

Article for websites and newsletters

Located on the coast adjacent to Broome, Roebuck Bay holds a great diversity of cultural and natural heritage values for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Covering an area of approximately 400 square kilometers, almost half is intertidal mudflats exposed or covered only by shallow waters at low tide. It is the combination of mudflats with their rich diversity of marine life, big tides, mangroves, red cliffs and aquablue water that make Roebuck Bay such a natural and visual wonder.

Interconnected with the rich biodiversity of Roebuck Bay is the powerful attachment to this coastal country by Aboriginal people for millenia. The Bay plays a significant part in the daily life of local Aboriginal people, not only by providing food but also in maintaining customary linkages and contemporary culture.

The invertebrate rich tidal mudflats make the Bay an outstanding and internationally renown shorebird location. Roebuck Bay is the first place many migratory birds land during their annual migration from breeding grounds as far away as Siberia and the Arctic. The sheer numbers of birds qualified the Bay for listing in 1990 under the international Ramsar treaty for the protection and wise use of wetlands.

The Bay also contributes significantly to the commercial viability of Broome, through activities such as tourism, commercial fisheries, aquaculture and the port. These, together with important recreational values, have a strong reliance on the health of the Bay. However, with a rapidly growing population and tourism industry, pressures on the Bay are increasing.

With these increasing and often competing pressures comes a need for well-planned and coordinated management of the whole area – the Bay and its surrounding ecosystem. It is in this context that people from different interests and backgrounds, have come together to form the Roebuck Bay Working Group. Group members have a common goal: protection of the Bay's values through community based management planning.

The group has invited people, who see the value of Roebuck Bay, to be involved in this process. Want to know more? Contact the RBWG Secretariat Tanya Vernes tvernes@wwf.org.au or ph: 08 9168 0903 to receive updates, or provide comments to the group.

Groups represented on the RBWG currently include: Rubibi Traditional Owners, Broome Shire Council, Broome Visitor Centre/Australia's North-West Tourism, Broome Bird Observatory, Department of Conservation & Land Management, Department of Planning & Infrastructure, Environs Kimberley, Fisheries Department, Kimberley Land Council, Thangoo Station, World Wide Fund for Nature.