

2013

Tracking Onslow: a community in transition. edition 3, late 2013

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Tracking

ONSLOW

a community
in transition
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When change is happening, communities talk and some tales get taller in the telling. Opinions are often based on shared stories and collectively these opinions are the community sentiment that affects the way people live and act.

This magazine was produced by a collaboration between the ECU Journalism Program and the Shire of Ashburton that set out to track the shifts in the community sentiment in Onslow over the construction phase of the Wheatstone and Macedon gas hubs. The project aims to capture the stories being told in Onslow as the town changes, regardless of their factual accuracy. Where possible we have sought to verify facts and provide balance, but we have not excluded comments by community members on the grounds that they didn't check out, because if we did that, then this would not be an accurate record of what people are saying. In all cases we have been careful to correctly report what people said in our interviews.

The result is a sometimes optimistic and sometimes disgruntled reaction to the town's rapid, but in some ways not rapid enough, growth spurt. We hope that you enjoy this snapshot of what was being said in Onslow in the middle of 2013 and find it interesting food for thought about the impact of major resource projects on their host communities.

There is a digital version of the magazine available on the website so you can email a link to it to your family and friends in other places. The website also has soon-to-be updated galleries showing how parts of the town have changed almost beyond recognition and video interviews with Onslow locals.

We look forward to seeing you when we come back in early 2014.

Best regards,



Dr Kayt Davies
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July 2013: Shannon Wood, Karma Barndon, Brad Davis, Katherine Powell & Tasha Tania.

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Disclaimer:

In creating this magazine we made every effort to ensure that the information presented here was correct at the time of publishing. While we have accurately reported what people have said, we acknowledge that in some cases our interviewees may not be in possession of all relevant facts. Interviews were conducted in Onslow in July 2013. Some information was gathered in subsequent phone interviews and through other research processes.

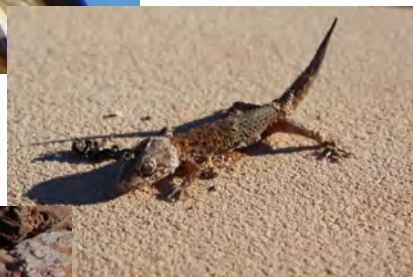
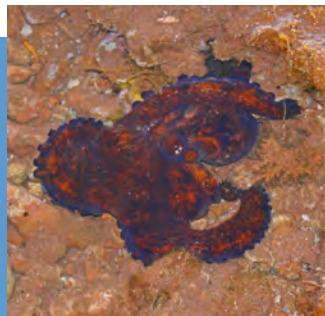
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Some Onslow wildlife photographed in 2013.

Boomtown businesses

Article by Karma Barndon

The hope and optimism that first enveloped Onslow when the gas hub boom started seems to be fading.

The business environment in town is “very strained” at the moment, according to Geoff Herbert from the Onslow Chamber of Commerce.



“It’s the best opportunity businesses have ever had but everyone is stymied because there is no land or accommodation,” he said.

Geoff said he doesn’t think Chevron supports the local economy, and he believes that companies from Perth are at more of an advantage when it comes to securing contracts, than companies from Onslow.

Even so, he doesn’t heap the blame on Chevron exclusively.

“It is not all Chevron’s fault,” he conceded.

“A lot of businesses are busy, my business has quadrupled its turnover, but there’s no industrial land, so we’re waiting on the Shire to release more land. But then there’s no water or power, so until they sort that out nothing is going to happen.”

He agrees there is a good side and a bad side to the current business climate, and added that businesses need to be creative in order to overcome the obstacles.

Businesswise, he said the optimism was still there, but things were “difficult”.

Jim Ireland, general manager of the Onslow Supermarket and Hardware Store agrees.

“Onslow is not the easiest place to do business,” Jim explained.

His workforce at the supermarket consists of just three locals, and the other 22 staff members are backpackers and ‘grey nomads’ (senior tourists), who only stay for a season.

He said his business spends \$260,000 a year on accommodation, with five caravans at Ocean View Caravan Park plus a one-bedroom unit that costs \$1200 a week to rent.

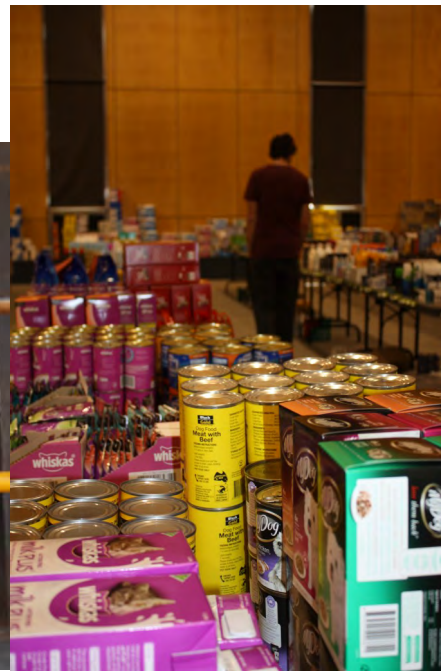
Add to that the \$1.2 million it pays for a 35-year-old house for extra staff beds, and you can appreciate why Jim sees the town as “character building”.

Usually based in Perth, he took on the general manager’s role in January, when the former manager left town suddenly. He said that in the two years he has been a shareholder, the business has not turned a profit, but that he is working hard to turn that around.

“It was just a massive kick in the guts.”

June 2013 was the best month they have had but tragically, on July 1 the supermarket building was gutted by fire.

“It was just a massive kick in the guts,” he said. “Now I’ve been here since the fire sorting everything out.” >>



The damaged supermarket and (right) shopping at the basketball court.

When we visited Onslow in July 2013 the supermarket was operating from the basketball court at the MPC building, which Jim admitted was not ideal, especially as the Shire had only made the space available to them for 13 weeks, after which it would revert to being a sports facility for the community.

Luckily the fire in the supermarket building, which was sparked by an electrical fault in the refrigerators, did not cause structural damage, so the building does not need demolishing. Builders were already on-site reconstructing the entire supermarket interior.

Jim said the logistics of running three businesses — the supermarket, hardware, and liquor stores — from three separate locations was certainly a challenge. The liquor store was temporarily accommodated in the building that was until recently Nikki’s restaurant.

Another business affected by fire, albeit in a different way, is Discovery Parks, which is transforming the over 50-year-old Beadon Bay Village into deluxe apartments for workers.

General manager Tim Dodds said the hoops he has had to jump through for his buildings to achieve fire compliance were all “a bit silly”.

The company had to install two 150,000 litre water tanks, a pumping station, and an extensive fire indicator panel, despite the structures not being flammable, as they were made of fibro cement and steel, rather than timber, and despite the absence of a dedicated town fire engine.

Mr Dodds said: “We’ve got all this stuff but we don’t have a fire engine. All this water to put out a fire but no way to use it. If we did have a fire we would have to wait until the truck came from Wheatstone.”

Discovery Parks will offer 96 apartments and a 320 seat dining hall with a state of the art kitchen, recreation room, wet mess and gymnasium, in a \$100 million dollar investment.

Mr Dodds believes once it is completed, the park will be the biggest in Australia in terms of monetary value, and the Wheatstone demand will pay for it all in the long run over the years.

“We are building a facility that can easily be converted for tourism once the construction [at Wheatstone] is over,” he proudly said.

There are many new businesses in town, especially in the Light Industrial Area (LIA) south of the town centre with Blackwoods, Access Hire, and Hansons, to name a few.

A new Onslow Courier Service, owned by the owners of the supermarket, has also started.

Onslow Courier Service manager Anne Ross said the new business had only been operating for a month and was in its initial stages.

So far it employs two full-time staff and it has mainly been busy bringing in supplies and specialist orders for the supermarket and hardware store.

However, Geoff Herbert believes there could be many more businesses taking up opportunities in the region. >>



“They do not do anything benevolently ... they only do what they have to”

“If they had the [expansion of the] LIA up and running then they would probably fill 40 blocks straight away.”

Geoff said while some businesses are just in Onslow to make a quick dollar, others have invested in the community by buying property.

Pilbara Access bought three properties and an industrial yard and gave good support to the recent Passion of the Pilbara festival.

He laments the fact some international companies do not act as benevolently as others, and seem to lack community spirit.

“Some of these companies are so used to operating in third world countries, like Chevron in Africa, that they have difficulty relating to people and communities.

“Chevron cannot just ride roughshod over us here and try to appease us with the odd hospital or school like they do overseas.”

He added: “People forget that Chevron is a big company with lots of shareholders, and those shareholders want to make money.

“They have a \$265 million agreement with the State Government, with conditions on what they must do for the town, but I know they are trying

to get out of whatever they can. They do not do anything benevolently, while they say they do with their public face on, they only do what they have to and are forced to.”

Prominent Chevron shareholders include prestigious US institutional investors and asset management firms like JP Morgan Chase & Company, Blackrock Institutional Trust Company, and The Vanguard Group, Inc.

Chevron is committed to spending \$250 million, via its critical and social infrastructure funds, but that includes investment in some things that the company would have had to spend money on anyway, even if there was no community based in Onslow, such as sealing the road to Onslow and the airport.

While some of its funding is yet to be specifically allocated, the current WA Government seems to have little will to challenge Chevron over the community’s concerns.

WA Premier Colin Barnett described the whole project as “extremely important to the state, and of course Onslow.” But it appears that not everyone in Onslow is happy with how it’s panning out.



