



BOAB BULLETIN

No. 83

December 2007

NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETINGS

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m. at
Shenton Park Community Centre, corner Onslow and Herbert Roads

Wednesday, 5 December 2007

Mike Lisle-Williams

(CEO, Kimberley Foundation Australia)

**“Kimberley Foundation Australia: helping to
understand the Kimberley's prehistory”**

Wednesday, 6 February 2008

Pat Lowe

(Author, publisher and environmentalist)

**“An evening with Pat Lowe: writing, publishing and
nature in the Kimberley”**

- March 5th Emily Rohr (Short Street Gallery, Broome) — Interpreting Aboriginal art of the Kimberley (*availability and title to be confirmed*)
- April 2nd Dr Philip Playford (Geologist and rock art enthusiast) — “Aboriginal art and culture in the Kimberley and adjoining areas: a historical perspective”
- May 7th Mary Ann Jebb (Historian) — “Kimberley histories told through Boab nut carving”

Members and visitors are invited to stay for supper after the meeting.
The Society asks a \$2.00 hospitality fee from non-members.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Kimberley region continues to have a mixed press. On the one hand, there are signs that the area is sharing in increasing economic prosperity from mining and tourism in particular. On the other hand, the reports of Aboriginal poverty, alcoholism, injustice and ill health, are regular front page news items. So often I feel that something is missing from the reports, that the sensational revelations are anything but new to those who have lived in the area and that seeking to blame governments, politicians, departments or agencies does not lead forward. The success stories rarely rate a mention.

In the meantime, The Kimberley Society has sailed on in comparatively calm waters and has had a successful year. After the initial difficulties that we had over the bookings for the hall (we have got in early for next year), we have had good attendances and some big audiences for the interesting range of speakers. At our final meeting for the year on December 5th we hope that you will be able to stay on for a light supper. Rock art aficionados will be looking forward to hearing about the Kimberley Foundation which is supporting rock art research.

The programme for next year is well advanced with firm commitments for the first half of the year with some great speakers, starting with "An Evening with Pat Lowe" whom we are bringing from Broome to hear about her fascinating life.

The great event of the year was the advent of our book, *Rock Art of the Kimberley*, which had a long gestation but which is selling well. I have not heard an adverse comment about it and the outlets that we have approached to sell it have been enthusiastic. We have covered the printing costs and repaid the loans to the Society and backers, so remaining sales will be profit for us. We feel that we can now purchase a digital projector (not cheap!) as so many of our speakers need one for their PowerPoint presentations and it is becoming increasingly difficult to borrow one.

Corrigendum. In my talk on Kimberley explorers and their rock art finds, I erroneously stated the George Grey was not only knighted but was also made a lord.

While in New Zealand, he was indeed knighted (KCB) in 1848 at the age of 38. In view of his continuous disputes with Colonial Office in London, (he was sacked from his second governorship in 1867), as well as many settlers in New Zealand, it was unlikely that he would have been recommended to the peerage.

For those who have been agonising over this error since the meeting, I offer the following fruits of my research. There seem to have been multiple My Lords Grey. Sir George was related to Lord Grey of Groby who was a cousin of his father. However he was not related to the Earls Grey, the second of whom gave his name to the tea and who was British Prime Minister when "our" George made his expedition to the Kimberley. His son, the third Earl Grey, previously Lord Howick, was sometime Colonial Secretary in London and usually a keen supporter of Sir George. I hope that is now clear!

Hamish McGlashan

WARMUN AND BIDYADANGA ART GOES TO SYDNEY

The Mary Place Gallery in Paddington has two exhibitions of Kimberley art that were put in place by Broome's Short Street Gallery. The work by Mabel Juli, now one of the oldest of the Warmun artists, is presented in association with the Warmun Arts Centre. The Bidyadanga works come from Daniel Walbidi, who is described as "the youngster" of that school of painters, and from the well-known elder Jan Billycan.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CHANGE IN THE KIMBERLEY

On 4 July 2007, Max Clarke (former head teacher, Derby District High School) shared his recollections of life in Derby. That time included twenty-eight years as a teacher and shorter periods as town crier, auctioneer, singer, golfer, and as Hamish McGlashan put it when he introduced Max, as *an icon of the area, 1975-2004*.

