

The North-west Marine Region is being assessed by the Federal Government for marine protected areas in Commonwealth waters.

The North-west Marine Region is home to hundreds of species of fish, a coral reef, Beaked, Sperm, Blue and Humpback Whales, and Olive Ridley, Green and Flatback Turtles, all threatened. Several dolphin species live here, and diverse sea-snakes. Seagrass meadows grow around Ashmore Reef, feeding its distinct dugong population. Ashmore and Cartier reefs are staging points for migratory birds and host seabird colonies. This Region, which includes the Kimberley, is as unspoilt as the Arctic and Antarctic.

**Disaster strikes!** On 21 August, the West Atlas oil and gas rig, belonging to Thai-owned PTTEP, began leaking oil and gas into this marine area. The Australian Government made the following statements:

*That slick hasn't grown overnight and the indications are it's either breaking down or evaporating as quickly as it's leaking out of the ocean floor.*

Australian Maritime Safety Authority CEO Graham Peachey (22/08/09)

*Oil seems to be evaporating at the same rate as it is leaking.*

Ms Tracey Jiggins, AMSA (22/08/09)

*That has been contained, it will be treated, and the saving grace is it is over 200 kilometres off our coastline. It will not reach the coastline.*

WA Premier Colin Barnett (22/08/09)

The same day, a worker evacuated from the rig said that in two hours, he "could see the slick had grown to eight kilometres..."

Later Government statements:

*...the oil spill is not as big as first thought ... It (the oil) is evaporating naturally and the work of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) will merely assist in that evaporation.*

Minister for Resources, Energy and Tourism, Martin Ferguson (23/08/09)

*I was able to inspect the impact of the incident personally on Saturday, 29 August as part of a daily aerial inspection that is being undertaken by AMSA. Natural evaporation and weathering is breaking down and dispersing the oil.*

Minister Ferguson (7/09/09)

AMSA eventually reported that oil had spread over 6,000km<sup>2</sup>. Satellite images from NASA on 24 September showed that it may have covered 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> to 25,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

**September — Independent survey** An expedition by WWF Australia to the oil slick in late September found an oily sheen and waxy particles 260km from the Montara oil well, and sea snakes, Sooty Terns, Flatback Turtles and emaciated dolphins swimming in oil. 17 species of seabird, four species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and five marine reptiles, including two species of turtle, were recorded.

# TIMOR SEA

## MARINE WONDERLAND POLLUTED BY OIL

*Oil sheen was present for the majority of the three days of the survey so most animals were likely to have interacted with it to some degree and therefore be at risk of harm from its toxic effects, which may be manifest over long time periods.* WWF

**Government survey** A rapid ten-day survey, commissioned by the Department of Environment Water Heritage and the Arts the day after the WWF expedition set off, found 23 species of birds (2801 individuals), four species of cetaceans (462 individuals, including 100 False Killer Whales), two species of turtle and four species of sea snake.

**October** At a Senate estimates hearing, government officials admitted that the well might be leaking five times the amount estimated by PTTEP—up to 2,000 barrels a day—into the Timor Sea. Other estimates were 3,000 barrels (320,000 litres) a day.

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said the impact on wildlife had not been significant (7/10/09), while Indonesian fishermen reported thousands of dead fish, as well as dead tuna and dolphins in the oil, and complained of a loss of livelihoods.

**November** The fifth attempt to plug the leak succeeded on 3 November, after 10 weeks. At 2,000 barrels a day, more than 22 million litres of oil would have leaked into one of the world's most pristine oceans. The Exxon Valdez, in one of the most devastating human-caused environmental disasters ever to occur at sea, spilled 40 million litres of oil into Prince William Sound. (Mr Garrett's one-time rock group Midnight Oil played an impromptu, illegal concert outside the offices of the company in protest.)

The world has seen a failure to take seriously an environmental disaster in a globally significant marine environment. The incident has shown up the inadequacy of safeguards in an industry that wants access to the most sensitive parts of our oceans. It has also shown how compliant our Government is with this industry.

The only way to ensure our globally significant marine areas are not put at risk is for the Commonwealth and State governments to declare a series of large marine protected areas, with oil and gas exploration off limits.

The final words go to Minister Ferguson:

*...we should also never forget that the nature of the industry is hazardous to the people and the environment when things go wrong.* (7/09/09)



# REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Hello all. Since the release of the last newsletter, much has passed both on the campaign front, with the West Atlas oil spill disaster and the gas hub development in particular, and within EK, with a new Board elected at the AGM, which sees me compiling this report as your new Chairperson.

In the intervening period, the West Atlas rig accident in the Timor Sea became Australia's worst ever oil rig spill.

