

Judge Report

CLEAN BEACHES 2014

Nhulunbuy, Northern Territory



Keep Australia Beautiful National Association

Averil Bones
Tel 02 8626 9396

PO Box W268
Parramatta 2150
NSW Australia

kab.org.au
averilbones@gmail.com

Contents

Introduction	1
Community Action & Partnerships	3
<i>Dame Phyllis Frost</i> Litter Prevention	4
Resource Recovery & Waste Management	5
Environmental Protection & Innovation	6
Water Conservation	7
Energy Innovation	8
Heritage & Culture	9
Young Legends	11

Introduction

Community

Nhulunbuy, Northern Territory

Population

4000

Date judged

22 May 2014

Contacts

Vanessa Drysdale

Project Facilitator (Sea Country)

Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation

scf@dhimurru.com.au

08 0939 2789

0437 187 036

Overview

Nhulunbuy is located on the traditional land of the Yolngu people, and currently has around 4000 residents. Its residents, including the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, have taken on responsibility for managing the huge amount of beach litter, including lost fishing nets, that washes up on the beaches of Cape Arnhem. Residents of Nhulunbuy are faced with the challenge not only of caring for and maintaining beach closest to the town itself, but also the considerable work required to manage and control litter on Cape Arnhem itself.

The role of the area's traditional owners in providing effective stewardship Arnhem Land cannot be overstated. Newly emerging challenges, predominantly associated with the loss of a major employer in the town, are likely to see greater pressures put on members of the community already active in managing the considerable litter that arrives in the area as a result of ocean currents. The commitment and determination of the residents to take on such an overwhelming litter challenge, and their success in maintaining an active program of litter collection under such extreme circumstances, in particular remoteness, scale and climate, is truly inspiring.

Similarly, the role that the residents of Nhulunbuy and East Arnhem Land play in Australia's cultural landscape is important. As well as developing initiatives to ensure the engagement and education of local and visiting young people, and to provide opportunities for women to be actively involved in management decision in the coastal environment, Yolngu people are also instrumental in the organization and delivery of the Garma festival, one of Australia's most

important annual festivals. The festival's program, as with all elements of the work undertaken by Dhimurru, demonstrates the community's strong sense of responsibility for the condition of the land, and commitment to sustainably managing its resources.

Community Action & Partnerships

Recognises achievement in community and civic beautification, presentation, health, wellbeing and pride. Also recognises partnerships between government, business, industry and local community networks.

Dhimurru is a Yolngu organisation representing the 13 traditional owner groups or clans of the East Arnhem peninsular. Of the 21 staff employed by the organisation, 15 are Yolngu Traditional Owners and Custodians.

Dhimurru manages 100,000ha of land and 450,000ha of sea on behalf of these Traditional Owners as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). Its motto is “Ngilimurru bukma djaka wangawu” or “all of us together looking after country”. It is a highly respected organisation with many years of managing high profile cultural and environmental projects including; Yellow Crazy Ant management program (which won the Gold Banksia award in 2010), Sea Country IPA Planning project (which led to the declaration of one of Australia’s first IPA on sea country) and others.

Developing and maintaining partnerships with a range of organisations which may or may not have a clear understanding of the area’s traditions and cultures is likely to be incredibly challenging at times. The success of the Yolngu people in creating a successful and dynamic group of Rangers, and attracting a range of support for their activities is impressive.

Dhimurru Rangers undertakes Australia’s longest running continuous marine debris survey – over 13 years – at Wanuwuy (Cape Arnhem), and have worked closely at all times with project partners including Northern Territory Parks Commission, WWF, Charles Darwin University, CSIRO, NAILSMA, GhostNets Australia, Conservation Volunteers Australia, World Expeditions, James Cook University, Northern Territory Government, Commonwealth Government and Rio Tinto Alcan Gove.

The challenges posed by the litter that washes up on East Arnhem land beaches are significant. The Indigenous Protected Area Dhimurru Rangers manage includes over 250km of coastline, often very remote and inaccessible. In 2013, the rangers retrieved an average of 1 tonne of marine debris and discarded fishing nets per kilometre of beach.

Dame Phyllis Frost Litter Prevention

Recognises achievement in community litter management and reduction initiatives including the undertaking of litter audits, and litter education programs.