Max and his wife Maxine landed in Derby in 1975 from an MMA jet – the last passenger ship having called there in 1973. At that time, there were 4000 people in Derby, 2000 in Broome and 1500 in Kununurra – Derby was thus the centre of the Kimberley.

Max's fondest memories related largely to Derby's isolation:

- Roads – the bitumen ended south of Hedland and there was 867 kilometres of dirt track from Hedland; to get to Derby you went via Yeeda Station and the Gibb River Road was extremely rough.
- The rivers – the main stream of the Fitzroy was Yeeda Creek at Willare, and there was even a ski lake.
- Communication – there was ABC radio, a telephone exchange and very out-of-date newspapers.

This all meant that Derby was very isolated but, inside the perimeter, there was a hospital, Dr Mendes, the “native” hospital, two schools, two hostels, three supermarkets, a meat works (DEMCO), and the leprosarium with 30 inmates and sweeping lawns as big as an oval. The leprosarium also had a golf course – 9 holes before a barramundi feast at the Golf Club.

The work at DEMCO was seasonal and an extra teacher was required. The wharf was a hub of activity with one ship every ten days. Three of the big gang of wharfies were on every day, with jubilee twist for morning tea. Quite a vibrant place!

The cattle stations such as Gogo, Meda, Yackamunda and Mt House were thriving, and the Clarkes spent many holidays there. Aboriginal stockmen showed off their marvellous skills.

Camballin had 100 inhabitants, and the dams and barrages there had been constructed for irrigating crops (rice and fodder). Koolan and Cockatoo Island iron ore mines were operating, with a 20-seater Otter plane flying there daily. Derby airport had a full complement of staff, including three meteorologists.

The three government vets provided their services free. The Ag. Department had a 44 gallon drum of dieldrin for community use outside their office (good for dogs with ticks!!).

Life was sweet for Max! Every day a siesta from noon to 2pm. Such was life in Derby.

In 1981, after a break of several years, Max returned to Derby as head teacher. Soon after that, “the rot set in”! The State Shipping Service ceased; the river system was changed; and the ski lake went. There was the man-made Minnie River, the new Willare bridge, and the road to Derby no longer went via Yeeda. The government departments, the airport and the port were all downsized or closed; the cattle stations fell on hard times; and the mines closed. The road from Hedland to Broome became a blacktop. The tourists flooded in, and Broome became the Number 1 town with pearl farms and tourist everywhere. Camballin's 12 mile dam had gone, and, in Derby, the school and houses had air-conditioning.

At the school, although the numbers remained static, the mix of races went from 60% non-Aboriginal in 1975 to 80% Aboriginal in 2004. In 1975 there was only one Aboriginal aide. The curriculum ignored the Aboriginal students' needs but it has improved in some ways since then. The "coloured school" has gone, and the hostels have closed, but throughout the 1980s and 1990s more Aboriginal people became involved with the school. The students' health improved too. Scabies, once common, has gone now. Commonwealth money has been a great help but attendance was better then than now!

More Aboriginal people have employment than before, and many enterprising families – such as the Ah Chees and D'Antoinnes – have done well. The Mowanjium Community is also doing well.

Max went on to reminisce about people he had met while in Derby – Ernie Bridge, Elkin Umbagai, Alan Mingulu and Gudu, Albert Barunga, Randy Spargo, Bob Rowell (father figure of Derby), Sister Margaret Wells, Mary Fox of the YWCA, Peter Story the bus and grader driver, John James with his strong views establishing Yackamunda Station, Robbie of Aerial Enterprises and so on. Altogether an enjoyable talk, highlighting a personal perspective on Derby over the past few decades.

