



Endangered Species Forum - Townsville

The FNQ committee of EIANZ hosted an Endangered Species Forum in Townsville on Friday 6 September 2013. The forum was very popular with 39 environmental professionals attending. The Forum was held to provide information about threatened species and what we can do, as environmental professionals, to better manage the link between species and the protection and management of their, often fragile, ecosystems.

Dr Mark Read, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, provided a very thought-provoking presentation by introducing confronting data and information about several threatened species. Marks' overview provided insight into the threats facing some of Australia's iconic species, including: dugong; Australian snubfin dolphin; the humpback whale and green turtles. Mark provided a very interesting overview of Raine Island and the human intervention that has been implemented to provide a safer environment for the turtles to nest. Simple engineering interventions such as erecting pool fencing along phosphate cliffs to stop animals falling over the edge and dying have drastically reduced this source of mortality.

Eric Vanderduys presentation provided an introduction to some very interesting and unique species. Eric gave the audience lots to think about in providing a brief overview of the current threats and opportunities for *Litoria lorica* (Little Waterfall Frog); *Lerista allanae* (Retro Slider); black throated Finch; and the Northern Spadefoot Frog. Most interesting is how some species, thought to be extinct, have been re-discovered in small populations, with controls and monitoring now in place to manage and protect them. Eric also provided an overview of the complicated web of species management and protection of species. This included the interrelationship between: vegetation refuges, development decisions, legislative promises, protected areas and undefined offsets and offset management.

Dr Simon Hudson, Worley Parsons, provided an interesting presentation on reptiles and the difficulties surveying many such animals due to their cryptic habits and the lack of knowledge available for determining their existence. Simon provided a list of commonly used search tools used to identify potential species within a project area. These included: EPBC Protected Matters Search; Wildlife Online (DEHP); Birdlife Australia (Bird Atlas) and QLD Museum (Specimens). All databases have their own limitations and the message to take home is that just because they are not in the database, does not mean they are not there! Another desktop tool utilised commonly is "habitat modelling" using REs as habitat surrogates; however, this approach generally does not address the understorey, ground layer and/or micro habitat (logs, litter) etc. Simon provided a transparent look at these processes and challenged the audience to consider real, well planned and 'authentic' monitoring regimes, suited to the particular species - using appropriately qualified and experienced expertise in their field.

Dr Nathan Waltham, TROPWater, JCU lead a presentation and discussion on how, we as environmental professionals, can improve the environment for endangered and threatened species. Nathan presented some very good examples of ecosystem improvement projects, which was followed by an open discussion from the audience that will be used in the development of a position paper on endangered species and protection in northern Queensland. Some of the key messages and themes covered were:



- Education and Awareness – engaging media successfully to present key scientific information;
- The need to better understand species and ecosystems;
- The need to move away from the ‘tick and flick’ mentality where no one really understands the interrelationships between species and their ecosystems;
- The need for Government, industry and environmental professionals to work towards integration of the scientific information;
- To support success we need: political will, democratic will and community will;
- We need to have data so we can compare apples with apples- standardisation of data;
- We need standardisation at a National Level and collaboration between states, federal government and all groups in between;
- Further assessment and data is needed for threatened species; and,
- The role of consultants needs to include data sharing, so existing data is made available for threatened species.

The presentations were followed by a networking and discussion session, which was a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere for those attending the event.