whose attention jumps from one thing to

another at every moment: a state the antithesis of meditation. Even as I write I hear a 'ping!' from my computer, announcing the arrival of a new email; excuse me while I read it.

Occasionally, I spot someone in the street who seems not to be suffering from the grasshopper disease. I am not talking about tourists, who may be caught in a moment of repose between their flitting from attraction to attraction. I am talking about the hobos, the alkies, the mentally ill. They have their own dramas, but at least they have time to attend to them. Their freedom from immersion in the virtual e-world can seem enviable and it isn't always evident which of us is mad.

The Irish have a saying: 'We had the two days.' Two days may be a bit much to expect but before we all go up in smoke, let's make the most of the moments we do have: the silver sea framed in mangroves, seen through the window of our moving car; the kindness of a stranger; the shock of the full moon rising red over the sea; a glimpse of Price's Point as we may never see it again.



## and the winners are...

### *Congratulations to our winners of the Annual Environs Kimberley Raffle*

A crowd gathered at our market stall on Saturday 13 September to see who would win the fabulous prizes that had been generously donated by Broome businesses.

1<sup>st</sup> prize: Jill Green, Broome, ticket no. 218, won the amazing photographic print of Price's Point, donated by Red Dirt Photography

2<sup>nd</sup> prize: Marg Pearce, Broome, ticket no. 663, won Earth Garden Sustainable Living Books, donated by Earth Garden

3<sup>rd</sup> prize: Annemarie Poston, Beaumaris VIC, ticket No. 72, won a solar shower and Waeco torch, donated by Kimberley Camping&Outback Supplies.

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# THANK YOU

to the businesses who  
donated the prizes and to  
all participants for your  
continued support of  
Environs Kimberley.



# THE JOYS OF WATCHING GRASS GROW

Monitoring seagrass around Broome

Seagrass monitoring really does have a lot going for it: the rejuvenating stroll in the fresh ocean air across the luminous, sparkling tidal flats, the gorgeous soft pink-orange sunrises, the sense of wonder at the bizarre and beautiful fauna in our quadrats, and the delight at seeing the first patches of seagrass. There is also a great sense of satisfaction in learning the methodology, and in knowing that our efforts have made an important contribution to protecting our seagrass through a scientifically robust monitoring project.

Perhaps the joy of monitoring is why we saw record numbers of enthusiasts signing up for our recent Seagrass-Watch Community Training Workshop, designed to build the capacity of participants to monitor this precious resource. We had a fun and fascinating time learning about seagrass biology & identification, conducting laboratory exercises identifying seagrass and practising preparing seagrass press specimens. We also learned about seagrass ecology and threats, and were given a comprehensive presentation about Seagrass-Watch methodology. From 6am the next day, after a lovely breakfast of freshly baked muffins & coffee to wake us up (fast becoming a Broome Seagrass Project tradition), we walked out to the Town Beach monitoring site at Roebuck Bay for fieldwork practice, where WIN TV also turned up to capture the event

for a positive community interest story on the nightly news.

I would like to extend a special thank-you to the two ranger groups from the Peninsula who made the effort of travelling to Broome to attend the training — the KLC Bardi Jawi Rangers and the KRCI Djarindjin Rangers. I'm also grateful to Department of Environment and Conservation's Sharon Ferguson who helped organise the event, and to Seagrass-Watch scientists Len McKenzie and Rudi Yoshida, who travel the world delivering this important training, and who ran a very professional and impressive workshop for us here in Broome.