Daphne Choules Edinger and Margaret Larke

SUPPORT FOR SPORT

Alicia Janz, an indigenous netballer from Derby, is one of the first two recipients of scholarships from the Wally Foreman Foundation. Set up in honour of the late sports broadcaster, who passed away last year, the foundation will help talented athletes to meet some of their expenses. Alicia, who recently sat her TEE exams at Methodist Ladies College, is considered a likely candidate for the Australian netball team. She will use the scholarship to pay her university college boarding fees next year and will thus be in a better position to meet her training commitments with the WA Institute of Sport development squad. The other scholarship went to Emma Knox, a Perth customs officer who, as goalkeeper for the Australian women's water polo team, is ranked the No. 1 keeper at world level. She is preparing for the Beijing Olympics.

HIGHS AND LOWS AT AN ABORIGINAL ART AUCTION

In mid-November, *The Australian* carried an article in which Corrie Perkin told of people questioning the provenance of several paintings from the Kimberley on the eve of a major Sydney art auction. Sourced from Neil McLeod Fine Arts in Melbourne, the paintings by Rover Joolama Thomas, David Banggal Mowaljarlai and Paddy Jampin Jaminji were estimated to be worth nearly \$500,000. The article cited concerns expressed by the executor of the Rover Thomas estate, Kevin Kelly; by gallery owner and federal government art valuer Beverly Knight, who had declined to value some of the works; and by Hannah Rachel Bell, the trustee and executor of Mowaljarlai's estate. A Lawson-Menzies spokesman stood by the paintings but some failed to sell at the auction. A second article, by Corrie Perkin and John Stapleton stated that Storm Wandjinas (1994) by Mowaljarlai was passed in (estimated value \$9000-\$12,000) as were two much more expensive paintings by Thomas. On a more positive note, a record was set when the 2004 painting Joogoomoondiny - Grawler Gully, by Paddy Nyunkuny Bedford, who died in July this year, fetched \$300,000. That price was more than three times its estimated value.

TOURISM AWARDS

This year, as we have come to expect, Kimberley tour operators and tourism ventures again carried off a swag of the annual awards offered by the Tourism Council of Western Australia. In the four named awards and the twenty-six separate categories, those who received recognition included:

Winners

- ❖ Brad Bayfield — Aussie Off Road Tours (FACET Golden Guide)
- ❖ Airnorth Kimberley Moon Experience (Festivals & Events)
- ❖ Kooljaman at Cape Leveque (Ecotourism)
- ❖ Willie Creek Pearls (Retail tourism)
- ❖ Willie Creek Pearl Farm Tours (Major Tour and/or Transport Operators)
- ❖ North Star Cruises (Adventure Tourism)
- ❖ Faraway Bay — The Bush Camp (Unique Accommodation)
- ❖ Habitat Resort Broome (Deluxe Accommodation)
- ❖ Cable Beach Club Resort (Luxury Accommodation)

Medallists – Gold

- ❖ Willie Creek Pearl Farm Tours (Sir David Brand Award for Tourism)
- ❖ Kimberley Wild Expeditions (Ecotourism)
- ❖ Broome Sightseeing Tours (Heritage & Cultural Tourism) and (Tour and/or Transport Operators)
- ❖ Aussie Off Road Tours (Tour and/or Transport Operators)
- ❖ Kooljaman at Cape Leveque (Unique Accommodation)

Medallists – Silver

- ❖ Kooljaman at Cape Leveque (Sir David Brand Award for Tourism)
- ❖ Willie Creek Pearl Farm Tours (Tourist Attractions)
- ❖ Manbana (Indigenous Tourism)
- ❖ Broome Visitor Centre (Visitor Information and Services)
- ❖ Kununurra Visitor Centre (Visitor Information and Services)
- ❖ Kimberley Croc Backpackers (Backpacker Accommodation)
- ❖ Kimberley Kayak Fishing (New Tourism Development)

Medallists – Bronze

- ❖ Uptuyu Adventures (Indigenous Tourism)
- ❖ Kununurra Backpackers (Backpacker Accommodation)

