

# SEA COUNTRY

INFORMATION ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES OF THE CAPE YORK MARINE PARKS

## NUMBER 2

MAY 1995

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## NOTICE BOARD

Need more details about planning for the marine park off Cape York? Talk to a **Community Ranger**:  
Alima Panuel  
Meun (Shorty) Lifu  
Gwen Toby  
Phil Wallis  
Alison Liddy  
James Creek  
Jim Wallace  
David Claudie  
John Bowen  
Derek Deemal

The second issue of *Sea Country* is written by staff from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage (QDEH), and Community Rangers from Cape York. This newsletter will keep you up to date with sea country issues on Cape York.

## Proposed marine park for eastern Cape York

Most people know that there is a marine park off Cape York - the Far Northern Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). It is run by the commonwealth government (GBRMPA). In the last newsletter, we talked about how people can have a say in the management of this marine park.

There are some areas that are not inside the Far Northern Section of the GBRMP - they are the white patches on the zoning map. Back in 1986, they were left out with the idea of developing them as ports.

Other areas are also outside the GBRMP - coastal areas that are covered by the tides. This includes the beaches between low and high tide marks on the coast and on islands. It also includes tidal areas of estuaries (land and waters that are covered by the tide). These areas are not protected by marine park laws. The idea is to give them protection as a state marine park called the Cape York Marine Park.

Marine park laws can:

- protect the environment from some of the impacts of developments
- protect special or valuable sites from harmful uses

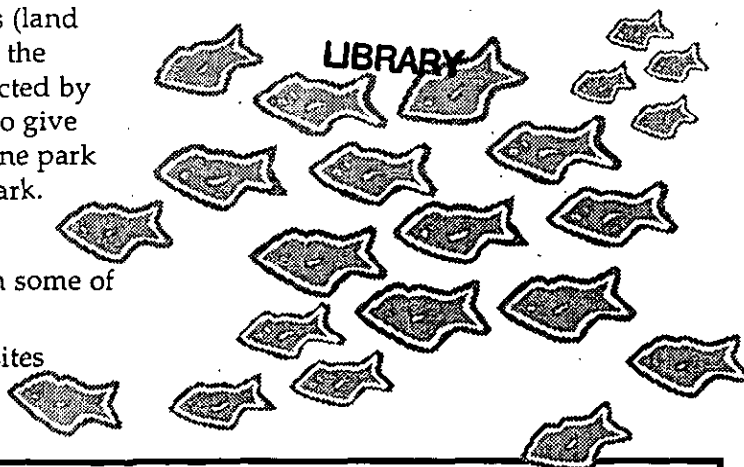
- allow for traditional use of resources
- allow better management of all land and sea country, with both traditional ways and 'whitefella' ways.

**What does it mean for people on Cape York?**

People on Cape York need to think about how a change of these areas to become Marine Parks might affect them. People need to discuss this matter amongst themselves and communities and give information to the planning team. It is important that Aboriginal people speak with a strong voice about the uses and zoning of the proposed Cape York Marine Park.

GREAT BARRIER REEF  
MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

26 JUN 1996



See back page for meeting dates!



Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

## Turtle and dugong offal - off the menu

Queensland's Health Department is advising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples not to eat offal (kidney, liver and guts) from dugongs and turtles.

Only indigenous peoples can legally eat turtle and dugong, as their traditional food.

The Acting Chief Health Officer, Dr Harvey Whiteford, said recent tests showed that the offal from these animals contained fairly high levels of cadmium.

Other parts of dugongs and green turtles, however, remain fine to eat. In fact, the (muscle) meat contains low levels of cadmium. Cadmium occurs naturally in sediments formed from corals in the ocean. It is especially common in shallow, nutrient-rich, tropical waters like the Torres Strait.

Cadmium is taken up (absorbed) by seaweeds (marine algae) and seagrass, then passed on to vegetarian animals like the dugong and green turtle when they feed on these plants.

Scientists think the reason the cadmium reaches high levels in these animals is because it builds up over

time, and dugong and green turtles live long lives - over 40 years.

Mercury, copper, and selenium have only been found in small quantities in dugong and turtle offal.

Dr Whiteford said if you eat offal regularly over many years, you will run the risk of taking in too much cadmium, which might affect your health.

Dr William Gladstone, from GBRMPA, said that over time cadmium builds up in the kidneys and livers of grazing animals such as dugongs and green turtles. As it is not excreted, the longer the animals live, the higher the concentration in the animal.