Here and above: Construction work at Discovery Parks’ site in Onslow

macedon

What: Gas will be piped from the Macedon field to an onshore plant for processing. The refined gas will then flow along the Dampier to Bunbury pipeline for the WA domestic market. Plant capacity is 200 terajoules per day.

How much: \$A1.67 billion project

Where: BHP Billiton's four subsea wells are located 100km west of Onslow. The Macedon gas hub is located at Ashburton North about 17km south west of Onslow on the Urala pastoral lease. Macedon House where the 16 permanent workers will live is in town.

Timeline: 1992 Macedon gas field discovered.
2012 Construction started.
2013 In July the project was 99% complete. Macedon declined to name the expected month of completion but said project was on schedule for completion in the second half of 2013.

Workers needed: Employment will peak at 600 during the construction phase. When the plant is operational it will employ 16 workers.

Money invested: BHP Billiton committed \$5 million in March 2013 to build a basketball stadium and skate park next to the Multi-Purpose Centre in Onslow, but local government input is needed before the funds can be spent.

Source: BHP Billiton, <http://www.bhpbilliton.com> and <http://www.planning.wa.gov.au>



wheatstone

What: Gas hub in three parts. One section will process 200 terajoules of gas per day for the WA domestic market. The other two will convert gas to liquid for export, processing a combined total of 8.9 million tonnes per year. Chevron has approval to expand to 25 million tonnes of LNG per year.

How much: \$A29 billion project.

Where: The Wheatstone hub is being built at Ashburton North not far from the Macedon hub.

Timeline: 2004 Chevron discovered Wheatstone.
2011 Construction started.
2016 First LNG expected. Expected project life is 40-50 years.

Workers needed: There will be 6500 workers at the peak of construction and 300 when it is in its operational phase after 2016.

Money invested: Chevron has committed around \$250 million to social and critical infrastructure projects in Onslow for health, education, local business, community and conservation.

Source: <http://www.chevronaustralia.com> and <http://www.planning.wa.gov.au>



Community consultation is the process working?

Article by Tasha Tania

'Social license to operate' is the industry buzz phrase that compels giant companies to spend mega-bucks keeping the communities they operate in on-side. In Onslow this has resulted in BHP Billiton and Chevron both starting up Community Reference Groups to encourage members of the community to make suggestions and to allow them to communicate their PR messages directly back into the community. Tracking Onslow spoke to some current and former CRG members to canvas their views on how well the process is working.



Chevron's Community Reference Group (CRG) bills itself as a platform for community consultation, but some are now seeing it as little more than a space for people to vent their frustrations about the effects of the Wheatstone project on the town.

Shire president Kerry White is getting tired of not being heard. She described the reference group as a strategy used to make it look like Chevron is involved in the community. Kerry added that there is now an imbalance of numbers between attendees and Chevron representatives as people have stopped coming to the meetings.

"They have bad corporate behaviour as far as I'm concerned, and you tell them, but it's like water off a duck's back. What's the point of us going, because they're not listening," she said.

Entertainment for the local community was one of the topics discussed in recent meetings.

Kerry said Chevron had arranged for Guns & Roses to perform at their site and there were hopes that the locals could also see them, but the town gig was cancelled at the last minute due to an insurance problem – and it wasn't the only time Chevron cancelled an event.

She said: "They treat us like dogs. [The CRG has] now turned into a bitching session. The message is just not going back up higher."

Flic Brennan is an active member of both the BHP Billiton and Chevron CRGs, and feels the same way. "We were talking about the changing amenity of our town from six or seven years ago, telling them what was going to happen. They denied it and it's all happened."

Flic told us that the changes are worse than she'd previously expected, everything from people being forced to leave town by the increased gas prices, water, petrol and

accommodation, to the environmental impacts, especially on the turtles. Flic said at the end of the day it's Chevron's money, and they decide what to do with it.

"They're spending \$20 million on an airport and it still doesn't seem that we're going to see it," she said.

Flic and Kerry, however, both agree that Chevron is making a positive impact on the school. With Chevron funding for the V-Swans and WELD programs, school principal Jackie Barry is embracing the positive change. However, Chevron's involvement with the school has been managed via other relationships established through other means - outside of the CRG.

The Chevron Onslow CRG was originally a branch of the Gorgon CRG established in 2005. In 2008 it became solely focused on the Wheatstone project. It comprises community, local government and regional body representatives and meets every second month at the Sports Club. The meetings are mainly information sharing sessions to provide members with a space to ask questions about Chevron projects.

Jackie said that Chevron representatives at the CRG do listen to what the members have to say, but they act as middlemen to 'pass on the message' to the relevant agencies.

"A lot of [things discussed in the meetings] are out of their control and they have to go back and forth, unless a representative for the specific matter is there," she said.

CRG member Ann Eyre is staying optimistic about the town's future despite her worries about rising prices, especially for pensioners.

"I don't think we as a community realise how big of an impact it is

because it's all new to us. That's why the CRG is a positive environment to try and make change."

As a member of both the BHPB and Chevron CRGs Ann encourages community members to join, but adds that not many are interested.

"[Chevron] tries to be co-operative most of the time by having an informative discussion both ways. The main thing that affects people is the amount of FIFO people that come into town and the town isn't used to that many people," she said.

Ann worries about the people who are struggling, however, she acknowledges there's very little that can be done.

"It's not so much their fault, but I don't think they realise that by paying such high wages it draws a line between the locals and the resource workers."

At the meetings the 15-20 community representatives who attend are updated on Chevron activities and members can contact Jeremy Coulson, Chevron's Community Engagement Advisor, to suggest additional topics of discussion. A spokesperson for Chevron said: "The forum's two way communication provides valuable feedback which continues to influence Chevron's activities in and around Onslow."

Chevron also conducts surveys to assess whether CRG members think the CRG is working and the majority of the 25 people who took part in the last survey in early 2012 said they believed the CRG process was efficient, ran smoothly and had clear expectations/guidelines.

New nominations for CRG membership are reviewed each December.



Photos: Kerry White, Flic Brennan, Ann Eyre, Jackie Barry and Jeremy Coulson



While some of the adults in town feel let down by Chevron's community involvement efforts, its child focused programs are making Onslow's kids smile.

Onslow's playgroup has expanded. Mum of five Dina Grainger said that many new mums come and go but it's the whole town that's doing the same.

Chevron has been funding the group of 13 mums through the community grants for a few years and has just replaced many of the toys and resources that were burnt in the Shire office fire in January. The rest of the toys are being temporarily stored in the TAFE shed while they wait for a permanent location.

"We've moved from one place to another place and another," said Dina. She added that the Sports Club has said they're happy to have the playgroup in part of their building.

"But we're still hoping for a sea container or somewhere we can store our stuff," she said. The playgroup also organises different trips like barbecues at the back beach and swimming at the sun chalets.

The Chevron-sponsored Earbus program in the Pilbara is a mobile children's ear clinic managed through Telethon Speech and Hearing. Travelling through Karratha, Roebourne and Onslow, the Ear Bus visits primary schools and childcare centres to provide free ear health screening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The focus is on this group because of the high incidence of ear problems in Indigenous communities and their restricted access to health care.

"This gives them a prevention path that they may not be able to access through a normal health way due to where their family lives or their family situations," said regional manager Dayna Williams. The service comes to Onslow two or three times a year and is welcomed because of the limited services available in town. However Dayna said: "Unfortunately it's hard to travel to Onslow because our guys that drive from Karratha might not be able to find a place to rest their heads."

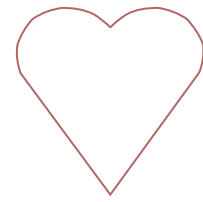
The Chevron-sponsored V-Swans is a WA youth development program that promotes a healthy lifestyle through education and sport. It has been running since 2010 in Onslow and has included the *Leading Forward* primary school sports league, and developing high school students' coaching skills. Around 35 kids are involved in the programs four times a week.

Regional manager Daniel Munday said V-Swans engages them in an active way to participate in volunteer work. Recent discussions in the CRG have covered the V-Swans future plans for renovating the Power Station youth drop in centre as a safe place for the younger generation to call their own. "We would like to make it an asset for the community in the future," said Daniel.



Photos: Top — Jarrad Holton loves playgroup
Bottom — The soon to be renovated Power Station youth drop-in centre.

FIFO families long distance love



Article by Brad Davis

Most people can appreciate the difficulties of FIFO (fly-in fly-out) work and the stress involved with spending up to 80 per cent of your time away from home, especially if you have a family. But the pressure felt by the family back home, while one of the parents is away for extended periods of time, is less often recognised.

People have described it as being like a single parent for most of the time. Even though the support is there, the parent left at home has to juggle kids, grocery shopping, cooking, washing, running errands, etc.

Joe and Nicole Ashby are among the thousands of Australian families in this situation. With Joe being a FIFO worker, Nicole was struggling to cope with the pressure of raising their three kids, until she decided to hire a young tourist to babysit and help with house chores in exchange for free rent and meals and \$100 or so a week.

This arrangement was the seed that grew into Nicole's business and support group 'FIFO Families', which now has corporate clients and over 750 members.

"We are currently working with resource related companies to help support and educate their FIFO workforce," Nicole said.

Nicole explained that families can become part of the FIFO Families community for free or pay to become members and access a range of value deals. Some companies pay a corporate fee that gives all of their employees the paid membership for no cost. She added that while neither Chevron or BHP Billiton had done this, there could be FIFO workers in Onslow accessing the services.

