

Looking for Dolphins (Oyoro and Oyar) and Dugong (Uuchada) in Lama Lama Sea Country



A Research Collaboration between the Lama Lama Community, Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation and James Cook University.



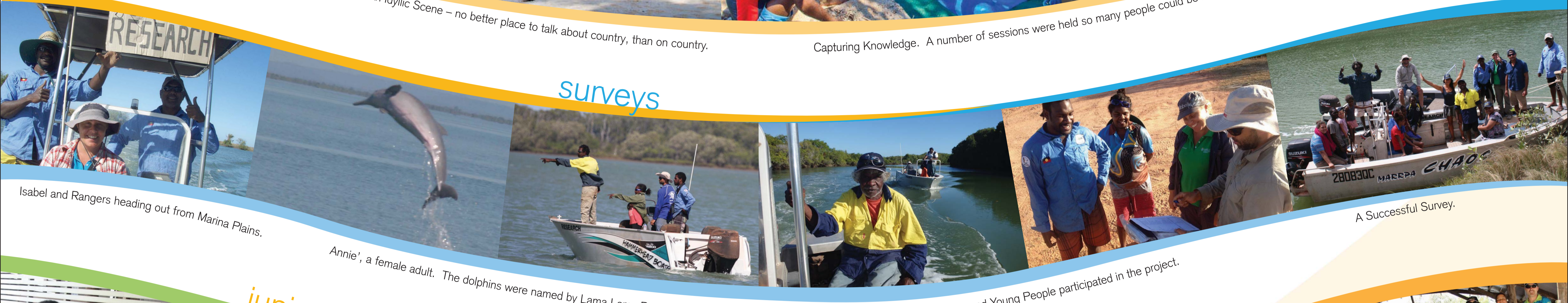
sea country mapping

Dr Helen kicks things off with Inshore Dolphin Identification Training.

An Idyllic Scene – no better place to talk about country, than on country.

Capturing Knowledge. A number of sessions were held so many people could be involved.

The logistical challenges of getting there, worth the effort.



surveys

Isabel and Rangers heading out from Marina Plains.

Annie', a female adult. The dolphins were named by Lama Lama Rangers.

Lama Lama Elders and Young People participated in the project.

A Successful Survey.



junior ranger fun

Kids of all ages learnt about Inshore Dolphin Species and Identification.

Then the painting. Parents joined in too.

Helen facilitated alongside Senior Lama Lama Rangers.

Mural features.

Heaps of fun for everyone.

about our project

This collaborative research project:

- Addresses a gap in the scientific knowledge of the occurrence and distribution of inshore dolphins and dugong in the Princess Charlotte Bay region.
- Builds on Lama Lama's knowledge of Sea Country and assists Lama Lama to undertake initial Sea Country Mapping.
- Assists the Lama Lama Ranger Program to develop knowledge about survey methodology and activity.

The research approach integrates Indigenous and Western Scientific knowledge of four focal species.

- Australian snubfin dolphin (*Orcaella heinsohni*)
- Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*)
- Indo-Pacific (inshore) bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*)
- Dugong (*Dugong dugon*)

Scientists consider that these inshore dolphin species occur in small isolated populations across Northern Australia, but the locations of these populations are poorly known. While aerial surveys have been used for extensive regional assessments of dugong distribution and relative abundance, there are significant gaps in local-scale information. Within the northern Great Barrier Reef (GBR), coastal development and other human activities pose increasing pressure on the conservation and management of dolphins and dugongs.

These species are Matters of National Environmental Significance that trigger development referrals to the Commonwealth Government.

Study Area

Because of tidal restrictions surveys were only possible in the southern end of Princess Charlotte Bay, with personnel based at Marine Plains Homestead.

To date, two surveys have been undertaken, with a possible third survey on the way.

key components of our project

Sea Country Mapping

To capture Lama Lama knowledge of different species found in their waters, Lama Lama focused on their research priority species - dolphins, turtles, dugongs, seagrasses, mangroves, sawfish and crocodiles.

Sea Country Mapping took place as part of the Lama Lama Tumra Cultural Heritage Activity in May 2013.

Surveys

Training Senior Research Officer, Dr Helen Penrose, and Postdoctoral Researcher Dr Isabel Beasley, initially spent two days at the Lama Lama Ranger Base in Port Stewart providing training to fourteen rangers on dolphin identification and monitoring. The rangers trained the researchers in language names, cultural sites, protocols and cultural mapping.

Survey 1 – September 2013

The team headed to Marina Plains, accessing the Bay via the tidal waters of the Annie and North Kennedy Rivers.

Although the trip was cut short by windy conditions, Lama Lama Senior Ranger, Peter Liddy was pleased with the results. "It's been great for our country to get out on our sea country and learn different monitoring skills. It's particularly good for our young people" he said.

Annie', a female adult, 'Rindoparr', a juvenile and 'River Dog' an adult male, were all photo-identified. The dolphins were named by Lama Lama Rangers following four days of monitoring.



Survey 2 – August 2014

Based again at Marina Plains, the second surveys followed a similar survey track.

Lama Lama Rangers Operation Manager, Gavin Bassani said that research such as the Inshore Dolphin research project highlighted the importance of partnerships with Traditional Owners and Rangers. "We are out on our Country everyday, managing threats, monitoring flora and fauna and recording information. Partnerships like this are mutually beneficial. Our rangers increase their skills and knowledge, and JCU have people collecting data all year round for their research. And in this case, hopefully we can collect enough data on inshore dolphins in Princess Charlotte Bay to contribute to and improve management practices for Humpbacks and Snubfins across the country"

Junior ranger fun

One of the highlights of the partnership was a weekend spent at Port Stewart during the June 2014 School Holidays to engage the Junior Rangers and their families in the project through a mural painting weekend.

This was a great success and enabled the wider community to participate in the research project.

Everyone had heard about the surveying at Marina Plains, this gave families a chance to learn about the project and get involved.

"The art workshop was a hands-on learning activity that aimed to familiarize the children with the features of these marine mammal, particularly the dolphins. The workshop resulted in two beautiful murals that feature these species, as well as other sea life of the children's choice. The final product is very much the work of the Junior Rangers with some final touches by adult family members and Lama Lama Senior Rangers" said Dr Helen Penrose.

what we have found out so far?

Engaging the community in research helps to foster relationships for a successful and enjoyable project and leads to a mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration.

Junior Ranger programs offer an endless opportunity for creativity, fun and learning, involving the leaders of the future.

We can also confirm the presence of the Humpback dolphin (note- now called the Australian Humpback Dolphin rather than Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin), dugongs, rays, crocodiles and turtles, and anecdotal information to suggest the occurrence of the Australian snubfin dolphin in the region.

Also, Rangers are now trained in the western-style scientific surveys for inshore dolphins and by 2015 should be independent in conducting their own surveys without JCU assistance.



The project is funded under the National Environmental Research Program and supported by Lama Lama Land Trust, Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation, the wider Lama Lama Community, James Cook University, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Government, - Working on Country Program.