

ECA WA News

Quarterly newsletter of the Environmental Consultants Association (WA)
ISSUE 03 Autumn 2013



26th Annual ECA (WA) Inc New Year Breakfast 5 February 2013 at Burswood on Swan

this issue

- WA's Underwater Office P.2
- YECA's Debut Event P.3
- Scholar Recipient Maddison Read P.4
- Richard Gorham Honoured P.5
- ECA on SRGs P.6
- Conferences and SEWPaC Workshop P.8

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Left: Anthony Sutton (from left), Charlie Welker, Darren Foster

Below left: Michelle Holliday (from left), Clinton van den Bergh, Matthew Johnston.

Below right: Hannah Fletcher (left) and Floora de Wit.

Photos – Van Hart



Winter ECA WA News

Winter ECA WA News contributions should be sent to ECA Editor Jo Tregonning at editoreca@iprimus.com.au by **Friday 7 June 2013.**

ECA WA News is a quarterly publication of the Environmental Consultants Association (WA) Inc (ECA). It aims to inform members on the activities of the ECA and its members, events and training, and developments in the environmental industry. The views and opinions expressed in the articles in ECA WA News are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the ECA.



WA's Underwater Office

By Ben Davis (Oceanica Consulting)

When I studied marine science at university I had visions of long, sunny days spent diving in crystal clear, tropical waters, with dolphins doing cartwheels and fin slaps as we worked. The truth, I was to find out, is that this experience is mostly limited to our eastern states counterparts, while we westerners rely on cold water, seagrass and sharks to see the days through.

A typical field day starts with a 6am meet up at the offices, where equipment is packed into vans and we trundle off to a boat ramp somewhere along the coast to meet the vessel. So far my work has taken me from the southwest of our state, right up the northern reaches of the Kimberley region. The Kimberley would have to be one of my favourite places in the world, a vast, relatively untouched landscape of raw, and sometimes very powerful, beauty. Added to this are the locals – who always make life interesting.

Once the boat is loaded and the obligatory paperwork is out of the way, it's time to start off to the first site. Divers kit up into wetsuits, dive gear and all the tools for the day's work. Sometimes there is so much equipment that weight belts become a formality, rather than a necessity. Once on-site and settled, the divers (usually one or two at a time) are over the side to begin the day's work.

The best thing about working underwater is the quiet. Emails, phone calls and daily life can't reach me, and there is nothing to do but focus on the task. Serenity is occasionally interrupted by the dive supervisor calling over the radio, but this is a small price to pay. In a typical day we will do anything from 4-10 dives each, spending up to four hours in total underwater. Tasks range from harvesting and planting seagrass (following the same methods you would use in the veggie patch!) to swapping loggers on mooring lines, counting seagrass, videoing or photographing the seafloor, taking sediment cores, or installing and measuring star pickets to monitor sand movement.

Some days you strike it lucky, and can see for 10-20 m. Other days you don't, and seeing your hand in front of the dive mask is a struggle. Conditions like these make work difficult, but not impossible. I've found that I've become very good at working by touch since I started this job!

If we are really lucky a few of the locals will come to say hello, and, provided they're not straight out of *Jaws*, it's a welcome sight. Fish, stingrays, seahorses and crayfish are almost mandatory, while whales and



This pregnant Western Spiny/Narrow-bellied seahorse (Hippocampus angustus) clings to a star picket. Photo – Ben Davis

dolphins are also common in some of the remote sites, although I'm yet to see a whale underwater.

Once done, it's time to make our way back to the office, following the reverse procedure. Diving isn't the only field work we do. Installing monitoring cameras, diver-less surveys using ROVs and towed video, and marine mammal surveys make up some of our other jobs. It's all part of being a marine scientist and I love it.



Working conditions at an underwater office can vary from harvesting algae in the crystal clear waters offshore of Alkimos (left), to counting seagrass in a dredge plume at Woodman Point (right). Working in such poor visibility means that work is done by touch rather than sight. Photos – Ben Davis





YECA's debut event a resounding success

By Judy Ruppert

On 21 February, the Young consultants of the Environmental Consultants Association (YECA) held its debut event which entailed a 'speed dating night' with the topic 'what it is like to be an environmental consultant?' The turn-out was beyond YECA's expectations with 60 experienced and young consultants attending the event.