A spokesperson for Chevron said that the company understood that FIFO work could be stressful on families and that it provided

counselling and support through an Employee Assistance Program to workers who were encountering difficulties.

According to Nicole: "We do need further support. We need someone in a Business Development Manager (BDM) role and an Executive Assistant as well as trainers to present our workshops nationally."

The business runs support groups across Australia for FIFO families to come along to and discuss things, like child care and buying communal groceries, and over holidays they arrange group celebrations for families with one of the parents away.

"The feedback we get from families is that we are changing their lives, saving marriages ... we are connecting families effectively and keeping them connected, we are making the lifestyle so much easier and manageable for families via our online, virtual and education support," Nicole beams.

It only takes a quick peek at the website to the glowing testimonials. There is also a newsletter posted every fortnight. In Nicole's words: "Families have told us that we must keep doing what we do as they would be lost without us."



For more info visit
www.fifofamilies.com.au



Eating Out in Onslow

If you find yourself feeling hungry and want to grab a bite, there are now a few options on offer.

Article and photos by Tasha Tania & Brad Davis

the coffee pot

Onslow's local coffee van is up and running again after a six month hiatus due to a change of owners. Food prices are slightly higher than the service station, however it has a selection of frappes, smoothies and coffees that the servo doesn't offer. Its quick meals are still a local favourite although wait times are sometimes long especially in the mornings, so phone orders are recommended if you're in a hurry.

the servo

Another option for quick meals is the service station on the corner of Simpson and Second. They now have a selection of sandwiches, burgers, rolls, wraps and daily specials that could fuel your fishing trip, as they also have a good supply of fishing tackle.

the pub

The Beadon Bay Hotel's daily \$18 dinner specials include chook, steak and pasta nights and they're definitely worth a quick walk down the road if you're staying in town. The prices are fairly reasonable and the portions are big enough to fill up even the hungriest bellies.

the club

The growing number of FIFO workers at the pub has shifted the local hangout spot to the Sports Club. Located on Third Avenue, it has a licensed bar and light takeaway meals on Fridays only. It is open Wed-Fri 2pm-midnight, and Sunday 5pm-10pm.

caravan park

Discovery Caravan Park provides mess hall type meals for the workers who are the park's main occupants, but takeaway fish and chips are sometimes available for other guests.

the shop

If none of the above can slake your hunger you can buy groceries such as bread, cheese, fruit, cold cuts and snack foods at the supermarket.

but no Nikki's

Sadly, fine dining is no longer an option in Onslow as Nikki's licensed restaurant officially closed its doors on June 28 after 19 years in business. Taking over its spot is a makeshift bottle shop. Owner of the property Jan Bevan said the bottle shop is renting the space until its original location, that was damaged by a fire in July, has been renovated. The room will then be rented out as office space. But hopefully, there will be a new restaurant opening up at the motel down the road in 2014.



Gary Eales, Servo



Bruce Strahan, Sports Club kitchen



No longer Nikki's

Reimagining the town centre

Article by Katherine Powell

The Onslow Expansion Plan, released last year, promises in its subheading that Onslow will be the “Star of the North”. The plan was the result of a week long consultation process that involved over 80 residents coming together to put forward their views and aspirations.

As the town’s population continues to grow, with an additional 1500 residents expected by 2016, so too does the need for more and better facilities.

There’s been a lot of talk about how Onslow should evolve to provide the shops and services that locals and visitors need, and work on the development of a detailed master plan is expected to start before the end of the year.

In mid-2012, Landcorp published the Onslow Expansion Plan detailing the vision and way forward for the town. After an extensive community consultation period where about 80 Onslow residents attended a community planning session in the Town Hall in 2011, a ‘wish list’ was developed and the Expansion Plan was distributed throughout town. The key objectives in the vision for Onslow are sustainable living, economic vitality and community wellbeing. The plan outlines the priority areas for the town as well as the values and aspirations the community

identified during the consultation process. Affordable housing options, acknowledging Aboriginal heritage and increasing tourism and recreation opportunities are important to Onslow residents.

Amanda O’Halloran from the Shire of Ashburton said the key was not changing what’s available to the point of losing what Onslow is, but understanding that Wheatstone is a 60-year project meaning future growth is necessary.

“We need to capture where we are today but we want to enhance and develop Onslow into a liveable and sustainable community into the future,” she said.

Another document produced by the Shire is the Living Life document. It focuses on the Shire as a whole and again captures the spirit of the entire Ashburton region and the plans for the way forward.

Amanda said locals are always getting asked what they want from the future and where they’re



headed. She said the Shire hoped that a local could pop this document under their arm knowing it captures those key ideas.

“This document really does in a lot of ways demonstrate who and what we are,” she said.

Both Amanda and Shire President Kerry White say that a bit of consultation fatigue has set in as residents have been “consulted to death.” Amanda said there have been over 300 consultations with the community since 2006. Progress, however, has been slow since the 2011 planning session.

While the initial overall planning for the town still stands, including the upgrades of the town centre and the foreshore, Kerry said there are a few areas yet to be decided on including new residential land releases.

“Nothing has happened since, but Landcorp are going to start next month, so we are just on the cusp of getting things moving.

“I don’t think people are going to believe it when it finally happens

because it’s taken so long. It’s been like two and a half years now,” she said.

Pressure on Onslow’s water supply is also a concern. Resources are currently stretched but Water Corporation spokesperson Emily Hunter said there are projects underway to help relieve the pressure on existing supplies. Stage one includes expansion of the Cane River Borefields, which currently supply the town’s water.

Though the town centre planning is still in its conceptual stages, it’s a joint effort between the Shire, Pilbara Cities Office, Landcorp, Chevron and State Departments.

The intention is to grow the town and its facilities while staying true to the heart and soul of Onslow.

Amanda said: “We are hoping that at the end of it all we will still be a nice, niche community of 2000-2500 people where you will still know everyone and feel safe, but you will have the increased services that will make the town more liveable and more comfortable.”

“...we are just on the cusp of getting things moving ...”





New runway done

Salt does strange things to conventional bitumen and Onslow's abundance of salt meant this was a key concern in planning the new runway.

With the help of the ARRB Group (formerly known as the Australian Road Resource Board), the Chevron-funded \$30 million Onslow Aerodrome is the first in Australia to use salt water in the runway construction to increase its salt-resistance. Several Australian roads have been made using salt water but Onslow boasts the first use in an airport context.

Project manager Fiona Keneally said the innovation was required because Onslow's limited water supply meant it was not possible to reliably source the million litres of fresh water required daily during the construction phase from nearby bores, in terms of quality and quantity. In addition, the cost of sourcing fresh water from a further distance and double handling that water would have exceeded the cost of engineering salt mitigation measures.

Another obstacle that needed to be overcome was moving the town's water main as it crossed the land that is now the new runway.

Despite bad weather in June that delayed waterproofing the bitumen from the underlying pavement, Fiona said the project is on time and on budget, according to the project's original scope.

The new runway was completed in late July and granted Civil Aviation Services Australia (CASA)

approval. The slab for the new terminal building is about to be poured and the building is due for completion before the end of 2013.

The new runway replaced one that was first sealed in 2006 after Cyclone Glenda damaged the town's original unsealed airstrip.

The old runway, that stayed open for use throughout the construction process, has been used for small charter and corporate flights, usually handling around seven flights a day. The new runway will allow for planes as large as Fokker 100s to fly in and out.

The Shire will manage the new aerodrome but no announcement has been made yet about when the people of Onslow might be able to catch planes; or funding for a passenger screening security system; or whether a commercial airline has expressed interest in providing a service to Onslow.

Amanda O'Halloran from the Shire said she was working on the "significant negotiations and statutory requirements" involved in setting up regular passenger services, that the council has budget for it and that she would keep the community updated. In the meantime the new runway, that will sometimes have water on both sides, will be used by Chevron's FIFO workers.



Photos: Above the new runway in late July ready for its first planes, and here the runway being rolled in early 2013



4 mile smiles

What a difference six months makes! Last time Tracking Onslow visited the town's favourite fishing spot at 4 Mile, there wasn't much there — except for a picnic table under a small shelter, a wood-fire BBQ, a wheelie bin and a solar light with a huge bird's nest on top.

Now it's a hub of construction activity. Workers have been on-site since February and the face-lift is well underway. A large shade shelter is nearing completion, there is decking along the shoreline, gas barbeque facilities, and stone seating and walls.

According to the Shire, August will see the building of toilets, the regrading of the access road and extensive revegetation around the area.

The work has included strengthening of the creek edges to make them more stable and safer to fish from.

The 4 Mile facelift was funded by Chevron and the State Development Council.

The reduced access to 4 Mile has not kept visitors away. We met two brothers, David and John Ulherr, bricklayers from Sydney in town to do some contract work, enjoying the sunshine and doing some fishing on the shoreline.

David caught a flathead with bait but threw it back in and John was using a lure in the hope of catching something bigger.

We asked the Shire workers what happened to the nest that was perched on top of the solar light in February and were told that it didn't appear to be occupied and so there were no dramas with removing it in terms of having to relocate angry nestlings.



