Tracking Onslow: a community in transition.
edition 2, early 2013

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“MY PRACTICAL PLACEMENTS PROVIDED A GREAT INSIGHT INTO THE FILM INDUSTRY.”

Courtney Loney – Film and Video student

COMMUNICATIONS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

“I love my course. Even my assignments and projects. Who else gets to write scripts and make films for homework? The lecturers always keep classes engaging and entertaining and I have made many amazing friends here who share my passion for film. I was lucky enough to land work experience placement at Melbourne’s ABC Film Studios. It was an amazing and fulfilling experience. I came away with a real insight into the film industry. I made very valuable contacts and felt reassured I was in the right industry.”

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In February the second group of ECU students involved in the Tracking Onslow Project spent a week in town, talking to people and gathering stories, footage and photos for this magazine and for the next update of www.TrackingOnslow.net.

Our journalism is independent. It is not controlled by the companies operating in town or by federal, state or local governments. Our aim is to tell your stories and create a record of the impact of the new resources projects on Onslow.

We hope this process is not only helpful to you, by keeping you informed about what is happening and how other people in the community feel about it, but that it will also help the rest of Australia understand the impacts of major projects on the communities that accommodate them.

We'd like to thank everyone who took the time to share with us your thoughts, inspirations, ideas and concerns.

Our first visit was in July 2012 when journalism students Claire Ottaviano, Aine Ryan and Jasmine Amis came to Onslow with me and we interviewed, recorded and photographed as much of the town as we could.

In early 2013 Claire came back again and we were joined by Jon Hopper, Kaitlin Shawcross, Kirstyn McMullan and Karma Barndon. Most of us will be back again in July 2013 with a few more new students to make edition 3 and to update the website again. Our aim is to visit every six months for three to five years so that we can track the shifts in community dynamics over these tumultuous times.

We look forward to seeing you in July, and in the meantime we hope you enjoy this snapshot of the town,

Best regards,

Dr Kayt Davies
Edith Cowan University
Early 2013
Disclaimer:
In creating this magazine we made every effort to ensure that the information published here was correct at the time of publishing. Interviews were conducted in Onslow in February 2013. Some information was gathered in subsequent phone interviews and through other research processes. We apologise for any omissions.

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Ean McDowell
And historic Mervyn Forrest

Clockwise:
Onslow locals
Flic & friends, Dawn, Demelza and Arnold with our first magazine.
The Mackerel Islands are a group of ten individual islands off the WA coast. The largest of them, Thevenard Island, is 22 kilometres north of Onslow and is one of only two islands that can accommodate visitors.

Thevenard Island has long been one of WA’s best-kept secret holiday locations, with only a small corner of the island hosting accommodation facilities for 72 guests. Direction Island is the other Mackerel with lodgings and for just $300 a night visitors can have the place to themselves.

Over the past three years only 18 Onslow residents have stayed on the islands, with most guests being from further afield. Now with tourist season approaching Onslow would normally be preparing for thousands of visitors to pass through. This year may be different though. The fate of Onslow’s tourism future is now uncertain with 80 per cent of Thevenard Island likely to be used by Chevron for transient workforce accommodation for the next five years.

The Ashburton Council first considered the application, lodged by Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd, at its meeting on July 18, 2012. Concerns were raised and the application was deemed to be incomplete because it didn’t include a signature from the island’s landowner, the state government. Council also asked the CEO to write to Chevron to ask why it suddenly needed more accommodation; to the applicant to ask for a detailed plan about how the income would be spent improving the facilities and for assurance about when the accommodation would revert to tourist use; and to the Department of Regional Development and Lands expressing reservations about the loss of tourist accommodation.

When all of that information is received, the plan will be made available for public comment for a fortnight before a decision is made.

Despite these hold-ups, Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd anticipates that workers will be occupying the island from March 2013.

Many residents are outraged that their big tourist draw card will be reduced to a mere 20 per cent of its original size and worry about the impact this will have on the town.

Resident Nora MacNeall fears for the town’s tourism industry: “Where is Onslow’s tourism going to come from? There will be no tourism in Onslow next year, it’s going to be wiped.”
The Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd has promised that tourism won’t shut down completely and 16 beds will remain available for visitors.

The islands’ admin manager, Jade Woolley, is confident that they will be able to pick up where they left off: “After speaking with a lot of our long term guests we feel that there won’t be any effect to the reputation of the Mackerel Islands.”

Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd believes that the dredging and construction of Wheatstone would seriously impact tourism to the islands if they were to remain solely a tourist operation.

In a submission to the September Council meeting, Geoff Loxton of Property Development Solutions assured the council that accommodating workers would ensure the islands’ financial future as a tourism destination. He said: “Providing accommodation will provide surety ... that it will remain financially viable during this period and emerge at the end of the Wheatstone construction with the opportunity to further develop and renovate facilities on the island to launch a new tourism product for the Onslow locality.”

Stage one will include a beach front bar and restaurant. Construction of these is planned so their opening will coincide with the re-opening of the island. Additional stages will include more accommodation, as well as a pool and jetty.

West Australian holiday makers have been enjoying the Mackerel Islands for decades. We looked back into the archives and found a 1982 feature in *The West Australian* that described a trip to the islands as “a real privilege”, even though back then the only accommodation was four cabins on Thevenard Island, and the only other ‘facility’ was a two-way radio.

It also added that: “Holidaymakers on the Mackerel Islands have been known to refuse to leave – they have had to be carried down to the boat to go back to Onslow and the rest of the world.”

A 1995 story in *The West Australian* told of how Thevenard island benefitted from “power, fresh water and equipment transportation” after agreeing to share the island with WA Petroleum.
Chevron, BHP Billiton, Woodside and Apache are, as you know, the big rollers when it comes to oil and gas in the Pilbara but getting your head around exactly who owns what and how it all works is another thing.

First up, oil and gas are found in naturally occurring rock basins that are often hundreds of kilometres across. WA has eight major basins. Running from the north of the state to the south they are the Bonaparte, Ord, Canning, Carnarvon, Officer, Amadeus, Perth and Eucla Basins.

The Carnarvon Basin stretches from Geraldton to Karratha and includes the southern part of the North West Shelf, the rest of which is part of the offshore Canning Basin. The offshore Canning is nestled near the coast between the Carnarvon and the Browse, which also hosts a cluster of gas wells. Onshore the Canning is huge. It stretches past Fitzroy Crossing and Karajini and then curves down almost as far as Warburton.

Rising gas prices, buoyed by the growing global demand for energy and for lower-emission fuels, have encouraged exploration for gas in WA.

