



Picturing Coastal Stories

A coastal photography essay anthology

Preface

The idea for this book came out of a special session held in the 2018 Coast to Coast Conference held in Hobart, Tasmania. The session was called “Picturing coastal issues” and built on the idea that a picture is worth a thousand words. Photographers were invited to submit one of their photos that told a coastal story. These were shown in a darkened room on a screen one photograph at a time. The session was open to anyone, and participants were given time to reflect, react and then comment on each photo in turn. The photographer was then given the opportunity to respond to the comments and tell the audience what was intended. The session concluded with a general discussion about the power of photography to tell stories, and it was decided that the photographs and the intended stories be turned into a book: this is that book.

Garry Middle, December 2018

The photographers

Nick Harvey, Allan Young, Viktor Brenners, Els Wakefield, Gustaaf Hallegraef, Maddie Glynn, Heidi Krajewsky, Mary Mackay, David Chidlow, Linda Johnson, Karen Byrush, Garry Middle.

Editor

Garry Middle

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End of the Road

Nick Harvey

I used to drive down this road on my way home from James Cook University when the rickety old wooden bridge across Three Mile Creek was still there. This all changed after 24 December 1971. Category 4 Tropical Cyclone Althea crossed the coast north of Townsville creating a storm surge and massive waves which slammed into the coast, virtually cutting off the northern suburb of Pallarenda. The former bridge across Three Mile Creek was severely damaged and the Pallarenda coast road was eroded beyond repair. Eventually the remains of the bridge plus its wooden supports were removed.

Today you can still drive to Pallarenda but the road has been shifted landwards along an artificial levee constructed through the mangroves and across a new concrete bridge, which has now become a popular fishing spot for locals. The old Pallarenda coast road has been relocated with a reasonable coastal setback, as it should have been in the first place. Geologists beware that the horizontal black sedimentary strata exposed in the nearby coastal sand dune is not a new coal deposit but merely the remains of the old bitumen road. Swimmers beware that any crocodiles sighted around Three Mile Creek are probably the real thing.

Location: Three Mile Creek, north east Queensland



The Kids are Alright

Allan Young

In 2017 I was fortunate enough to be awarded a Churchill Fellowship to undertake research on coastal management in the US, Caribbean and UK. One of my US hosts was Professor Rob Young at Western Carolina University and we did a field trip to Isle of Palms, an affluent community on one of the barrier islands in South Carolina, where this photo was taken. These holiday homes are vulnerable to coastal erosion and various forms of protection are being trialled, with limited success. It looked to me like a futile effort and my intent in taking the photo was to document the way that protection works can obliterate beach amenity. It just looked plain ugly and I felt like they had forfeited something precious in the process. Looking at it now, I also see something more. The children reveal a sort of ambivalence to those gloomy adult perspectives. They seem happy to find an interesting pool to play in. It strikes me that this situation, to them, is normal for a beach or at least unremarkable. It also made me a little nostalgic for the beaches I knew as a kid in Australia. Wild beaches, free of any need for engineering solutions, with water the colour of ancient glass and the feeling of freedom that comes from connecting with unadorned nature and finding risk, adventure and fun in equal measure.

Location: Isle of Palms, South Carolina, USA



Testing the Waters

Viktor Brenners

Beaches can be fun at any time of year. In fact, they're sometimes more fun in winter when you're not overwhelmed by summer heat or over-stimulated or distracted by all the other people milling around. The three boys in this photo are extended family, aged 7, 9 and 11, and do many things together. Here, first one, then the others joined in playing a game with the tide – stand where you think the next incoming wave will get to on the beach. I think you can see who won this round. He was the tallest and oldest of the three. Was the result a function of age and experience, or just pot luck? You decide. I'm sure scientific method was applied, i.e. trial and error.

This photo also makes me think of the often used “ape to man” evolution image. This is how the shoreline often inspires us – to evolve from an initial position of ignorance, innocence and wonder to gradually one of understanding and But be sure to keep your wits about you. The shoreline is not ours to control nor to take lightly any time we visit. Develop a respect for it, and appreciate it like the animal in the wilderness you would love to pick up and cuddle, but know you can't cos you'll probably get hurt.

Location: Wilsons Prom, Victoria



Kayak on an Island shore

Els Wakefield

This photo tells a thousand words, a thousand emotions and a thousand memories of times past. A three day mid-winters trip around Frederick-Henry Bay in SE Tasmania, visiting the many tiny islands there in our double kayak. One night, under a starry sky we camped on the foreshore of King George Island, pitching the tent on a bed of dry seagrass, snuggling up to stay warm in the frosty morning. These were perfect winter days with hardly a breath of wind, flat water and blue skies. So quiet, we heard the sound of popping seaweed below the kayak and the heavy breathing of a pod of dolphins as they passed.