After an introductory presentation by YECA Chair Judith Ruppert, young consultants had the chance to question experienced consultants during five ten-minute rounds. After the official part, the event continued with drinks and food.

Feedback from the event has been overwhelmingly positive, with both young and

senior consultants enjoying the opportunity to network with like-minded individuals and share their knowledge of the environmental consulting industry. One senior consultant commented that "Not only was it a pleasure to see so many enthusiastic young environmental scientists but I am sure their energy revitalised a few of the older mentor cohort offering their advice."

This event will provide the basis of a long-term mentoring program. The majority of attendees have already expressed their interest in participating in this program.

The next event is proposed for June 2013 and will most likely involve a presentation or workshop on a professional development or industry specific skill. This event will be for YECA members only.

For more information on upcoming events, the mentoring program or becoming a member please email yeca@eca.org.au.

YECA

YECA is a subgroup of ECA (WA) targeted at young professionals with less than three years of work experience. The main purpose of YECA is to provide a platform where young environmental consultants can gain valuable business and industry specific skills which are not necessarily taught at university or work. This for instance will include presentations and workshops about useful business skills such as time and project management as well as industry specific topics such as Strategic Environmental Assessments. Ideally, attending these workshops will be integrated with company professional development programs so graduates can earn 'professional development points' when participating in such events.

Ray Hart Memorial Scholarship

The Ray Hart Memorial Scholarship encourages and assists a deserving student to pursue field research in natural history.

If you would like to contribute to the scholarship fund you can download the donation form at www.eca.org.au.

Students wishing to apply for the scholarship can obtain more information by contacting Sophie Peoples on sophie.peoples@uwa.edu.au or 6488 8071.

Pathway to an Enhanced Western Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Knowledge System

20 March 2013

King Street Room, Rydges Hotel

The ECA invites you to attend a presentation by Russell Barnett of Australian Venture Consultants covering a significant investigation undertaken by Australian Venture Consultants into the knowledge system that supports decision-making by industry, governments, environmental NGO, communities and other stakeholders pertaining to the

State's terrestrial biodiversity. The project was overseen by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy Western Australia administered eNGO-Industry-Environment-Forum (NIEF) and funded by BHP Billiton Iron Ore.

The report is serving as a key input to several State government and industry planning initiatives that revolve around improving many of the issues identified in the report.

Arrive 5.30pm for a 6.00pm start with drinks and nibbles to follow. Members free. Non-members \$20. Registrations at www.eca.org.au.

Ray Hart Memorial Scholar: Mulgara vs. Feral Cats – and the winner is...

By Madison Read



*Lorna Glen Homestead (above) was a home-away-from-home during my honours project and a very comforting sight after a long day and night. Photo – Harriet Mills
You couldn't stay angry at these guys for too long – their personalities won me over every time. This brush-tailed mulgara (*Dasyercus blythi*) (right) is definitely princess-(Diana)-worthy.*



I had already begun my honours project and was down on funds when the Ray Hart Memorial Scholarship came to my attention. To receive the great news that I had been awarded the scholarship in July 2012 came as such a relief and helped considerably to fund my project at Lorna Glen Station in the Murchison Region.

Lorna Glen is a proposed reserve managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Aboriginal Wiluna community. Since becoming a reserve, DEC has erected a predator exclusion compound and undertakes annual baiting for feral cats. This work has made Lorna Glen a sanctuary to semi-arid species such as the brush-tailed mulgara (*Dasyercus blythi*).

Prior to 2006, observing a mulgara or a mulgara track was uncommon. However through the cat baiting/monitoring program, there has been an increase in the number of mulgara observed. Thus proposing the question as to whether feral cats were having any effect on the mulgaras' ecology/biology.

To answer this question, mulgara populations inside the fenced compound were compared to populations outside the compound; no feral cats vs. feral cats. If feral cats were negatively affecting the

mulgara we'd expect to see populations within the compound to have a greater population size, be in better condition and have a greater home range than the outside population.

A typical day would begin in the afternoon organising traps to be set up and then heading out to the trapping grids approximately 30 km away from the homestead. Just after dusk we would head out again to begin radio-tracking till just before sunrise. By 9 am the traps put out from the day before would be checked and cleared with mulgara caught taken back to the lab at the homestead to be measured. Before measuring, it's time to have a quick break and breakfast. Depending on the number of mulgara caught, measuring and recording took between 1-2 hours and as they couldn't be taken back till dusk it was time to have a short 2-3 hour sleep before doing it all again that afternoon.