Gas was first discovered in the Carnarvon Basin in 1971, and now its wells are WA’s most productive, and they’re worth billions of dollars.

Woodside’s North West Shelf Project JV was the first to get to the production phase and it exported its first gas in 1989., shipping to Japan.

Chevron’s Gorgon Project, under construction on Barrow Island and due to get its first gas to market in 2015, is the largest single natural gas project in Australia’s history. Over the past 35 years, 200 exploration wells have been drilled in the Barrow sub-basin alone, and the sub-basin is just a part of the Carnarvon Basin.

There are two things that can happen to the gas that is extracted from these basins. It can be refined and then pumped as gas into pipelines for the WA (domestic) market or refrigerated into liquid and shipped to other countries. BHP Billiton’s Macedon is only domestic gas while Wheatstone will be doing both after 2016.

While drilling for gas offshore is costly for logistical reasons, WA’s offshore gas is in conventional formations that don’t require hydraulic fracturing (fracking) to extract the gas.

On the other hand, some of the onshore Canning Basin gas is in “tight” or shale formations that will require fracking, if it’s to be extracted.

There is a Bill currently before State Parliament that, if passed, will authorise a joint venture between Buru Energy, Diamond Resources (Fitzroy), Diamond Resources (Canning) and Mitsubishi to evaluate, develop and exploit the Canning Basin gas.

If the onshore Canning Basin projects go ahead, Premier Colin Barnett has said the gas will be processed and shipped via the controversial James Price Point facility, which Woodside proposed initially to process gas from its offshore Browse Basin JV.
So what is a joint venture? It means that a project is owned by more than one company. Each joint venture has an appointed operator, which is the company responsible for moving the project along. These are a few of the joint ventures currently operating in the Carnarvon Basin.
The map to the left shows the maze of pipelines and gas hubs coming from the Carnarvon Basin and the map below shows the Carnarvon Basin in the context of the other basins and nearby towns and gas hubs, but as new projects come online the big picture is constantly evolving.

And here's a few more fun facts about the WA gas industry:

- The Wheatstone project gets 80% of its gas from the Wheatstone gas field and 20% from Apache's Brunello and Julimar gas fields through their joint venture.

- In mid-2008 Apache's Varanus Island gas hub primary gas pipeline ruptured, causing an explosion that crippled the hub and reduced WA's gas supply by 30%. This disrupted gas supplies for six months. The hub is now poised for a $200 million refurbishment and expansion.

- Since 1989 the Woodside-operated North West Shelf Venture has been WA's largest producer of domestic gas. It currently provides around 65% of WA's production, processed in Karratha.

- The Dampier to Perth natural gas pipeline is 1600km long.

- Woodside's Browse LNG Project is exploring the option of replacing the $40 billion gas hub proposed for James Price Point with a floating processing plant. The Browse partners will make their final investment decision on James Price Point in the first quarter of 2013.
The gas projects are having an impact on nearly everything and everyone in Onslow, including Mother Nature.

Onslow resident and animal carer, Marie-Pierre Dussault, said that while the development has been slow, changes are becoming apparent.

“What used to be scarce is now dense with either activity or people or projects coming up.”

As Onslow’s industrial area develops, local animals must learn to adapt to the new conditions that include more fencing and barbed wire.

Despite the changes, Marie-Pierre hasn’t had an influx of injured animals to care for.

She said: “There is a good effort from the environmental departments of those companies to try to do the best for the animals that get involved or hurt in the process.”

Onslow has the opportunity to learn more about it’s marine life thanks to a number of environmental surveys supported by Chevron and BHP Billiton.

In one study, turtle nests are monitored several times a year in order to understand their breeding patterns.

Another survey involves tagging sawfish and monitoring their movements by placing receptors at the mouths of creeks that send a signal when a fish passes by.

Marie-Pierre is glad that steps are being taken to increase marine knowledge but feels that it shouldn’t have been necessary to wait for a resources company to support the project.

“I think it would be great if the government itself could find the money to do those studies themselves.”

Local waters are also being mapped to help locate and study coral beds.

Last year Onslow played holiday home for two sparrows that arrived by boat.

The couple’s holiday was interrupted when they were captured and taken to the WA Museum.

The Department of Agriculture’s Mick Elliot says foreign sparrows bring the threat of seed and grain contamination and could be responsible for spreading diseases to humans.

“In the long run we’re trying to stop these birds getting in a position where they can breed.”

The two birds were identified as a male and female ready for breeding.

Although there haven’t been any more sightings in the last six months, the department is asking that locals stay on the lookout. “There needs to be on-going vigilance.”
Mile Creek is a picturesque fishing and picnicking spot 8km out of town. Renowned for its fish and crabs, locals have been visiting Mile for years despite the lack of proper facilities.

Situated on Mile Creek that runs into the salt pans, the site currently only has a undercover picnic table, a half-drum wood barbecue, a wheelie bin and a solar light that’s functionality is compromised by the presence of a large nest.

But thanks to Chevron and the State Development Council, locals will soon be catching crabs in comfort.

Shire Project Officer Zoe McGowan has been planning the redevelopment for a few months.

She said that since Mile Creek is a focal point in town for fishing and crabbing, it made sense to give it a thorough revamp.

“It’s very rundown and the facilities are tired and out-dated,” she said.

“So we’re giving it a face-lift.”

Plans involve the installation of two shade structures, some barbecues, decking, construction of stone-wall seating and strengthening of the creek edges to make them safer and more stable. The stone-wall seating will be similar to the new niche wall at the cemetery, so as to maintain a common theme around town.

Exmouth quarry stone, local to the area and resistant to erosion, was used in the cemetery and will be used to strengthen the creek’s edges.

Zoe said work will begin on February 18 and can’t come around quick enough for excited locals.

“There’s been a lot of talk and community consultation about doing up Mile, so hopefully in the next month people will be able to see the work that’s being done.”

Article by Karma Barndon
Swans has received $60,000 to turn the old power station on Lot 302 on Second Avenue into a youth drop-in centre.

Last year the Council resolved to support the Chevron funded VSwans and lease the building from Regional Development and Lands for use as a youth drop-in centre, on the condition that it would be leased to VSwans for a peppercorn rent.

Ashburton Executive Manager of Community Development Deb Wilkes said the Shire has plans to build a fit-for-purpose youth centre as part of the Onslow redevelopment.

“Current discussions are about incorporating the youth centre into the new aquatic centre and recreation hub, but this may change,” she said.

“And as this is a few years away from opening and given the lack of recreation options for young people in town, this will fill a gap in the meantime.”

A report presented to the council in February outlined concerns including the heritage listing of the building and the substantial amount of work needed to upgrade it.

