

SEEKS SPEAK

A recent meeting of SEEKS raised the issue of pearl farm leases along the Kimberley coast. A total of 11 pearling companies have 77 leases covering 49,000 hectares with further applications and proposed expansions being considered. Some of the leases are in areas proposed as Marine Reserves. Pearling companies will claim for compensation for loss of leases if these marine reserves are proclaimed. Many of the leases occupy areas offering secure anchorages and access to freshwater for boats cruising the coastline. Charter boat operators are also concerned at the loss of access to places of interest, safe anchorages and freshwater, as well as the navigation hazards posed by pearl farms.

Leases are granted by the Fisheries Department after calling for public comment and consultation with other government departments eg CALM. However Fisheries can choose to disregard any submissions and supports the development of the pearling industry without consideration to other uses. Environmental impacts are assessed by the applicant and are generally not referred onto the Environmental Protection Agency. The number of leases already granted highlights the lack of planning and management of the Kimberley coastline and the Shire is now opposing any further leases. It would appear that the pearling companies are making a 'land grab' before areas can be set aside for other uses such as conservation, tourism and recreation.

For more information about pearl farm leases contact Rob Floyd on 9168 1019

SEEKS meets at 7pm on the third Wednesday of the month at the Kimberley Development Commission conference room. Anyone is welcome to attend. For more information about SEEKS contact president Trish Purchase on 91681782 or secretary Jenny Wilksch on 91682276.



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Kununurra's unique view of Lily Creek as seen from the Victoria Highway

IN THIS ISSUE

- Farm issues
- SEEKS
- LA21 workshop
- WWF
- Healthy Country

KWOCA AGM

The Kimberley Wildlife and Orphan Carers' Association (KWOCA) is having its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 10 September 2002. Members and interested others are invited to come along to the Dining Room of the Hotel Kununurra at 7pm (informal dinner at 6pm).

KWOCA helps everyone involved in wildlife care and rehabilitation by providing information, speciality foods and feeding equipment, bedding and other care products and support for medical expenses. Look forward to seeing you there. For further information, contact Rachel on 91 681 815.

Ramsar in the Kimberley



Many people are unaware that at our backdoor is a wetland of international significance: Lakes Argyle and Kununurra. Listed as a single site under an international treaty, the **Ramsar Convention**, Lakes Argyle and Kununurra was designated on 7th June 1990 to assist conservation and wise use of the wetlands they contain and the species dependent on them. Although artificial lakes, the wetlands are important habitat for waterbirds, with up to 200,000 waterbirds counted at the lakes during the dry season. The wetlands are also an important breeding site.

The **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands** is an intergovernmental treaty adopted on 2 February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is one of four international non-government organizations also party to the convention. When countries join the Convention, they are enlisting in an international effort to ensure the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Nomination of wetlands to the Ramsar list enables landholders and communities to develop sustainable practices of wetland resources whilst protecting the ecological, social, cultural and economic values that makes the wetland special. Ramsar provides international endorsement of land management practices for nominated wetlands, greater security, funding, management, training and other support. Nominated wetlands are protected through legislation (in Australia the Commonwealth EPBC Act), and that protection includes any activities occurring outside the actual wetland site, but within the catchment. In the context of Lakes Argyle and Kununurra, the obvious external activities would include those in the Ord River Regeneration Reserve, development of the Lake Argyle Structure Plan, etc. A management plan is developed for Ramsar sites and acts like a "contract" between the landholder, state and commonwealth governments for how the site will be managed. Lakes Argyle and Kununurra do not currently have a management plan, however, the Ord River Waterways Management Group is focused on achieving this in partnership with the local community.

Ramsar is about Recognising and maintaining wetlands and the vital services they provide. It's about people using their wetlands wisely, and the important socio-cultural role is recognised within wetland management. Ramsar specifically identifies the need for custodians of cultural heritage to be an integral part of the planning process, given that cultural and environmental maintenance is dependent on each other.

There are 127 countries that have joined the convention and have between them designated 1085 Ramsar listed wetlands worldwide covering some 81 million hectares. This includes other Kimberley wetlands such as Parry Lagoons and Ord River Flood Plains, Roebuck Bay and 80 mile Beach. WWF has assisted in partnership with communities and governments worldwide to list Ramsar sites and assist with the management of these wetlands.

For more information on Ramsar visit www.ramsar.org or WWF visit www.wwf.org.au

Lily Creek

Lily Creek is never out of the news for too long, whether its cumbungi or house boats you can be sure that people will have some very firm views on what should or should not happen there. The question needs to be asked why this relatively small section of artificially maintained wetland is constantly under the microscope?

The answer of course is 3 words- location, location, location. To those who wish to see it commercially developed it represents a great investment, close to town, highway access and how about those views! To those who wish it to remain untouched it's that thirty seconds of visual tonic taken as they drive to and from work or while walking the dog at sunset.

No one can deny that in its present form it has become a Kununurra icon, we have billboards painted with Boabs on one side of town and Lily Creek on the other side welcoming tourists. It would be arguably the most photographed spot in town by both snap shooters and photographic enthusiasts. So just what is its future?