My late husband, Bill Wakefield and I were visiting these islands that winter to monitor the birds. Each summer we monitored their breeding colonies; those summer frenzies of counting and measuring the eggs, banding the chicks of gulls, terns and oystercatchers, listing all the other birds and the slowly changing vegetation. Those precious little-known islands along the coast, in the bays and estuaries of south east Tasmania where our birds can breed in peace away from dogs, cats and humans if they obey the signs to stay away.

But private islands can be sold and in 2017 Fulham Island in Frederick Henry Bay was sold to James Koh, a Malaysian billionaire. Fulham Island is covered in internationally protected Short-tailed Shearwater burrows and Little Penguin burrows. If these are damaged, the birds will never return. Along its sheltered coast Pacific Gulls, Sooty Oystercatchers and internationally protected Caspian Terns breed every year. There are endangered plant communities and plants on the island.

James Koh plans to build a two million dollar jetty onto Fulham Island, not revealing why or what his further plans are for this island. The Sorell Council passed his application for the jetty but I objected with the help of a pro bono lawyer under the Environmental Defenders Office, we took both the Council and James Koh to the Tasmanian Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal. After mediation, we all agreed he could build his jetty but did not have the use of the island, limiting him to a small footprint at the connection point of the jetty.

Work to build the jetty was proposed to commence in May 2018 after the last of the young Short-tailed Shearwaters have left for the northern hemisphere but gale force winds may hamper the work.

I fear for Fulham Island, for its precious birds and plants. Without adequate protection, I fear for all these islands where our birds should be safe to breed now and into the future.

Location: Fulham Island, Frederick-Henry Bay in south east Tasmania



Are Fish Farms and Algal Blooms Compatible?

Gustaaf Hallegraeff

Dense algal blooms irritate the sensitive gills of finfish. While in nature these animals can avoid bloom patches and have been observed to change their migratory routes to avoid problems, when finfish are held captive in cages they are extremely sensitive to algal bloom phenomena. As a result globally finfish aquaculture operations have suffered massive economic losses, such as in Chile in 2016 where USD800M of salmon were killed and which incident led to massive political unrest. Similarly in South Australia in 1996 the Port Lincoln tuna aquaculture industry lost AUD45M in association with a harmful algal bloom. Some algal species clog gills through high biomass, others irritate fish gills mechanically, but some release highly reactive chemicals that irreversibly damage the sensitive fish gill epithelia. This image portrays red tide slicks of the dinoflagellate *Noctiluca scintillans* flowing in wind-driven rows through the salmon farm region of Nubeena in Southern Tasmania. While not one of the most harmful species for fish, the circular pens trapped a 4 m deep layer of pink mucus. In response the fish refused to surface and stopped feeding, a problem which was elegantly solved by creating an air bubble screen coming up in the centre of the cages to keep the surface water clear. *Noctiluca* is a highly visible algal bloom phenomenon, producing red slicks in day time and specular bioluminescent spectacles at night. There exist no records of this species in Tasmania prior to 1994. *Noctiluca* was first reported in Australia from Sydney Harbour in 1860, became more prominent in Sydney coastal waters in the 1980s in response to increasing nutrient pollution, but its recent appearance in Tasmania heralds a climate-driven range expansion. Climate change makes our marine environment more unpredictable and creates many challenges for the people that depend on its services. What will be next?

Location: Nubeena in Southern Tasmania



Seal and People for Space

Maddie Glynn

My time had come to find my home
I may be young but I need some shore
I find some beach to have a rest, but as I see it's not the best
I am too tired, I need to rest
Where can I go, what can I do?
There's colour and noise, so I stop and think
Will they share, do they care?
Can I come ashore – do I dare?
I slowly creep, I'm scared and weak
Where is my space, where can I go?
Do they not know
This is my place, this is my home.

Location: Torquay Australia



Take This Rubbish with You!

Heidi Krajewsky

Welcome to Svalbard! I'm standing on a beach on a little island called Karl XII Øya. This island is only about one kilometer long and it's in the far northeast corner of the Svalbard archipelago which is well above the Arctic circle. The nearest human settlement is a small town called Longyearbyen, which lies about 300 km away as the crow flies, right on the other side of the archipelago. It's much further if you walk along the coast like I do. I went there once, walked into town to see what all the smells were. I'm a young male and naturally curious and I usually spend most of my time wandering and investigating the world. I won't ever be going back there though, too much noise and I was run out of town with a helicopter. You humans can be very territorial, didn't make me feel welcome at all. I've decided to stick to this wild side of the islands, where humans rarely venture. Now I see you looking at me. You have traveled a long way to get here. You have been watching as I spend time on the beach, sniffing all that the sea has washed up with the last tide. I was hoping for a dead walrus or whale. Nothing too smelly but I'm not picky; I'll eat anything if it has some nice fat on. It will be a while before the ice returns, then I can hunt properly. In the mean time I wander this beach everyday looking for a dead offering from the sea. Yesterday I found a few puffins, nice birds, but pretty small to make a meal for me. What did I find today instead? Take this rubbish with you!