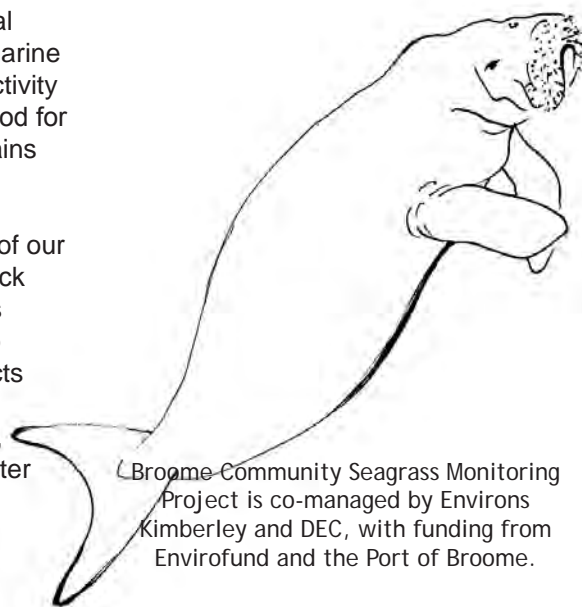
Speaking of grateful, I am delighted to announce that our Community Seagrass Monitoring Project has recently been granted another year's funding from Coastwest; the Port of Broome will also kindly continue its financial contribution. This support is particularly important in light of new scientific studies showing that seagrass loss globally is accelerating through human impacts such as coastal development, dredging and pollution. We lose a seagrass meadow the size of a football field every thirty minutes. As we all know, without seagrass our oceans are in real trouble. This humble yet vital plant directly supports 70% of marine life and is valuable to the productivity of coastal fisheries. It is a key food for turtles and dugongs, and maintains coastal water quality and clarity. Seagrass is recognised as an excellent indicator of the health of our internationally significant Roebuck Bay. While the state of seagrass globally is dire, it's heartening to know that with monitoring projects like ours supported by funders and community volunteers alike, this precious resource has a better chance of being protected and continuing to flourish.

## Broome kids clean up the bay

Congratulations to Year 6 St Mary's College students, who collected marine debris from Town Beach in September, as part of international research organised by Tangaroa Blue Ocean Care Society. The students and their teacher, Mr Peter Tresise, collected the debris and analysed it. The results will be used to compare what debris appears in different oceans around the world. This will help people see what they can do to reduce rubbish entering the waterways.

One student said, 'It's amazing how much debris there is even when it looks very clean!'

**well done & thanks for the great effort**



Broome Community Seagrass Monitoring Project is co-managed by Environs Kimberley and DEC, with funding from Envirofund and the Port of Broome.

# The Life and Tides of Roebuck Bay



Launch of DVD and the Interim Management Guidelines for Roebuck Bay

On 11 August at the Pearl Luggers, the Broome Bird Observatory (BBO) hosted the world premiere of the DVD, *The Life and Tides of Roebuck Bay*, and the new Interim Management Guidelines (IMGs) for Roebuck Bay.

The cool twilight evening started off with nibbles, drinks and conversation for nearly 150 lovers of Roebuck Bay. Nik Ward, the BBO Warden, kicked off the evening's activities by introducing Neil McKenzie, who gave and explained the Welcome to Country and illustrated the importance of the bay from an indigenous perspective.

Chris Hassell then gave a fascinating talk about his recent visit to China to study Red Knots. China's Yellow Sea is a vital migratory stopover point for shorebirds on their 12,000km international flight between Roebuck Bay and their northern breeding grounds. Millions of shorebirds funnel through the Yellow Sea, along the shores of China and North and South Korea, where they rest and fuel up before continuing their flight. Chris and his crew of volunteers search for colour-banded birds along the shore of the Yellow Sea to document migratory paths and survival. Habitat destruction along the coast of the Yellow Sea has displaced some species to less favourable sites, overcrowding the remaining feeding grounds. For example, one small area in the north-west of Bohai Bay has had an increase of 30,000 Red Knot over two to three years. This increase has happened as the surrounding areas

of mudflat were destroyed for development. Fascinated by Chris's research, we went away with an understanding of the importance of international cooperation in conserving the entire flyway used by these special shorebirds.

Tanya Vernes, of WWF Australia, discussed the development of the IMGs, including the collaboration of the members of the Roebuck Bay Working Group (RBWG). The IMGs outline ways in which visitors can minimize their impact on the bay, which so many of us value as ancestral land, shorebird habitat, and a source of livelihood. Tanya highlighted the eight principles of the IMGs, which will form the basis of a community management plan for Roebuck Bay.

Finally, the show we had all been waiting for... *The Life and Tides of Roebuck Bay*! With the backdrop of stunning images of the bay, the film presented the science that explains why the bay is so special for shorebirds and people, and promoted the appreciation and conservation of the bay.

The film is a result of collaboration between the BBO, the RBWG and the Australasian Wader Study Group, supported by many local volunteers. Funding was provided by the Federal Government's Envirofund (now Caring for our Country) and the DVD was beautifully produced by Goolarri Media.

If you would like a copy of the DVD and IMGs for only \$15, please contact the team at the BBO.



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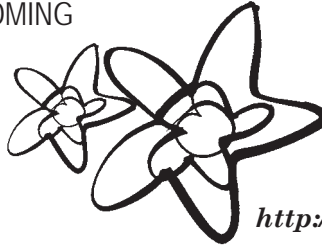
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