The minutes state that, because the site was once used as a power station, the building may still be polluted with contaminants.

As a result the building’s utilities need to be replaced, the gantries removed, the toilets upgraded and a disabled toilet installed. There also needs to be an assessment of potential contamination and an emergency exit added at rear before the site can sub-leased to VSwans.

As well as these changes, parking bays and lighting need to be installed, energy efficiency improved and insulation and air-con added.

Noise issues will also be considered after complaints from residents back in 1988 when the building was used as an “unauthorised” youth drop-in centre.

The bill is estimated at upwards of $50,000 which will be covered by VSwans at no extra cost to the Shire.
Kerry White came to Onslow nearly two decades ago (in 1994) to buy and run the supermarket. She sold up in 2010 and, after being a Shire Councillor for five years, decided to run for the top job of Shire President. She was elected in 2011 and has presided over some turbulent times.

Kerry said her biggest reason to run for President was to guard the four main towns in the Ashburton footprint, and to have a big say in what happens. Since then Kerry has been passionately vocal on several occasions, particularly on issues to do with her own electorate, Onslow. She is doing what she can to close the gap between the town’s people, Chevron and ‘salt city’. She wants people to be involved in community services.

“We need volunteers for FESA, for St John’s and for the sports club. There’s a few starting to get involved in the tennis but they can’t commit because their work periods are 12 hours a day and then they fly them out and they’re off. So they’re not going to be involved, which is pretty sad actually,” she said.

She added that she can also see the potential Chevron has brought here for young people.

“This project’s going to be great for those young kids that are 9, 10, 12. It’s going to give them incentives to leave school, so they can earn the big money for the mining companies.”

With the town lacking things like coffee shops and banks, there is infrastructure Kerry is working hard to get.

She said: “I want to see the buildings happen, the swimming pool, the squash courts, the youth centre, the airport, the lot, and once that’s all achieved, I think I will have repaid my service to the community. The community looked after me when I had the shop, they supported me, and it’s my turn to give back.

“I’m passionate about a few things and I will win some battles. I just want to see Onslow’s character retained and that residents are happy living here.”
The Mums and Bubs playgroup used to be held in from the Shire office but since the fire they’ve been shuffled around from house to house and to the MPC and back.

Now thanks to the generosity of School Principal Jackie Barry the group shares the kindy room at Onslow Primary School.

Tracking Onslow attended the group’s first session at its new home, with its new name ‘Playgroup’ because so many dads have been coming with their bubs.

Mum-of-five Dina Grainger took over running playgroup two years ago. Most weeks 29 children turn up but numbers can get up to 35 in the school holidays when siblings come along too.

“All the mums work together, helping each other to make life easier,” she said. “Even if I can take someone’s baby for just ten minutes to give them some time with their other children.”

But she couldn’t do any of this without the support of the Shire, the school and funding from the Chevron

“We’re so lucky because Chevron helps us all the time to buy our resources and equipment. We’ve had funding from them four times, before that we just shared our toys and things,” she said

Mum-of-three Amanda Roulston moved to Onslow mid-2012 when her husband took a job here. “I think if it wasn’t for Mums and Bubs we’d be lost because although the Shire runs programs, they never run programs for kids under six years old so there’s nothing for the kids to do,” she said.

Amanda said that for families new to Onslow fitting into a community and feeling a sense of belonging can be difficult without support. “It’s quite daunting really, because we never knew what to expect. It was only a week and a half that I’d been here when I came to Mums and Bubs and I haven’t stopped coming. It gives the kids their time, they love it, and they love socialising.”

It’s not just for the kids either, the mums love the socialising time even if it’s just for two hours a week.

Jackie Barry said she is glad playgroup can be at the school and wants it to stay.
Not too much has changed for Back Alley Pete (Peter Kalalo) since Tracking Onslow last spoke with him. He still takes his dog Clancy out on the paddleboard most days and still makes his own art, he’s even started drawing cartoons for the local newsletter.

Just last Australia Day Pete won $1000 paddling his custom-made boat, The Master, in the Onslow Regatta.

Pete said he’s not bothered by the changes in town, as long as he has his little piece of paradise, but he can see the dynamic of the town changing.

“The town’s lost its personal touch,” he said.

“You used to be able to go down to the supermarket for one thing and end up staying there for an hour chatting to someone — now it’s serve and get out.

Pete said: “The miners don’t make an effort to socialise, they’ll go to the club and support the club but the locals don’t know them, which is sad.

“They don’t take the time to get to know us, they come in on the bus, go back on the bus, they file in like lemmings.”

Pete is looking forward to being able to use the gym: “They’ve opened up a program now for retired people to go up and use the gym for free which I quite like. I’m not too fussed about the changes — maybe disappointed in some respects, but you know, what will be will be.”

Todd Hallam from country Victoria has lived in Onslow for the last nine months and boasts of being "the youngest adult in town."

The 21-year-old boilermaker came to Onslow to work at a local business with a friend, also from Victoria, who moved here with his family.

"I socialise with everyone. I’m pretty much a local, as I spend more time here than I do at home," he said.

“I’m friends with a lot of people who have spent most of their lives here and can appreciate that. I hope to stay for at least a couple of years.

Todd said he is grateful to have a job that pays well, as there’s not much work back home.

“The beauty of this place is most of my wage goes on savings cause there’s nothing to spend it on,” he added.

Todd also loves fishing, swimming and running.

“Running on a beach, where no one else is, is a great feeling and Onslow’s fishing is incredible. The water is a nice 27 degrees, so I go swimming everyday. Where else in Australia can you get this?”
When Tracking Onslow came back to town we revisited local Marie-Pierre Dussault to find out how she’s feeling about the changes.

“I’m still pro-conservation. I’m still not very pro-development,” she said. “I came to live in Onslow to have a certain lifestyle and now I feel like I see a lot of yellow shirts and I hear a lot of reverse beeping … I don’t find it particularly attractive.”

Marie recently received an environmental grant from BHP that has enabled her to buy equipment to better care for injured birds.

While she is grateful that the projects have brought with them the opportunity to learn more about local wildlife, she still wishes that things would remain unchanged.

“I’m still pro let’s leave it alone, let’s leave it the way it is.”

Marie believes companies should be looking at alternative natural energy sources such as geo-thermal energy.

“I think there’s a fantastic energy in the centre of the earth and we’re not even looking at it.”

Originally from New South Wales, Trevor Pascoe has called Onslow home for the past 31 years. After retiring from his work with Hamersley Iron in Paraburdo, Trevor bought a boat and moved to town to fish professionally. He’s enjoyed spending time fishing the Mackerel Islands and has fished as far afield as the Montebellos.

