

Number 5 May 1996

SEA COUNTRY

INFORMATION ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES OF THE CAPE YORK MARINE PARKS

Look Inside...

- **Other views** - What are fishermen, conservation groups and tourists saying about planning for the marine parks of Cape York?

- **Dugong** - what do we know about their population numbers?

- **Seagrass soup?** Find out why it is an important part of reef tucker

- Community Ranger views from **Phillip Bowie at Injinoo**

The fifth issue of Sea Country is written by staff of the Department of Environment (DoE - yes, we have had a name change!), the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and Community Rangers of Cape York.

We thank you for your feedback about Sea Country to date and would like to hear of any changes you would like to see made or other information that should be included. Contact your Community Ranger.



Planning Update

It is clear that bama care about the health of their sea country.

Many of the zoning proposals that Aboriginal peoples on Cape York Peninsula have put to GBRMPA and DoE are based on peoples' wishes to protect marine areas from too much fishing and too much development.

Some of these proposals will affect other people who use the marine parks. (Other groups' views are summarised inside).

The next planning steps are to:

- have follow-up talks between Marine Parks staff and Aboriginal peoples from eastern Cape York, and:
- hold meetings with people such as commercial fishing, conservation and tourism groups to reach agreement on how marine parks should be zoned and managed.

As well as zoning, staff from GBRMPA and DoE will be discussing ways to make formal arrangements with Aboriginal groups for the on-going management of the sea areas of clan and language estates.

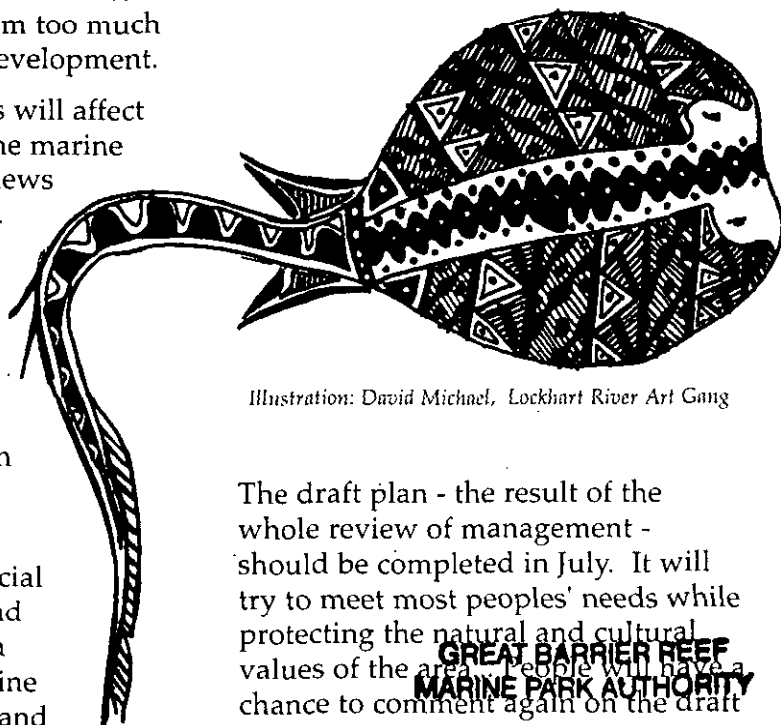


Illustration: David Michael, Lockhart River Art Gang

The draft plan - the result of the whole review of management - should be completed in July. It will try to meet most peoples' needs while protecting the natural and cultural values of the area. People will have a chance to comment again on the draft plan.

26 JUN 1996

NOTICES

Community Ranger Report
Sharing the Caring, an informative and useful report, has been produced by the Community Ranger Co-ordinating Body. Copies available from DoE, Cape York Land Council and Community Councils.

Need more details about marine parks?

Ask one of these people:

Phillip Bowie
James Creek
Rocky Gibson
Alison Liddy
Meun (Shorty) Lifu
Conrad Michael
George Monahan
Abraham Omeeny
Alima Panuel
Gwen Toby
Jim Wallace
Phil Wallis

Illustrations by Lockhart River Art Gang:

David Michael - pages front, 3
Richard O'Brien - page 2
Silas Hobson - page 2
Edna Johnston: page 4
Terry Platt - page 5

Marine Parks



Seagrasses are special

Many salt water animals rely on seagrass for their survival. We must look after it.