Working partnership with GhostNets Australia and Tangaroa Blue, each year, Dhimurru undertakes a program of marine debris and ghost net retrieval. The debris coming ashore is rarely generated by the Nhulunbuy community itself, but rather often includes plastic bottles with languages suggesting overseas origins. Similarly, the fishing nets that arrive on the East Arnhem coastline are likely to have been discarded by remote fishing vessels and fleets, and are brought to the area by ocean currents and prevailing winds.

The marine debris “season” is predominantly the dry season (May-September) with a peak in debris coming ashore in the early dry or “Dhimurru” time which starts when the winds shift from northwest to southeast. This is also the most vulnerable time for marine sea turtles who are particularly susceptible to entanglement in ghost nets. During the site visit, it was reported that over a three week period, more than 25 sea turtles were release alive from ghost nets. Sea turtles are particularly important to the Yolngu people.

The IPA contains over 250km of coastline, often very remote and inaccessible. Last year (2013 season), the rangers retrieved an average of 1 tonne of marine debris and Ghostnets per km of beach. It is easy to see that the retrieval of marine debris is hard work; hot, labour intensive and logistically difficult to manage.

Dhimurru operates an in an extremely remote area of Northeast Arnhem Land. It is over 600km from the nearest large town of Katherine by road which is cut off seasonally by the monsoon wet. Some of the area’s beaches are so remote they cannot be accessed by either 4wd or quad bike so they must be surveyed them via helicopter. Where Dhimurru rangers cannot retrieve large nets or marine debris with a helicopter, they still work to spot any turtles that are entangled in nets and release any found alive.

Resource Recovery & Waste Management

Recognises achievement in resource recovery and waste management including initiatives which conserve resources, recover and reuse materials and the appropriate disposal of non-recyclable materials.

Marine debris is very difficult to transport to recycling stations from NE Arnhem as there are no recycling plants nearby, freight charges are extraordinarily high and make the exercise difficult. Despite the difficulties of transporting recyclable materials to recycling points, the town of Nhulunbuy still operates a recycling centre associated with its town dump. Facilities are provided for recycling of batteries, electronic equipment, metal, and green waste.

Recently though, a small amount of marine debris is being re-used to make beautiful and functional baskets, and the discarded fishing nets have also been used to create hammocks for the Garma festival, providing not only increased amenity for the participants but also establishing an effective way to educate people about the issue of marine debris.

Facilities for camping in the Cape Arnhem area include self-composting toilets. Dhimurru also uses recycled plastic materials such as bollards, table tops and corduroy material for minimising the impact of vehicle movements over fragile dunes.

Environmental Protection & Innovation

Recognises innovative principles and actions associated with developing sustainable communities. Also recognises protection of the natural environment focusing on the conservation of native flora and fauna.

Dhimurru supports Traditional customary land management practices whilst infusing contemporary knowledge systems into their management priorities. The IPA Sea Country Management Plan sets out the principles guiding the work and, in particular, acknowledges the importance of long-term stewardship of the land and connection to country. The Plan commits to conservation and enhancement of natural and cultural values, and management that protects the ecological and heritage values that “are the result of generations of Yolgnu management”, including that dugong, turtles, fish and other culturally and economically important species are harvested sustainably for generations to come.

Dhimurru maintains an active partnership with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory which has responsibility for biodiversity conservation and research in the Territory. This includes hosting a senior Ranger who assists Dhimurru with the daily challenges of managing the IPA and helps both Dhimurru and Parks NT to make the most of two way learning opportunities.

The plan also acknowledges the challenges of managing environmental impacts of bauxite mining, refining, shipping, aquaculture, commercial and recreational fishing and tourism. It sets out initiatives for controlling feral animals and weeds, such as perennial mission grass, buffalos and pigs, as well as for controlling erosion at campsites. One result of these efforts is that vehicle access to beaches is now more controlled, improving the condition of dunes.

The Plan’s implementation program demonstrates clearly that large scale challenges associated with managing the environmental assets of the area in a culturally aware way, and demonstrate that the Yolgnu’s ancient connection to the landscape includes long-term active management of its elements.

These practices, although not new, are undertaken with a great deal of enthusiasm, respect and ultimately positive outcomes for the land, the people and the flora and fauna as a whole. The investment of time and resources in collection and removal of marine debris is a key expression of this approach in action, and has direct results for the area’s threatened marine turtles.

Water Conservation

Recognises sustainable water management within communities which has combined innovative water conservation and water re-use initiatives at the private, industrial and municipal levels, benefiting society and nature.

