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## Ecological Misfortunes of a Bay *by Helen Hagemann*

On the sand I read: "No fishing,  
crabbing, prawning", before I see 'fine'  
the word exactly right for today's forecast.  
But then, there is rock, a breakwall, and crabs  
are dependant on rocks as mossy edges  
or grottos to spawn.

A portrait of home and the land  
is pulling away from the shore. Each edge  
an erosion of dunes, shoals.

I take a walk on narrow sand,  
look at landmarks I once knew.  
The past returns like a creeping tide, November  
rendezvous with December, dreamy towels of youth.  
Father arriving upstream, large snapper  
anchored against his coveralls. The bilge water  
washing gills, proffered to pelicans, gulls.

How to inhabit this space again, to understand  
the ecology of change, the forced greetings to locals  
without conversation, words sinking like tackle into an  
afternoon breeze. We meet the disappointed, an Italian  
neighbour dark on the Shire for higher rates.  
A long silence follows. He folds the bill into his pocket,  
shoring up his strife.

Along the esplanade, history floats back with  
a strong nor'easterly, fishermen returning home with  
sacks of fish, crabs, prawns. You want this  
starting with today, not just a painting on the wall,  
but a channel deepening itself with prawns,  
bloodworms, cormorants arriving with their dewy  
outlook from feeble swamps.

The bay could be become large again,  
budding with life, kites circling on a ramp of air,  
families staying till dusk, children swathed in salt,  
mothers thinking of dawn, the bay's mist  
infusing time and space.

These are only thoughts that float  
like wing on thermal. Thirty years on  
and there's not one crab, not a claw drying on rock.  
You can only hope for a grittiness of shore to return  
curved and flinty, feet roving a line of spinifex and dune  
beyond this punitive sign  
that makes the bay just a pothole to sink into,  
a nothing coast.

**Helen Hagemann** has prose and poetry published in Australian Literary magazines, including *Overland*, *Island*, *Westerly* and *Southerly*. She is an award-winning poet having won a Varuna Publishing Scholarship in 2008. As part of that program, her first literary collection "Evangelyne & Other Poems" was published by the Australian Poetry Centre in their New Poets Series 2009. Helen holds an MA in Writing from Edith Cowan University, and teaches poetry and prose in Fremantle in affiliation with Out of the Asylum Writers Group.