Location: Karl XII Øya, Svalbard



Drying Out

Mary Mackay

I sometimes forget just quite how many different roles the coast can play. I focus on what it means to me. Most recently, as the sandy safe haven, before I ambitiously- more like imprudently- delved into waves far too big for my aspiring surf abilities. I think of it as a place where I once ran, painfully, over a coral beach from a dive boat, not wanting to stop and consider the past I was walking on, just focusing on getting across the area of tiny needles stinging the bottom of my feet. If I think harder I consider it to be protection from strong Antarctic dwelling winds in Tasmania, and remember the coastal degradation of less protected shores.

Then I remember the most vibrant and functional beaches I'd ever visited in Sri Lanka where the fish dried. The horizon speckled with small boats with every colour of sail and hull in the strong west coast winds of the Laccadive Sea. On the beach, boats were landing and nets were being emptied, fish were being gutted and cured and dried. Where the drying fish was a scene of activity with the local birds, lured there by the strong stench, opportunistically chanced their luck at an easy feed. The role the coast played in this context was vast and beyond what I could comprehend. The livelihood, sense of community and survival that was reliant on the beach was clear and resonated with past pictures I had seen of my home village in the north west of Scotland, which was once was a vibrant coastal fishing village. I think of the role that beach played then and now, and the role Negombo beach plays now and will play in time. I think of what we can learn from past oversights and what opportunities lie ahead to ensure prosperity for coastal communities.

Location: Negombo beach, Sri Lanka



They Paved Paradise, and Put Up a Parking Lot

David Chidlow

Thirsty Point is described as a sandy cusped foreland and is an iconic popular swimming and recreation beach for locals and tourists. Known all over the world as a safe place to learn windsurfing due to shallow waters and consistent sea breezes: it is a regular place for windsurfing competitions.

Decades ago, the Shire of Dandaragan constructed a sealed carpark and brick ablution facility to cater for people using this beach. However, coastal engineers predicted that sea level rises would result in coastal erosion and a receding coastline along this stretch of beach. When I first commenced working for the Shire in 2012, I observed that the beach had an expanse of white sand stretching 100m to the water's edge from the edge of the carpark.

In April 2013, a series of storms hit this part of the coast with storm surges and high tides. The result was as shown in this image. The ablution facility in the image and nearby heritage lookout were demolished shortly after this event as they were deemed unsafe due to footings and septic systems being exposed. Replacement of the ablution facility was not recommended due to further expected coastal erosion. The ablution facility was replaced with an open beach shower in 2017.

The beachline has since accreted to the point that the beach is now back to 50m from the carpark to the water's edge. We anticipate that over time, future storm fronts will further erode away the carpark area.

There are no other significant assets within the predicted 100 year erosion area along this section of coastline and protection is not an economically viable option.

It is hoped that the community can continue to enjoy this beach for at least the next 100 years as it slowly moves closer to built-up areas.

Location: Thirsty Point in Town of Cervantes, Western Australia



Serenity!

Linda Johnson

River and ocean, sand and rocks, bush and boardwalk on a calm Spring afternoon.

Our little town, the residents and visitors, just relax and enjoy the scenery.

The ospreys soar and fish, the pelicans and seagulls, terns and stilts come and go as they please.

No-one about to interfere with nature, to bring their shovel to dig through the sandbar for a bit of surf.

No noisy 4WDs tearing up the sand and crushing the crabs just to get their fishermen 'away from it all'.

As soon as it warms up a bit we'll all be back. The families frolicking, the walkers strolling, the swimmers and body boarders 'in the zone', oldies just watching.

Mostly happy noises, sometimes windy but mostly still peaceful.

The Friends work on to Protect Moore River Estuary from others' ideas of 'progress by urbanisation'.

We love it just as it is!

Do come and share our 'special place' just an hour north of Perth in WA anytime you please.

Location: Guilderton, Western Australia



Better to Step Down to the Water than Step Out from Your Front Door Into it

Karen Byrush

As sea levels rise, so must the quality of the infrastructure used along our foreshore environments.