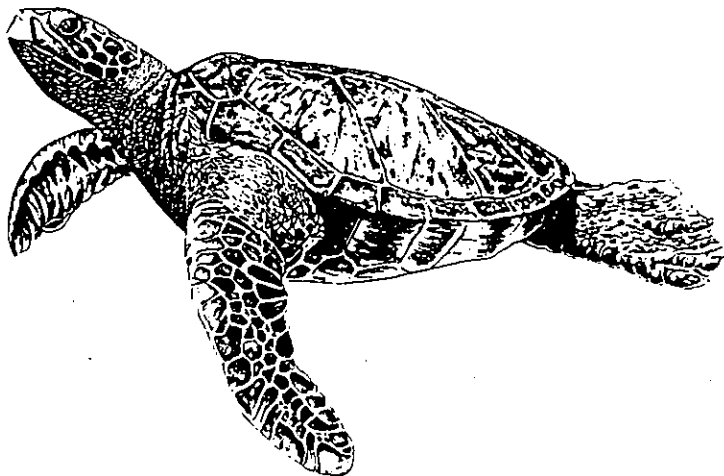
If you eat too much cadmium it is stored in your kidneys. Because it is poisonous, after many years the kidneys can stop working properly. Liquids will then be stored in the body instead of being passed out. This makes it harder for the heart to keep pumping properly.

Dr Whiteford said health officers would soon consult with communities to find out how much offal is being eaten, and how much cadmium is being eaten from other sources.

The study figures show that an adult should not eat more than 50 grams of dugong offal a week. A 50-gram amount of kidney or liver is about the size of a chicken egg.

Adults should eat much smaller amounts of turtle offal to be on the safe side. Children should only eat half as much as adults. But, to be safe, the Health Department recommends that dugong and turtle offal not be eaten at all.

*Illustration by Doris Engelhardt of REEFWATCH*



# Princess Charlotte Bay - special sea country

Princess Charlotte Bay region is the homelands of the Lamalama language people. They have returned to their country at Port Stewart, a timeless camping place near the mouth of Stewart River. Mounds of shells at Port Stewart and stories passed on tell of the long relationship between people and sea country. The harmony between the people and environment stems from continuous connection with the country, despite the efforts of past governments to move people away.

Large coastal plains around Princess Charlotte Bay make the area one of the largest tidal wetlands in Cape York. Long winding rivers, wide saltpans and grasslands, and fringing mangroves give the area its character. Some of the mangroves can reach 30 metres in height.

Seagrass beds fringe the shores, and off the coast are beautiful large reefs, including Corbett Reef.

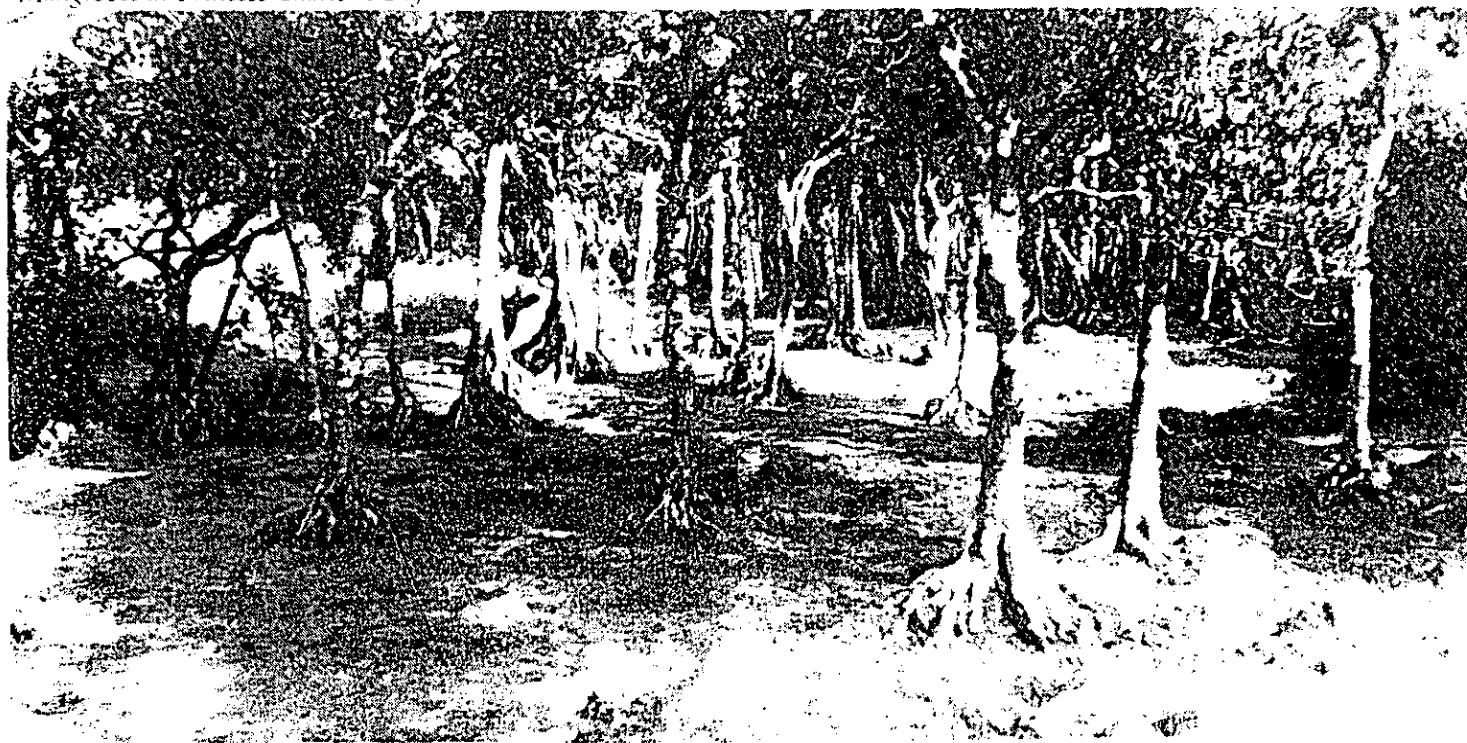
The area is habitat for dugongs, green turtles, Hawksbill turtles and crocodiles. A number of rare plants and animals live in the area, and the wetlands are important for waders and other birds which migrate across the world. The tidal areas next to 'Silver Plains' are recognised as important for barramundi habitats.