While the Rudd-Ferguson Government's response was to downplay events and keep a tight rein on what information was made available, the environmental allies mounted an effective campaign to raise awareness about the accident and its effects and to call for action from government and industry, including the establishment of large marine protected areas off the Kimberley coast.

EK played a lead role in monitoring events and providing up-to-date and accurate information to the media and wider community. And, as the spill spread west, Australians began to learn a good deal more through Indonesian and West Timorese media reports.

Martin Pritchard's article in this newsletter provides details about the accident, its effects and the response, including the holding of a government inquiry to find out why the spill happened. It is not yet clear whether or not this will be an open investigation, but EK will assert the public's right to know.

Last month, keen observers packed the public gallery for the first meeting of the new-look Broome Shire Council. Councillor Jenny Bloom, a business woman with an apparent preference for tabling long motions, moved that the Shire Council accept the selection of the James Price Point site and cooperate with the planning processes of the WA Government and Woodside. The item was passed 5 to 3. Shortly afterwards, the Council also approved an application by the Broome Port Authority on behalf of Department of Regional Development to re-zone a large tract of bush reserved as 'environmental and cultural corridor' bordering Reddell Beach, for use as an industrial precinct handling hazardous and toxic chemicals. This move is directly associated with the government's plans to industrialise the Kimberley coast, and will remain under the intense scrutiny of EK and concerned community members.

The latest incarnation of the EK Board was elected at the AGM in October. There are seven new members of a total of 13, and all the office-bearers have changed. Thank you to Andy Chapman for facilitating the event.

One of the first tasks being undertaken by this Board is a review of the Board selection process. Early next year, we will consider a set of recommendations about improving the present approach to nominating members, some of which would entail changes to the constitution. As well, we are examining ways to strengthen the way the Board works with, and supports, staff, including the allocation of portfolios. EK has undergone many changes in its 13 years as the region's peak environment organisation, and these proposals flag a commitment to revise and strengthen its policies and procedures.

Kate Golson

# DIRTY SOCKS, BROKEN THONGS AND THREE BOUQUETS



We have received so many entries this year for our annual Dirty Sock and Broken Thong awards for notable disservice to the environment that the judges stayed up till midnight sifting through them. We don't usually like to reward the same person two years running, but Colin Barnett's entry was again so outstanding we have made an exception. He will now be the proud recipient of the 2009 DSA and bar, which he has earned for his persistence in the folly of industrialising our beloved Kimberley region. Never before have we seen politicians threatening mining companies with the resumption of their leases if they don't make the decision the government wants them to make, ready or not. The Browse Basin joint venture partners have been given four months to choose James Price Point for their LNG processing plant. If they don't? Well, Chinese companies are waiting in the wings...

The Broken Thong award goes to PTPP, for their incompetent handling of the blow-out on their West Atlas oil and gas rig in the Timor Sea, and for their obfuscation of the facts, in which they were ably backed by State and Federal ministers.

This year we have a number of deserving recipients of our virtual bouquets. One goes to Joseph Roe, for his courage and conviction in defending James Price Point against the odds and under great pressure. Neilo McKenzie receives another for his sustained and eloquent efforts to protect country under trying circumstances, and a third bouquet goes to our Director, Martin Pritchard, who has survived his first twelve months with Environs Kimberley and has done a tremendous job, keeping on top of so much bad news and responding to it with commitment and verve.

Congratulations to all our award winners.

## NO BIRDS

Our bird researchers were all too busy to provide us with an article for this edition of our Newsletter. Liz reminds me that bird research continues during all months of the year. Currently she is doing field research into migratory waders, which wisely spend the northern winter here, fattening up for their long return journey to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. This time of the year is a good time to find vagrants in and around the Broome area. Keep your eyes and ears open for strange avian visitors. Report unusual sightings to [bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au)

# Monsoonal Vine Thickets & Wetlands

The West Kimberley Nature Project is managed by Environs Kimberley and funded by Rangelands WA as part of the Caring for our Country Dampierland bioregion program

## The West Kimberley Nature Project

When we started the EK Community Weed project in 2007, I wondered what could be achieved in 12 months. Where to start? No weed could be controlled permanently in such a short time. It was an easy decision to invest strongly in people, partnerships and building the knowledge and skills of on-ground groups.

CWEED was extended for a further 12 months, and after its work with many groups across the Kimberley to identify and control weeds, the project came to a close in July this year.

The West Kimberley Nature Project was born out of the successful work and strong partnerships developed in the CWEED project. WKNP is a two-year project and part of the Rangelands NRM WA, Dampierland Bioregion Program. The Program includes the Roebuck Bay Working Group and Grazing Land Management (DAFWA).