The Shire Council is aware of its significance from both a recreational and commercial perspective and has taken steps to look closely at the issues that surround Lily Creek. A plan that the community can sign off on is still some distance away but now looks one step closer.

If anyone has any suggestions on the future use/development of Lily Creek they can contact Chris Adams at the Shire on 91 681 677

Healthy Country project comes to Kununurra

The Healthy country project is an initiative to coordinate natural resource management activities in the Kimberley.

Late May saw people including traditional owners from the West Kimberley, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra meet over two days to exchange views on how we could best look after land and water of the Kimberley.

Day one included a field trip to farms on packsaddle to look at how some farmers are changing their management practices to reduce their off farm impacts and create healthy soil.

Michael Eppler from Ceres Farms told the group how he uses predator insects to control pests, reducing his reliance on chemical pesticides. Barry Lerch talked about the use of wet season cover crops to maintain the health of the soil by keeping its biology active.

Day two looked at how the many groups, cultures and industry of the Kimberley could participate in land and water management.



David Newry and Button Jones inspect some of Michael Eppler's predator bugs

Pesticide Work

Meanwhile the partnership project between Ord Land And Water and the Ord Bonaparte Program looking at farm pesticide use is progressing.

To date it has identified the 'high risk' chemicals being used in current management practices, they include atrazine, ametryn, diuron, endosulfan, trichlorfon, chlorpyrifos, mancozeb and cypermethrin. Low risk chemicals included fluroxypyr, glyphosate, trifluralin and imidacloprid. The next stage in the project will be to see how these chemicals can be kept on farm.

Landline in Kununurra

Peter Lewis and his ABC Landline crew spent a couple of days in Kununurra late May looking at some of the new local farming practices.

Sustainability was the theme of the filming with issues such as recycled mill waste turned into compost and the latest commercial water efficiency trials.

Expect to see the program go to air sometime in September.



Paul Mock talks to Peter Lewis on water efficiencies gained with properly constructed paddock levels

Fish Kill

A recent fish kill was reported in the Ord River and the D4 drain. Unfortunately by the time authorities were notified the fish were severely decomposed and samples could not be taken. Fish need to have just died or be still alive for sampling to have a chance of identifying the cause of the problem.

Farmers can be especially helpful with this because they work close to drains. Reports of fish deaths can be made by calling Scott Goodson of the Water and Rivers Commission by phoning 9168 1082 or after hours on 9168 1570



Jacinta Christie from DEWCP takes a sample of drainage water at D4

LA21 workshop

Ord Land and Water, the Ord-Bonaparte Program and The Shire combined to host an environmental workshop in May to look at some of the issues involving the shire developing an environmental/sustainability policy.

The facilitator spent much of the morning dealing with what that word 'sustainability' actually meant. 'Sustainability' short for 'Ecologically Sustainable Development' or ESD. This was boiled down to: *Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.* This recognises that we have to look beyond economic progress to achieve a sustainable and equitable future for our society. Economic and social progress depends on a healthy environment.

The remainder of the day was spent looking at where we are now and where we would like to be in 15 to 20 years time and consider the implications of our decisions on our environment. Any one interested in finding out more about the outcomes of this workshop contact the Ord Land and Water coordinator listed on the front cover.



Local farmers stand to benefit greatly from better information on chemical movement in the environment

Cover Crop work

Another Ord-Bonaparte project is shedding new light on wet season soil movement. In a monitoring trial last wet season, soil run off from a bare field and one planted with a cover crop was compared.

Results indicate a dramatic reduction in soil loss from the field with the cover crop. Recorded soil loss was reduced by 80%. This demonstrates that cover crops can significantly contribute to soil health by helping to retain topsoil and humus in the field.

Sustainability

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

Water Tables

At a Ord Bonaparte Program meeting recently it was revealed by CSRIO project scientists that there was still a lot of work to do to control the present rising water table in the ORIA. Some of the findings presented to the community at the meeting included.

- Most of the ground water is suitable for irrigation if mixed with dam water at a 10% ratio with some periodic flushing to reduce salt build up in the soil.
- Ground water depth is between 7metres and 1 metre below the surface with levels expecting to rise over the next few years.

It is a goal of the Ord Land and Water Management Plan to maintain levels below 2 metres across the irrigation area. Leaky channels, leaky dams and present watering practices all need to be put under the microscope for the community to attain this goal. Recent actions taken to the reduce water tables include commercial water efficiency trials on sugar cane by the Department of Agriculture and the installation of two major dewatering bores on Ivanhoe plain by the Water Corporation.



De-watering bore trial on packsaddle

Wet season rainfall

While Kununurra's rainfall last wet was above average it certainly was not as large as the year prior. However residents of a large portion of the Cambridge Gulf catchment to the south and west of Kununurra might beg to differ. Records show that their figures were very much above average. One only has to look at the new face of the Pentecost River and remember the Dunham flood to realise that a lot of rain was dumped on that area late in the wet.



Ivanhoe Crossing March 2000