SENIORS AWARDS 2007

Congratulations to Kimberley Society member Kath Kneebone, this year's Kimberley Senior of the Year. Her volunteer work in Derby community has helped improve the literacy of schoolchildren and provide social support to individuals. Congratulations, too, to Marjorie Hunter of Wyndham for her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Award. Nominated by her daughter Philomena, Marjorie has provided shelter, sustenance and comfort for many needy children and adults.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF THE RFDS IN KIMBERLEY

On 1 August 2007, Richard Youngs (a former RFDS pilot) spoke to the Kimberley Society about his time with the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Richard had images to accompany his talk but, because the Society did not have a projector on hand, he unfortunately had to forego that component. Interested members of the audience were able to see the images on his computer after the talk.

Richard went to Wyndham with his wife Pip and two young children from Hobart in 1989. They had no idea what to expect in the way of accommodation or facilities and, to say the least, they were a little surprised at the basic nature of both.

Wyndham was the first RFDS base in Australia, established in the 1930s by the Victorian section of RFDS and then supported by that section over the years. The basic nature of the Wyndham accommodation and facilities may have been due partly to the fact (unknown to the Youngs) that the RFDS was progressively scaling down its Wyndham operation. A newer base existed at Derby, and Richard was transferred there in 1990. The Youngs initially regretted that move because, even in their short time in Wyndham, they had made friends there.

At Wyndham the RFDS had one aircraft, a Piper Navaho, which was predominately used for clinic work. It visited Kalumburu, Drysdale River, Oombulgurri, Turkey Creek, and Lake Gregory. The clinics were well run, and the RFDS nurse and pilot generally worked a four-day week. Friday was almost a day off, with the maintenance and cleaning being done to keep everything pristine and ready to go.

If an emergency occurred, a call went to the hospital. Richard and the flight nurse had five minutes to dress before they drove to airport. They were generally airborne within 30 minutes of the call. The local police were helpful when it came to dealing with emergencies.

Richard related the story of one particularly memorable flight recorded in his logbook 17 June 1989. A 3.00 pm call came in from a police officer who had heard on HF radio that someone had fallen off the Mitchell Falls. With the possibility of that person being dead or near dead, the RFDS plane needed to carry a policeman in addition to the doctor, nurse, and the normal full kit. It also had to be ready to fly the person, if he or she was seriously injured, to Wyndham or Derby, or even Darwin.

The story loses some of its flavour in being committed to print but Richard told how the plane reached Mitchell Plateau in the late afternoon, flew low over the vehicles that could be seen near the falls, and then flew on to the strip for a landing. No one was there, and, with no vehicle available to drive to the falls, the RFDS party waited to see whether someone would arrive with either information or the injured person. Daylight was running out, and, with no way of contacting the people at the falls by radio, there was nothing to do but wait.

Not having expected to stay overnight, the RFDS people ate the snacks they had brought with them. The policeman tackled his chicken sandwiches, and they all shared the bottled water. There was not enough room for everyone to bunk down inside the aircraft but those who slept there were better off than the policeman. He slept on the ground and had a close encounter with a dingo. That fearless animal had a good sniff around before it marked its territory and strolled off!

During the night, a radio call came in from Drysdale River Station via the RFDS Base at Derby, indicating that a man name John was driving from the station to the plateau to offer assistance and he expected to arrive at about midnight. Everything was ready to deal with an emergency but, next morning, a man with his wrist in a sling turned up at the landing strip. It had been a minor accident after all.

In 1990, Richard received only a few weeks notice that the Wyndham base would close. The closure occurred because, with the Wyndham meatworks having shut down, the focus on the provision of local facilities had shifted to Kununurra. The Wyndham hospital had been downgraded, and there were fewer teachers and school children in the town. It was also relevant that the RFDS plane at Wyndham was not pressurised. Derby had better and faster aircraft, and, because politics affect health care as well as most other things, it had become simpler to fly all the way to Perth rather than across the Northern Territory border and on to Darwin.