In coordinating WKNP, EK will continue to be a supportive partner for KLC-facilitated Indigenous Ranger Groups and other West Kimberley community groups (SKIPAs), and assist in the planning and implementation of on-ground works. Considerable investment will go to support the fantastic works of indigenous ranger groups through fee-for-service contracts. This is a great way for conservation groups to assist in the development of sustainable employment, and support indigenous groups working on and caring for country.

WKNP will work with Bardi Jawi, Nyul Nyul and Karajarri Rangers to develop and implement management plans for key monsoonal vine thicket patches and wetlands across the Dampierland bioregion. Patches will be selected according to conservation, cultural and community values. At least nine sites will see on-ground activities over the next two years, to conserve the natural and cultural significance of

these assets and manage threats such as fire, weeds and feral species.

There has been a lot of consultation with Traditional Owner Groups, stakeholders and on-ground groups about the development and structure of the project. We have been conducting site visits, choosing priorities and ideas for project sites and activities. We hope that, early next year, the plans will be developed, endorsed by TO groups and ready for contracts to be written for their implementation.

As a support for the project (contrary to popular belief, I am not Superwoman), EK will employ an Indigenous Project Assistant in the new year. Recruitment has begun and interviews will be conducted in mid-December. I can't wait to meet our new team member!

While it's sad to see something end, it is fantastic that we can move on from weeds and work towards more integrated land management. We have visited some amazing places over the last four months and I can't wait till we begin to pull the works together and measure their positive impacts on such special places.

Louise Beames



Wetland – Lake Louisa



## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I've been here in Broome for a year now, and what an interesting one it's been for us all at EK! Once again we've been faced by nationally significant threats to Kimberley. We've been advocating for the protection of our environment on a local, national and international level.

The issues have been surprisingly diverse and include Browse LNG, West Atlas oil spill, vehicles and turtles on the beach in Broome, Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy, oil spill on Cable Beach, Camden Sound Marine Reserve, humpback whales, coal, uranium, GM cotton and climate change. We've managed to get these matters into the Broome Advertiser, The Australian, ABC TV, Living Black, SBS News, Radio National Breakfast and PM, Australian Financial Review, Sky News,

Channel 7, Channel 9, UK Independent, Tagas Anzeiger (Switzerland), WIN TV, GWN, The Age, Sydney Morning Herald and The West Australian. In total we've had more than 100 interviews with the media.

We've also had more than 100 meetings with individuals, non-government organisations, businesses, consultants and local, state and federal governments about our environment. We've highlighted our vision for the Kimberley with 12 members of parliament including the WA Premier, State and Federal Ministers for the Environment, Minister for Water, Federal Minister for Industry and Tourism as well as the Prime Minister.

2010 promises to be highly significant for the Kimberley with some decisions that could affect our environment for generations to come. The Federal

Government's Environment Minister Peter Garrett is expected to make several announcements including a decision on whether Browse Basin gas can come ashore at a new industrial port and processing facility at James Price Point, National Heritage listing and marine parks for Commonwealth waters off the Kimberley. These decisions will have a profound effect on the Kimberley; they could make the difference between the industrialisation of one of the world's most intact and least spoiled natural areas or its protection for future generations because of its intrinsic value.

With your support, EK will continue to advocate, raise awareness and influence decisions that affect us all in this most amazing part of the world. Please continue to be involved, think of the environment over Christmas and make your New Year's resolution one that helps EK and the Kimberley.

Martin Pritchard

# WHAT IS INEVITABLE

*We keep being told that developments, such as the LNG hub proposed for James Price Point on the Kimberley coast, are 'inevitable'.*

Nothing based on a decision is inevitable. A decision is a choice. Where the benefits of a decision are dubious, or bring with them obvious harms, they will be challenged. And decisions can be reversed.

There is nothing inevitable about a development at Price's Point. If we accept that the Browse Basin gas fields will be exploited (a different decision), there are several options besides bringing the gas ashore for processing at Price's Point. One is a floating LNG platform. Others are to pipe the gas to Darwin, as Inpex decided to do, or to the Pilbara, as Woodside's joint venture partners would like to do.

Despite the indecently frantic efforts of Colin Ferguson and Martin Barnett to push the joint venture partners into premature action, no binding decision has been made about the site of the LNG plant. Woodside says 'a decision is possible as early as 2011'. If it is the wrong decision, it may still be reversed.

Accidents, on the other hand, are inevitable. Risks accompany almost everything we do. When we walk along a street or drive a car, we take a risk. It doesn't feel risky, but consider the problem statistically. Of all the people who walk along busy streets, an indefinite number will come to harm: fall and break a bone; cross at the wrong time and collide with a car; meet a rare event, such as a lightning strike or a suicide bombing.

