



5th Western Australian State

COASTAL CONFERENCE 2009

*Whose Coast Is It?
adapting for the future*

Gaining Community Ownership of the Beach —The Port Hedland Story

10B:

Community
and the Coast:
1.55–2.25pm
Friday 9th
October 2009
Sirius Room

PRESENTER:

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Introduction

Port Hedland is 1800km north of Perth, in the resource rich Pilbara region of Western Australia. Port Hedland is situated on the traditional land of the Kariyarra people. The Kariyarra name for Port Hedland is Marapikurrinya meaning where five finger-like tidal creeks begin.

Background

Sea turtles have had a long association with the local people of Port Hedland. Local Aboriginal rock carvings depicting Green and Flatback turtles have been dated to approximately 8000 years of age. Many of the local Kariyarra people today, still have the turtle as their spiritual totem.

But much has changed in the Port Hedland area, particularly with the lifting of the iron ore export embargo in the late 1960s, so much so that the dredging and transformation of the mangrove harbour and an array of other mineral resources has in recent times lead to the Port Hedland harbour as one of the largest bulk tonnage ports in Australia.

Today with a population of 20,000 people Port Hedland and its associated beach areas, are a far cry from what they once were.

Methodology

Each of the Port Hedland beaches represents a unique community monitoring and management opportunity. Cemetery Beach is unparalleled to any other sea turtle nesting beach in Australia, situated right in the heart of a residential township and supporting a critical mainland nesting area for Flatback Turtles. Pretty Pool Beach area is in the sights of a proposed residential development and if the plans are fully realised will too be in the heart of a modern residential community. Each of these beaches is predisposed to a number of threatening factors that could detrimentally affect the turtles nesting in the area: high level of disturbance by people (direct contact, off road vehicles, tourism and disturbance of nests and Indigenous take, harbour dredging), residential lighting and feral animal predation.

For the past six years, a volunteer community group the Care For Hedland Environmental Association has been at the forefront of instigating and implementing efforts to monitor and conserve the local nesting sea turtle populations.

Project Outcomes/Conclusion

Through an open and all inclusive approach and the use of methods that have enabled a high community participation rate, the resulting community lead management effort has resulted in not only the collection of quantifiable data that has been able to be input into management decisions. It has also promoted the development and distribution of an array of education and information materials. These combined efforts and continued high profile within the community, has seen a massive shift in community attitude and respect for the coastal environment. This community lead approach has importantly in the process endeared the turtle and its habitat to the local community, going a long way to ensuring the continued presence of sea turtles in Port Hedland for the next 8000 years.