When it comes to the new changes around town, Trevor thinks that younger generations will feel more of an impact.

“It’s progress, I know that, but it’s nothing for me really. I’m too old for that sort of thing.”

He’s keen to see improvements to Onslow’s current facilities before new ones are built.

“They’re supposed to be building a tourist swimming pool, I don’t know why a swimming pool. We’ve got a big ocean out here.”

“We could do with a new hospital and a permanent doctor here too, a live-in one.”
Demelza Franklin is one of Onslow’s growing number of vibrant young mums. She runs a social media business from home, works part-time as a school teacher, works for Chevron as a consultant with the Community Reference Group and she’s mum to three children under five.

She originally came to Onslow on a six month contract as a school teacher and fell in love with then teacher (now Deputy) Sean Tyndall, who is now her partner. After leaving for a while to experience teaching in the Kimberley and in Perth, she is happy to be back in Onslow.

Having spent the last five years here, Demelza said it’s a great place to raise children, being able to walk everywhere.

“In terms of what’s on offer – groups, activities, music tuition that lacks, but it’s getting better since Chevron has come to town.”

She added: “I’m glad for what the changes offer me, as a family, but there are some down sides like traffic and waiting in line at the post office and also the change in faces.

“I used to know everyone at the supermarket and you could chat to everybody but now they don’t know that we’re local and we don’t know them. We don’t get that friendly treatment that we used to. It was nice, I miss it.”

Demelza was happy to return to Onslow because she knew everyone here from the first time. “Now a lot of locals have left, the real old locals, it’s sad to see that happen. The old Onslow has kind of gone now and the new Onslow is here but that’s what comes with change.

“There’s quite a lot of young families here. They come here for the financial gain. You lose one income when you have children, and you’re more inclined to come to these kind of places.

“The mums here are very supportive but I think a lot of them find it hard. Especially when they go away to their friends and family over Christmas and they see what they’re missing.”

Asked what change she’d like to see in town, she said: “We’d love a swimming pool, we have the water park but it gets shut down a lot.”

Asked if internet speeds make it difficult to run a social media business, she said no and added that it is an ideal business for her as she does most of the work at night after her children are in bed.

Demelza also runs two Onslow community Facebook pages. One called Town of Onslow that is a space for casual conversations about things happening in town and the other is called For Sale In Onslow and it’s a bit like the old classifieds.

She explains: “I saw a real need for it and because of the growing use of social media, so many people we knew were already connected. As I’m already in social media managing businesses' Facebook pages, it was fairly easy for me. The pages are growing substantially because it’s just a great way to communicate.”
**Felicity Brennan**, or as locals know her Flic, is a bright character who has lived in town for 20 years. But Flic fears the town is changing beyond repair with locals moving away, no longer enough room for tourists, investors moving in and the FIFO workers not appreciating the town. Speaking on behalf of the tourists she said: “It’s $280 a night for a donga at the caravan park. It’s a donga, you can go stay in the Sheraton for that and the fuel is $1.90 a litre. They can’t afford that. “It’s all investors now, very little local ownership of anything in town, it is all about money now.”

Bringing home the point, she stocks t-shirts and bumper stickers in her store that say: “Are you a FIFO? Fit in or f—k off”.

“I have nothing against the FIFO workers personally but they don’t want to be here. They are only here for the dollar and they come into our town and bag us and if that’s the case I say there’s the door.

“It’s a great town or at least it was, we still like it, but there’s no community here anymore.”

**Alyx Burges** (aka Axle to everyone on site) is one of seven girls in a group of 49 workers constructing the Onslow Aerodrome.

Out on site Axle is part of the all-girl roller driver team who spend all day going up and down the runway compacting the soil.

Axle has completed a degree in education and is a qualified PE teacher. She says quite honestly that she came up here for the money but not everyone is as lucky in their efforts to land a job.

“It’s not easy to get into. It is funny that they are employing people from overseas when I know lots of people who are trying to get into it — it can be very cliquey,” she said.

“Mining is more word of mouth, so you get in because someone knows someone.”

This job isn’t forever though. While she’s driving backwards and forwards all day, Axle is thinking of leaving FIFO and finishing a journalism degree she started back in Melbourne.
Déjà Vu
dust storms

Onslow was the talk of the town in early 2013 - the town of New York, Shanghai, Buenos Aires and even the Norwegian capital Oslo. But it wasn’t talk about the gas hubs, it was talk of those snaps of a big dust storm that ended up all over the world wide web.

Dust storms form when a bunch of loose dust on the ground is picked up as storm front moves through the area. The dust rolls into town and is usually followed by some rain that cleans it all up and washes it away.

The rain is what separates a good dust storm from a bad dust storm, according to locals. If the rain doesn’t follow, you’re going to spend a fair bit of time behind a broom.

But why has it taken so long for pics of Onslow to end up in the Norwegian capital?

Long time residents Joe and Flic reckon the dust storms are no more frequent than usual. Some years there are heaps and other years, none at all.

It’s simply a case of Onslow having more people and more cameras with a little help from social media. And we couldn’t help but notice that these days it’s hard to take a photo of a dust storm without having another photographer in the shot.

Photos: A 1996 storm courtesy of Onslow Heritage Museum (top), Feb 12, 2013, at the Aerodrome site by Sarah Wilson; and Feb 13, 2013, at Front Beach by Kirstyn McMullan (below)
Cyclone All
A few hundred kilometres north of Australia, the Arafura and Timor Seas get pretty warm. You could spend all day floating around in water of 27 degrees. But fly a few kilometres straight up into the air from that water and things get much colder.

Combine that cold air with a system of low pressure and you have ideal conditions for a thunderstorm to form.

If there is a bit of circular air movement near the thunderstorm that’s relatively even in speed, a tropical cyclone is born.

These tropical cyclones usually head off to the west or south west seeking somewhere to cool their warm cores and disappear.

But anyone who’s seen a forecast or two in their time knows that weather can be pretty unpredictable.

Sometimes tropical cyclones make a left hand turn and head for the coast of the nearest continent.

Welcome to Cyclone Alley. Capital City: Onslow.
Neil Bennett from the Bureau of Meteorology in Perth has watched plenty of tropical cyclones make their way down our coast.

He said: "It is true to say the most cyclone-prone area in Australia is between Broome and Exmouth. It’s the orientation of Onslow’s coastline that puts the area at risk."

Onslow has faced around two tropical cyclones every year with winds blowing above 90 km/h since 1910.

The Bureau uses the speed of a tropical cyclone’s winds to determine its severity. Wind speeds must be sustained for ten minutes before they are recorded.