Article by Karma Barndon
Top pic: David and John Ulherr
Inset : 4 Mile in February 2013
Above: Construction workers Jake Johnson & Cori Moon.
Below: Paul Ingold & Jason Little



Tourism on the back burner

It's grey nomad season and Onslow is normally the highlight of the Northwest tour. It's renowned for its fishing, sunsets and stunning landscapes. This year however, with limited accommodation options for travellers, it could be a different story.

Tina Roper from the Onslow Visitor Centre said service workers and locals are filling up the caravan parks, resorts and chalets, leaving little or no space for tourists.

Currently the only real option is the Ocean View Caravan Park. Tina said people are currently forking out \$45 a night for a piece of dirt in the overflow area of the park.

"Most people don't like paying that much and if they do, they expect better facilities, like pools and barbecues. They are staying one night and then ringing their friends and families telling them not to bother coming."

You can camp at Ocean View Caravan Park but those spots are also limited. Even people staying in Onslow for work are resorting to tents in camping areas, parking bays and roadsides because of the lack of accommodation.

The Mackerel Islands are another Onslow drawcard but Carol Stratford from the Visitor Centre says Thevenard Island is pretty much out of bounds.

"We had to fight for it. It was meant to be completely a 'man camp'. They didn't want the workers mixing with the public.

"They're booked out almost all year round though so you pretty much know you can't go to Thevenard."

According to the April council meeting minutes, Council has approved an application from Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd to allow 80 per cent of Thevenard to be occupied by transient workers, leaving just 20 per cent available for tourism. The Shire approval is currently set to expire in December 2017.

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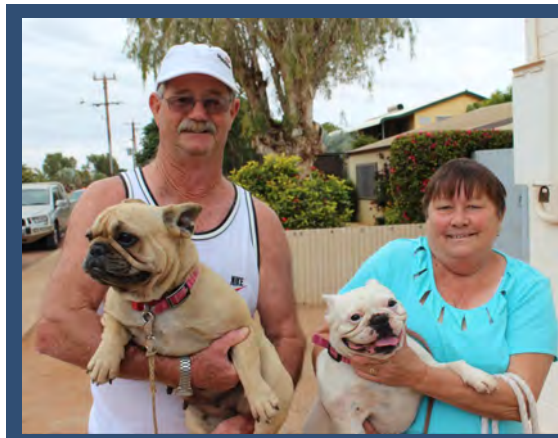
Direction Island is about 30 minutes from Onslow by boat and the lone house can accommodate up to 10 people. Tina says it's about \$600 a night but special deals are often available for as low as \$350.

According to Tina, confusing exclusion zones in the water, rigs and markers have also ruined the deep fishing experience locals and tourists once enjoyed. The Mackerel Island charter boats are finally operating again but at \$400 per person, Tina says it's really only workers on RDOs that can afford them.

Elaine and Neal Lee have been coming to Onslow for years, staying for four months at a time. They too have felt the impact of the resource projects and the flow-on effects such as spiralling food and petrol prices.



Tina Roper, Onslow Visitor Centre



Neal and Elaine Lee, regular tourists

“We’ve been coming here for years but this will be our last visit. We won’t be coming back. There’s just nothing here any more.” Neal said.

The Shire of Ashburton appears to be public enemy number one in the eyes of the locals and tourists alike but Amanda O’Halloran, executive manager of Strategic and Economic Development, said while tourism is still a Shire focus, affordable housing solutions for locals is the main priority at present.

The Shire-owned Ocean View Caravan Park provides semi-permanent van sites for around \$400 a week. When compared with \$2000 a week to rent a house, many locals have had no choice but to relocate.

“Tourism is an aspiration at the moment. We certainly don’t want to stop it but we have to say it’s not our absolute focus at the minute.

“While we’d love to say the caravan park is 100 per cent for tourists, we couldn’t be running a supermarket or day care centre or supporting our local businesses at the moment if they couldn’t put some of their staff in the park.”

Amanda added that the Shire’s main problem is weighing up the conflicting priorities. “We need to focus on how to maintain and sustain our local community and look after our local businesses to ensure they remain here forever.”

The Shire has applied for a dedicated tourism manager, with intentions to draw the tourists back in the future. But with the appeal of sleepy old Onslow dwindling, hopefully it’s not too late.



Amanda O’Halloran, Ashburton Shire

Ashburton Resort Motel

Corner of Second Ave & Third St
Standard rooms from \$275/night
Rooms have ensuites and aircon
Most rooms have ocean views
Phone 08 9184 6586

Onslow Sun Chalets

On Second Ave, near the museum
Motel rooms from \$185/night
Two bedroom chalets from \$245/night
BBQ area and pool available
Phone 08 9184 6058

Discovery Parks

(limited casual vacancies at present)
Beadon Creek Road
Powered van site \$40/night
Swimming pool and BBQ area
Meals for work groups are also available
Phone 08 9184 6007

Beadon Bay Hotel

Corner Second Ave and Simpson St
Standard rooms from \$150/night
Double or twin-share \$190/night
Meals available, \$18 specials
Phone 08 9184 6002

Ocean View Caravan Park

On the Sunrise Beach foreshore
Powered van sites from \$45
6 bed cabins from \$125/night
Long term tenants \$435/week
Phone 08 9184 6053

Contact the Onslow Visitor Centre



Did you know ?

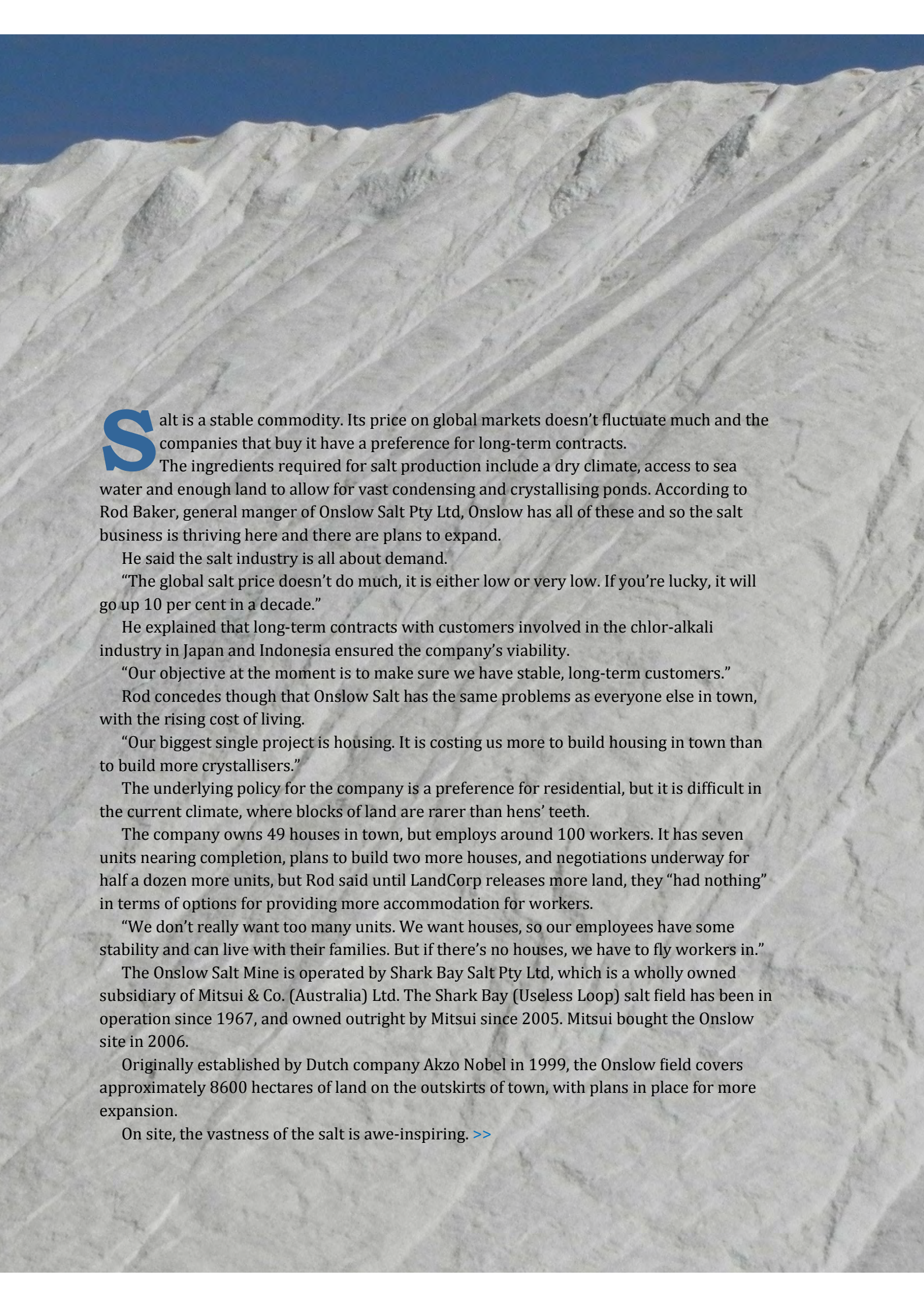
- In WWII Onslow was bombed by the Japanese.
- The town of Onslow was named after Sir Alexander Campbell Onslow, who was chief magistrate of WA on and off from 1882 to 1890. He was a friend of the Forrest family and had bitter professional arguments with WA’s newspaper owners.
- Sir Alex never visited Onslow.
- All of the streets in Old Onslow, except Ankatell Road, were named after relatives of Sir Alex.
- When the town relocated, some people wanted to change the name to Beadon or Ashburton.