In speaking more generally about “the good old days”, Richard mentioned the effect of weather on the RFDS operations. The flying conditions he encountered in the Kimberley were predominately fine but lightning struck his plane twice. He also had to turn back on two other occasions. On one of the flights involving the lightning strikes, the nurse had the unfortunate experience of the trip being her first with the RFDS.

Richard’s talk provided good insight into what it was like to be a pilot for the RFDS little more than a decade ago. His answers to the questions from the audience filled in some more gaps, and the very well attended evening finished on a high note.

Daphne Choules Edinger and friends

Editor’s note: Numerous books have been published about the RFDS. Coverage of the relocation of its services to Derby can also be found in the Western Australian State Heritage Register assessment for the Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office in Derby (<http://register.heritage.wa.gov.au/>).

AWARDS

On 24 November, in the Government House ballroom, Mark Bin Bakar of Broome received the award of Western Australia’s Australian of the Year for 2008. In the role of Mary G, the flamboyant “Queen of the Kimberley”, he is known throughout the Kimberley and beyond for dressing as a favourite aunty and sending up stereotypes and other aspects of society. As well as his nationally broadcast radio show and television appearances, Mark travels to remote areas talking to people about alcohol and drug abuse, health, emotional wellbeing, respect for elders, and domestic violence. In reporting the award, *The Sunday Times* noted that the judges selected Mark as the winner ‘for dedicating much of his adult life to increasing cultural understanding and insights into indigenous culture, as well as improving opportunities for indigenous musicians’.

Congratulations are also due to Kimberley Society member Sister Patricia Rhatigan, who received the state’s Senior Australian of the Year award. Sister Pat coordinated this year’s centenary activities for the Sisters of St John of God in the Kimberly and she has worked there as a nun for almost fifty years. Her service began at a leprosarium and the Beagle Bay mission, changed to classroom teaching in 1960, and then led to an appointment as the foundation regional officer for the Catholic Education Office in Broome. More recently, Sister Pat has worked at Notre Dame University where she became Dean of the Broome campus in 1998 after negotiating for first year undergraduate degrees to be offered fully through that campus. She was also instrumental in having the campus inaugurate a Diploma of Indigenous Management and its studies in nursing and counselling.

With the state’s Young Australian of the Year (Simone McMahon) and Local Hero (Geraldine Webster), Mark Bin Bakar and Sister Pat are now national finalists for the Australian of the Year Awards, which will be announced in Canberra on 25 January.

THE HONOURABLE TOM STEPHENS MLA : KIMBERLEY SOCIAL POLITICS

Our advertised speaker, Carol Martin JP MLA, the Member for Kimberley, was unable to speak at the November 2007 meeting and we are most grateful that Tom Stephens MLA was able to step in at the last minute. He conveyed Carol Martin's apologies. He then spoke of his personal history of 30 years involvement in the politics of the Kimberley; the history of previous political representatives; citizenship issues; and some aspects of the current challenges facing the region.

Tom Stephens is the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Central Kimberley-Pilbara; former Minister for Housing & Works; Local Government & Regional Development; and Kimberley; and long time Kimberley Society member. He has represented the people of the Kimberley region in the state parliament since 1982.

After several years of uncompleted studies for the Catholic priesthood, Tom arrived in Kununurra from Port Keats to work for the local Mirriuwung people. He had three rather tenuous previous connections with the Kimberley: his uncle's father named Fox (after whom the Fox River was named) had driven cattle from Queensland to Halls Creek to sell to the gold prospectors; and while in his first year at his seminary, Mary Durack's *Kings in Grass Castles* was read aloud at meal times in the College Dining Room; and he later met up with a Pallotine priest from the Kimberley (Peter Willis), whose links led him to his first Kimberley employment. He was met at the local airport by community leaders and soon became absorbed in the advocacy for the Aboriginal community.

Tom conceived the idea of a regional land council, which became a reality—through joint work with anthropologist Kim Akerman—at the great Noonkanbah dance meeting of Aboriginal people from all over the Kimberley in May 1978, and he became the first executive director of the Kimberley Land Council. This was shortly before the AMAX and drilling exploration, which led to the famous convoy and uproar.