Wind gusts are of higher speed, usually up to 25 percent faster than the sustained wind speed. The wind speeds help the Bureau categorise a tropical cyclone.

As well as being given a category, the naming of tropical cyclones began in 1964. The naming provides the public with an easier way to distinguish which tropical cyclones may be a risk to them.

Up until 1975, tropical cyclones were only given female names, after which the boys got a go too. The Bureau now maintains an alphabetical list of over 100 names that are allocated to tropical cyclones when they reach category one. Names on the list are reused if the tropical cyclone doesn’t make a significant impact on the coast. The name Bobby was retired in 1995.

Bobby took seven lives when two fishing trawlers sank just off the coast of Onslow, the Lady Pamela and the Harmony.

On board the Harmony was 15-year-old Daniel Brennan, nephew of Onslow resident, Felicity ‘Flic’ Brennan.

Flic spoke to crew from vessels that were lower in the water during Bobby and made the return.

They said the ship’s stove and fridge were bolted to steel bulkheads. The force of Bobby on the ship ripped off the bindings and threw them around the galley.

Flic was at home when Bobby struck. She lived in a raised house at the time and could feel the floor vibrating and threatening to lift away.

"It was as if Thor was standing at the end of the house swinging his hammer every three or four seconds. The whole house would shudder," she said.

A few blocks down and over the road from Flic’s current house on Second Ave is a woman who may be Australia’s most seasoned tropical cyclone survivor.

Dawn McAullay speaks of her experience in Cyclone City in an incredibly calm manner. After all, for Dawn, it is just a casual chat about the weather.

Cyclone alerts make their way to Onslow without much hassle. "It’s easy-peasy now. You just go online, it’s all there and tracked for you.

"Years ago, the old post office building had a big notice board and they used to put up telegrams from the weather bureau. They’d come through about every four hours with an update.

"The days of watching ant nests growing and the birds disappearing when a big blow is coming are gone," Dawn said.

When rain is on the way, ants are known to build up a little sand hill around the entrance to their nest to stop water getting in.

In Dawn’s house hangs a prize from the 1989 Emu Export Handicap from Carnarvon. It’s a sturdy wood framed clock with a barometer below it. Dawn said she’s a habitual barometer watcher.

One of the most terrifying experiences Dawn has had in a cyclone began in 1961 when Onslow recorded the lowest barometric reading in Australasia.
“My husband Darral was waiting and watching it and thought the thing was broken. He’d never seen a barometer go so low.

“So he came to bed and it wasn’t long after that the dog, who was inside because of the cyclone, he put his paws up on my chest and he was all wet.

“I put my hand out and the water was level with the top of the bed.

“One of the kids we had was in the cot and he was asleep, floating on his little mattress.

“So I just picked him up and that’s when we had to go sit on the kitchen table,” Dawn said.

After living in Onslow for a decent amount of time, both Flic and Dawn agree that initial cyclone warnings sometimes feel like the little boy who cried wolf.

“Sometimes you can be on blue alert forever. We get heaps of warnings and nothing happens and then people just become complacent. But you’ve always got to be ready. When you’re on yellow alert, you start making preparations,” Dawn said.

Even with the catastrophic results a cyclone can bring, Onslow and its people share a strange relationship with the weather. Flic said: “It’s definitely a love/hate sort of thing and I don’t mind a good cyclone. If they’re just bouncing down the coast, you just get the rain which is awesome. We all love the rain.”

The Cane River supplies Onslow’s drinking water. Mid-year rains usually aren’t sufficient to support the town.

"That Narelle cyclone [early in 2013], that was a beautiful cyclone. It was way out to sea and we got 25 mm of rain from her," Dawn said with a smile.
When fire ripped through the Onslow Ashburton Shire office in January, the staff lost more than paperwork and stationary. For those who had worked for the Shire for years it was a place where roots were grounded, friendships made and special treasures kept close at hand.

Customer Service Officer Jane Hathaway had the only two photos of her father and son together and they were displayed on her office wall. “My dad passed away in June last year so it was pretty devastating for me, they were taken 15 years ago on an old instant camera, so they’re gone,” Jane said.

Despite the fire crew managing to quench the fire in Jane’s office it re-lit three times throughout the night.

“I’d never seen a fire that up close and personal, the devastation was unbelievable. “The first time we walked through I sort of stopped and went, ‘where am I?’ I literally could not picture where I was because the walls had burnt down.”

Having worked in the Shire for two years, Jane cannot walk through the burnt out building without shedding a few tears.

“You know, it’s your work, it’s your second life, it’s where you live most of the time,” she said.

Project Manager Megan Walsh may not have lost her office but watching everything burn has left its mark.

“It made me feel physically ill. As I was standing there and [emergency services] were working on the right side of the building, I could see the flames flicking and I was just screaming...
‘please save my office, please save my office’,” Megan said.

“I thought ‘oh my god if I lose my office I’ve got all my hard copies of everything in there.’ I had so many documents which couldn’t be replaced and tender documents that people had sent me and there was just so much in that office which I hadn’t backed up on the system yet.

“It’s a place I’d worked for three years and to watch it burn to the ground and not be able to do anything, I felt quite helpless.”

Like many of the other staff, Megan now has an eerie feel about the place.

“Once I got all my stuff out I didn’t want to go back, I didn’t want to see it.

“There was so much stuff in there, all the time you think, ‘oh, where’s that document, oh yeah, it was in the office’.”

Worse than the devastation of the fire itself was the confusion around how to get back to work.

“It was a real upheaval for us, we were all split up and it took us a while to get used to working on our own at a time when we just wanted to all be together and now we’ve been scattered all around the place,” Megan said.

*Tracking Onslow* was not allowed to go inside what is left of the office, as the walls stand at 45 degree angles and the part of the roof still up is at risk of caving in. Even though most of what survived has been removed, the roof still provides shelter for a lot of things that might be retrieved.

Since there was already a plan for a new office to be included in the new town centre, it’s unlikely that the site will be restored this year, but the debris may be cleared.
After the Shire of Ashburton received complaints about ‘irregularities’ in its tendering procedures, CEO Jeff Breen suggested to the council that they could request a Probity Compliance Audit (PCA).

The council voted for the idea in August and it was agreed a request would be lodged with the Department of Local Government (DLG).

Essentially a PCA tests the standard of compliance and the integrity of any systems, processes, procedures and practices used by a local government.

When a PCA is requested, it’s the DLG’s job to gather information about compliance with the Local Government Act 1995 and other regulations to determine whether there is a problem with...
how well the rules are being followed and to look for other issues with the council’s operations.