In Hobsons Bay, especially in Altona and Seaholme, we have homes located a tennis ball throw from the foreshore. With the effects of climate change driving an increase of storm events, higher than ever tides and slowly increasing sea level rise, we've had to picture a new future for our coastline.

That picture looks like higher seawalls, a consolidation of our gaps in the wall and some major infrastructure upgrades to the remaining access points to and from the foreshore areas.

While it is a picture of protection, we still want it to remain easy on the eye and introduce additional community benefit, while providing maximum sightlines to the water.

Protecting our foreshore and the homes near it doesn't mean we just build a wall between the community and the foreshore.

Our approach is about using infrastructure to safely improve access to our foreshore for all, create new spaces for our community to enjoy and where possible, to enhance the views of the natural environment.

It's also an opportunity to be creative, to respect heritage and keep our urban design about both the natural environment and people.

Stepping, rolling or walking down to the foreshore will be the way of the future but that doesn't mean we can't continue to live near it, view it, enhance it, protect it or enjoy it as we always have.

Location: Altona Foreshore



Decision

Garry Middle

It was a cold morning, but I had to get away. I had to fish. I had to decide. What to do. My daughter was in a destructive relationship. It was not good for her to stay. It was destroying her emotionally and physically. She knew it, but she also didn't. Can anyone understand a father's pain watching his daughter spiral downwards. The pain in the heart. And in the gut. Do I just wait? Do I tell her to leave? Do I drag her away? I go fishing. It's cold and the cloud is low. Time slows and stops. I don't catch anything. Just as well. As the sun comes up the cloud begins to lift. I suddenly see across the lake. I now know what I must do.

Location: Lake Gunn, New Zealand, South Island.

About the photographers and their connection to the coast

Nick Harvey

My coastal interest started with pebble beaches and chalk cliffs in England but migrated to coral reefs and sandy coasts of Australia. As a retired professor my research in coastal geomorphology and global change is balanced by an advocacy for coastal values, good governance and managing people using the coast.

Allan Young

Allan Young saved up to buy a \$15 second-hand surfboard in 1969. His parents figured it was a passing fad. Still surfing, it has become a constant and defining element in his life. His urban and regional planning career has specialised in coastal and marine management.

Viktor Brenners

The noise and dirt I experienced working in the trades after leaving school drove me to study environmental sciences. Since completing my studies, I've been working in the water sector for 30+ years. I've always enjoyed being near water and the coast is one of my "happy places".

Els Wakefield

Having lived in Tasmania since arriving from the Netherlands in 1952, I appreciate the importance of our unique wildlife. A serious ornithologist, botanist, artist, writer and bird photographer, my lifelong passion has been to protect Tasmania's wildlife through research, and sharing my knowledge, hoping to inspire others.

Gustaaf Hallegraeff

I have been fascinated by microscopic plankton since childhood, and am now employed at the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies of the University of Tasmania. My research focus is on harmful algal blooms, their impacts on aquaculture, tourism, human health, and relationship to nutrient pollution, shipping and climate change.

Maddie Glynn

Having worked in the environmental field for 30 years, and with a passion for wildlife, caring for our coast and its biodiversity values is becoming harder as populations become increasingly disconnected. We must continue to work together to adapt, reconnect and share our shores for all living creatures.

Heidi Krajewsky

I am an outdoor enthusiast living in Tasmania, originally from Canada. I work as a polar tourism guide in the Arctic and Antarctic. On my trips I encourage clients to contribute wildlife data to citizen science and to help me clean up remote beaches of marine debris, a growing global problem.

Mary Mackay

Growing up in a small coastal fishing village meant I grew up thinking the ocean and the coast was a part of life. I still do as I finish my PhD in Tasmania in fisheries management and strive to be near, on, and in the ocean as much as possible.

David Chidlow

Urban and Regional Planner based in Jurien Bay WA. Above and below water photography hobbyist, grew up in Albany WA with the ocean being the focus of my youth. Now 58 years young and still have salt in my veins. I want my grandchildren the choice to have salty veins.

Linda Johnson

We were lucky to find this lovely place, less than 100kms from Perth, nearly 30 years ago. I am a retired nurse, with a family, so caring about what's important gives me the fight to continue as one of many regulars and residents just trying to protect Moore River estuary.

Karen Byrush

Karen Byrush is Client Officer, Active Communities at Hobsons Bay City Council.

Garry Middle

I am 65, an environmental planner and sometime photographer from Perth WA. Climate change is demonstrably impacting on the values of our coast. My 'mission' is to help communities adapt to these changes in ways that protects the significant environmental and public values. For the public not private good.