The southern part of Princess Charlotte Bay borders Lakefield National Park; in the north is Port Stewart community land and 'Silver Plains'.

Lamalama people feel strongly about caring for their country, and many story places are treasured and respected. One story place - the Cliff Island group and waters - is treated with great respect, as it is a powerful wind story place. There are cultural restrictions on who can go there and how people behave, and consultation with Elders is essential.

We need your advice on how the Marine Park management can be improved for Princess Charlotte Bay.

*Mangroves at Princess Charlotte Bay*



# Community Ranger's views - from Lockhart River

by Jim Wallace

Recently publicised poaching of plants and animals on Cape York and the plunder of trochus and clam shell in the Far Northern Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, prove that more Rangers should be employed to patrol National and Marine Parks in northern Cape York. Community Rangers are well placed to do this.

The Community Rangers believe that licensed commercial fishing (prawn trawling, beche-de-mere, barra and crayfish) damages the seagrass beds and hunting grounds of their peoples' estates (sea country). This, along with smuggling, causes people great concern. There was a case last year of an unknown person (and his dog) in the scrub at Cape Direction - he escaped before Lockhart people could find out what he was doing. This disrespect for

Aboriginal law and sacred sites on land and sea, both within and outside of DOGIT (deed of grant in trust) areas frustrates Community Rangers - and the people of Lockhart River.

Aboriginal Rangers from communities should be contracted by QDEH and GBRMPA as Authorised Officers. They could also be contracted by Coastwatch and Fisheries to help with their patrol work on the Cape. The skills acquired at the Cairns TAFE Rangers course can be utilised outside of the community in all facets of Rangers duties including acknowledgment as trained land and sea management officers in their own right.

These Aboriginal Rangers are fully qualified to manage, patrol and work in existing National Parks under guidelines set down by QDEH and GBRMPA. They must not be patronised as modern day 'blacktrackers' or seen as tokenism within the system. They are a resource which can only lead to more efficiency in sea and land management.

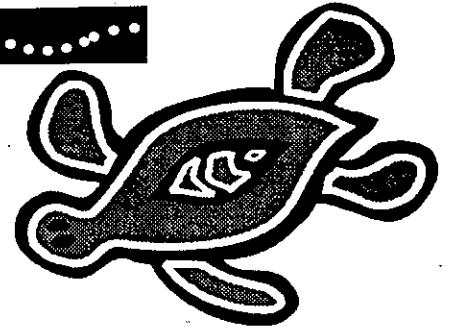


*Jim Wallace giving his views on the role of  
Community Rangers*

## Turtle traveller

The Great Barrier Reef is now a refuge for the green turtle. Six kinds of sea turtles live in the Great Barrier Reef. The well known green turtle is a vegetarian, feeding on seagrass and seaweed. Others, such as the loggerhead turtle, feed on marine animals such as crabs, marine snails, and jellyfish. Green turtles are great travellers! Females have been tagged by scientists over the past 20 years. They feed and lay their eggs in different areas, sometimes up to 3500 kilometres apart! Studies show there are 2 distinct and separate populations of green turtles in the Great Barrier Reef. Most (80%) turtles on the Great Barrier Reef nest on Raine Island, Moulter Cay, No 7 and No 8 Sandbanks and Bramble Cay. These turtles travel to feeding areas in the northern Cape York, Torres Strait, Arafura Sea, the Gulf of Papua and New Caledonia. They are taken by people in Torres Strait, Papua New Guinea and eastern Indonesia. Turtles that nest in the south (near Mon Repos) also travel up the coast to feed along Cape York.