It wasn't all hard work and no sleep for nothing though – 100 individuals were caught. This is the largest record caught to date in one area over a short period of time. Population sizes inside and outside the compound were large and all individuals were considered healthy. Home ranges were also found to be three times larger than those observed by previously published research papers. Overall, it seemed that the current population size of

feral cats at Lorna Glen did not have a significant effect on the ecology/biology of the mulgara.

Although my honours has finished, I look forward to publishing and reminiscing the year I had. Like the little sleep I got and the realisation by volunteers that a mulgara bite is worse than its bark. However the one thing I will remember the most is how interesting and unique each mulgara was, as they showed many different personalities.



*Approximately 30 mulgara were caught on this day to record and process – a busy day!
Photo – Madison Read*



Photo Story: *It was one of the hottest weeks of summer, and every lunch we would head back to camp to relieve our heat-affected bodies. As we were about to head back out we were invited to jump into the helicopter to go on the mail run and to check windmills and monitoring points at the station and surrounding area. The pilot ended up taking us to Karijini National Park, flying through the gorges, over the old asbestos mine (above), Wittenoom town and over some spectacular scenery of the national park. Photo –Anna Leung (Phoenix Environmental)*

Richard Gorham ECA (WA) Honorary Life Member

By Ian Le Provost

Richard Gorham was a foundation committee member of ECA (WA) and has made a significant contribution to the Association during many years. His work was recognised at the New Year breakfast in February 2013 when he was awarded Honorary Life Membership.

Richard was a committee member for several years following incorporation and played a very significant hand in our Charter and our Constitution, as well as our Code of Conduct and our guidance policies on 'Peer Review' and 'Engaging a Consultant'.

Richard returned as Committee President in 2003-2005 then continued on the

committee for a further two years. Valuable initiatives that he delivered during his presidency included:

- Negotiating the Partnering Agreement between ECA and the EPASU (now OEPA);
- Establishing the Environmental Assessment Training for Practitioners Course, which in November 2012 was held for the 11th time and has always been a sellout; and
- Founding the Ray Hart Memorial Scholarship which supports outstanding Honors students committed to fieldwork and multidisciplinary ecological research.

Each of these continues as important ECA initiatives today.

In an environmental consulting career spanning more than 30 years, Richard helped develop Bowman Bishaw Gorham into one of WA's pre-eminent environmental consultancies. Upon Bowman Bishaw Gorham's acquisition by RPS in 2004,

he served as RPS Asia Pacific's Chairman of Directors and as Managing Director of RPS Environment until 2010. He continued with RPS in a mentoring and business development role until his retirement from them in July 2012. Richard is now practicing privately in environmental due diligence and strategic review.



Ian Le Provost (left) presents Richard Gorham with an Honorary Life Membership to the Association at the recent breakfast. Photo – Van Hart



Photo Story: Perched atop the Seven Rivers Lookout at the start of the wet season in November 2011 we watched a large storm roll in and dump rain on Wyndham and the stock holding yards at the port. We were based in the region as part of an Orange Leaf-nosed Bat (*Rhinonicteris aurantius*) research project. Photo – Glen Gaikhorst (Senior Zoologist, GHD)



Photo Story: This Wongai ningai (*Ningai ridei*) was observed during the night feeding on a grasshopper as big as him in the Great Victoria Desert. These tiny carnivorous marsupials weigh only 4 grams but are able to feed on larger insects such as this grasshopper using speed and agility to capture prey and needle-sharp teeth to devour it . Photo – Glen Gaikhorst (Senior Zoologist, GHD)

ECA represented on Stakeholder Reference Groups

ECA has been identified as a key stakeholder for a number of reference groups in WA and has nominated senior members to represent ECA (WA) members. Your ECA member will aim to bring relevant matters to the groups for discussion and constructively discuss and debate relevant matters.

Environmental Regulation Stakeholder Reference Group

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is establishing an Environmental Regulation Stakeholder Reference Group to guide policy in DEC's Environmental Regulation Division, which is responsible for industry licensing, inspection and compliance, contaminated sites, controlled waste, noise regulation and pollution response. This group will contribute to reforms which are currently being progressed. These include a review of the *Contaminated Sites Act 2003*, amendments to the Environmental Protection (Noise) Regulations 1997 and reforms to streamline industry licensing.

