

FOURBIES & GREENIES

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Chastity and a prostitute was how the workshop between the Conservation Council WA, Recreational 4W Drivers and Trackcare WA was described in a text to an ABC Radio drive show interview on 12th January.

Who would have thought these two groups, who for years have suspiciously viewed each other as the 'enemy', with each thinking the other were red neck 4W Drivers or lock-everything-up-chain yourself-to-a-tree greenies, would get into bed with each and further the cause of environmental conservation? The catalyst for the joint workshop was a presentation by TCWA's Graham Weber to a South West Catchments Council conference held in November 2017 at Collie. After his presentation he was approached by conservationists including; Conservation Council WA, Friends of Moore River Estuary and Ledge Point Coast Care Group; all had realised the two groups

shared many common goals and maybe they weren't the enemy after all. A decision was made to have a workshop with both groups present; it was held over the weekend of 13-14 January 2018 and well attended. On the Saturday, participants were split into manageable groups, and each attended sites to learn more about the environment at that location and about the specific issues each site faced.



A good turn-out for Nic Dunlop's talk on beach erosion.

I attended the Wedge Island Fairy Tern and beach erosion session run by Dr Nic Dunlop. He explained Fairy Tern habits and how their populations were at risk, because they nested on the ground on beaches. He also explained how Wedge Island's positioning and the resultant changes to wave action and erosion were important to the local ecology. We also viewed a 1,000 plus year old Aboriginal camping and midden area. We enjoyed learning more about the local environment but were saddened and surprised to learn of damage caused by 4w Drivers and motor bike riders unwittingly running over bird nesting sites, Aboriginal archaeological sites and of the stress caused by dogs chasing birds that had yet to recover from a long northern hemisphere migration. At the Hill River estuary session, run by Dr Mic Payne from the Northern Agricultural Catchment Council, we learnt of damage and erosion caused by having numerous unnecessary

tracks going through the same area and how sand compaction by tyres damages areas in which microscopic and larger burrowing creatures lived. Mic explained the Hill River Estuary was a pristine estuary because of little impact on it caused by inland land use and run off. He also outlined problems with weed infestation and damage to the Hill River ecological cycle caused deliberately and unwittingly by recreational 4W Drivers and others. We were delighted to learn about the local environments, erosion, animals, plants, marshes and estuary. Likewise Nic and Mic were I'm sure, surprised at the level of interest we showed, the questions we asked and the offers to assist. The idea that each was the enemy was quickly fading. The next day had us at a workshop discussing the impacts of recreational activities and conservation issues

Hill River Estuary is a pristine environment due to minimal upstream impacts like agricultural runoff.





in the coastal zone of the Northern Agricultural Area and a model for community based environmental protection.

What has come clearer to me is that governments are spending less and more is left to volunteers to progress environmental protection and conservation, recreational infrastructure upgrades or if unable or unwilling to upgrade facilities, close off access to areas. The government however just can't see the elephant in the room. Just like we saw each other as enemies or groups with different agendas so does the government. In my opinion what is needed is being able to determine the total value of recreational activities to Federal, State and Local governments. What is the annual spend on recreational vehicles, accessories, caravans, campers, boats and so on for us to pursue our interests? What is the value of the recreational manufacturing industries in Australia? How much is injected in local and regional economies by recreational tourism?

▲ ***Dr Mic Payne described how creating unnecessary new tracks destroys fragile environments.***

The governments at a higher level are busy with exotic advertisements seeking to attract tourists to Australia. They haven't realised that the biggest group of travellers and spenders of tourist dollars is under their noses. Every marketing person knows that by all means seek new customers but don't forget to look after the ones you already have. Governments should be ploughing more money into environmental tourism and conservation projects. Most people want a purpose for a trip; ecology, history, scenery, photography or whatever. Governments should be enablers and encouragers and not compliance and revenue driven.

I see a very bright future for the marriage of these passionate groups, their success will without doubt spread across the state to other areas.