



SALTWATER SCIENCE

NEWS FROM THE MARINE BIODIVERSITY GROUP

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Marine Park planning process launched

Strategic planning for Marine Parks (or Marine Protected Areas) in the NT was launched recently with the inaugural meeting of the NT Marine Protected Areas Advisory Committee in Darwin on the 9th March.

The Committee has been established to provide stakeholder feedback to NRETA (Dept. Natural Resources Environment & the Arts) on the development of a draft Northern Territory Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Strategy. The Strategy is one of several NRM/NHT-funded projects currently being conducted by NRETA's Marine Biodiversity Group.

The Committee is independently chaired by Professor Bob Wasson of Charles Darwin University and includes representation from NT Land Councils, recreational and commercial fishing, aquaculture, mining, sailing and diving interests, as well as relevant Australian and NT Government representatives.

Significantly, the NT MPA Strategy will not, itself, identify new MPAs but will set out the legislative, scientific, planning and consultation framework

for how this will be done, including guidelines for MPA identification, selection and management.

The Strategy will provide a clear direction for the NT Government, community-initiated MPA proposals and also, formal community and industry input into the establishment of individual MPAs in the NT.

A draft of the Strategy will be released for wider public comment in the second half of this year.



Neil Smit

Kelloway Reef, Bynoe Harbour.

M&E expert visits NT

Last month the Marine Biodiversity Group invited (and hosted) meetings with the National Land and Water Resources Audit (NLWRA) to discuss approaches to coastal, estuarine and marine monitoring.

Dr Richard Mount, the NRM Estuarine, Coastal and Marine, National R&D Coordinator with the NLWRA, visited Darwin for

a two-day series of meetings with relevant NT scientists and data managers.

Richard's visit was timed to discuss national initiatives, approaches and information relevant to the development of the NRM Monitoring & Evaluation Framework for the NT's

coastal, estuarine and marine ecosystems.

Discussion focussed on the development of bio-physical indicators, methodologies, standards and protocols for monitoring biodiversity conservation and also reporting and data management systems.