There are not as many green turtles in Australian waters as in the old days - they are classed as vulnerable to



extinction in Australia. This is due to many reasons: drowning in shark nets and trawl nets, boat strikes, fewer beaches for nesting, less seagrass for feeding and hunting of green turtles. The trouble is that turtles are travellers - if they stayed in one place, we could look after them better. When they are in other countries, we have no laws to protect them from over-hunting or egg-collecting. We need to look after them here in the Great Barrier Reef too!

### DID YOU KNOW?

- a green turtle egg in a warm nest (above 29°C) will grow into a girl but a turtle egg in a cooler (below 28°C) nest will grow into a boy!

- Raine Island and Bramble Cay have the largest green turtle nesting population in the world.

- females must grow to about 30-50 years of age before they can breed.

- females lay up to 100 eggs in each clutch but only one will survive to an adult turtle.

- between 10 000 and 20 000 green turtles are taken in Papua New Guinea (most are from Australia).

### Reward For Turtle Tags

If you catch a turtle with a metal tag on its flipper, please give the tag to a National Parks or Community Ranger or post it to:

QDEH

PO Box 155

Brisbane Qld 4002

You will be helping in the greater understanding of the lives of turtles and will be rewarded with a special hat.

*You will not get into trouble.*

## PROTECTING RIGHTS AND INTERESTS

GBRMPA said 'no' to a big tourist company who wanted a permit to put a large pontoon on the reef at Green Island. The permit was refused because Green Island and reef is an important place in the sea country of certain aboriginal Custodians. People feel that building the pontoon will affect the cultural values of that place.

There is a Marine Park law which says 'cultural and heritage values' must be considered when deciding permits so GBRMPA was able to say 'NO'.

Other Marine Park laws which help Aboriginal and Islander peoples include:

- \* the right of any person to appeal a GBRMPA permit decision if a person is affected by that decision. That person can give their reasons and the permit is looked at again.

- \* an Aboriginal member will be included in the decision-making board: the Marine Park Authority. When this person is appointed indigenous people will have another way to have their say in Marine Park management.

## SEA SPY

Community Rangers attended a training workshop at Cairns and Lake Tinaroo recently. Evenings were spent with Ross and Jimmy playing the guitar but no-one could remember the words - they were very short songs! And Shorty entertained the mob with some dance! Thank you to all the rangers who came - we worked hard (sorry about all the paperwork!) and we look forward to successful workshops this month thanks to you!

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about planning in the marine parks talk to Ross Williams on (077) 81 8811 or write to him at GBRMPA, PO Box 1379, Townsville Qld 4810. These articles are the views of the authors and do not represent the views of GBRMPA or QDEH.

## Have Your Say !

Staff from GBRMPA, QDEH, and the Cape York Land Council are visiting communities for the regional workshops to discuss sea country issues. Dates are listed below so don't miss out! We need your help to make the plans work.

### Open meetings

Open meetings will be held to explain to users (fishermen, boaties, locals) about planning the Marine Park and to listen to their views. Everyone is welcome to come along to these meetings:

Cooktown	3 May
Coen	4 May
Weipa	20 May
Bamaga	24 May

Regional workshops for Marine Park planning have started, with the first one being at Hope Vale. Make sure you come and have your say, and help us with some decisions. Regional workshops dates are:

Hope Vale	2-3 May
Coen	6-7 May
Lockhart River	15-16 May
Weipa South	19 May
Injinoo	22-23 May

### School visits

Community rangers will be visiting schools to tell young people about sea country issues and to give them the chance to say what they think. Interested teachers should talk to a ranger (see front page for names).

LAURA DANCE FESTIVAL is coming up soon, on 24-25 June.

## Who's who?



Leanne Sommer is a Planning Officer at GBRMPA, and works on the management review of the Far Northern Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

She grew up at Kowanyama with the Kunjen people. Leanne has studied natural and cultural resource management and conservation at university.

Leanne has spent 8 years working in conservation in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

She has a desire to see indigenous people grow strong in their role in managing and caring for land and sea.

Likes: being in the bush, good coffee  
Dislikes: wild pigs, missing coffee in the mornings