

Yawuru Conservation Estate— Planning for the Future

Written by Kandy Curran, Monday 14 September 2015



Yawuru Rangers conducting a survey of snubfin dolphins on Roebuck Bay.

With draft plans released in June this year for a proposed marine park and newly created terrestrial parks around Broome, it is timely to learn the story behind the ground-breaking planning process undertaken.

The story starts thousands of years ago, with Yawuru people living along the shores of Roebuck Bay.

As Traditional Owners of their land and sea country, Yawuru people have a dynamic and enduring relationship and deep responsibility to care for their country and pass on knowledge and traditions to future generations.

The first legal step toward achieving these aspirations in modern Broome, was the determination of native title and securing of agreements with the State of Western Australia, the Shire of Broome and others.

These agreements paved the way for the creation of a network of four parks collectively known as the Yawuru conservation estate that would encompass traditional lands and waters in and around Broome.

The Yawuru Cultural Management Plan was developed in 2011 as a guiding document for all future planning and to ensure Yawuru land, sea and intertidal areas are managed as one interconnected cultural and ecological system within the living cultural land and seascape.

The intention is to combine traditional Yawuru knowledge and practice with current science and technology, resulting in holistic and sustainable management for the benefit of everyone.

Over four years, Nyamba Buru Yawuru and Department of Parks and Wildlife have worked in partnership on planning for the Yawuru Nagulagun / Roebuck Bay Marine Park and Yawuru Birragun Out of Town Conservation Park, with the draft joint management plans released at a joyous ceremony overlooking Roebuck Bay, in June 2015.

Yawuru nagulagun means 'Yawuru sea country' and covers around 78,800ha from Minyirr (Gantheaume Point) in the north to Miriny (Cape Villaret) in the south, and includes the subtidal and intertidal areas from the high water mark to the seaward limits of WA waters.

Yawuru Birragun means 'Yawuru bush country', and the park covers about 19,125ha of freehold land to be held by the Yawuru Registered Native Title Body Corporate, and leased back to Parks and Wildlife to be jointly managed as a conservation park for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations.

The management plans identify key cultural, ecological and social values, management programs, and targets and performance measures to track progress against the stated management objectives over the life of the management plans.

As such, the plans are outcome based, providing a robust framework to support adaptive management.

The key ecological values for the proposed marine park include geomorphology, water and sediment quality, seagrass and algae communities, gundurung (mangrove communities) and bundu (saltmarsh and saline

grassland communities).

It also includes filter feeding communities, intertidal sand and mudflat communities, invertebrates, waterbirds including migratory gamirda-gamirda (shorebirds), finfish, marine mammals and gurlibil (marine turtles).

The key ecological values for the Yawuru Birragun Conservation Park include geomorphology, hydrology, bilarra (wetlands), bundu (saltmarsh), murruga-yirr-garnburr (melaleuca thickets), bundurr-bundurr (pindan vegetation communities) and niyamarri (sand beaches and dunes).

A thorough understanding of the cultural, ecological and social values of the conservation estate is critical to effective management.

The plans recognise a need to fill gaps in current knowledge relevant to park management, including establishing baselines for the condition of key ecological values and the importance of the area for high priority flora and fauna.

Research and monitoring programs are proposed to provide the background information necessary for an effective approach to the protection of cultural and ecological values and the responsible management of social values.

There is no doubt, conservation reserve management in WA is entering a new era, with opportunities for partnership with traditional owners under joint management arrangements.

The Yawuru conservation estate in and around Broome's beautiful coast is among the first of these new ventures.

Draft plans for the Yawuru Birragun Conservation Park and the Proposed Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park are available for public comment until September 25, 2015.

The Roebuck Bay Working Group and Yawuru Land and Sea Unit held a Science on the Broome Coast presentation on July 7, 2015 as part of the Science on the Broome Coast series to provide the community with the opportunity to learn about the proposed marine and coastal parks.

The series is funded by Inspiring Australia, Rangelands NRM, Broome Shire Council and the WA Marine Science Institution.



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