Tucker

Seagrass is good tucker for turtle and dugong, but most marine animals can't eat seagrass directly. It has lots of fibre which takes a long time to digest (break down) to give energy to the animal. Crabs, prawns and small fish wait until bacteria in the salt water break down dead seagrass leaves to 'seagrass soup'. This 'soup' is their tucker.

Shelter

Some animals (shrimp, shellfish and small fish) live amongst the seagrass. It provides shelter from other animals that eat them (their predators). This shelter is especially important to some fish and prawns when they are young.

Sand traps

Seagrasses in coastal areas also play an important role in keeping the water clear by trapping fine sediments (sand) in their large root systems.

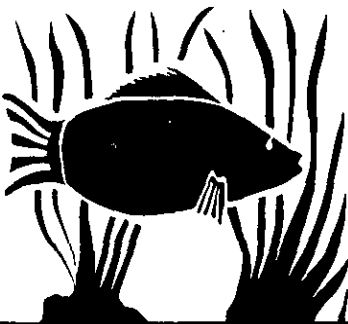
Where are the seagrass beds?

In the marine park, we know seagrasses are found in shallow water along the coast of eastern Cape York. What we didn't know until recently was that seagrass also survives in the deep water, down to 58 metres deep. (Seagrass needs light to survive - deep water is usually too dark).

The deep water seagrass beds found to date are mostly south of Princess Charlotte Bay, in the waters between reefs on the middle and outer part of the Great Barrier Reef. They are probably important feeding grounds for dugong. They seem to be less important for prawns and fish compared to shallow coastal seagrass areas.

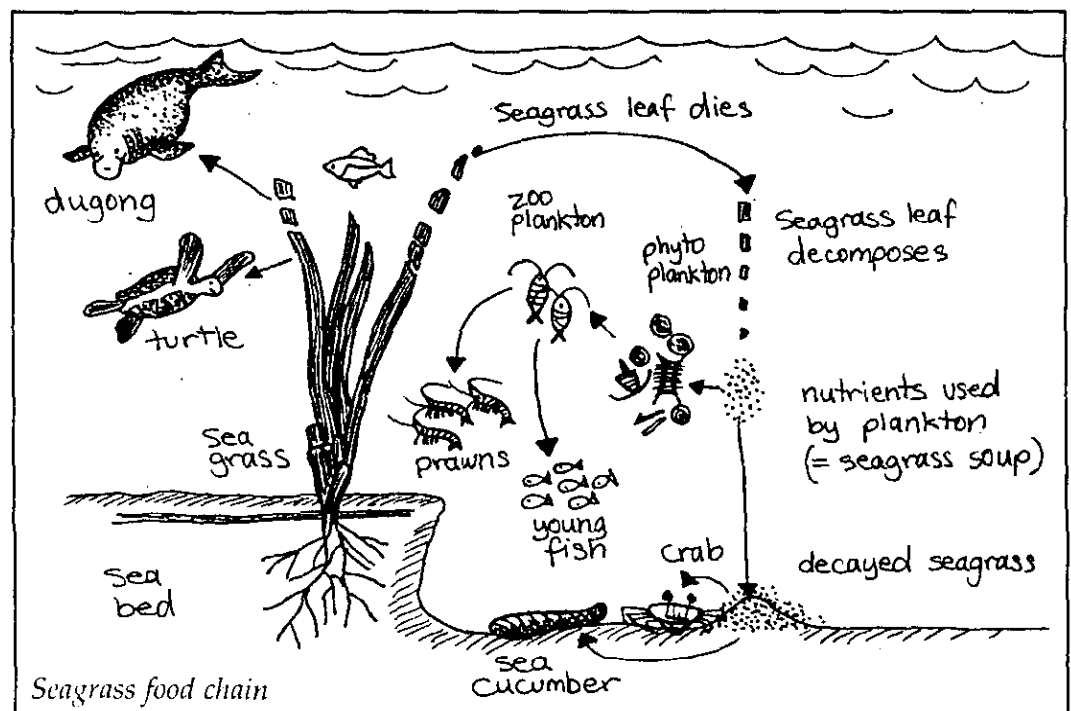
Now that we know where the deep water seagrass beds are, we need to find out more about them.