NT Marine Conservation & Monitoring Overview

COMING UP

SCIENTIFIC WORKSHOP

TUESDAY 10 APRIL

Coastal, Estuarine & Marine Conservation Priorities in the NT

STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

FRIDAY 13 APRIL

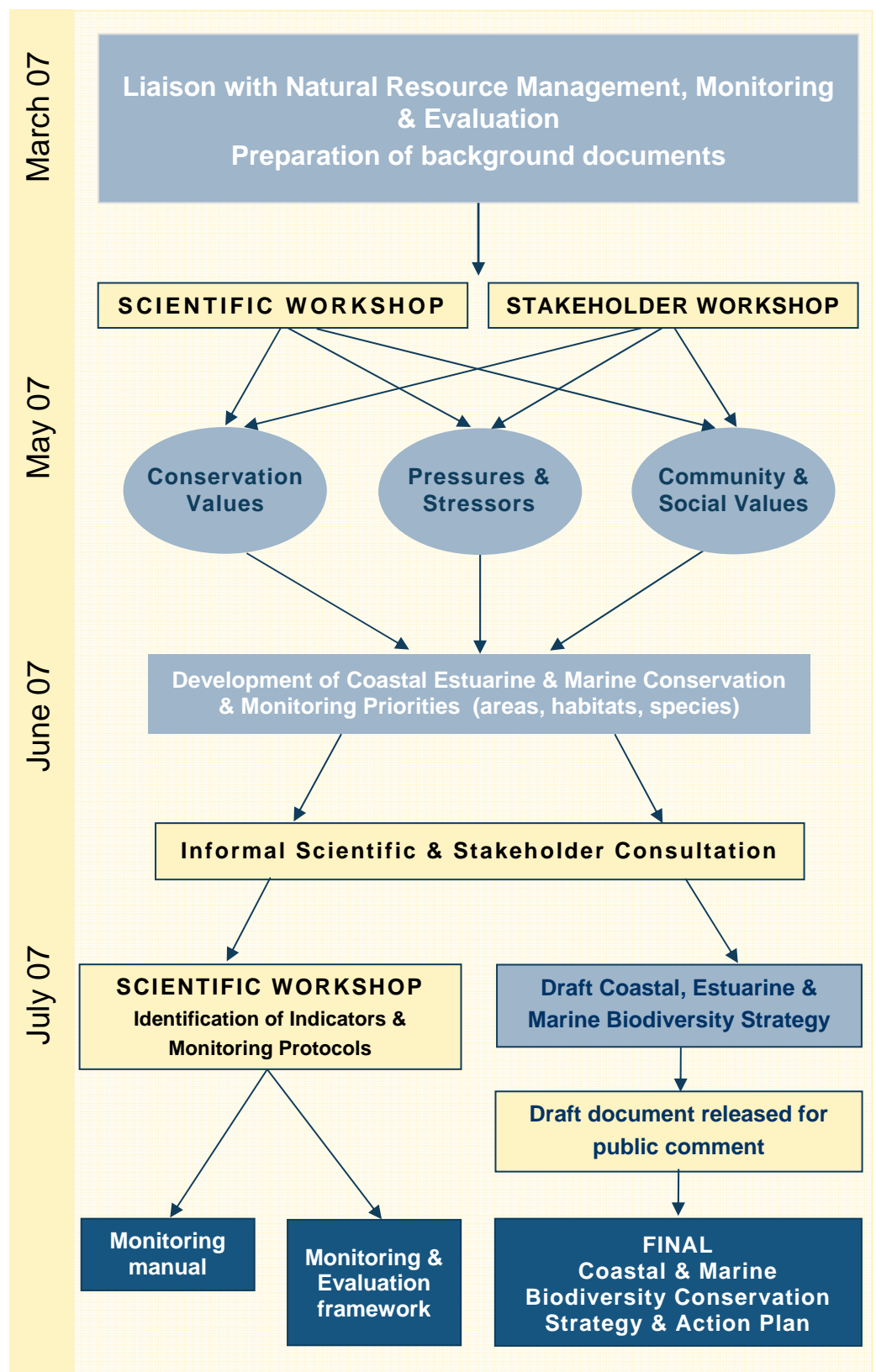
Coastal, Estuarine & Marine Values & Management Priorities in the NT

The Marine Biodiversity Group has planned a series of scientific and stakeholder workshops for 2007.

The workshops will assist in the development of a *NT Coastal, Estuarine & Marine Biodiversity Conservation & Management Strategy* and a Natural Resource Management monitoring and

evaluation framework for the NT's coastal, estuarine and marine ecosystems. The first two workshops will be held in April and a third will be held in June (see sidebar).

The figure below illustrates the consultation process planned for this year.



MBG shares marine experience

As an education and training initiative under the 'CDU-NTG Partnership', the Marine Biodiversity Group (MBG) last month coordinated the 2-week intensive Coastal and Resource Management Unit (on behalf of Dr. Naomi Rea) for the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Charles Darwin University.

Students in the course attended a range of specialist lectures on tropical marine ecosystems (physical processes, species, habitats), fisheries, aquaculture, marine pests, law, planning, policy and indigenous sea country planning and management. Speakers included a range of NT coastal and marine experts, including the MBG (NRETA), NT Fisheries, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, National Oceans Office and the Native Title Tribunal.

Case studies and assignments on Darwin Harbour, Sea Country Planning, the Northern Regional Marine Plan and Arafura-Timor Seas were also included to highlight the local, regional and international models, complexities, progress and approaches to coastal and marine resource management.

Significantly, students also had the opportunity to talk 'face-to-face' with

researchers, with visits to the Arafura Timor Research Facility, NT Museum and the Darwin Aquaculture Centre. A full-day field trip around Darwin Harbour, meeting managers and experts, highlighted the many complex, Indigenous, ecological, legal, planning and management issues associated with coastal and marine management in the NT.

