

NEWS

Roebuck Bay regime comes into spotlight



Mudflats and seagrass meadows support a rich diversity of benthic fauna, shellfish and marine life, which support one of the biggest collections of shorebirds found anywhere in the southern hemisphere.

Picture: Fiona Bishop



Yawuru traditional owners inspect drainage, aiming to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment entering Roebuck Bay.

Picture: Kandy Curran

ROEBUCK Bay's management has never been more in the spotlight, with a new sponsor for the Roebuck Bay Working Group and announcements of coastal conservation estates and a proposed Roebuck Bay marine park, with Yawuru as co-managers.

The Roebuck Bay Working Group started out in 2003 with a group of Yawuru traditional owners and other concerned community members who wanted Roebuck Bay's extraordinary values protected and managed.

Broome owes its existence to Roebuck Bay with its calm waters and shipping channel providing the conditions for the pearling industry, Port of Pearls and town site to be established.

The bay also has significant cultural heritage for the Yawuru people and is listed as an international Ramsar wetland.

Ecologically, Roebuck Bay is unique, with extensive seagrass meadows supporting a diverse community of marine wildlife including dugongs, turtles and snubfin dolphins — a new species described as recently as 2005.

Even more impressive are the 50sqkm of mudflats. The soft mud is home to billions of squirming invertebrates — the nourishment for thousands of



Roebuck Bay is a hotspot for the endemic snubfin dolphin found in northern Australia, with 163 animals identified so far.

Picture: Deb Thiele

shorebirds migrating from Roebuck Bay to breeding grounds in Siberia and Mongolia.

Seven years on, the Roebuck Bay Working Group has grown to 47 members and developed a series of community-based plans to protect and manage Roebuck Bay. It has also won a State award and achieved two years of funding from NRM Rangelands.

With Roebuck Bay a principal site for migratory shorebirds and a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, NRM Rangelands was keen to fund the group, which has a track record in delivering community education, participation and stewardship in the management of the bay.

One of the milestones has been to prioritise projects targeting weeds such as Lyngbya — a blue-green algae occurring in

Roebuck Bay since 2006 and linked to nutrient enrichment. The major concern is the impact of Lyngbya on essential marine ecosystems such as seagrass meadows, mangroves and associated fauna.

The prioritised projects include drainage remediation to reduce nutrients and sediments entering Roebuck Bay, monitoring of stormwater drains, removal of foreshore weeds and funding of research into nutrients in the food web.

A "Clean Drains" education project is also being developed to help the community better understand how to they can reduce pollutants such as phosphorous and nitrogen from fertilisers and detergents, from entering Roebuck Bay.

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