

Feature Article by Kandy Curran, Roebuck Bay Working Group

In the months leading up to the fourth State Coastal Conference my workload became a tsunami, which it is oft to do, working seven hours a week as secretariat for a large group of stakeholders, undertaking the ambitious task of management planning for Broome's Roebuck Bay.

Two urgent tasks were to submit an entry from the Roebuck Bay Working Group for the Community Group Effort award and to source funds for traditional owner Neil McKenzie and myself to attend the conference.

Fortunately the WAPC responded generously and Neil and I left our beautiful tidal peninsula for a much greener and cooler coastal landscape with rust coloured estuaries, tall trees and boulder strewn beaches.

While the information being presented by the keynote speakers on Western Australia's most pressing coastal issues was incredibly interesting and well orated, it was pretty horrifying, and at times, disempowering. Projections about the effects of sea level rises – that include inundations of much of Australia's magnificent coastline – and lamentations by Allan Tranter about society crashing down around our ears as a result of Australians' hell-bent preoccupation with consuming and doing less and less for their communities as they move up to four times in a lifetime, were pretty ominous. It's not to say, of course, that the information was by any means disputable, uninteresting, or unnecessary, it was just a bitter pill to swallow for a conference participant with a great love and appreciation of community and Australia's natural coastal environment.

The dearth of bad news was offset by coastal excursions each afternoon with traditional owners and members of the Denmark community, in and around



their picturesque coastline. Particularly inspiring was the award-winning Parry Beach Voluntary Management Group whose work includes looking after the camping area and adjacent beach for the local shire. These elderly conservationists were role models extraordinaire, with a list achievements that include restoration of the local town hall, installation of fish composting bins on their beach and in between all of their on-ground coastal conservation work, the ability to cook up a fete of delicious cakes for conference participants. With Broome attracting a large migration of elderly people during the dry season each year, it seems that a dedicated program needs to be initiated to encourage volunteers to get involved in looking after our ecologically and culturally unique peninsula, that is coming under growing pressure as the old pearling town's population and industry base expands.

Also accessible were the concurrent sessions, as participants could interact easily with speakers and each other to apply new knowledge to their own coastal area. With plastic litter frequently seen along Roebuck Bay's shoreline, it was both illuminating and

disturbing to hear Wally Smith (Tangaroa Blue Ocean Care Society) talk about the long-term effects on the food chain from highly edible microscopic plastic debris.

Neil and I also enjoyed the opportunity to talk about the Roebuck Bay Working Group's work to management plan for Broome's Roebuck Bay. The audience reaction to our on-ground stories, about how a community of volunteers with traditional owner guidance have come together to undertake a large number of management planning activities to preserve and restore Roebuck Bay, was incredibly encouraging and uplifting. Little did we know that even more encouragement was on the way, with the Roebuck Bay Working Group being announced winner of the Outstanding Community Group Effort Award in the WA Coastal Awards for Excellence 2007.

So the tsunami of work to get to the conference was well worth enduring, particularly the opportunity to meet so many wonderful civic-minded people, who continue to inspire me to continue working with my fantastic community of volunteers to manage one of the world's most beautiful wetlands.