The seat of the Kimberley (when first combined) was held by Francis O'Connor (1904-05); then Arthur Male, who was Sam's father (1905-17); M P Durack, who was our member Perpetua's grandfather (1917-24); A A Coverley (1924-53, ALP); Jack Rhatigan, who was our member Sister Pat's dad (1953-68, ALP); Alan Ridge (1968-1980, Liberal); before Ernie Bridge (1980-2001, ALP).

These personal histories linked people from the pastoral, pearling, business, government, and working-man's life of the region.

Coverley, whose period in office was the longest, was just one of these colourful characters. He told Tom's wife's uncle, Doug Davidson, who ran against him in 1947, that he would return to life as a shearer's cook if he was defeated!

Jack Rhatigan was next – his parents had run the old Turkey Creek boarding house (sometimes known as the hotel) that operated alongside the police post from the early 1900s. Rhatigan lost the seat to Alan Ridge in the turmoil that followed the granting of citizenship rights in the late sixties.

Then came Ernie Bridge. He had been elected to the Halls Creek local government at the young age of 21, when his father died suddenly. He served that local Council for 21 years, including many years as Shire President, before he first ran for and was eventually elected to the State Parliament as the first WA Aboriginal MP. He was ultimately the first Aboriginal Cabinet Minister in Australia.

We were taken through the history of the Aboriginal community of the region to secure their right and opportunity to vote – against a bewildering backdrop of a

number of moves to restrict aboriginal voters – the first of which was defeated by the actions of Tom Dadour and the vote of Speaker Ian Thompson. This was followed by the alteration of electoral boundaries (directly by the politicians); restriction of postal voting aimed at remote communities (over which Tom was incarcerated in Wyndham prison but acquitted); and, strangest of all, the delivery of a drum of port to Turkey Creek on election eve where Tom was the first advisor at that community.

The challenge of Aboriginal communities was addressed. Tom spoke of the need for Aboriginal groups to be able to get away from the towns where alcohol and more recently the rise of drug abuse, are pervasive problems. He stressed the need to support communities, although noting that success was not widespread.

The recent restriction to light beer for takeaway at Fitzroy Crossing has brought a dramatic improvement in the town despite what Tom and others see as the less than objective reporting in *The West Australian*.

There then followed lively questions and discussion.

Hamish McGlashan

CAMDEN SOUND WHALE REPORT

Richard Costin and Annabelle Sandes (conservationists and documentary film makers) have completed their self-funded 2007 survey of whales in the Camden Sound area, approximately 280km from Derby. The information that follows has been extracted from their preliminary report. A full report is being prepared and should be available on their Web site (<http://www.kimberleywhales.com.au>) by January.

Camden Sound and the adjacent bays and islands are within the Buccaneer and Bonaparte Archipelagos. Camden Sound has been recognized as the main calving grounds for the Group IV population of humpback whales, which undertake a 13,000km return journey from the Antarctic to the Kimberley coast every southern winter.

Although there is a small degree of overlap in the Antarctic feeding grounds, the Group IV population is thought to be quite distinct from the East coast population. The Group IV population is of international significance. A 2001 population estimate for humpback whales in the Southern Ocean by the International Whaling Commission, placed the number of Humpbacks at 20,000, divided into six major groups. By comparison, the North Atlantic population was estimated at 10,600 in 1999. The Group IV population was estimated at 4,000 in 1995, and thought to be increasing at a rate of 10% per annum.

Based on those figures, the 2007 population for Group IV is estimated to be between 8-12,000. The Western Australian population of Humpback whales is one of the largest individual populations in the world, and double that of the Group V population on the East Coast. Humpback Whales are still listed as vulnerable.