However much effort a government may put into safety measures, we can predict that a number of the cars on our roads will meet serious accidents, some fatal. At holiday times the figures, reliably, go up. We cannot foretell who will be a road victim, but we can be sure that road victims there will be. Wherever there are risks, sooner or later, there will be accidents.

Where human beings have the hubris to puncture the earth's crust on the ocean floor, miles below the surface, releasing oil and gas under pressure, sooner or later there will be a blow-out. Recently, West Atlas blew out in the Timor Sea. What has appalled most of us about this particular accident is not merely that it happened, but that the owners, PTTP, took so long to stop it. Given the severe consequences of all that oil and gas being lost to the sea and the atmosphere, one would have expected there to be iron-clad contingency plans. But there were none. It was days before PTTP decided who to ask for help, three weeks before another rig arrived from Singapore. Ten weeks and four failed tries later, the leaking pipe was plugged—but not before the rig had burst, spectacularly, into flames.

West Atlas is not the first or last rig to meet such a fate. The company that finally succeeded in blocking off the oil and gas was well experienced: it had done something similar 1200 times before.

Our coast is subject to cyclones, as the southern coast of the US is prone to hurricanes. Hurricanes Rita and Katrina caused 124 oil spills, destroyed 115 drilling rigs and petroleum production platforms, and 457 pipelines in the Gulf of Mexico. Sounds right for the Kimberley?

## friends and funders

- Environs Kimberley would
- like to acknowledge our
- partners and funding
- organisations, without
- whose assistance we would
- be unable to continue the
- work we all care about:
- Saving the Nature of the
- Kimberley.



Heartfelt thanks to you all.

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# BIG SPRINGS

17-18 October 2009

Society for Kimberley Indigenous Plants and Animals

If you were dropped, blindfolded, into the middle of the biggest spring at Big Springs, on Meda station, then had to guess your location, the last place you'd be thinking is savannah—let alone a searing hot mudflat between the Great Sandy Desert and the Timor Sea.

The spring is home to two types of possum and a million birds. The Rose-crowned Fruit-dove feasts on the fruit of two types of fig—the banyan (*Ficus virens*) and the cluster fig (*Ficus racemosa*). The sprawling canopies of white paperbark (*Malaleuca leucadendra*) and *Terminalia microcarpa* provide shelter to Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, Pheasant Coucals, Mistletoebirds, Purple Swamphens, Channel-billed Cuckoos and a multitude of honeyeaters.

Big Springs is Janet Oombagooma's father-in-law's country and the springs are her son Ashley's *wungkurru* (conception site). Janet and her family escorted the SKIPA crew and Tom Vigilante from the KLC, bagging a couple of fat bush turkeys (Australian Bustard) along the way. On Sunday, the entourage trooped into the largest of the springs, calling out to the ancestors, asking them to give us all safe and snake-free passage.

Big Springs comprises a number of mound springs north-east of Derby, along the Gibb River Road. Green hemispheres float in the shimmering heat haze of the salt marsh. The springs represent the might of the freshwater against the salt around it.

The treasure of the springs is its plant life. The smaller springs only support one or two trees, whereas the largest, about a kilometre long and 600 metres wide, is home to an impressive number of plant species.

Edged by tea-tree thickets and bullrushes, it harbours substantial specimens of *Ficus*, *Pandanus*, towering paperbarks and ferns. There are *Terminalia* with buttress roots to support their sprawling canopy. Some of the banyan figs have girths you would expect to find in a rainforest.

Climbing ferns (*Stenochlaena sp.*) and pockets of *Pandanus* (*Pandanus spiralis*) weave through the thick upper canopy of the forest in search of sunlight. Ferns (*Acrostichum sp.*) up to two metres tall, occupy some of the lower storey, along with trees such as the swamp corkwood (*Sesbania formosa*), garj (*Timonius timon*) and tangled vines.

The pirates are the cattle; unchecked by fences, they plough up the earth, their hooves ripping great, gaping holes through the springs.

The birds in Big Springs are responsible for the aerial acrobatics of banyan figs. They eat the fruit and excrete the seeds on the branches of trees. Eventually, the fig casts its roots downwards—we found a striking example growing ten metres up in the branches of a cajeput, its roots, like manila rope, holding it anchored to the ground.

At times your footsteps through this landscape become muted. The earth gives way to a matt of fibrous roots over water seepage areas. Green ants infiltrate collars and waistbands. Crows caw-caw as they chase the Channel-bill Cuckoos away from their nests. Every now and then, after scrambling through dense marsh and undergrowth, we burst into open meadow areas where the temperature is noticeably higher.