The Reference Group will be chaired by DEC's Director of Environmental Regulation and is expected to meet three times a year for the first two years and bi-annually thereafter. The first meeting date will be announced in April. Your ECA (WA) members on this group are Jamie Shaw (senior representative) and Rob Holmes (deputy) who welcome your contributions and thoughts. For more information contact **Jamie (AECOM) on 6208 0199 or Jamie.Shaw@aecom.com**.

Strategic Assessment of the Perth and Peel Regions Stakeholder Reference Group

The Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments are undertaking a Strategic Assessment of the Perth and Peel regions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The Strategic Assessment will assess the potential environmental impacts arising from future development on matters of National Environmental Significance (NES).

In parallel with the Strategic Assessment, the Environmental Protection Authority will be preparing strategic advice on related matters for the Minister for Environment under Section 16(e) of the Western Australian *Environmental Protection Act 1986*.

A Stakeholder Reference Group began meeting in November 2012 and will meet every six weeks continuing, initially, until the Strategic Assessment draft policy and assessment documents are released for public comment in mid-2013. Your ECA (WA) member on this reference group is Jason Hick.

At the first meeting Jason gave a three-minute introduction of ECA (WA) and highlighted members' experience with the EPBC Act, process experience and technical knowledge. "Our interest in this process is a strong desire to see the development of a functional, science-based and scientifically-sound, holistic framework for dealing with matters of NES across the regions" he said. "In particular, we think the process should address: key regional and species level information gaps; ensure consistency and transparency in the approach and outcomes; enable efficiency in a regional assessment that addresses cumulative impacts; and provide certainty that matters of NES are adequately planned for and protected."

If you have any queries, desires or thoughts on how ECA (WA) engage with this process and what we should contribute please contact **Jason (Emerge Associates) on Jason.Hick@emergeassociates.com.au or 9380 4988**.

Dredging Science Advisory Committee

The Dredging Science Advisory Committee (DSAC) was established to oversee implementation of the West Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI) Dredging Science Node and is chaired by the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority (OEPA). DSAC provides advice and recommendations to other WAMSI committees and the WAMSI Board in relation to dredging research. A key measure of success of WAMSI's Dredging Science Node will be practical application of its research outputs and ultimately the

degree of uptake by end user stakeholders such as ECA.

Ian Le Provost is the ECA (WA) representative on DSAC in an 'observer' capacity and is a conduit for communication between DSAC and the broader ECA membership and vice versa. Ian has attended two DSAC meetings to date. For more information relating to practical matters associated with research by the WAMSI Dredging Science Node contact **Ian (Le Provost Environmental) on 0418 997 759 or ian@leprovost.com.au**.

EPA Stakeholder Reference Group

Barbara Brown currently represents ECA (WA) members on the EPA Stakeholder Reference Group. The Group had its origins during the review of EIA Administrative Procedures back in 2009/2010. Although Group membership, and to a certain extent its aims, have evolved since then, it continues to meet on a regular basis. The Stakeholder Reference Group's work is primarily forward-looking, providing high-level strategic advice on the policies, strategies and processes that frame the EPA's work. The Stakeholder Reference Group has an informal liaison role rather than a formal advisory or decision-making role.

For more information contact **Barbara (Sinclair Knight Merz) on 9469 4421 or BBrown@skm.com.au**.

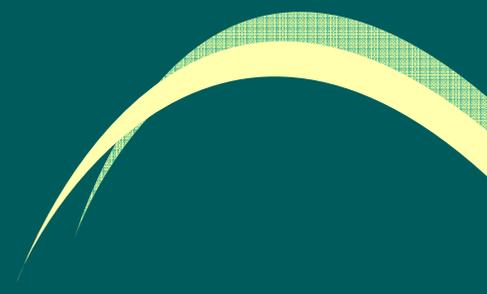


Photo Story

Have you taken a ripper photo and have a great yarn to tell about the photo? We'd like to hear from you! Photos and accompanying stories will feature in *ECA WA News*. ECA members will have the opportunity to vote and the winning entry will be announced at the 2013 ECA (WA) Inc. Annual General Meeting. Please send your photo and story to Jo at editoreca@iprimus.com.au.