Salt People

Article by Karma Barndon

It's been 14 years since Dutch company Akzo Nobel came to town to develop the area's potential for salt production. Now owned by Japanese giant Mitsui, Onslow Salt is a major employer and salt is part of the essence of Onslow.

in the heart
of Onslow



Salt is a stable commodity. Its price on global markets doesn't fluctuate much and the companies that buy it have a preference for long-term contracts.

The ingredients required for salt production include a dry climate, access to sea water and enough land to allow for vast condensing and crystallising ponds. According to Rod Baker, general manager of Onslow Salt Pty Ltd, Onslow has all of these and so the salt business is thriving here and there are plans to expand.

He said the salt industry is all about demand.

"The global salt price doesn't do much, it is either low or very low. If you're lucky, it will go up 10 per cent in a decade."

He explained that long-term contracts with customers involved in the chlor-alkali industry in Japan and Indonesia ensured the company's viability.

"Our objective at the moment is to make sure we have stable, long-term customers."

Rod concedes though that Onslow Salt has the same problems as everyone else in town, with the rising cost of living.

"Our biggest single project is housing. It is costing us more to build housing in town than to build more crystallisers."

The underlying policy for the company is a preference for residential, but it is difficult in the current climate, where blocks of land are rarer than hens' teeth.

The company owns 49 houses in town, but employs around 100 workers. It has seven units nearing completion, plans to build two more houses, and negotiations underway for half a dozen more units, but Rod said until LandCorp releases more land, they "had nothing" in terms of options for providing more accommodation for workers.

"We don't really want too many units. We want houses, so our employees have some stability and can live with their families. But if there's no houses, we have to fly workers in."

The Onslow Salt Mine is operated by Shark Bay Salt Pty Ltd, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsui & Co. (Australia) Ltd. The Shark Bay (Useless Loop) salt field has been in operation since 1967, and owned outright by Mitsui since 2005. Mitsui bought the Onslow site in 2006.

Originally established by Dutch company Akzo Nobel in 1999, the Onslow field covers approximately 8600 hectares of land on the outskirts of town, with plans in place for more expansion.

On site, the vastness of the salt is awe-inspiring. >>

...salt continued >



Health and Safety Superintendent Peter Trenerry said the salt ponds can be seen on a map but until you get out there, you can't tell how big they really are. "It's a unique ecosystem out here," Peter declared. "There's termite mound after termite mound, and no shortage of pelicans, the healthiest pelicans I've ever seen."

The whole process of solar evaporation begins at the pumping station that moves seawater into the first of the condensation ponds, which is chock full of fish. Peter explained the fish get sucked into the pond through the pipes from the Beadon Creek when they are tiny, and grow as they feed off the rich nutrients in the pond.

"The fish are huge," he said. "There's cod, stonefish, bream, trevally. You can see how big they get by the size of the pelicans."

Fishing is banned at the site and all fauna is protected. The termite mounds are also protected, though not in an official capacity. Peter's attitude is why ruin nature. "It's all part of the environmental plan. We'd rather put a bend in the road than knock down any mounds."

Pond One, the biggest pond in the field, is about 30km around and about a metre and a half deep. The seawater/brine passes through a series of culverts until it ends up in Pond Six. Sitting in each pond, the water evaporates. By the time it reaches Pond Five and Six the concentration of the salt is very high.

The salt field has 12 crystalliser ponds at the moment, and each pond is around 55 hectares. When the ponds are ready for the harvest they hold around 250,000 tonnes of salt each.



Graders go around the edges of the pond to 'rip' the surface, and then the harvesters pick the salt up and dump it into haul trucks. Approximately 30cm is scraped off the surface each time, but that doesn't reach down to the red dirt as the salt in a pond ready for harvesting is about 50cm deep.

The haul trucks then belly dump the load onto the drop bridge, the salt is washed down, and then dumped onto the stockpile. A hard crust forms over the stockpile that stops it dissipating in the rain or blowing away. From there the salt travels by conveyor belt to the salt ships when they arrive and on to the plastic factories of the company's customers.

Regular maintenance of the equipment is a big part of the work cycle as the salt promotes rust on everything, especially the haul trucks.

Peter explains: "They're good for seven years but after that they're good for scrap only."

All but 12 of the company's workforce live in town and work either four-on/four-off 12 hour shifts or regular 7am-5pm five-day weeks.

Peter said they're long hours but it's an awesome company to work for because he's in a great place, working with great people.

The Ionic Composition of Sea Water by Weight		
%	Chemical	Symbol
55.1	Chloride	Cl ⁻
30.6	Sodium	Na ⁺
7.7	Sulfate	SO ₄ ²⁻
3.7	Magnesium	Mg ²⁺
1.2	Calcium	Ca ²⁺
1.1	Potassium	K ⁺
0.4	Bicarbonate	HCO ₃ ⁻
0.2	Bromide	Br ⁻
0.1	Borate	BO ₃ ³⁻

Salt (NaCl, sodium chloride) is not just for sprinkling on your chips, it is an industrial chemical extracted from the sea by solar evaporation and an essential ingredient in the production of glass and plastics.

Table salt for taste and food preservation accounts for approximately 20% of salt use, while around 80% is used as raw material for the production of caustic soda (sodium hydroxide), chlorine and soda ash, in the chlor-alkali industry.

Caustic soda is used in paper, textiles, soaps and detergents; chlorine in PVC (polyvinyl chloride) and water purification; and soda ash in the making of glass.

Salt use has a long history

In Romania, archeologists discovered an ancient salt works plant used by Neolithic people of the Precucuteni Culture around 6050BC, while ancient Egyptian tombs from 3000BC were found to have contained salted birds as funeral offerings. In the same period, the Egyptians traded their salt fish to the Phoenicians in return for Lebanese cedar wood, glass and Tyrian purple dye.

Commercial solar salt is extracted from the sea by the process of solar evaporation. Sea water, with an initial composition of around 3.5% NaCl, is first contained in large, earthen concentration ponds, or condensers, where the sun and wind work to evaporate the water and raise the salt concentration to the point of crystallization (25.8% NaCl).

The water is then fed through a series of crystallising ponds, where calcium carbonate and magnesium is removed, and a layer of salt crystals forms. Laser controlled harvesters then scoop up the layer and wash it in clean brine, before drying the salt and shipping it out to market.



The Shire's brand new day

Article by Katherine Powell

With the drama of the last few months finally behind them, the Ashburton councillors can now get on with the job at hand after being reinstated as of June 11.

In our last magazine we outlined what had happened with the council in 2012.

The council sacked former CEO Jeff Breen in November after a Probity Compliance Audit (that he had advised the council to request) prompted the Department of Local Government to ask questions about council processes.

In December the council was suspended for six months and required to undergo governance training.

With the details of the probity report yet, if ever, to be made public, all Shire President Kerry White could say was that the councillors hadn't done anything wrong.

Councillors attended six months of training in things like understanding the roles and responsibilities they held and ensuring policies were in place to govern the CEO.

Along with the training, the councillors now have a mentoring panel in place to support them through the changes occurring in the Shire. Given that the council budget has swelled from \$12 million to around \$100 million over the past several years, the expectations for appropriate use of the funding are high.

The mentoring panel consists of Karen Chappel who is the Shire President of Morawa, Don Burnett who is the CEO of the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Jenni Law from the Department of Local Government.

A spokesperson from the DLG said the panel

will be in place for six months and while it is the first time the Department has had to put a panel in place, they say they have used peer support and training programs in the past.

Kerry said the training and support from the mentoring panel has been helpful in light of the tough six months they encountered.

"The mentoring group is there to support us. I think in case we have any conflicts between the council and the staff," she said.

Local Government Minister Tony Simpson attended the first council meeting on July 17 along with the mentoring panel. While he is impressed with the councillors' progress, he echoed the high expectations and issued a warning.

"Local government elections are just around the corner in October, so that's another reason to learn from your training and do your best," he said.

With the arrival of new CEO Neil Hartley in October, President Kerry White said there were encouraging times ahead for the Shire, saying they were "very lucky" to have a man of his qualifications coming their way.

"It was unanimous. We voted him in 9-0. He's a smart man and knows everyone in Government. We are very fortunate to have him," she said.

Geoff Herbert, President of the Chamber of Commerce has been a vocal critic of the councillors in the past but even he is optimistic ahead of Neil's arrival.

"He's very qualified. The Council may hamper him but he's a lot smarter than them. Hopefully he will give them some vision."

The DLG will continue to monitor the council's progress over the next six months.

"Local government elections are just around the corner in October, so that's another reason to learn from your training ..."

In your words



Neil Hartley is looking forward to taking up the reins as CEO of the Shire of Ashburton in October. While he'll be based in Tom Price, he's planning to make good use of Skype to connect with people in Onslow and he said he aims to bring a focus on good governance and wise use of the money the resources boom is bringing.

He described Onslow as "the centre of the universe when it comes to the gas business" and said he's excited to be working on helping Onslow to find "amicable, sustainable, cost-effective" solutions to its challenges, while it's in "the eye of the world".

Moving to the Pilbara is only one of the big changes in his life this year. He also has plans to get married in November, but before he takes time off to do that, he'll spend five weeks settling into his new role. His previous role was CEO of the City of Kwinana and he was prompted to move by the recently announced metropolitan local government amalgamations.

When Shire President **Kerry White** addressed Chevron at the last Industry Forum she talked about the 'Onslow Way'. The characters, the way of life and the community spirit that makes the town of Onslow what it is.