Richard O'Brien Lockhart River Art Gang



DID YOU KNOW?

- Threats to seagrasses include damage by floods and cyclones, oil spills, ports, mariculture, tourism development and trawling
- Seagrasses in shallow areas (and important dugong feeding grounds between Starcke River and Barrow Point) are protected from trawling through inshore trawl closure areas and marine park zoning



Other groups' views on marine parks

The first stage of planning for the marine parks of Cape York is now complete and many people have had a say.



Archie Tanna, Cape York Land Council, makes his point at a Fishing Issues meeting in Cairns in November, 1995, attended by representatives of many interest groups.

- current management should be improved and better enforcement of existing rules is needed

- Aboriginal peoples' strong cultural connections with sea country should be recognised through greater involvement in management of the marine park

Different groups have different concerns:

- commercial fishermen want to protect important fish breeding grounds and keep areas open for commercial fishing

- conservation groups want to stop commercial fishing until we know whether it is causing long term damage to the reef and they want more green zones to protect special areas

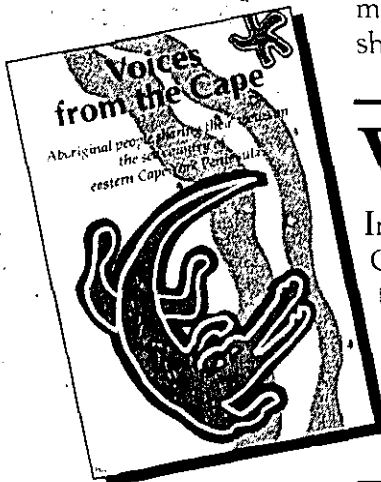
- recreational fishermen want to keep access to the coast open; they don't want to be 'locked out'

- tourism groups want to keep their options open for future ecotourism ventures such as extended dive trips to the outer reef and specialised natural history or cultural tours



Most people agree that:

- the Far Northern Section of the marine park is a special place that should be protected



Video release

In May last year, we filmed Elders, Community Rangers and other people talking about caring for sea country.

The video, *Voices from the Cape* (30 mins.), has now been released. See people from the Cape talk

about their connection to sea country and ideas for management of marine parks. See how different communities view the same problems. Don't miss this video!! Ask a Community Ranger or your local Corporation.

Warning - This video contains footage of recently deceased persons used with the permission of their families.

Community Ranger Views

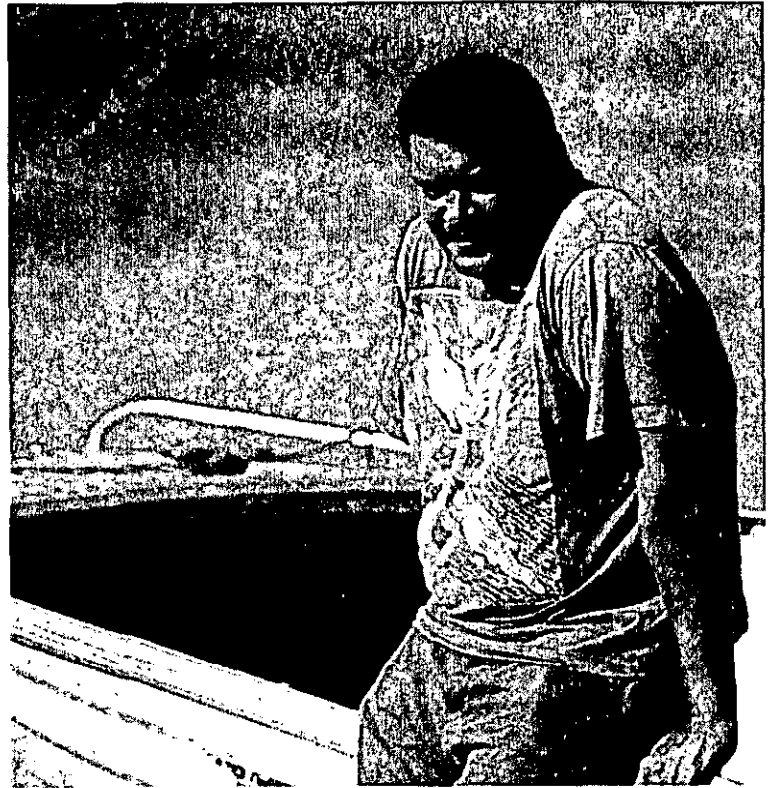
Phillip Bowie - Injinoo

I am a third year Community Ranger with Injinoo community and currently into my Associate Diploma. After leaving school, I worked in the sugar and banana industries in the Innisfail area. Since coming back to Injinoo, I have worked in the community (CDEP). I have been employed as a Community Ranger at Injinoo for the past two and a half years. The Community Ranger program should provide me with a theoretical background to the practical skills I learn on the job and the cultural knowledge I gain from my Elders.