Photo Story: *Strategen has been involved in the implementation and monitoring of rehabilitation works at the Fiona Stanley Hospital site since the project began. Rehabilitation of environmental offset areas has involved the planting of native vegetation, weed control and vegetation monitoring (above) to assess rehabilitation success. Photo –Strategen*

Conferences

Monday 18 March 10am–5.30pm

Forests, drought and climate change adaptation symposium, Economics, Commerce & Law Lecture Theatre 3 (ECL3), Murdoch University. Register at <http://www.piar.org.au/events/2013/forests-drought-and-climate-change-adaptation-symposium> by 2 pm, 15 March. Morning and afternoon teas provided.

24 - 27 June

Climate Adaptation 2013: Knowledge + Partnerships, Sydney. NCCARF National Adaptation Conference. Visit www.nccarf.edu.au/events/conference2013 <<http://foresthealth.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=578288a1bc146bea00eb6dc60&id=fef238a232&e=e0c8fcfc5b>

21–26 July

Building a Sustainable Earth through Remote Sensing, Melbourne. IGARSS 2013: IEEE International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium. Visit www.igarss2013.org/.

31 July–2 August

Balancing Communities and Coasts, Esperance. 2013 WA State Coastal Conference. Visit www.2013wacoastalconference.com.au

15–20 September

Solving the Groundwater Challenges of the 21st Century, Perth. Convention and Exhibition Centre. International Association of Hydrogeologists 2013. Visit iahcongress2013.org/.

8–11 October

Greenhouse 2013, Adelaide. Conference on climate change science, communication and policy. Visit www.greenhouse2013.com.

Workshop on SEWPaC Offsets calculator

11 April 2013

As an outcome of the recent ECA Offsets Workshop, the ECA is working with the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) to deliver workshop(s) on the use of the SEWPaC Offsets Calculator. There is an opportunity to deliver a maximum of two workshops with 30 places available at each. Prior to details being finalised ECA would like interested members and non-members to register their interest with Bec James at admin@eca.org.au.

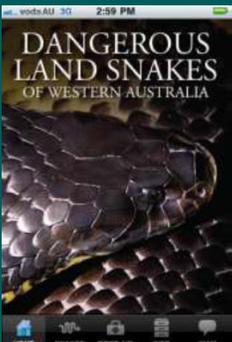
The partnering agreement signed in 2005 between ECA (WA) Inc. and Office of the Environmental Protection Authority (OEPA) (formerly EPASU) aims to jointly support regular training courses on EIA in Western Australia. Some past workshop overheads are available at www.eca.org.au/downloads.



Photo Story:

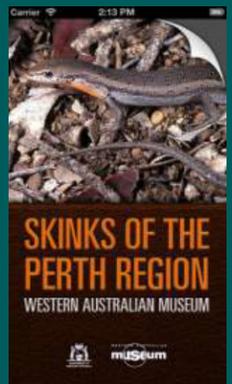
A brush-tailed mulgara's (*Dasyercus blythi*) favourite habitat – spinifex grasslands and red dirt near Lorna Glen homestead. My Honours project research suggests that the current population size of feral cats at Lorna Glen did not have a significant effect on the ecology/biology of mulgara.

Photo – Madison Read (Ray Hart Memorial Scholarship Recipient 2012)



Apps

Dangerous Land Snakes of Western Australia helps you identify the 54 species of venomous land snakes known to inhabit WA and also contains First Aid information.



Skinks of the Perth Region has images, maps, habitat, descriptions and general observations for 29 species of skinks located around the Perth region.

Both Apps are published by the Western Australian Museum and are available from the iTunes store for \$1.99 each.

Publications

The Angry Summer This report provides a summary of the extreme weather of the 2012/13 summer and the influence of climate change on such events. Visit <http://climatecommission.gov.au/report/the-angry-summer/>

March 2013 Forest Health Newsletter, Murdoch University. Visit <http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=578288a1bc146bea00eb6dc60&id=4503d16efa&e=4507f4fbe8>

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Previous editions of *ECA WA*

News From September 2012 the Environmental Consultants Association WA commenced publishing a quarterly newsletter *ECA WA News*. Past editions of this newsletter can be found at <http://www.eca.org.au/>

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