Dhimurru is very conscious of its water usage. The office grounds are watered on an automatic reticulated system which is turned off during the annual wet season. The only other watering regime Dhimurru undertakes is to keep revegetation areas watered during their early growing period and/or throughout the dry season.

The wet season comes with its own challenges with regard to water management. Water sensitive design is used in the development of roads and tracks in the Cape Arnhem area, including swales on roads and provision for roadside run-off. Tracks are stabilized by rocks and management of adjacent vegetation, and campsites are positioned so that they are not badly damaged during times of high rainfall.

In the town of Nhulunbuy, signs have been erected that encourage wise use of water in the domestic setting. Run-off into wetlands adjacent to town is currently the focus of water quality testing and improvement programs, and managers are aware of the problems associated with high-nutrient run-off into coastal wetland systems.

Dhimurru does not have jurisdiction to manage water usage in any other areas, but leaves nature to care for its own water needs.

Energy Innovation

Recognises sustainable energy management which focuses on innovative energy efficiency measures and climate change issues

Traditional Owners and Custodians are very concerned about the impacts climate change will have on their country and traditional practices. Already they are seeing signs of the environment changing around them, plants flowering at odd times and animals behaving peculiarly.

Heritage & Culture

Recognises how communities proudly preserve and value cultural history.

Nhulunbuy and East Arnhem Land is managed as an Indigenous Protected Area. As the traditional owners, the Yolngu generously welcome guests to their country, and acknowledge that the IPA has significant values for residents and visitors as well as to its traditional people. Part of the work of Dhimurru involves developing a range of interpretative displays and walks to promote greater cultural understanding through interpretation of Yolngu beliefs in order to build joint understanding.

Dhimurru is a Yolngu organisation which is overseen by a Yolngu board and has a predominantly Yolngu workforce (15 of the 21 employees are Traditional Owners and Custodians). As part of the leadership role played by the Dhimurru organization, it works with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to ensure delivery of its work program, and to increase the understanding of cultural elements of its vision for the land and sea over which it has stewardship. Dhimurru regularly undertakes cultural work including Cultural Mapping projects both within the sea country and on land and also nurtures their employees to undertake traditional customary practices whilst on country.

Part of the current IPA Plan of Management is the establishment of a Women's Ranger Program. This program acknowledges the unique knowledge, skills and understandings of local women, and the important role that a robust women's program will play in holistic management of the area's cultural values.

The area also hosts the annual Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures. This festival, which is now internationally-recognised for its unique contribution to global culture, is part of the work of the Yothu Yindi Foundation. The Foundation includes three primary objectives within its vision for financially, physically and culturally sustainable Indigenous Australians. These objectives, taken from the YYF website, are to:

- provide contemporary environments and programs to practice, preserve, maintain and present traditional knowledge systems, cultural traditions and cultural practices (such as traditional dance (bunggul), song (manikay), art (miny'tji) and ceremony);
- develop economic opportunities for Yolngu through education, training, employment, enterprise and personal and community development, including community leadership development;

- and to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and culture, thereby fostering a greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

The festival itself is Australia's most significant Indigenous event, and has delivered real outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the context of self-determination, reconciliation, and Indigenous knowledge sharing, transfer and exchange. Garma incorporates visual art, ancient storytelling, dance – including the famous nightly Bunggul – and music, as well as other important forums and education and training programs relevant to cultural tourism, craft, governance and youth leadership.

Young Legends

Recognises environmental achievement through youth initiative and/or by a community, which encourages and promotes youth initiative and environmental education programs and/or achievement.

A key part of Dhimurru's work is done through encouraging school aged children to participate in the cleanup activities via the Learning on Country Program. The children work closely with Rangers on a range of programs, including the marine debris cleanups and turtle recovery. During the site visit, participants in the Learning on Country program highlighted its importance in providing insight to the opportunities that may be available, especially in the context of a geographically-isolated and relatively small community.

Participants were inspired by the leadership role that the Dhimurru Rangers were fulfilling in management of their traditional lands, and seemed motivated to continue learning about the cultural and environmental elements of the landscape. Manifestation of the wider world predominantly in the form of large quantities of rubbish seemed to give both them and the Rangers a unique perspective on the values and priorities of the broader community.

Dhimurru is committed to community education, both within the indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Rangers often make presentations to the Nhulunbuy Highschool which is a predominantly non-indigenous population and at the Yirrkala School which is Yolngu. Dhimurru also hosts work experience students from both schools.