

Executive Summary

What the report is about

This report summarises the major human activities that occur within the coastal and marine environment from East Pilbara to Wyndham – East Kimberley (inclusive). This remote section of coastline is the northern part of the Rangelands NRM region. The report also outlines local residents', visitors' and resource managers' priority concerns about the management of the coastal and marine environment. The report addresses the critical need for synthesised information outlining the location and nature of human activities within the Rangelands coastal and marine environment.

A study of the major human activities that occur within the coastal and marine environment from Carnarvon to Port Hedland (the southern part of the Rangelands NRM region) was conducted concurrently. The results from this study are contained within the report 'Human Uses of the Rangelands Coast Part One: Major Uses and Priorities for Natural Resource Management from Carnarvon to Port Hedland'.

Background

This study, funded by the Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group through the Australian Government's Caring For Our Country Programme, sought to identify how and where people use the coastal and marine environment and their priority concerns for natural resource management. The study centred on the area between East Pilbara and Wyndham – East Kimberley. This region is remote, geographically and geologically diverse and contains world significant mineral reserves. The region is also home to some of Australia's most spectacular natural wonders and Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture and heritage. Much of the coastal land of the region is Aboriginal Reserve, with many small Indigenous communities located along the coast.

The remoteness of the region, and the provisions of dominant land tenure arrangements, have resulted in a variety of agencies and approaches being involved in natural resource management in the region. Recent pressures on the environment caused by population expansion and growth in the horticultural, mining and tourism industries have heightened public and political awareness of the need to effectively manage the natural resources and assets of the northern Rangelands coast.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To describe the major human activities occurring within the Rangeland's coastal and marine environment.
2. To identify users' priority concerns regarding the management of the coastal and marine environment.
3. To identify probable development trends within the key coastal settlements in the Rangelands region, and implications that development trends might have for the uses of the coastal and marine environment.
4. Given probable development trends within the study area, to identify users' perceptions of limitations and gaps within existing management frameworks and research programmes.

Methods

The study recognised that users and managers of the coastal and marine environment were well placed to describe the uses of the marine and coastal environment and identify priority concerns regarding the management of the natural resources. The study involved extensive community consultations and interviews to identify users' and managers' priority concerns about the use and management of the marine and coastal environment. Stakeholder workshops and focus groups were used to identify users' and managers' preferred approaches to addressing priority concerns. Other supporting information sources included: data sets compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics; management documents and research reports, Native Title determination documents and data releases prepared by mining companies.

Results/ Recommendations

Through interviews with stakeholders a range of priority concerns about the use and management of the Rangelands coastal and marine environment were identified. Priority concerns that were frequently raised by stakeholders from various backgrounds were presented to focus groups and community workshops for further discussion. Focus groups and workshop groups discussed the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the priority concerns and identified preferred approaches for addressing the issues. The six broad issues discussed during the focus groups and workshop groups were:

- How to improve the regulation of building activity and infrastructure development on Aboriginal Reserve Land
- How to conserve heritage sites along the West Kimberley coast
- How to improve the regulation of visitor access to Aboriginal Reserve Lands
- How to conserve Indigenous sacred and significant sites along the Kimberley coast
- How to minimise the social, environmental and economic costs (and maximise the benefits) of banning driving on cable beach
- How to reduce litter in the coastal areas surrounding the town of Broome

The workshop and focus groups recommended a number of preferred actions to be undertaken to address users' and managers' priority concerns. These recommendations were developed taking into account current management programmes and projects, and also probable social and economic development scenarios in the Rangelands coastal region. The preferred actions to address the six broad issues discussed during the focus groups and workshops are listed below.

Issue 1 How to improve the regulation of building activity and infrastructure development on Aboriginal Reserve Land

Actions

1. Develop a strategic plan and guidelines for building activity and infrastructure development on Aboriginal Reserve Land. The strategic plan should take into account the longer term goals of the Indigenous communities. The guidelines should take into account the development protocols and guidelines of the local governments and the strategic plan of the regional development commission.
2. Undertake research to assess the physical capacity of coastal Aboriginal Reserve Land for various types of development. From this research produce a detailed map outlining areas physical suitability for various types of development.

Issue 2 How to conserve heritage sites along the West Kimberley coast

Action

1. Establish a regional council to undertake an audit of heritage sites along the West Kimberley coast, and develop a management plan for these.

Issue 3 How to improve the regulation of visitor access to Aboriginal Reserve Lands

Actions

1. Expand the Indigenous ranger programmes to establish staffed offices in popular visitor destinations in Aboriginal Reserve areas. Staff of these offices should check the permits and monitor the activities of visitors.
2. Develop a system whereby when a permit to visit Aboriginal Reserves is issued the details are immediately forwarded to the Indigenous rangers.

Issue 4 How to conserve Indigenous sacred and significant sites along the Kimberley coast

Actions

1. Provide location specific cultural awareness training for tourist operators who visit Indigenous sacred and significant sites
2. Develop an educational pamphlet for visitors to the region that outlines appropriate behaviors and actions when visiting Indigenous sacred and significant sites. This brochure should be attached to all permits to visit Aboriginal Reserves.
3. Extend Indigenous Ranger programmes to establish teams that are specifically focused on identifying and conserving Indigenous sacred and significant sites (and the traditional stories and management practices associated with these).

Issue 5 How to minimise the social, environmental and economic costs (and maximise the benefits) of banning driving on cable beach

Actions

1. Revise the current parameters of the beach driving ban to only restrict driving 1 hour after sunset until sunrise, during turtle nesting periods, and during the day between 9 am and 4 pm. The revised parameters will permit beach driving from sunrise to 9am and between 4pm and 1 hour after sunset.
2. Develop a comprehensive management plan for the beaches of the Broome Statistical Local area to ensure that issues resultant from beach driving on Cable Beach are not shifted to other beaches in the area.

Issue 6 How to reduce litter in the coastal areas surrounding the town of Broome

Actions

1. Establish local 'tidy-town' groups that focus on cleaning up litter around Broome and other urban centres in the Kimberley region. These tidy-town groups should be voluntary, with expenses partly funded by local governments, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure and Department of Environment and Conservation.
2. Establish a programme to encourage all local businesses to, where possible, minimise use of plastic packaging. This could be modeled on the programme undertaken in Coles Bay in Tasmania

Further to the four core issues identified through the interviews and discussed during the workshops and focus groups, many participants in the study expressed concern about the effectiveness and appropriateness of various approaches to management. Specifically, concern centred on the management arrangements for Aboriginal Reserve lands with issues of access, protection of sacred sites, fire management and the transparency of the development approvals process all noted. Participants were also concerned about the effectiveness of management approaches that create spatial restrictions on activities. Developing an improved education strategy was identified as being a preferred approach for environmental management given the remoteness and nature of uses of the region. Users' and managers' concerns about the use and management of the coastal and marine area are summarised in Chapters Two to Five of this report. Chapter Six presents a précis of recommendations to address the priority concerns of users and managers.

In addition to this report, some of the results from the study have been included on a purpose built website. The website, which was constructed to house data that describe the nature and location of human uses within the Rangelands marine and coastal environment, acts as a complementary resource for this report. The website can be accessed at <<http://www.rangelandswa.info>>.