The main duty I have as a Ranger is the management of land and sea country. I also liaise with the various state and federal government agencies on behalf of the Elders and the Injinoo community, ensuring their interests are communicated to decision-makers.

Other duties include campsite management, tourist management, guided tours and general community awareness. I have recently completed a law enforcement and investigation course with state marine parks.

The main reason I joined the Ranger Service was to help 'care for country' so that future generations can enjoy the land and sea and all their resources. I was also interested in being able to work with Elders and gain further cultural and environment knowledge.



The main problem Injinoo community faces is the impact of tourism on the country, with very high impacts in small, sensitive areas. There are concerns over illegal netting, smuggling and over-taking of fish and other marine resources (oysters, crayfish).

One of my main desires is to help Injinoo gain control of land and sea rights and also our natural resources. The traditional owners have the best knowledge of the area so it is important that they have input into all decision-making which concerns their country.

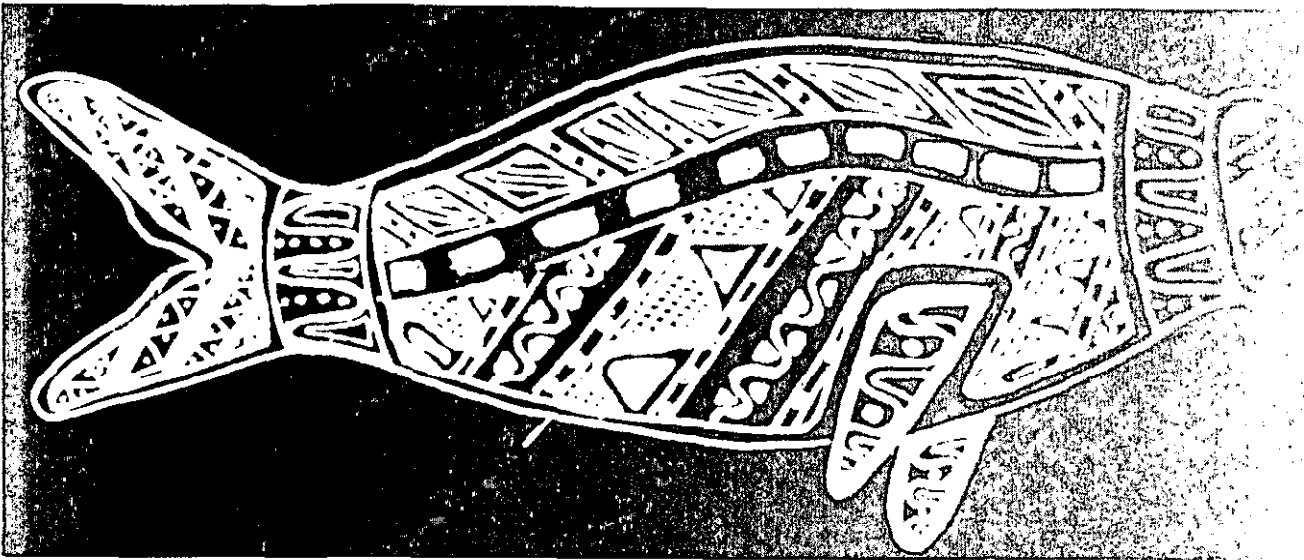
I feel that, with continuing co-operation between traditional owners and government agencies such as GBRMPA and DoE, land and sea country will be for everyone to enjoy and to pass on to the next generation.

Written by Phillip Bowie

"The main reason I joined the Ranger Service was to help 'care for country' so that future generations can enjoy the land and sea and all their resources"



Dugong— here today gone tomorrow?