Registers, documents and records from January 2012 to August 2012 were examined, along with the systems and procedures the Shire uses to review standards of compliance and best practice.

According to information provided by the DLG there were: “issues relating to the Shire’s tendering, contract management and purchasing practices, its record keeping and its internal controls.”

In response to the findings the DLG asked the Shire to justify why it should not be suspended due to examples which showed it had failed to comply with the Local Government Act 1995.

The council chose to sack Chief Executive Officer Jeff Breen as a result. All local government CEOs are employed by a vote of their council and can be dismissed by them. At the time, Breen told the media he would sue for unfair dismissal, but his case has since settled out of court.

He also said the rapid growth of the council and the Pilbara had made running a local council more difficult. When Breen was dismissed, Frank Ludovico was appointed acting CEO in his place.

But this action did not affect the DLG’s position and the council was suspended for six months and ordered to undertake governance training.

While the council is suspended, commissioner Ronald Yuryevich is making decisions in its place.

Even though council suspensions are rare, the Ashburton Council is not the only one to be suspended recently. Just one day before the Ashburton suspension was announced the Canning Council was also suspended.

We’ll bring you another update in our July edition, ahead of the October 2013 election.
Managing the Money

How the Onslow Council is planning to spend the huge cash windfall from Chevron and BHPB of around $255 million on new infrastructure

Article by Claire Ottaviano

It’s no secret that the big money arriving in Onslow means the town can grow in ways it couldn’t before.

A multi-million dollar airport, a renovation to Four Mile Creek, upgraded roads and a waterpark are just some of the projects already underway or completed thanks to Onslow’s new pot of gold.

Onslow’s new airport is an example of what money can buy. Just six months ago the Onslow airport consisted of a small terminal and a very bare runway.

Now it’s a full blown construction site. It’s a project on a grand scale and it’s unbelievable that it will be finished by August 2013.

Executive Manager of Strategic & Economic Development for the Shire of Ashburton Amanda O’Halloran said the project is running on time and on budget with only nine days lost due to the threat of cyclones Peta and Narelle.

Amanda said the shire was currently in negotiations to make sure Onslow residents would be able to get onto flights, once the airport is completed.

“It’s one of the biggest things the community wants — so we’re fighting for it,” she said.

There are two ways residents can get onto those flights.

At present the airport is only for mining workers and associates of the mines.

Charter companies can either share their flights with the community or compete with regular passenger transport (RPT). This means charter flights will have to decrease the amount they can charter and mining companies will have to hop on normal planes.

“The way it works is the charter continues but the company is more open and shares its flights with community,” she said.

“That’s what we’re proposing right now, that’s what we’d like to see happen because that way the company can still control the time of the flights and make sure they meet their business

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<th>Wheatstone</th>
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<td><strong>How much</strong></td>
<td>$29 billion project</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong></td>
<td>Refined gas for the domestic WA market (200 terrajoules per day) and liquefied natural gas for export</td>
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<td><strong>Workers needed</strong></td>
<td>6500 at peak of construction and 300 to maintain operation once the plant is finished 2016</td>
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<td><strong>Money invested</strong></td>
<td>Around $250 million into social infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Workers needed</strong></td>
<td>330 during construction phase and 16 once the plant is operational</td>
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<td><strong>Money invested</strong></td>
<td>$5 million in social infrastructure</td>
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Amanda said Chevron had not yet agreed to sharing planes with the community because they were currently focused on construction.

*Tracking Onslow* did some further investigating into Onslow’s stash of cash, where it’s coming from and what it’s buying.

The three major sources of investment for the Onslow community are the Wheatstone Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF) and its Critical Infrastructure Fund (CIF) and the Macedon SIF.

A $5 million investment fund from the Macedon SIF has already been ear-marked for a three-court undercover basketball stadium and skate park next to the Multi-Purpose Centre, which could be up and running by the end of the year.

Even though the WA Department of State Development oversees both of the Wheatstone funds, it primarily coordinates the CIF while the Ashburton Shire coordinates the SIF.

The CIF covers future investments in the hospital, education, childcare, emergency services, a new power plant, possible water desalination plant and land release and development.

It also paid for the recent upgrade to the Onslow road which saw the highway widened and overtaking lanes added to make the roads safer for the community. There’s also $60 million in the fund for future roadworks.

The Wheatstone SIF has so far paid for the airport and the Four Mile Creek redevelopment with considerable funds still remaining for a planned swimming pool, youth centre, a better flood-free road into town, upgrades to Second Avenue, a new library and shire office and for maintaining Onslow’s heritage buildings.

Later this year, almost 300 housing lots will go on the market with 50 designated for the Wheatstone residential workforce (ready for 2015) and about 20 for *Grow*, a government...
housing scheme for police, nurses and teachers to help them cope with increased competition for housing sites. The rest will be available for the public to buy.

The Shire is also working with Landcorp to ensure that there’s some preference given to local families who want to buy land over investors.

The land release will increase demand on the water supply, so there is a project currently underway to increase the amount of water being pulled from the Cane River bore field from 0.35 gigalitres to 0.5 gigalitres per year.

But this increase will only meet the interim demands of the Wheatstone project and more water will soon be needed. Work is currently underway on a desalination plant that is due for completion by 2015-2016.

Amanda O’Halloran said that with all the large scale projects in the works, it is easy to believe Onslow will continue to grow exponentially.

“But Onslow by its sheer nature can probably only grow to about 5000 people. A lot of what is going on right now is construction. When you get into operations the workforce is a quarter of that,” she said.

“We have a big responsibility to help the community understand that the expectations aren’t limitless and endless.

“We are going to be a lovely little community, quite well resourced, we should be able to fly to Perth. We will have a swimming pool, lovely parks and gardens and a good social program through the support of the companies.

“But it’s not going to be gold plated — and I think the community expectations can lead towards that sometimes.”

We are going to be a lovely little community, quite well resourced, we should be able to fly to Perth. We will have a swimming pool, lovely parks and gardens and a good social program through the support of the companies.”
Before British colonisation, Aboriginal people in the Pilbara lived a semi-nomadic food-gathering and hunting life. Cultural practices, trade routes and spiritual associations were shared between an estimated 20 to 30 different groups, each with its own language, spiritual mythologies and social organisation.

Mythologically, in the dreamtime — where there is no time and past, present and future unite — their creation spirits shaped the Pilbara when the earth was soft and stamped their impressions on the land.

Maintaining a sense of country therefore connects the people to their ancestral beings and their spirit world.

This connection is kept strong through preservation, celebration, and ceremony.