PROF. K. EDYVANE



Students meet Aquaculture technician, Damon Gore at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre.

Reef Check Trainer Training for MBG

Earlier this year Shane Penny (NRETA) successfully completed certification as a Reef Check Trainer.

Reef Check is an international non-profit organization dedicated to the monitoring and conservation of coral reefs around the world. The organisation

promotes local community involvement and action through public education, training and collaboration with scientists. Based in Townsville, Reef Check helps co-ordinate surveys within the Great Barrier Reef and across northern Australia.

Shane is now able to train

other divers in Reef Check monitoring methods. Reef Check divers count key species or groups of fish and invertebrates and record the composition and health of the reef, noting incidence and expanse of coral bleaching, disease or mechanical destruction.

Data collected from each survey is owned and retained by local communities and shared with the Reef Check global community for broad scale comparisons.

The experience gained by Shane will be valuable in helping establish community monitoring programs within the Northern Territory and provide support to ongoing habitat mapping projects in Timor-Leste.



Divers undertake training in Reef Check monitoring methods.

Research Update

Turtle research techniques come to the NT

NRETA marine researcher, Dr. Scott Whiting, returned recently from a study trip to Mon Repos Conservation Park in Queensland. Mon Repos supports the largest loggerhead sea turtle nesting population on the east coast of Australia.

The trip has enabled Scott to learn important new turtle research techniques which will help to provide us with an understanding of the biology of different turtle species in the NT. Given that the NT supports six of the world's seven species of marine turtle—with 5 species nesting on NT beaches—this knowledge is critical.

During Scott's seven days at Mon Repos he was trained in laparoscopy and ultrasound techniques which are used to assess the breeding condition

and health of individual turtles.

Information gained from these techniques includes an estimate of the percentage of new breeding female turtles on a nesting beach. These estimates provide essential data on the sustainability of turtle populations.

Turtles face a number of threats in the NT, including discarded fishing nets that drown turtles at sea and feral animals such as pigs and dogs which dig up and eat their eggs.

As many of the sea turtle populations, and threats, extend across the borders with Queensland and Western Australia, a cooperative approach is needed for conservation.

This trip has provided a great opportunity to enhance existing working relationships and set the foundations to establish cooperative research projects with organisations in other states.

The Marine Biodiversity Group is currently working with several Indigenous Sea

Ranger Groups to study green, flatback, olive ridley and hawksbill turtles on their nesting beaches across the NT.

The impact of climate change on sea turtle nesting will also be a focus of future research.



Dr. Col Limpus and Dr. Scott Whiting perform an ultrasound on a loggerhead turtle at Mon Repos Conservation Park.

HOW TO CONTACT US:

If you would like to be on our contact list please send your name, postal address, email and phone details to one of the addresses below. A brief comment on your interest in the marine environment would also be appreciated.

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Staff Profile

Dr. Scott Whiting

Research scientist, Dr. Whiting joined NRETA in September 2006. Scott has come to the MBG with 15 years experience working on marine vertebrates, in particular sea turtles and dugongs. For most of that time he has worked in the NT, in locations such as Fog Bay, Tiwi Islands, Groote Eylandt and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands.

Scott has previously worked with Charles Darwin University, WWF Australia and has also run his own consultancy.



He is a member of the National Marine Turtle Recovery Group and the IUCN sea turtle specialist group.

Scott's research interests include investigating the population dynamics of

sea turtles, including their nesting and foraging biology and migration behaviour. He works with partners across the NT including Tiwi Land Council, Mabungji Aboriginal Resource Association and Anindilyakwa Land Council.

Scott is also currently working on several NRM projects including the development of marine monitoring indicators and standard monitoring methodology with help from a working group of experts.



Northern Territory Government



Natural Resource
Management Board (NT)