The SKIPA party navigated its way through seepage areas and ferny thickets. We took cuttings and sifted through the rich humus beneath trees, collecting seed, while trying to take in all the plant and animal life around us. We identified a mistletoe (*Amyema sp?*) from the telltale orange petals scattered across the leaf litter. Skirting, leaping and wading through wet areas, we suddenly found ourselves squinting into the sun on the other side of the spring.

Thanks to Janet Oombagooma, her grand-daughter Christobel, her daughter-in-law Lisa and her son Ashley for allowing us to experience the beauty of Big Springs.

## congratulations!



### Marvellous moment at James Price Point

Kimberley conservationists Kerry Marvell and Rod Hartvigsen exchange vows in the shadow of the red cliff at James Price Point.



# Board of Directors 2009-2010

# environ kimber



KATE



ANDY



TANVIER



KEVIN

## CHAIRPERSON

### KATE GOLSON

I first arrived in the Kimberley in 1992 and lived in Derby and Halls Creek for 7 years, working for the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) as a researcher, and coordinating community development, native title and cultural heritage protection projects. After a stint in my home town of Canberra and then in Perth, I returned to the region in 2004 to live in Broome, and have been based here ever since. Among other things, I have worked for EK (on the Appropriate Economies Roundtable project), and am currently the regional coordinator for the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) program.

## VICE CHAIRPERSON

### ANDY SMYTH

I have lived in Broome with my wife Michelle for two years, and am a science/maths teacher at Broome Senior High School. I am originally from Scotland, but have spent most of my life around Fremantle. Before coming to Broome I was in Geraldton for 18 months. I had a passion and love for the Kimberley before I moved to Broome and have decided to take an active role in the community and join Environs Kimberley. I am passionate about climate change and marine conservation and look forward to working with the team over the next twelve months.

## SECRETARY

### TANVIER FOWLER

This is my third year on the board. For those who don't know me, I run an organic farm and cafe just out of Broome and am very passionate about protecting the nature of the Kimberley. Hand in hand with protecting goes choosing a lifestyle with minimal impact and supporting environmentally sustainable energy alternatives. I hope to continue being proactive and look forward to another year on the Board.

## TREASURER

### KEVIN SMITH

Born in England, I migrated to Australia when I was 12. Lived in a few cities before settling in Sydney, having my interest in the environment and conservation triggered by a high school teacher in Whyalla. An accountant (CPA) with over 30 years' commercial experience, I moved to Broome in 2005 to take up a position with Kimberley Land Council. I am now Regional Manager for Conservation Volunteers, overseeing the local turtle monitoring program, amongst other things. I look forward to being part of a very active board at EK, saving the nature of the Kimberley, and thank Laurel for her great work as former EK Treasurer.

**PETER MITCHELL** I am a long term resident of Broome and the Kimberley. I became involved with EK in 1997 because I was and am passionate about protecting the Fitzroy River and other Kimberley catchments from the sort of development that has ruined so many other Australian landscapes and ecosystems. I have experience and skills in administration, negotiation and governance from my six years as a Broome Shire Councillor and my employment with community service organizations. I believe EK needs to keep using its local knowledge and partnerships to provide a strong environmental voice for the Kimberley.

**DAVID BROUN** David and his family have lived in Broome for six years. David has a keen interest in the marine environment. He has worked as a primary school teacher in Broome and spent the last five years with the Department of Child Protection in a variety of roles with a community development focus. In the past he has worked as a carpenter and film-maker, and has a degree in Media Studies. He is interested in the unique intersection of social, environmental and cultural issues in the Kimberley and how these can be addressed together without the large-scale industrial development of this wonderful part of the world.

**JASON FOWLER** I grew up fishing, surfing and scuba-diving along the WA coast, from Ningaloo to the Kimberley, and have always been fascinated by the marine environment. After five years of study I completed a Science degree in Marine Biology and Aquaculture in Townsville. Since then I've been organic farming at 12 Mile, where we have built our organic cafe. From my spell in Queensland, the connection between coastal land use and the health of the nearby marine ecosystems became very clear to me. I joined the EK committee to bring some marine science to the table.

# ns pley



PETER



DAVE



JASON



JORJE



MICHELLE

**JORJE EMERSON** Originally from Rangoon, Myanmar (Burma), I arrived in WA with my parents to live in Wyndham and then Merredin, where I enjoyed my school years. My occupation as a teacher-librarian took me to Geraldton, Bunbury and, more recently, Melbourne, which was my home for two years. 2009 called me back to WA, working at Christchurch Grammar School, Claremont, and now at Broome Senior High School. It is important to me, as an educator, to take every opportunity to transform young adults into environmentally responsible citizens. I'm looking forward to assisting the EK team and reconnecting with the land and the people in this wonderful and unique part of the world.

