

**Connecting Land, Shores and Oceans
4th WA State Coastal Conference. November 2007.**

Robyn Benken

Frauke and I are both grateful to have received funding to attend the conference in Denmark. On Tuesday 30th November, before the conference, a community coastal forum was held at the Denmark Surf Club. It was great to meet fellow coastal environmental volunteers from across WA. I gave a short power point presentation on some of the things we have learned during 11 yrs of communicating the 'coastcare' message to our community.



Denmark SLSC - community forum venue

The following three days were very busy indeed! 280 delegates were challenged by exciting speakers, panel discussions, and field trips. The social events were fun too and we sampled some delicious local food and wine. Community involvement remained strong throughout. We met local farmers, fishers, tourist operators and councillors, some of whom worked, always cheerfully, as volunteers throughout the conference.

Professor David Wood (Curtin University of Technology) opened the proceedings with his paper: "Co-operation and Integration in the Boom Time". I found it sobering to learn that China builds new cities the size of Perth every year! Prof. Wood's theme of **developers being ahead of planning and infrastructure** was a concern echoed by several other speakers over subsequent days.

Another key- note speaker was Dr Gina Newton (Australian Marine Sciences Association), who spoke about "Australia's coasts and oceans: the big picture in a climate change". Two of the many interesting facts she quoted were:

- 85% of Australia's finfish and 62% of our seaweeds are endemic to Australian waters
- Australia's marine based industries are worth \$70 billion a year (10% of GDP), tourism is worth approx. \$35 billion.

One workshop I particularly enjoyed was presented by the **South Coast Indigenous Group**, comprising people from 10 significant local families. These people from many different language groups have come together to address cultural and historical issues throughout the Shire of Albany. They

have created a cohesive forum which is working well. On the bus on the way back to Perth, Neil, an aboriginal delegate from Broome told me that he wished that the 9 different language groups who lived in Broome could solve their differences and come together. Neil said the environmental health of Roebuck Bay is under severe pressure and a united community could achieve much.

Doug Lord (Dept of Environment and Climate Change NSW), titled his paper "Protect or Relocate". Doug said that 450 football fields of coastal land are being lost annually at present and this will increase with the (present) sea level rise of 4mm per year. He said that irrespective of CO² emissions, sea levels will rise for thousands of years. As 85% of us live on the coast and 56,549 homes in WA are less than 4m above sea level, "**climate change is the ultimate challenge for all coastal managers**", he said. He discussed the need for local governments to take a risk management approach.

Another keynote address was by Allan Tranter, (Creating Communities Aust Pty Ltd). Allan believes that we have become great nomads, economic nomads - "Our communities are crashing down around our ears". He said that the "whimsical rich" are moving constantly and therefore have a shallow connection to a place and there is the expectation that government will provide services that family and community used to provide. Allan said that the social element must be taken into account in coastal planning, considering all social strata and age groups.



Wilson Inlet - Mike Norman, Coastcare award winner (seated).

I took two field trips – one a land based excursion around Wilson Inlet, during which a diverse range of community and stakeholder interests were discussed. The second was a water-based trip on the beautiful Walpole–Nornalup Inlet. The decision this year by the EPA not to artificially open the inlet is a very hot topic indeed and has polarised the community. Lots of heated debate took place, out on the water and homewards on the bus! Everyone, however, agreed that the soon to be

officially announced 13th Marine Park for WA, the **Walpole – Nornalup Marine Park**, is good news indeed.

Thanks to the conference organisers for giving us the opportunity to attend the conference.

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Frauke Chambers

The most haunting image shown at the Community Coastal Forum was the stomach of a young Albatross so full of small pieces of plastic its parents had fed it and which it could not digest that it died of starvation. Just small bits of plastic! The group who showed this image, the **Tangaroa Blue Ocean Care Society** www.oceancare.org.au was founded only three years ago by just two concerned people (Richard and Heidi Taylor) and has since organised hundreds of clean ups and collected thousands of kilos of marine debris along the Cape-to-Cape coastline in the south-west of WA.

This group is one example of many who presented their work. They all demonstrated that it is often literally a single person finding like-minded people who can make a real difference in a relatively short time. This was one of the strong messages of the Conference: to manage the gigantic task of protecting WA's 13,000 km of mainland coastline with its 10,000 beaches, the efforts of all those local **volunteers are absolutely vital**. Another strong message was the existential importance of education and awareness raising, especially of young people. An inspiring example of this work was given by students of the **Albany Senior High School's** Marine Science Program – it was such a joy to see these enthusiastic students presenting several years' of their research of seagrasses, cockles and fish in Princess Royal Harbour.

Many presenters emphasised the Conference motto '**Connecting Land, Shores and Oceans**': connection and integration, co-ordination and co-operation of the many government and community agencies involved in the



Denmark Agricultural College

management of WA's land, shores and oceans are essential. Excellent examples of this were the partnerships between government and community that have developed in the management of the **William Bay National Park** and the **Parry Beach Campsite** and the co-operation between the Department of Fisheries and the Fisheries Volunteer Groups in Albany and Esperance who run 'fish clinics' to teach young people how to responsibly '**fish for the future**' and who visit schools with their interactive

collections of debris found on the beaches. Linda Bellchambers from the Department of Fisheries contributed an encouraging paper on the new

management approach termed **Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management** which develops the broader focus on bycatch, protected species, habitats and marine communities and Ian Herford from DEC outlined the department's '**Integrated Approach to Marine Planning for WA's South Coast**' which included consultation with no less than 21 different sectors!

As was to be expected, another key topic addressed by many speakers with some frightening scenarios was **Climate Change** exacerbated by the current economic boom with its increased pressure on the natural environment through bigger and more numerous boats, sophisticated technology facilitating larger and better catches and more powerful 4WD vehicles. All of which necessitates urgent research to allow informed management decisions. An impressive example of this kind of **base-line data research** was given by Peter Barnes from the School of Plant Biology at UWA to establish benchmarks of seagrass and water quality in Geographe Bay.



Wilson Inlet

Keynote speaker Barbara Pedersen (Department for Planning and Infrastructure) highlighted the efforts of her department in responding to the increased pressures in managing the WA coast. The latest of many concerns is the **oil and gas development** industry seeking access to the Kimberley coast for planned multiple gas processing facilities on **Maret Island**.

This is a controversial development which was also addressed by the last of the

keynote speakers, Chris Tallentire (Conservation Council WA) who urged delegates to watch it very closely and suggest to the government that it might be better to postpone any buildings on Maret Island until technology allowed gas processing from a **floating base**. He queried the necessity of yet another major industrial development in WA at this time of economic boom and asserted our right to say "No".

However, in spite of being overwhelmed by the awesome scale of the coastal management areas in WA and some of the huge threats to our unique coastline, at the end of the conference I felt that so many committed people are involved in such a variety of positive actions that there is **hope for the future** of our coast.