"We have our way of life here," she said. "We call it the Onslow Way and Chevron have their way. Our way is to be friendly and welcome people to town and Chevron's is not."

She's feels let down by Chevron. While she acknowledges the good work the company has done in terms of the local school and the V-Swans program, she said it's the long term residents that have been hit the hardest.

"You've got all the biggest companies in Australia operating here and what are they giving us? Nothing, do you see anything here?"

"Some people have lived here for 25 years and they've had to go and buy a caravan and live in the caravan park paying \$400 a week for a bit of dirt just so that they can stay here.

"There's about forty or fifty odd residents living down there. My heart bleeds for them."

For others the cost of living and loss of services like the Community Resource Centre and Nikki's is too much and many locals have packed up and left town. Kerry said it's very sad to lose some of your best friends.

With property prices and rents through the roof, the only people who can afford to move here are those working for the big companies like Chevron. Kerry said while she welcomes new people, she just wants them to be a part of the town and support the locals clubs and businesses.

"They've bought out our town and then they like to call themselves locals but they're not really locals because they won't join anything or be a part of anything. "

Kerry's said: "It's the whole town I'm passionate about. I look forward to generations of Onslow residents being able to proudly say that there is *still* an Onslow Way."

Her final word: "We don't want to be a Chevron town. They start talking about this rule and that rule. I say get your rules out of my town. I won't tolerate their rules. This is our place."



In your words



Ashley McAullay and his family are quite well known around these parts. Along with the Hazes, Ashburtons and Barkers, the McAullays have been here for generations.

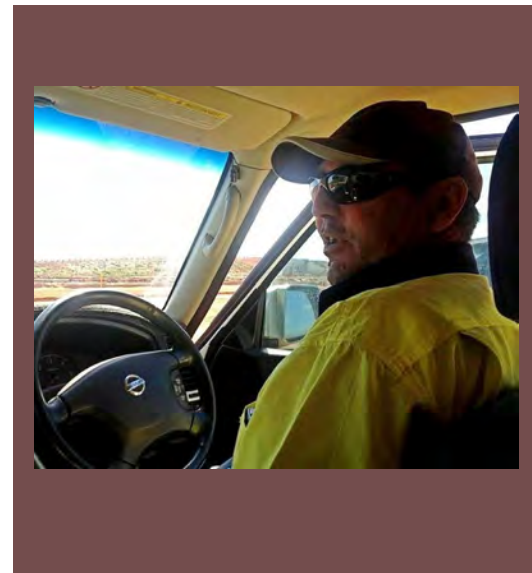
Asked to describe his thoughts on Chevron in one word, he simply said “sh*t”. His reasoning is that Onslow was a nice quiet town pre-Chevron, but now you can’t even go to the pub for a beer anymore, and the company doesn’t care about the Onslow community. Asked what the town needed he suggested “a new pub!”

“They say they’re going to do things for the town but don’t,” he said. Despite his feelings about the town’s transformation, he said he will be here permanently. “I’ve been here all my life and I’m not going anywhere.”

Peter Trenerry is the Health & Safety Superintendent at Onslow Salt. Originally from South Australia, he enjoys the relaxed atmosphere of the northwest. He described Onslow as “a very, very friendly place, full of community spirit.”

“I love it up here,” he declared. “Nice people, nice town, great company to work for and great people to work with, what more could you want?” The quiet nature of the town is what impresses him most. “Everyone waves at each other here, you feel you know them all, and there’s no noise after 9pm, it’s just a really quiet town.”

He also appreciates the lack of hoon driving on the roads, and he’s looking forward to the opening of the new airport, and the prospect of passenger flights for locals. “I’d like to be able to fly in and out of Onslow. It would be convenient ’cause to get out now it’s either a three-hour drive to Karratha or a four and a half hour drive to Exmouth. Last time we went on holidays it took a full day just to get to Perth.”



When Carol Stratford rocked up in Onslow five years ago, she planned to stay here permanently. Now, her response is: “I’ll be staying here as long as possible”.

She works at the visitor’s centre, and loves Onslow for its strong sense of community. “I’ve been welcomed into the community, like a member of the family, right from the start.”

This is perhaps why she is so protective of the town when it comes to the gas hub projects.

“The town is changing very quickly,” Carol said. “There’s a loss of community, you’re either cashed up or you leave.”

According to Carol, the town is losing a lot, despite growing. The Centrelink is gone, there’s no vehicle rego office, and prices for everything have gone up, leaving lots of demand with no supply. “What we give with one hand gets taken from the other.”



Tracey Strahan has lived in Onslow for 16 months with husband Bruce and Pudgy the dog. Having moved from Port Hedland, both Tracey and her husband now work at Onslow Salt. They are well known around Onslow for being actively involved in the community, managing the Sports Club and being involved in the upcoming Variety Bash.

“My first impression of Onslow was that it is quiet and small, but it’s what you make it, you gotta make your own fun,” she said.

Tracey’s favourite thing to do in Onslow is to be “out on the water, on the boat, with a few beers and a fishing rod. There’s loads of places to go fishing and camping, and on day trips, there’s a lot to do.

“Nothing beats the sunrise and sunset here. It’s a beaut little place,” she said.

In regards to the changes happening in town, Tracey has witnessed small towns in transition before,

“We saw the same thing happen in Port Hedland, and you just have to move on, it’s happening regardless. Whether you like it or not it’s happening. What do you do? You’re fighting with the big boys,” she said.

Joan Haymes from Augusta has only one gripe about Onslow: the flies! “They’re terrible this year,” she exclaimed. “Big, black shiny ones.”

Joan and her husband have been coming to Onslow for 20 years, to fish and escape the southern winter.

While hubby was busy packaging their daily catch (an estuary cod, pike and trevally) Joan told the Tracking Onslow team about their love of the town.

“A lot of folks reckon it’s jumped up in price, but in the supermarket prices aren’t that bad. We just eat fish and sit around. I enjoy that.”

Joan explained that the climate in Onslow was ideal for fishing. “We have our little boat we put down at Beadon, and we just trawl along the river.”

Joan does not believe the gas hubs have made too much of a difference to her and her hubby’s holiday experience, although she has noticed an increase in traffic.

“There’s so many utes with signs on the sides, and people with their orange or yellow vests, but the character of the town is still the same.”



Joan doubts that they will come back next year, but certainly won’t rule it out.

“We’re a bit older now,” she lamented. “I’m not happy with my husband putting the boat on top of the car at his age, but time will tell. Come back next year and see if we’re here!”

In your words



Jeremy Coulson came to Onslow as Officer in Charge of the Onslow Police, but last year he took a job as Chevron's Onslow Community Engagement Advisor.

Though he has only lived in town for three years, his mother grew up in Onslow in the 1950s and 1960s when the town was much smaller.

He is enthusiastic about the town's growth. "The services in Onslow generally satisfy my needs, but as the town grows I look forward to seeing more community facilities for recreation and other retail stores which contribute to Onslow's vibrancy," he said.

When asked about the gas hubs, he said despite the challenges Onslow faces as a growing community, there are positives, such as investment in social infrastructure.

"There are many opportunities for the community and industry to work together and take advantage of local business and employment prospects," he said.

Jeremy enjoys fishing and exploring the Pilbara, and was drawn to Onslow due to its isolation and proximity to the coast.

"I thoroughly enjoy living in Onslow and love the sense of community, especially that you know almost everyone in town," he said.

Like many people who live there, **Ann Eyre** loves everything about the little town of Onslow. She's president of the Onslow Tourism Association and when asked what services she'd like to see established in Onslow, she said "upgrade the hospital, a new Shire office [they're using the Multi-Purpose Centre for meetings at the moment because the old Shire office burnt down], hairdresser in the street, things like that."

Ann is a little uneasy about the community's future.

"The trouble is they come in, pay huge money, raise prices, and us little people can't afford it. People won't be able to retire ... Also [the FIFO workers] are not supposed to be fishing but they are, and there's 6000 of them."

She says big business is now sucking petrol, accommodation, and cash (the FIFO workers withdraw all their cash from the limited ATM's here then leave) out of the town.

Along with Ann's many responsibilities and volunteer work, for the last seven years she's been one of the main driving forces behind the local A4 photocopied newsletter, The Onslow Times.

"It's difficult to keep the paper going unless it's a non-profit organisation, so that's why we do it."



Tim Dodds believes the future for Onslow is in not pandering to the grey nomads but trying to attract the baby-boomers, who have better “spending habits”.

Tim said overseeing the Discovery Parks site for over a year had been a hard slog: “It’s been a hard road, it’s not for the faint-hearted, but if you sit back it won’t happen.”

Coming from the Eastern States, he is disappointed at the lack of tourism options: “Onslow needs more shops, like Noosa or Port Douglas, or even Broome, and more beachside development.

“And Chevron needs to encourage tourism, so people come here. I know they cite issues of terrorism and bio-security but there is great potential in industrial tourism.”

According to Tim, Onslow is an interesting beast. He said there are probably 100 people who work to make the town go forward, 200 odd workers, and around 400 who just do not work.

“There are some people in town who don’t like the council but I think the council is trying very hard to make things happen, with limited resources.”

Tim adds: “This is a changing town. As old stalwarts leave town the Onslow Salt people, who were never accepted as part of the town by the old people, are now the old people.”