**MICHELLE SMYTH** I have lived in Broome for two years, with my husband Andy. I am currently employed as a teacher's assistant at Broome Senior High School and had almost twenty years of administration experience before that. I was brought up around Fremantle and spent ten years in Darwin during the nineties. I love the Kimberley and the North of Australia and have decided to take an active role and join Environs Kimberley. I am interested in animal conservation and habitat protection. The next twelve months will be a good learning experience for me and I look forward to working with you all.

**PHIL DOCHERTY** I've had an interest in the environment since I was a small boy wandering around the bush, adding to my bird egg collection. I don't collect eggs any more but I spend as much time out bush as I can. I'd like EK to engage in more community-based activities such as revegetation projects and camping trips to support environmental studies. I'm active in the community group SKIPA (Society for Kimberly Indigenous

Plants and Animals), which promotes using native plants in gardens. I'm keen to get my children involved; if they become interested in the environment and have fun at the same time, they'll appreciate it more.

**HOWARD PEDERSEN** Howard first came to the Kimberley in 1977 as a bohemian wanderer. Inspired by stories told by Aboriginal people, he studied history at Murdoch University and later co-wrote *Jandamarra* with Bunuba custodian Banjo Wirrunmarra. Howard has been living in and out of the Kimberley over the past three decades, working with Aboriginal organizations and government, and as a historical and political researcher. Howard currently works at the Kimberley Institute and Notre Dame University and actively participates in developing ideas about reforming the Kimberley's colonial relationship with southern Australia and exploring ways for those ideas to find practical effect.

**LAUREL SUTCLIFFE** I have lived in the Kimberley for almost 24 years, three in Fitzroy Crossing and the next 17 with my partner and Aboriginal families from Old Cherrabun Station, establishing and living at Yakanarra Community, south of Fitzroy Crossing. I moved to Broome with my family four years ago, so that our two kids could be immersed in English and complete secondary school. I now teach at Broome Senior High, supporting Indigenous students who are disadvantaged because their home language is not Standard Australian English.

I am an active member of EK because not enough Australians consider the Kimberley environment to be more important than money. I believe the best ways to promote EK's cause is through Persuasion, Persistence and People Power.

**JOHN BUCKNALL** Having lived in the Pilbara during the 70's, my wife Gwen and I became Broome residents in 1983. This was around the time when Lord McAlpine 'fell in love with the sleepy little town by the bay' and Highway One was bitumenised. We have observed, with concern, the impact these and other events have had on the physical and social environment of the Kimberley. As a long-time member of the ACF—from the days of the Franklin Blockade—and more recently of Environs Kimberley, I am particularly interested in the further development of effective collaborative relationships between these organisations and Indigenous Australians in order to *Save the Nature of the Kimberley*.

**PAT LOWE** Pat grew up in English towns and thought 'nature' meant newts in ponds and cows in paddocks. Her ideas were broadened through travel to wilder places in Tanzania, where she taught secondary school students and spent weekends walking in the bush and climbing rocks amongst troupes of baboons. She studied psychology and moved to Western Australia, where she worked in prisons. She has lived in Broome for 30 years and written several books. Pat was one of the founders of Environs Kimberley and has served on the Board from the beginning. She loves clear, grammatically correct English and edits our Newsletter.

PAT



JOHN



PHIL



HOWARD



LAUREL





# FIRTLE TURTLES

Take an early morning walk along Cable Beach between November 1<sup>st</sup> and February 28<sup>th</sup> and the chances are you will encounter someone with a brightly coloured backpack, a clipboard and a GPS. This is a member of the Cable Beach Turtle Patrol, a community volunteer program run by Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), and now into its fourth turtle-nesting season.

Early each morning, small teams of turtle monitors patrol one of three two-kilometre sectors of Cable Beach, together stretching from two kilometres south of the Surf Club to about four kilometres north of the rocks. They are looking for signs of overnight turtle activity. This may be a new nest or a 'false crawl', where no eggs have been laid. From mid to late December onwards the patrols are also looking for hatched nests and hatchling tracks.

At the time of writing (late November), 21 nests and 15 false crawls have been recorded so far this season. These numbers compare very favourably with previous years.

Many people are not aware that turtles, specifically flatback turtles, nest on Cable Beach. Although all marine sea turtles are classified by the WA Government as rare or likely to become extinct, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature describes flatback turtles as 'data deficient'. This means the data being collected by the Cable Beach Turtle Patrol are extremely useful to turtle researchers the world over.