In the past, American and Norwegian whaling fleets hunted the whales throughout the archipelagos. Shore based whaling stations from Albany to Carnarvon decimated the population, which pre-whaling was estimated to number 17,000. The number of Humpback whales was reported to be less than 500 when whaling ceased in the late 1970s. The Group IV population is in recovery. In more recent times, observations by researchers and charter boats have identified Camden Sound as the main calving ground for the Group IV Humpback whales.

Personal observations between 1995 and 2006 have convinced us of the importance of the region. Camden Sound is a natural harbour that is bound by the islands of

Champagny, Heywood, Darcy, Byam Martin, and Augustus to the North and the East. The Sound includes the Wailgwin Islands, Bumpus Island and Lulim Island, and extends South to Hall Point. Samson Inlet and Deception Bay have been included in the main survey area.

This survey in the Camden Sound area has been undertaken to record the number and concentration of Humpback whales in the area, to obtain a photographic record and observe the natural behaviour of the whales, and to observe the reaction of the whales to the boats using the area. We also recorded the whale songs and the individual sound signatures of boats through the area.

Recent development proposals to locate gas-processing facilities on The Maret Islands (Inpex) and Wilson Point (Woodside) in Camden Sound have highlighted the need for comprehensive environmental research on the Buccaneer and Bonaparte Archipelagos on the Kimberley coast. The archipelagos of the Kimberley are part of a remote wilderness region, which has developed an international reputation as one of the last true wilderness areas in the world.

Camden Sound is approximately 280km East-South East of Woodside's Scott Reef (Browse Basin) gas deposits, and is now under consideration as a major industrial hub for the processing of liquefied natural gas.

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Up until now very little research has been done in the region. The marine ecology needs to be properly researched to identify and research special areas.

The behaviour of the whales in Camden Sound needs special consideration.

Questions that remain unanswered include:

- Why do they return to the same area each year?
- How are the whales using the tides, the channels, the reefs and the sandbanks throughout the Archipelagos?
- Are the whales feeding in these tropical waters?
- What other Cetaceans use the area?

This basic research should be seen as the first step in obtaining good information on how to manage the Kimberley coast.

Results

A full report of the findings of the surveys conducted in 2006 and 2007 is currently being prepared. Preliminary findings confirm that Camden Sound is the main calving ground for the Group IV Humpback whale population, with one of the highest recorded concentrations of Humpback whales in the world. During the 2006 survey, a total of 290 pods, representing 528 whales were recorded between the 18/8/06 and the 26/9/06. In 2007, a total of 531 pods, representing 877 whales were recorded in the Camden Sound area between the 27/7/07 and the 27/9/07. The highest concentration of whales was recorded on the 5/8/07, with 28 pods, representing 54 whales, which included 22 cows and calves.

During the peak migratory period, between the 27/7/07 and the 15/8/07, a total of 512 whales were recorded in 73.5 hours, or 6.96 whales per hour of observation. Peak densities in Camden Sound, between the 5/8/07 to the 15/8/07 ranged from 1.08 per square nautical mile to 0.56 per square nautical mile, with an average of 0.72 whales per square nautical mile, one of the highest recorded concentrations in the world.

The percentage of cows and calves in the total population ranged from 34.4% between the 27/7/07 and the 15/8/07 to 63% between the 20/9/07 and the 26/9/07, indicating how important this area is as a calving ground.

Behavioural Observations

The islands, bays and reefs of the Buccaneer and Bonaparte Archipelagos along the Kimberley coast are an important calving, resting and feeding ground for the Humpback whales. The cows and calves are very sensitive to disturbance and are constantly seeking to isolate themselves from the bulls, boat traffic, and predators such as killer whales.

The islands, reefs and channels in Camden Sound are ideal as a resting area and a training ground for the calves. Camden Sound is also an important area for the bulls, as courtship and mating is thought to take place in Kimberley waters before the whales embark on the Southward migration. An independent observation near Koolan Island recorded a pod of 20 whales feeding on mackerel or bait fish, which indicates that the Kimberley coast may also be an important feeding ground for the Humpbacks.