G Geoff Herbert is proud of his family’s historical link to Onslow. “My grandfather had a cattle station out of town, Dad was born here and I’ve got a son here, so its four generations here.”

Geoff said WA was a small state and everyone danced around each other. His great-great-great grandfather built the Rosie O’Grady’s hotel in Fremantle, and sold it to the Forrest family, while his mother used to babysit a young Andrew Forrest out at Munderoo station.

Geoff has this message to the towns-folk who blame the Shire, or feel they have been left behind: “This Shire has to battle the town, the state government, and Chevron, as well as an incompetent council. Old Onslow is gone, get over that, and let’s plan for new Onslow. Let’s make good business decisions and move forward. It’s sad, but that’s life.” Geoff believes the council decision to build the new Shire offices on the site of the burnt down building was not a good business decision.

“Why put it back, because it used to be there? Well it used to be out at Old Onslow, let’s all move back there then. It’s not going to happen, that’s why the town moved in the first place, to go forward”.



P rimary school principal Jackie Barry has lived in Onslow for three years, and she’s definitely seeing some changes. “There’s a more in-and-out flow of kids leaving and coming in at the school now. The revolving door is starting to happen for us,” she said.

But even with more new families, the school culture still hasn’t changed. The friendly community environment makes it easy for new students to fit in and parents still get involved.

“A lot of parents work so it’s hard to get involved in a committee, we have to try the right formula to get everyone in the meetings. Parents come and watch the kids’ assemblies in their flouros, then head straight back to work,” she said.

Jackie said Chevron has been good for the school. It paid for the school’s iPads, computers and interactive keyboards that are soon to arrive. It also supports the Working on Employment, Learning and Development (WELD) program that involves site tours, metal work training and the chance to complete certificate level trade qualifications.



In your words



Local artist and animal lover, **Stephanie Percy** was born in Onslow. Stephanie fondly remembers spending the early years of her childhood growing up on Yanrey Station, which is about 246km south of Onslow by road.

Stephanie's traditional-style Indigenous paintings, depict mostly sea-life, and are painted in a rainbow of colours.

They have been in demand in recent weeks. Her last one sold for \$1000, and buyers are lined up for her new works.

After living in Darwin for years, she came to Onslow to be with her mother, a Yindjibarndi woman.

While they now live together, with several cats and dogs, she said if it wasn't for her mother being here, she would be gone from the town tomorrow.

She said she is saddened by the recent changes in the town, with it changing from the place she once knew into somewhere she no longer wants to live.

Stephanie said: "Before them [the gas hubs], Onslow was a sleepy little town, now they're stuffing the whole town up.

"I'm only here for my mum. When my mother goes, I'm gone, I'm not coming back. I've told my family," Stephanie said.

Flic Brennan runs Tric Electrics and the plant nursery in town, and isn't shy about sharing her opinions about the effects that Chevron has had on Onslow.

Sadly the nursery business that Flic runs, that has been in operation for 40 years, through three different owners, is soon closing its doors. "So there's another service in the town gone," said Flic.

"My sales have gone down 300% in one year and I see that being due to the change of demographic in the town. What's the point of staying in business?"

"The demographic that's here now are people that are here for three years to make a million bucks, and don't care about the town," Flic added.

She said that when BHP came to town it was a much smoother transition, but Chevron is having more negative impacts on Onslow.

Flic said the workers used to come in to town, but after they started causing some trouble, they now need permission to leave their camps and come in to town. Speaking about the Chevron camp she said: "It's like jail out there, they have to get a day pass to get out." Not that she's complaining. She said: "It's a win for the town, there's less trouble now they don't come in to town as often."

We don't want to leave but it's not the place it was" Flic said.

"The town has gone to sh*t since Chevron started, we swore we wouldn't leave, but no, we're out. It'll take a year or two, but we're gone".





When Onslow was nuked

Article by Brad Davis
Image: Operation Hurricane

60 years ago, Onslow was in the midst of Britain's race to catch up to the United States and Russia in the field of nuclear weapons. The Montebello Islands, about 75 nautical miles north of Onslow, were used for atom bomb testing from 1952 to 1956.

Over four years 138 kilotons (kt) of nuclear load eradicated all wildlife in the Montebellos and sent radioactive fallout as far as Fiji.

With an audience of naïve and excited onlookers watching from shore, Operation Hurricane was detonated in 1952, just below sea level from a ship in shallow waters off the coast of Trimouille Island. Scattered remains of the HMS Plym can still be found kilometres away from ground zero, where there is a crater in the seabed six metres deep and 300 metres across.

The next bomb, Mosaic G1, was detonated from a tower in May 1956.

"At the end of the countdown, there was a blinding electric blue light, of such an intensity I had not seen before or ever since. I pressed my hands hard to my eyes, then, realised my hands were covering my eyes. This electric light power, or rays, were actually passing through the tarpaulin, through the towel, and through my head and body, for what seemed ten to twelve seconds, it may have been longer. After that, the pressure wave, which gave a feeling such as when one is deep underwater. This was then followed by a sort of vacuum suction wave, to give a feeling of one's whole body billowing out like a balloon."

Observer of the Mosaic G1 at Montebello, 16 May 1956.

To put this into perspective, that observer witnessed a 15kt blast. A month later, the 98kt Mosaic G2 was detonated. But it was recorded at the time as 60kt because the UK government wasn't allowed to exceed 60kt in its testing.

"We have made a successful start. When the tests are completed, as they soon will be, we shall be in the same position as the United States or Soviet Russia. We shall have made and tested the massive weapons. It will be possible then to discuss on equal terms."

UK Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, 1957

The bombing stopped when Australia's Menzies Government called off the tests in 1957 after scientist Hedley Marston revealed that radioactive fallout was widespread and extremely hazardous.

Overall, there were 29 British nuclear tests carried out in Australia and South Pacific Islands between 1952 and 1958. Over 22,000 British, 14,000 Australian and 500 New Zealand servicemen were involved, and an uncounted number of other observers (including many Indigenous people), plenty of whom were exposed to ionising radiation.

A study conducted by University of Adelaide researchers in 2006 found that these veterans



The kids of Onslow watching the Atomic Bomb cloud and aircraft flying overhead. Darryl Rooney is centre front and his sister Lorraine is second from the right. All images courtesy of the Goods Shed Museum.

were 23 per cent more likely than the general population to get cancer and 18 per cent more likely to die of cancer.

Unlike other veterans who experienced combat, however, these veterans do not automatically qualify for a healthcare Gold Card to cover their medical expenses and have had to pay up front and go through complex bureaucratic processes in often unsuccessful attempts to get government assistance.

Greens Senator Scott Ludlum said: “For a small sum, \$85.2 million over the forward estimates, the remaining 1892 Australian nuclear veterans could be provided with the same benefits and entitlements that other veterans are awarded. Given the devastating impact on their lives and families this is a small price to pay.”

In the words of Ray Whitby, a WA nuclear veteran: “More than half a century ago, I was a young man eager to serve his country. As a result I have suffered a lifetime of medical issues that have impacted my enjoyment of life. All I now ask for is fair and just compensation.”

As a result of advances in understanding about the medical effects of nuclear radiation, chances of further nuclear testing in Australia are slim.

“All nuclear-capable countries, except North Korea, currently observe a voluntary moratoria on testing, including the US and China,” said Dr Chris Hubbard, an International Relations and National Security academic at Curtin University.

“The real point here for Australia is that any form of nuclear testing on Australian soils is politically impossible out to the distant future.

Unlike Menzies, Australia’s Prime Ministers and their Cabinets, now and into the future, would inevitably destroy their party if they proposed or undertook nuclear testing, of any kind – not just here but anywhere else.”

Author Robert Drewe was nine years old and in Perth when Operation Hurricane was detonated. He recalls his mother telling him: “Atom bombs worry the blazes out of me, and I want you at home.” Penguin published his memoirs about the subject late last year. His book called Montebello takes readers through a journey alongside government ecologists sent to the Montebellos to repopulate wildlife on the islands. Though the narrative also documents his personal life, it covers his investigations into the environmental impact of the nuclear tests and the declining health of nuclear veteran Pat Coverley.

A study on the environmental impact, conducted back in 1983, saw three members of the Australian Radiation Laboratory working in conjunction with Lincoln Toussaint of the State X-Ray Laboratory of WA. They concluded that radiation levels had dropped below a level that could be considered hazardous to the general public... for the most part!

Speaking of Mosaic G1 & G2, the report states: “The radiation fields at both ground zero locations are now relatively low, and present no health risk to the casual visitor.”

However, where Operation Hurricane is concerned, it said: “In the central part of the island the fallout pattern from this test is evident.... Radioactive metal fragments,

containing the ^{60}Co radionuclide, were observed in large numbers scattered throughout the central part of Trimouille Island. The radioactive content of this metal, which originates from HMS Plym, was typically 6kBq/kg.”

This means that 7kg of this metal would emit enough radiation to require a special federal licence for handling, transport and storage, if it was to be moved anywhere.

Once the federal government pulled the plug on the nuclear testing, the islands were essentially locked away.

Things stayed that way for 35 years until they were handed over to the WA government in July 1992, at which point they became a conservation park managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).

The Federal Government allocated over \$300,000 to managing the islands and sent in a technical assessment group following a Royal Commission recommendation that stated that staying for any longer than 3 or 4 days on Trimouille Island would be dangerous. Because of this, the ground zero sites are still restricted to one-day visits.