One important use of the information collected is to assist local government and government departments in managing turtle nesting habitats under their authority. Shire councils up and down the West Australian coast are using data collected by volunteers such as the Cable Beach Turtle Patrol in making decisions about beach access and management during the turtle nesting season.

CVA has included flatback turtles in the Kimberley region in its expanded Wild Futures program. This program has identified 12 highly threatened wildlife species around Australia, such as Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies, Superb Parrots and Queensland's tree kangaroos. CVA is taking a leading role in coordinating research and recovery programs for these species.

As part of the program, CVA is conducting its second season of a more science-based turtle monitoring program at Eco Beach Wilderness Retreat. Each night, teams of volunteers patrol twelve kilometres of beach, tagging flatback turtles, taking DNA samples and digging out hatched nests. This year they also attached satellite transmitters to two turtles to find out more about their foraging and breeding grounds.

With over 40 turtles tagged this year, the research is already bringing fresh insights into flatback turtle behaviour. Accepted wisdom is that flatbacks nest every two to five years, but CVA's team at Eco Beach has identified turtles in 2009 that also nested in 2008.

Established in 1982, Conservation Volunteers is Australia's largest practical conservation organisation. It has offices in 23 locations around Australia, including one on Dampier Terrace in Broome. The Broome office also acts as a sea turtle information centre and visitors are welcomed.



top: mother turtle on Cable Beach  
bottom: baby turtle on its way to life in the sea




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Well, it looks like war between the Greenies and the Greedies: in the Kimberley, in Federal Parliament, in the rest of the world. Never have the stakes been higher. We're fighting over the future of our Planet.

Climate change sceptics, most of whom know nothing about the subject, intrigue me. I'm no climate scientist, but if the great majority of those who say that human beings are contributing to global warming through their carbon emissions, I'm prepared to listen. It wouldn't be the first time that we have damaged the atmosphere: remember the hole in the ozone layer? There are interesting parallels and alarming differences. In the 1970s, scientists tracing the fate of Chlorofluorocarbons

# THE GREENIES VS THE GREEDIES

(CFCs) in our atmosphere (gases used as propellants in spray cans, refrigerants and the like), discovered that they broke down in the stratosphere and released chlorine, which in turn broke down ozone, allowing a dangerous increase in ultra-violet rays reaching the earth.

The science about the growing hole in the ozone layer was widely accepted, even though we could not see the hole. The only doubters or deniers seem to have been—you guessed it—manufacturers of CFCs. Chairman of the Board of DuPont declared that ozone depletion theory was 'a science fiction tale...a load of rubbish... utter nonsense'.

It was a few years before the politicians caught on, but once they did, international action was swift and effective. Under the Montreal Protocol, the production of ozone-depleting chemicals was phased out (they are still found in those little puffers used by asthmatics, for which no replacement has yet been found). As a result, the hole in the ozone layer is shrinking.

Not so with climate change. Even though the evidence of global warming is there for all to see—fast-melting ice caps, retreating glaciers, seasonal change—there are doubters; some doubt that it is happening at all ('Climate change

is crap!'—Tony Abbot) and others, who do credit the evidence of their own eyes, doubt that human beings are contributing to it.

It's not by chance that most of the climate change sceptics are on the political right: typically, well-heeled business people, big consumers, and, of course, coal lobbyists.

Their professed scepticism is not the result of a superior education in the sciences, but a convenient choice. They preach doubt to the public to confuse us. Whether or not we are contributing to climate change is of little concern to them, so long as they can continue making money, avoid new taxes and hang on to their obscenely overstuffed lifestyles. ('We want to maintain our standard of living.'—Bronwyn Bishop).

Self-interest has a complex relationship with the truth.



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# Farewell Salvinia

## - YOU WON'T BE MISSED



Congratulations to all those working hard in the East Kimberley to eradicate Salvinia, a Weed of National Significance. In October, project partners were able to celebrate a rare win in the war on weeds and declare Salvinia eradicated from Lily Creek Lagoon and therefore the Kimberley region, WA. After much effort and monitoring, the Lagoon, which is included in the Ramsar Wetland listing for Lakes Kununurra and Argyle, has now been free of the weed for two years.



In May 2000, a small area of *Salvinia molesta* was found by a local resident. It was likely that the infestation had been introduced by someone disposing of aquarium plants in the lagoon or stormwater drains. Once the weed has been introduced, aquatic birds and other animals can easily spread it in or between waterways. The introduction of this plant into a Kimberley waterway was extremely concerning as Salvinia has completely covered waterways in other areas of Australia, choking and killing them. See picture from the Northern Territory below.

The control and eradication process was done by several organisations in partnership: Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley, Ord Land and Water, Water Corporation, Department of Water, Department of Environment and Conservation and Department of Agriculture.