The Thalanyji people connect with the rainbow serpent named Burra Balanyji who created underground tunnels linking all of Onslow’s water bodies. Because of this, the creeks and inland lakes around town are sacred sites.
The spread of pastoralism in the 19th Century and implementation of the Pastoral Award in 1968 forced inland groups into government-run camps at Onslow and Roebourne.

Consequently, Onslow’s indigenous people come from all over the Pilbara.

Today, as well as traditional owners and official native title holders the Thalanyji, there are Nhuwala, Burama, Punjima (Bunjima), Innawonga, Thudgari, Kurrama, Pinikura, Yindjibarndi, Ngarluma and Martuthinira peoples all living in the town.

Together they form a rich cultural tapestry.

Arnold Lapthorne, a Burrima man born in Carnarvon, said it is good to be surrounded by so much family.

“So many mobs round here!” Arnold cheerfully exclaimed. “The elders are all from here, though most others are from Carnarvon.

“And Yindjibarndi, a lot of Yindjibarndi too,” he added, before declaring with pride, “My country is in my heart!”

Arnold explained that inter-relations between tribes meant he had blood relations everywhere.

He believes the Thalanyji language is still going strong, and is being passed down to the younger generations in town by the tribal elders.

On September 18, 2008, the Thalanyji people were granted native title in a historical consent determination over 11,120 square kilometres of mainly pastoral land in the Ashburton Shire, stretching from Nyang down south, to Nanutarra in the east and Onslow in the north. These spinifex-encrusted plains and dusty sandstone ranges are Thalanyji country.

Subsequent mediation led to the signing in July 2010 of an agreement with Chevron for land required to develop the Wheatstone project.

The agreement provides the Thalanyji people with significant benefits in terms of education, training, employment, business development and financial support.

Nearly three years on from the signing, the benefits are starting to show. You can spot many indigenous locals around town proudly sporting their hi-vis work uniforms emblazoned with the name of their workplace. They are role models for their families and peers.

The Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation (AAC) is the main conduit for indigenous employment.

CEO Janet Brown oversees the provision of Job Services Australia (JSA) and the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) programs in Ashburton, but both programs are due to be integrated into the new Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) in July 2013. The AAC is likely to be awarded the contract to continue administering the restructured programs under the RJCP.

Janet said the corporation also holds a sub-lease on nearby Peedamulla Pastoral Station where construction of a twenty bed residential training facility is expected to be completed in April 2013.

The Peedamulla facility will be a venue for accredited training courses in Rural Operations and Hospitality and other courses run by Pilbara
Training Services or auspiced through TAFE South Australia.

“Peedamulla will be utilised by people right across the enormous Ashburton footprint,” Janet proudly proclaimed.

AAC has many plans in the pipeline for the station including language, literacy and numeracy courses. Even during its construction phase it is providing employment and on-the-job training for indigenous people who live in the station community.

Germaine Condon is manager of JSA at Bindi Bindi community and a woman who stands testament to the program’s success.

After three and a half years as manager, Germaine is moving on to start a new career with Bechtel (Wheatstone).

Germaine believes Onslow’s indigenous people have always had barriers to employment, like people in many other remote communities, but things changed somewhat when the gas hubs came to town and employment opportunities started to bloom.

CDEP and JSA participants can complete work-entry certificates in construction, or in resources and infrastructure, and move into the mining sector skilled up and job-ready.

While appreciative of her career opportunities, Germaine believes there is a good side and a bad side to Onslow’s transformation.

“Sometimes it feels like there are too many strangers in town,” she said.

“And on RDOs the pub gets too noisy and too full and it’s not a nice place to relax and hang out with your family.” Germaine claims that most FIFO workers are nice, but “some can be rude to us”.

Even though Germaine’s three children attend boarding schools in Perth, she is still mindful of the lack of dedicated services and facilities, especially organised sports, for the young people in town.

“There’s no footy, no tee-ball, nothing,” she said. “The kids, they love the VSwans and the water park, but they don’t have much else to do around town.”

There are plans to turn the old powerhouse into a youth drop-in centre (see page 10), which sounds perfect to Germaine.

“The only hang out spot the kids have is the basketball courts,” she said.

Germaine’s mother is Thalanyji while her father is an Innawonga man from Paraburdoo.

She said she beamed with pride when the native title consent determination was signed in 2008.

“The old people put in a lot of work to get their lands. They worked hard out there in the hot weather. Seeing my old people, my grandparents, get their native title was very touching to me.”

Overall, impressions of indigenous Onslow reflect a rich tradition mixed with multi-cultural connections to country and family, inter-woven into a beacon of light shining bright for all of Australia.

The people here fought for their country and they won.

That’s the true Australian spirit.

and dusty sandstone ranges are Thalanyji country.
During Tracking Onslow’s last trip to town, folks were more than happy to welcome a new business, the Onslow Pharmacy. But sadly, the little square building on Second Ave may not be a permanent addition.

Pharmacy owner Vincent Cosentino said: "The Onslow Pharmacy is teetering on the edge of economic viability."

Usually a town with Onslow’s population cannot support a chemist, but it was opened in the anticipation of a large increase in people fuelled by the Wheatstone and Macedon projects.

The estimated $36 million medical contract for Wheatstone was awarded to Aspen Medical through Bechtel Australia. All workers who fall under the Aspen medical contract are supplied with free medicines. This is due to the site’s isolation and lack of available transport.

Mark Harrison is the man on the ground doing the hard yards for Onslow Pharmacy. Mark has worked as a pharmacist for six years starting off his career in Perth, but also working in the Kimberley, Gascoigne and South West.

While the pharmacy is struggling, Mark said: "Everyone we’ve got working on the ground with Aspen makes every effort to work with us and we support each other as fellow health professionals."

"What I think is a little bit complicated is the constraints under which each individual contractor has to work."

Alastair McPherson is the Manager of Media Relations for Bechtel Australia. He said: "The relationship between Aspen and the chemist has been problematic, but it is improving."

Full stock sourcing from the chemist for Wheatstone will never happen according to Alastair: "Aspen is looking for wholesale prices, not retail. It’s always about the bottom line."

But with the size of the workforce continuing to fluctuate and peak construction still approaching, there is another issue with over sourcing stock locally: "The last thing we’d want to do is impact the community’s access to the chemist because it is flooded with workers."

Such a massive increase in Onslow’s population was always bound to have certain teething problems. With regards to the chemist, it is a bit of a balancing act.

If the Onslow Pharmacy doesn’t receive enough support from Aspen, it will be forced to close. On the other hand, if Aspen fully utilised the chemist, locals may be faced with periods of empty shelves.