Dr Roger Price, Adjunct Professor in Physics at the University of WA, said that while the radiation now received from spending a day on the islands was likely to be less than the dose you'd get from having a x-ray, it was a good idea to avoid eating seafood caught there because some toxins become more concentrated through the food chain, and also to avoid kicking up and inhaling dust because ingesting radioactive material is more dangerous than simply being near to it.

In 1993 CALM started re-introducing native animals and tourism around the islands is now starting to pick up, with charter boats, scuba diving, snorkeling, fishing, camping trips and safaris available.

Although there's yet to be any reports of tourists finding three-eyed fish or mutant turtles, it takes thousands of years for all traces of radioactivity to disappear from an affected area.

In this sense, 60 years doesn't seem all that long ago.





Photos by Flic Brennan

The highlight of the Onslow calendar, the annual Rodeo, is fast approaching with the Rodeo arena set to transform in to a showcase of spectacular talents and bravery on August 17.

The annual community event is the cornerstone of the Onslow community, and many locals will tell you it's the highlight of their year. With around 1000 attendees expected at this year's event, the rodeo grounds will turn in to a sea of swags and cowboy hats.

With the event costing around \$90,000 to run annually, organisers have been hard at work fundraising and gathering sponsors to keep the event a solid fixture in the Onslow community.

The main change with this year's rodeo is that it has just recently been given national accreditation, and is now affiliated with the Australian Rodeo circuit. This means that competing riders coming from across the country can earn points on the rodeo circuit which can go

towards earning them a spot on the international circuits in America and Canada.

Onslow resident and rodeo lover, Flic Brennan said she enjoys the community spirit of the event and how it brings the whole of Onslow together.

Flic said she was most looking forward to the Camp draft event, as this was the first year it is being included in the program.

Camp draft involves a horseback rider separating a single cow from a herd of cattle, and using their skills to navigate it around the ring and in to a pen.

Onslow Rodeo Club president, Shane Stratford, said there are plans to improve the rodeo grounds, to attract more people, and ensure the rodeo stays alive for future generations. Shane emphasised that the rodeo is one of the most important events to the people of Onslow.

"It's the one community event that we have left," he said. A new kitchen has been installed courtesy of a \$10,000 Chevron community spirit

Time to cowboy UP

Article by Shannon Wood

grant, and plans for further upgrades to the rodeo grounds are in progress.

Shane said that he hopes that the divide in town between locals and FIFOs won't effect the rodeo and the future of this well-loved event. He stated that on several occasions the Rodeo Association has tried to get the out of town workers involved in community events, such as this one, but have been unsuccessful.

Committee member Bob Harris said he enjoys seeing the skills on show at the rodeo and that the event holds great significance in the town.

"It's the only big event we've got in town now the races have packed in," he explained.

Rodeo veteran Bob has been involved in the event from the beginning and is in charge of organising the stock and riders for the big event.

Bob was very keen to get newcomers involved in the rodeo, and to expand the event with the changes in town. He said: "As more new people become involved, which some already are, we are getting fresh ideas, which means we are keeping up with the times ... The more people that become involved, the better, that's what I think."

NTC Contracting donated \$100,000 worth of earthworks so that the camp draft event could be added to the program this year. Other events on the program this year include; team roping, >>



...rodeo continued >

rope and tie, bull ride, and steer wrestling, all of which have a \$2500 prize. "The prize money helps, but to a lot of these guys, it's the interaction with other people from the community that they do it for," Bob said.

Club treasurer Carol Stratford said that a lot of hard work goes in to organising the event: "It's 12 months of hard work for one day ... There's the catering, security, getting sponsors involved and then there's organising the animals," she said.

Carol said that the rodeo has been improving every year and there are more events this year that involve the whole family. There are clowns for the children, a live band, food stalls and events

that everyone can be involved in. There is also the junior barrel race, junior breakaway, and juvenile steer events which all involve prize money for the under 18s.

"The rodeo is one of the only few annual events held in Onslow that the community has an opportunity to participate in at various levels as a contestant, a spectator or a volunteer," Carol said.

The hope of many of the rodeo committee members, and people in the community, is that as Onslow is changing, newcomers will become involved in events such as the rodeo and try to make the transition to being involved in the Onslow way of life.

Enduro Club

REVS UP

The newly formed Onslow Enduro Club is slowly making progress towards becoming a fully functioning Enduro racing club.

They have been given approval for a three year lease over the old race course and shooting and rifle range on Onslow Road, and they have plans to fix it up to make it safe and suitable for racing motorbikes.

The long process of cleaning up the grounds has begun and a Chevron grant of \$5000 for building materials has been spent on new sheds to house bikes and safety equipment.

Enduro racing involves motor bikes navigating their way around a race track which often has jumps and other obstacles.

The new club will give the rev heads in town a safe environment to race in.

Club treasurer, Kate Reddin, said the club is a long way off being functional, but they are making progress.

"It will be a club for families, individuals, kids and adults to come out, have fun and ride motorbikes," she said.

"At the moment there's nowhere designated for motorbike riding, there's not a lot for the young kids and adults in the town to do motorbike-wise," she said.

Ms Reddin hopes that as word gets around that the club will expand.

Racing events at the track are still a long way off as there is major work to be done before the track can be deemed safe.



MASH BASH DASH



The Variety Bash is coming to Onslow and the community has been busy preparing for the 'Bashers' arrival.

The iconic event, which is celebrating 25 years, starts in Exmouth on August 24 before arriving in Onslow on August 25 and winding through, Canarvon, Jurien Bay, Geraldton and a few mystery stops along the way, before ending in Perth on August 31.

Local residents Tracey and Bruce Strahan have been busy preparing for the big event, organising fundraisers around town and getting their vehicle ready. Having been involved in the Variety Bash for the past five years, Tracey said: "You meet some great people along the way doing it and at the end of the day you're all there for the same cause."

Driving in a M*A*S*H themed ambulance, Tracey and Bruce, along with 44 other 'bashers' will travel together through the designated stops, while experiencing some of the beauty of rural Western Australia. Tracey described the event as a "carnival on wheels", and said there are plenty of laughs along the way.

So far 45 cars have entered the race, with the bashers driving about 300 to 400kms per day, making various stops for food and fun. It's about a 2400km trip altogether. Tracey said:

"Unfortunately in previous years some of the mature aged cars haven't quite made it."

Various fundraising events have been held in the lead up to the Bash to help raise the \$10,000 entrance fee. A quiz night raised \$10,000 and there was a Kevin Bloody Wilson fundraiser show, which 245 people attended.

She said that overall there has been huge support from the people and businesses around town, who were all keen to contribute.

Over \$30,000 has already been raised in Onslow, with companies such as Chevron and Onslow Salt contributing, as well as the local community getting involved with the organising and fundraising. See the Bash in all its glory in Onslow on August 25 at the Simpson Street Community Garden.

All proceeds from the bash go to supporting Variety, which helps disadvantaged children all over Australia.

Bruce and Tracey also voluntarily run the Onslow Sports Club and business is on the rise.

"Fridays get absolutely packed," said Tina Roper from the Onslow Visitor Centre. "You can barely move in there by the end of the night." Tina is one of the club's 220 or so members. When you take into consideration that the town's population is only around 550, that number becomes a lot more impressive.

The sports club is only open Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays at the moment. Wednesday nights are pretty quiet and Friday is the only time they serve food, but with a glamorous new kitchen set up and an ear to the ground for a cook, things are looking up for the town pub's only rival.

Last Chance to see



The last of the old creamy yellow donga- style apartments is about to be moved from the site of the Ashburton Resort Motel on the corner of First Avenue and Third Street.

Recent works have seen 38 new executive apartments built, bringing the resort's total to 86. The new rooms will be ready for guests (mostly workers) by the end of September.

The final part of the revamp will be the addition of a restaurant next year.

The old dongas have just been moved offsite for now, and Drew Norrish said anyone who wants to buy one should call him on 9184 6586.



The block opposite the pub on the corner of Simpson Street and Second Avenue has sported a fancy sign for over a year foretelling its transformation into a plush apartment block called Onslow Oceanfront. The sign recently gained a red dot boasting that it's "over 30% sold" and construction is now underway.



The Community Resource Centre on Third Avenue that provided services including Centrelink, vehicle licensing, internet access and passport photos closed its doors, possibly for the last time, on July 31.

The closure is a result of a lack of response to a call for community support for the centre.



In our last edition we reported a rumour that the Beadon Bay Hotel had changed hands but it turns out that it didn't. We heard this time that the deal fell through over a disagreement about confidentiality and that a new deal had just been signed. We did a title and company search to check it out and found that on July 23, 2013, the pub was still the property of Beadon Bay (WA) Pty Ltd and that company is still owned by Donald Skipworth and Jamie Malycha, who have been involved since 2004.

The documents revealed that it was sold in 1989 by Belaize Investments to Rostlea Holdings for \$645,000. Taking a loss, Rostlea sold it for \$200,000 in 2002 to Westate Hotel Group who sold it in 2004 for \$435,000 and it hasn't changed hands again since. WA Today reported in July 2012 that the pub was on the market and expected to sell for around \$5 million, and we've heard abundant rumours about its imminent sale, but for now it's business as usual at the local bar.

And yes, there's more.

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

www.trackingonslow.net

www.trackingonslow.net

We'll be back in February 2014

to hear more of your views

and to continue recording

the story of Onslow.



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