Many methods were employed and continued innovation was required as the organisations tried to remove every last trace of the weed.

Monitoring of the waterway is continuing and, owing to the success of the project, the monitoring can now be decreased from twice weekly to monthly.

Lilies and other aquatic plants are now re-establishing themselves in the control area and all areas that were disturbed during the removal process have been revegetated with native trees.



Thanks to the quick thinking and coordinated action, Kimberley waterways have been spared an unnatural disaster. Three cheers to all those who acted on this in the East Kimberley!

by Louise Beames

*top: Salvinia containment area in Lily Creek Lagoon*

*middle: Katya Tripp from the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley monitors the waterway for fresh outbreaks of Salvinia*

*bottom: Salvinia infestation chokes out a waterway in the Northern Territory.*

Photo by Noel Wilson



# Broome

## 12 Dec 2009

### Reddell Beach

As part of the nationwide Walk against Warming on December 12, EK has organized a Broome event at Reddell Beach. A big thank you to Broome Senior High School's Year 11 students and their Art teacher Jaime Vidler for painting a fantastic banner! The team of students who worked so hard on the banner are: chief designer Annabelle Lindsay, Ciara Aspinall, Rachael Gabb, Sarah Czulowski, Melena Cole-Manolis, Bond Margitich, Zoe Bilston, Lexie-Jane Tang Wei and Kirsten Hunter. Well done!

Another thank you to Conservation Council of WA for designing our local WAW flyer, to Karla McKenzie for all her help and her inspiring speech, and to Damian Kelly for taking photos! And of course to everyone else who has helped make this event a success.



# SEAGRASS

## THE QUIET ACHIEVER

### 2010 SEAGRASS MONITORING EVENTS

5.30 am Sunday 3rd January Port Slipway

6 am Monday 4th January Demco Beach carpark

6.30 am Tuesday 5th January Town Beach carpark

*Our pre-monitoring tradition will be honoured with freshly baked muffins and coffee before we head out.*

Seagrass is like a quiet achiever, continually performing beyond expectations, surprising the scientific world with its newly proven contributions to marine health and sustainability. Recently, it has impressed in a whole new way.

We already knew the value of seagrass as a marine nursery, habitat, food, water purifier, fisheries sustainer, coastal stabilizer and marine health indicator. Now it has emerged that seagrass is also a significant contributor to our climate health. Research has found that seagrass is one of the most cost-effective carbon capture and storage systems on the planet. A paper, entitled, 'Blue Carbon: the Role of Healthy Oceans in Binding Carbon', reported that healthy marine ecosystems like seagrass could deliver up to 25% of the emission reductions needed to avoid 'dangerous' climate change. Launched by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, the report also reminds us that we are losing seagrass ecosystems faster than rainforests, and on current trends they may be 'all largely lost within a couple of decades', so there is an urgency to protect these 'blue carbon sinks'. The Environs Kimberley Seagrass Monitoring Project is a great way for our local community to get involved.

Roebuck Bay monitoring this season was undertaken in unusual visual conditions, with a sublime sunset caused by smoke-filled skies casting eerie hues onto glistening meadows at the Demco site. Then, at Town Beach, a thick blanket of heavy mist rolled over the bay from Roebuck Plains engulfing our site in a ghostly fog.

A special highlight of this season's monitoring was the number of newly trained volunteers attending each session. These volunteers recently completed a Seagrass-Watch

workshop, so were able to contribute a higher level of skill and knowledge to the monitoring process. During the October sessions we found that most areas of seagrass had flourished with thick green beds of *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule uninervis* containing all sorts of macrofauna. We also recommenced seed monitoring, which aids seagrass resilience calculations.

This season we launched into the new Coastwest funding period, which has been supplemented with a second grant from the Port of Broome. I had the opportunity to meet with the State Coastwest Coordinator, Christopher Lukes, at Roebuck Bay to show him our seagrass meadows first hand. The role of seagrass as food for dugongs was nicely illustrated for him by some impressive dugong feeding trails. This season has also seen the start of intertidal mapping and a new phase of community education, with presentations delivered to students from Broome primary schools and Notre Dame University.

Call 0422244145 or email [seagrassmonitoring@gmail.com](mailto:seagrassmonitoring@gmail.com) for more details.



The Environs Kimberley Seagrass Monitoring Project is co-managed by EK and DEC and supported by Coastwest, the Port of Broome and Seagrass-Watch.

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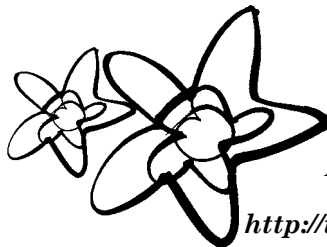
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