



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Quail Island Air Weapons Range Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Hazard Reduction Project

Newsletter No. 5
Monday 14 November 2011

WELCOME

Welcome to the fifth newsletter for the Quail Island Air Weapons Range Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Hazard Reduction Project.

This edition wraps up the first stage of the project. We report on the challenge of removing the debris and rubbish from the island as well as examining the project's environmental impact. Gareth Lewis from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority gives us the perspective of the traditional custodians of the land and we outline the detail about the temporary suspension of the project during the wet season.

On behalf of the project team we'd like to thank everyone for their support throughout the first stage of the project. The co-operation and collaboration between all parties has been a highlight and a key ingredient to the success of the first stage of the project.

We will return with news ahead of the resumption of the project in the New Year so if anyone would like to submit any stories please contact Sophie Morrison at 02 6273 0232

sophie.morrison@contentgroup.com.au



PROJECT UPDATE AND FINDINGS

The visual search for UXO on Bare Sand, Djadjalbit and Quail Islands has now concluded.

The shallow search is complete on Bare Sand and Djadjalbit Islands and is more than 50% complete on Quail Island. The Defence Project Management team and the Defence contractors, G-tek Australia Pty Ltd, have been successful to date in achieving all aims of the first stage of the project without incident and within the agreed time frames.

The surface and shallow search identified a number of items for disposal at depths up to 0.7 metres. Seven high explosive aircraft bombs, in fair condition, ranging in size from 120 pounds (54kg) to 1000 pounds (454kg) were discovered and disposed of during this first stage. Explosive ordnance disposal experts from Number 13 Squadron RAAF and Regional Explosive Ordnance Services from Joint Logistics Unit (North) joined forces with the project management team in disposing of the UXO.

This first stage of the operation confirmed the presence of unexploded ordnance and has clearly demonstrated the importance of the hazard reduction project and associated safety precautions.



RANGE DEBRIS AND RUBBISH CLEARANCE

Throughout the implementation of the project's first stage, Defence contractor G-tek Australia Pty Ltd, uncovered and stockpiled a large amount of metallic waste, including casing fragments from bombs, practice bombs, old target material and dilapidated signs. Thirty tonnes of range debris will be removed this month from the island and will be either recycled or disposed of appropriately.

The contractors also spent time clearing the islands of rubbish found at the high-tide mark. Most days, the contractors would take a number of bags containing non-ordnance related refuse including plastic bags and beer bottles by helicopter back to the mainland for appropriate disposal.

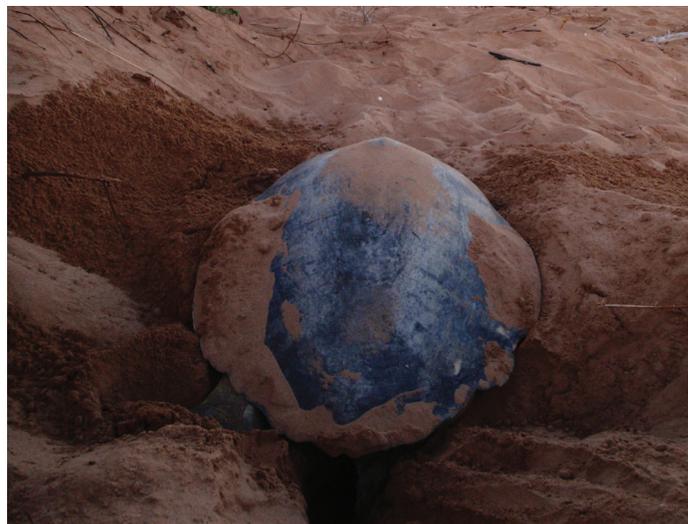


ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the first stage of the project Defence maintained close contact with the Charles Darwin University Bare Sand Island Sea Turtle Research Program to ensure the turtle habitat was not affected during the hazard reduction activity. Most of the UXO was located away from the tidal zone where the turtle nesting takes place. The search activity was conducted during the day to avoid nesting turtles and the demolition activity was delayed until after the end of the turtle nesting period.

"The hazard reduction project is something that has to be done as it will ultimately make the islands safer for researchers and more importantly for the turtles that nest there", said Dr Michael Guinea, head of the research project. "We're pleased to report that there has been no impact on the turtles from the first stage of the project."

Throughout the hazard reduction project, Death Adders were observed on Quail Island. With the help of the G-tek contractors, researchers from Charles Darwin University have embarked on a biogeographical project in which the DNA structure of death adders on the Island is compared with those on the mainland.



TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND

Duwan (Quail Island) along with neighbouring islands Ngulbiltjik (Bare Sand Island) and Djedjelbitj are Larrakia sacred sites located within the Port Patterson area west of Cox Peninsular near Darwin. Larrakia people have been fighting for the return of their country at Cox Peninsular, including these islands, since the 1970s through the Kenbi Land Claim. The sites have been long documented as being associated with important dreaming figures for the region and in the 1970s Larrakia camped on Duwan in an effort to protest and stop the use of their sites as a bombing range by Defence. With the resolution of the Kenbi Land Claim imminent, the UXO project has become even more important to Larrakia to ensure that the Commonwealth can safely return the islands to the traditional owners as Aboriginal land as part of the settlement.

“The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority has worked with Defence and with G-tek to issue sacred site clearances for the UXO project in order to protect these sites in accordance with the views of Larrakia custodians”, said Gareth Lewis. “The clearance process has included site visits during and after the clean-up work. During a recent inspection prior to controlled detonations, custodians were impressed with the amount of munitions and scrap that had been collected and were delighted with the improved condition of the islands.”



Photo Credit: Gareth Lewis AAPA

UNTIL NEXT DRY SEASON!

The hazard reduction project will be suspended from mid-November during the wet season. The declaration of the Defence Practice Area, which has limited public access to the islands, will shortly expire. It will come into force again when work resumes at the beginning of the dry season in 2012.

The next search will commence at the beginning of the dry season next year. This will include the completion of the shallow search, followed by a deeper search which will go down to the water table or to three metres. The probability that more hazardous items will be found and cleared is high.

This stage of the operation has confirmed the presence of highly dangerous unexploded ordnance and the need for the hazard reduction project and safety precautions. The project is not yet complete and the public needs to be aware that unexploded ordnance still remains on the islands.



Photo Credit: Gareth Lewis AAPA