If the balance isn’t found, the old days of having medicines posted in from Exmouth will return to Onslow.

Article by Jon Hopper, photos Jon Hopper and Kirstyn McMullan
Being the only pub in Onslow, The Beadon Bay Hotel is without a doubt cashing in on the gas hubs. But the influx of FIFO workers is driving some of the locals away.

“It used to be a lovely place for the locals, you could walk in and know everyone in the pub but it’s changed. Locals don’t drink at the pub anymore. It’s just been taken over by contractors who have left their manners behind,” said one Onslow local.

While we enjoyed hearty meals and friendly service during our stay in Onslow, we heard that the poor condition of the upstairs rooms was prompting locals to recommend other accommodation options to visiting friends.

The pub has just sold after going on the market mid last year. It is rumoured to have gone for more than $5 million to a group of investors who own other pubs and caravan parks around WA, including the Port Hedland Caravan Park.

According to the pub’s neighbour Felicity Brennan, the previous owners, known as Jamie and Skip, bought the heritage-listed building in 2004 for $434,000 and they tried selling it two or three times but each time the sale fell through.

“Skip has shares in bars elsewhere and Jamie still works in mining. They’re good boys both from Mandurah, who used to live in town. Originally they bought it to run, Jamie was going to bring his family up here but that didn’t work out,” she said.

According to Flic, the group of investors who bought the pub and the block next door, also bought two quarter-acre blocks across the road for $1.5 million each with settlement for all of the purchases expected in May.

She said the developers were likely to clear the blocks opposite the pub and build units “as accommodation is the big thing here. It’s interesting what’s happening in town at the moment. Investors don’t give a s--t. There’s nothing community here anymore.

“I still go down to the pub. It’s pretty much the only social place and we work long hours but as soon as 6 o’clock comes round, there’s a stream of contractors and as soon as that stream comes, I’m out the door.

“It used to be different types of people who came down to the pub even the workers would be very social. Now it’s changed, it’s not friendly anymore. They used to come in and want to get to know the locals, now they just look at you strangely.”

Article by Kirstyn McMullan
The Darby McAullay Bar

The main bar at the pub is named after a late pub regular and much loved community member Darral who owned the old McAullay’s Yard and whose family is still in town. This little verse about him is on the wall of the pub:

‘He is a good fella this McAullay bloke, he’s got a good missus too. You bite him for a dollar, he sometimes gives you two. So if you ride a horse, drive a truck, take tyres off a rim, Then your good enough to sit down and have a beer with ‘im. No matter what colour you are; black ,white, green or blue, He’s what the people know him as, a friend, good and true.’

overheard
at the pub

Did you know?

Here’s a few gems our flapping ears picked up:

“Yeah, he made nine grand out here last week. Before tax.”

“Where you been mate? On night shift?”

“Take that chalk out your mouth! Spit it out! Spit!”

“The young blokes get caught by the golden handcuff. The flash cars, fancy clothes and gambling. They get used to it and they’re hooked.”

“I’ve got three kids and a six-month-old baby back home, so it’s pretty hard being away from them, the little one changes so much each time. We’re just trying to pay the mortgage and look after our families back in Perth.”

On why Onslow is a great FIFO gig:

“Cape Preston! They call it Cape Depression. One bloke put an Aussie flag up and the Chinese owners made him take it down.”

“I deserve a medal for surviving two years on Barrow Island, there is nothing to do there, just your room and the wet mess and the dry mess. If you put one toe over the A-Class Reserve line it’s no questions asked, just ‘Oi! You’ve got a window seat’.”

The Beadon Bay Hotel was the first pub in the North West to have refrigerated beer.

During race week in the 1900s, 50 extra beds were put on the hotel’s verandah to accommodate extra visitors.

The pub is a smaller scale model of The Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle, built by the same architect.

A makeshift bar from the old Rob Roy Hotel was used until the pub was built in 1934.

In 1934, the year it opened, the hotel was used as a refuge centre during a cyclone.

The pub had a pet emu in the early 1950s.

In the 1970s, Mrs Gabriel Clowes, the owner of the pub, appeared before the Royal Commission on Alcohol and Drug Dependents in WA. She was advocating that Aboriginal women should have the right to voluntary sterilisation so they could avoid unwanted pregnancies.
If patience is a virtue, then Peter must be a saint. Perched on the shore of “Lake Laurie” down the bottom of Shanks Road, he has been dropping his line unsuccessfully for years hoping to hook something.

While Peter was reluctant to comment, owner/creator Laurie Bradley, stalwart of town, was more than happy to speak on his behalf.

“This is Peter, my shire drainage worker,” laughed Laurie. He created Peter as a protest against the Ashburton Shire a few years ago after reaching the end of his tether with complaints about lack of drainage near his property.

“I’ve been complaining since 1991!” he exclaimed.

He bought his block in the light industrial area under a conditional lease purchase, which meant he had to fence the property, backfill it and put in a workshop within three years. But being at the bottom of a hill, water kept washing his dirt away because there was no drainage system.

Responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the estate is vested with the Shire, but Laurie claims he’s still footing the bill for water damage as the Shire hasn’t fixed the drainage problem for drainage. “They’ve been promising for years to sort something out,” he said.

Despite the council using Royalties for Regions funds to install a concrete pad outside his gate to divert the water along a culvert, Laurie said his ‘lake’ still filled up daily.

“They need to sink a bloody sump,” he bellowed.

In frustration, he created Peter the Shire Drainage Worker to, in his words, “take the piss out of the Shire”.

Peter is now Onslow’s favourite ‘unofficial tourist attraction’ and he’s enjoyed by locals and FIFO workers alike. You can catch Pete anytime, down at Lake Laurie with Cobber the dog, fishing the day away.
A source from Nikki’s told us that the owners are not renewing the lease for the restaurant when it runs out in June as Shane Eaton, better known as ‘Charlie the chef’, is leaving town. So far no one has expressed interest in taking over the lease and so it looks like the days of à la carte dining in Onslow may be numbered.

Above & below left: Local rumour has it that The Beadon Bay Hotel has been sold, along with the site next door which houses the pub staff and the two properties opposite, that are likely to soon be re-developed.

Below right: The site between the post office and the supermarket is slated for conversion into a luxury apartment block. The building proposal is currently before council and construction is scheduled for Q2 2013.

Words and photos by Kirstyn McMullan
And yes, there’s more.

To watch the video interviews, to find this and our first magazine online and to see more of your changing town visit

www.trackingonslow.net

We’ll be back in July 2013 to hear more of your views and to continue recording the story of Onslow.
This project is a collaboration between Edith Cowan University and the Shire of Ashburton.
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