David Michael, Lockhart River Art Gang

Dugong are vulnerable to extinction. This means that in all the world there are not many dugong left. For this reason, the rest of the world wants to protect them.

Bama also want to protect dugong - they are an important part of culture and tradition.

Scientists have been studying dugong populations to find out how many live in the marine park and to understand more about them. They need to talk with bama about their traditional knowledge and are inviting Community Rangers to help with some of the studies.

South of Cape Bedford (Cooktown), dugongs are in trouble. Their numbers have halved over 8 years of the study. There are less than 1700 animals in 39 000 square kilometres. In some places here, dugongs have all but disappeared due to loss of seagrass beds, shark meshing, gill netting and traditional hunting. Very few bama hunt dugong in these areas any more.

North of Cooktown, the number of dugong generally does not seem to have changed over 8 years. There is still concern over the loss of seagrass and the numbers of dugong in some areas.

Dugong protection is a big problem and many different things need to be done. Commercial fishermen are already talking about how they can protect dugong, for example, no more gill netting in important dugong habitats such as Shoalwater Bay. Most seagrass beds are already protected from trawling but other threats must be considered. Shark netting can be stopped if different ways of protecting swimmers on popular beaches are found.

And traditional hunters need to understand that too much hunting now will mean no more healthy tucker for their kids in the future. Everybody must take responsibility for protecting the last of the world's dugong.

DUGONG DANGERS

- trapping in gill nets
- injury by boats
- loss of feeding grounds (seagrass)
- traditional hunting
- shark meshing
- floods, cyclones, storms & predators



SEA SPY

- "We are one mob. We share the water. We share the reef" (George Monahan, Traditional Owner, Flinders Island).

- The Cape Melville and Starcke interim planning committee got together recently to help with each other's submissions for planning the marine park from Bathurst Head to Port Stewart.

- Lakefield Traditional Owners put on a deadly display at the Boat Show in Cairns recently. They were promoting tourism ventures on their country to potential visitors.

- Jim Wallace took part in a routine aerial surveillance flight over Shelburne Bay with DoE ranger, Gary Luchi. Together they recorded all vessels in the area and checked for illegal activities (fishing in the green zone). Jim said it was very interesting to see his country from the air but wasn't so sure when the plane made some steep turns...

- Gary Luchi is keen to involve rangers in routine surveillance flights over their sea country, to train them in surveillance skills. Phone Gary at DoE to find out more. Tel: 070 523 952

- Speaking of flying ...

One GBRMPA staff member became famous (infamous?) when he caught a helicopter out of Lakeland Downs after being trapped there by recent flooding. Any guesses?



Australian Customs and Coastwatch visit communities

Australian Customs and Coastwatch staff from Cairns and Thursday Island visited Lockhart River and Injinoo, with Chicka Turner from GBRMPA. They spoke with Elders and Community Rangers about issues concerning the communities and future involvement with the service within their land and sea country.



Jimmy Wallace, Richard Hobdon, Andrew Frugniet, Blair Gardener and Mr Peter Creek talk about Coastwatch.



Community Ranger, Jimmy Wallace, on aerial surveillance

They talked about identifying and reporting illegal activities on the free-call number - 1800 06 1800. Also discussed was the future involvement of Rangers on Customs vessel patrols. Customs and Coastwatch hope to visit other communities later this year. Contact Andrew Frugniet in Cairns, (070) 523 576 or Michael Johnston on Thursday Island, (070) 691 554.

Who's who?

Joan Phillips is co-ordinating the Far Northern Section review, working with Leanne Sommer, Ross Williams and others at GBRMPA. (She's the short one!) Joan has been working at GBRMPA for about two and a half years. Before that, she was working in Victoria on marine parks matters. She studied marine biology at university and then worked at the museum in Melbourne, where, for several years, she studied squid and seashells.

Joan feels privileged to be able to work in Cape York and the remote northern section of the Great Barrier Reef at such an exciting and challenging time for indigenous peoples.



FURTHER



INFORMATION

For further information about planning the marine parks, talk to Ross Williams at GBRMPA on (077) 500 700 or Frank Gleeson at DoE on (070) 523 043.

We welcome your contributions to Sea Country - talk to Julie Swartz at DoE on (070) 523 043. These articles are the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of GBRMPA or DoE.