Cows and calves in the Camden Sound area were easily disturbed by boat traffic, including our 18ft aluminium dinghy. Avoidance displays included tail slashing, breaching and diving when disturbed. Interestingly, this behaviour was the same behavior used by the whales to maintain distance between the pods.

Sound recordings of the whale songs between 2006 and 2007 were significantly different, which may indicate that the whales using the area in 2007 were a different group to those using the area in 2006.

No effort was made to photo identify the whales as we felt that the disturbance was unwarranted. Incidental photographs were taken from fixed observation points and still need to be analyzed.

Conclusion

There is a real need to conduct a comprehensive five to six year study into the behavior and population growth of the Humpback whales in Camden Sound and the wider Kimberley coast. The concentration of whales through the Buccaneer Archipelago, between June to the end of October indicates that this is an important area for the Humpback whales. As the population increases, the need for free space and protected areas that minimize human impact is essential. This area should be recognized and protected as a Whale Sanctuary and Marine Park. A special research area should be set aside in order to observe and record the natural behavior of the whales. Very few other places in the world offer the same opportunities to study the whales in an area that is relatively undisturbed.

PUBLIC FORUM

On Tuesday 11 December, at 6:30 pm, adventurer and film-maker Malcolm Douglas, scientist Dr Andrew Burbidge, and prominent conservationists will speak about the need for effective protection of the Kimberley. The public forum is sponsored by The Wilderness Society, Conservation Council of Western Australia, Environs Kimberley, WWF, and Kimberley Marine Tourism Association. It will be held at the Alexander Library Theatre, State Library of Western Australia, Perth Cultural Centre, Northbridge. Refreshments will be provided. If you plan to go, please register your interest before 6 December by contacting dmcfarlane@wwf.org.au or 08 9387 6444.

LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS NEWS

Woodside Petroleum has secured fast-track approvals for its \$12 billion Pluto project in the Pilbara and customers for its Browse project in the Kimberley. Its deal with the foundation customer, PetroChina Company Ltd, involves the sale of 2 to 3 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) p.a., for 15 to 20 years, commencing in about 2013. Worth an estimated \$35 to \$45 billion, that deal was followed by a similar one with Taiwanese energy group CPC Corporation. With conservationists opposing both an onshore and an offshore LNG plant on the Kimberley coast, Woodside stated in September that it was considering piping the gas 900 km to the Pluto plant.

On 9 November, the Minister for State Development, the Hon. Eric Ripper, had a Broome meeting with conservationists who included Kevin Blatchford from the group Save the Kimberley. Kevin had accused the State Government of making deals about proposed gas ventures before its Northern Development Task Force had started work but, as a result of the meeting, he now believes the Government may be prepared to look at the merit of having multiple companies share a single hub.

2007 WA ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

Sixty-nine entrants from projects throughout the state competed for the 2007 Western Australian Environment Awards. The awards honour individuals, community groups and businesses who have shown outstanding achievement in protecting the WA environment. The 22 finalists, selected in September, included **Kimberley Toad Busters**. Their great effort in helping to slow the westward march of the despised cane toads—with a “bag” of 120,000 of those creatures since September 2005—did not allow them to seize the overall award. It went to Carbon Neutral / Men of the Trees WA Inc. All the finalists and entrants deserve our appreciation and respect.

COUNCIL 2007-2008

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Vice-Presidents:	Jack Vercoe and Cathie Clement
Secretary:	Jeff Gresham
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Grant Sellwood manages the Kimberley Society's Web site (www.kimberleysociety.org). It carries summaries of the Society's talks (as published in the *Boab Bulletin* but sometimes with additional images), FAQs, and information about the Society and how to join it.

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Dr Cathie Clement OAM edits this newsletter for the Kimberley Society. The material it contains is copyright but may be cited with acknowledgment. Correspondence, including requests to reproduce articles, reports or book notes, should be directed to The Editor, Kimberley Society, PO Box 8471, Perth Business Centre, Perth, WA, 6849; E-mail clement@q-net.net.au; telephone (08) 9272 3308; or facsimile (08) 9272 2087.

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