sustaining gondwana
Harnessing local, place-based knowledge for sustainable outcomes

Whose sea-change? Some reflections on transformations in the City of Albany, W.A.
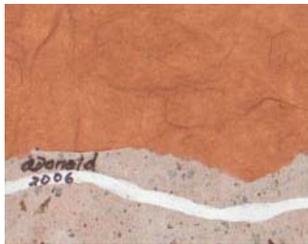
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Advancing Sustainability

Curtin University of Technology

Contents

IN LINE WITH OTHER COASTAL COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA, ALBANY AND THE SOUTH COAST HAVE BEEN EXPERIENCING RAPID POPULATION CHANGE. THIS IN TURN HAS IMPACTED ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS AND FOCUSED THINKING ON THE VISION THE COMMUNITY HAS FOR THE REGION'S FUTURE. ADD THIS TO MORE GLOBAL ISSUES, SUCH AS DROUGHT, CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND THE RESOURCES BOOM AND THE MIX BECOMES COMPLEX AND DEMANDING.

THIS DISCUSSION PAPER TOUCHES ON THESE COMPLEXITIES AND DRAWS SOME PARALLELS TO OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND INTERNATIONALLY. IT OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONSIDER THE 'BIG PICTURE' AND SUGGESTS SOME SIGNPOSTS FOR POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS.

Professor Stehlik is one of Australia's leading social scientists working at the intersections of resiliency, human service practice and social cohesion focussing on families and communities in regional/rural Australia. As the inaugural Director of the Alcoa Research Centre for Stronger Communities, she is leading a team in developing, among other indicators, a greater understanding of the 'social' indicators associated with sustainability specifically focusing on intergenerational change.

She is particularly interested in the generative capacity of women's energy and enthusiasm as an important component of community resiliency and in the inter-relationships between community practitioners and community capacity, as an aspect of the *Sustaining Gondwana* project. She is Foundation Chair in Stronger Communities in the Division of Humanities.

Introduction

'Sea-change' has been very prominent in Albany community dialogue in the past 12 months[i]. There have been discussions in the media and the city of Albany is a member of the National Sea-change Task Force[ii]. In common with most well used terms, however not everyone understands it to have the same meaning.

I therefore begin by explaining the concept of 'sea-change' and talk briefly about its history. I am using this opportunity to posit some ideas as to the 'reasons' for the current interest in the concept of 'sea-change' and also who constitutes the population. While the focus is on Albany my comments are also relevant to other neighbouring coastal centres – such as Bremer Bay, Denmark, Hopetoun or Esperance. The focus here is on Albany as a place[iii].

Place is actually where I want to begin – because the so-called 'sea-change' phenomenon is all about 'place': how we imagine it; what we want from it; how it affects our lifestyles; how our demands change it and why it is increasingly becoming more important in our future planning.

Our sense of place is under challenge and this becomes evident not only when we talk about 'place' to people who have lived for a long time in a community but also with those who have just arrived. Australians have always been highly mobile – we have criss-crossed the continent – usually following work. What is different about this national movement at present?

The difference is that now people are seeking place as part of a life cycle experience. This is more than a 'housing boom' – or a 'resources boom' – we are seeking other aspects to what we want from life – we are experiencing a resurgence of a phenomenon that was first observed in the late 19th century in Great Britain – when those who had the resources could determine where and how they wanted to live – also not in the city! The movement to garden suburbs and estate developments were the result.[iv]

A search for peace, quiet, a 'sense of community' as well as a sense of well being or belonging are often cited as reasons for this migration. In this

paper I want to highlight another, emerging reason that will have an impact on the future of this place. That is, that Albany has the potential to become an 'environmental refuge' and that this, in turn, will bring an altogether different population seeking community here.

So place – what it offers, where it is, and how we relate to it – is increasingly an important component in decision making about internal migration.

Smaller communities on the fringes of Australia's big cities or here around the Great Southern region are at the high impact end of this search for 'place'. Not only are many of these existing settlements not well prepared for such changes, they are also now being drawn into what can be called a peri-urban fringe and as a result find themselves incorporated into 'big city' thinking and planning – rather than 'country'.

It is important to point out that in using the term 'place' – I do not necessarily equate this with 'community'. This becomes a complex issue as 'community can exist without being in the same place'[iv] a point which developers and policy makers often appear to misunderstand. We all share communities of interest – and many of these are now global communities – as a result of technological advances. so while we may live in Albany – we have our communities of interest all over the world. The meaning of place is therefore something that is increasingly being argued over.

Experience and evidence shows that people seek 'place', yet by arriving and demanding the services they once enjoyed (often in the city), they are in danger of changing the very thing that they seek. Smaller environments with stable populations are perhaps not equipped to deal with rapid increases in new residents. A tension between the 'old timers' and the 'newcomers' is often one result. 'Why do they come here?' 'Why don't they go back where they came from?' There is a tension about the demands that new-comers put on existing values and lifestyle while often their potential contributions are not recognised. We have all heard the hoary chestnut – 'I am not a local – I can't

really contribute – I have only lived here for 30 years'! As a result, place quickly becomes a site of struggle for power[vi].

My question today – whose sea-change? resulted after reading a letter to *The Albany Advertiser* late last year which questioned the concept of sea-change and asked where did it come from? And how has it come to represent a short hand for what we might once perhaps have called a 'housing boom'?

To explore this further, first a brief history of the word 'sea-change' itself. Not surprisingly – it comes to us from Shakespeare – a man who coined literally thousands of new words that we now use without thinking about their history. It was first used in his play *'The Tempest'* by the character Ariel – the spirit who was imprisoned and then freed by the mage, Prospero, to do his bidding.

ariel sings

full fathom five thy father lies;
of his bones are coral made;
those are pearls that were his eyes:
nothing of him that doth fade
but doth suffer a sea-change
into something rich and strange.
sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell
burthen ding-dong

hark! now i hear them,--ding-dong, bell.[vii]

The meaning here that 'sea-change' refers to is the effect that the sea has had on the human – the change being 'into something rich and strange' – which is why the dictionary now tells us that it has come to represent an 'alteration' or 'metamorphosis' – or a 'radical change'.

Why then has it come to have this other meaning in the Australian context? I should add that this is not a common 'global' use of the term – but

strictly a local phenomenon. This is where we need to consider the other aspect of 'sea-change' – the 'who' part of the question …

Whose sea-change?

In Australia, this 'who' is broadly linked to three currently intersecting factors – first: intergenerational change; second: the search for place as a life cycle need; third: external environmental factors such as climate change. I have given the population each of these aspects represents, a name – the first – let's call them 'baby boomers' – the second, 'lifestyle seekers' and the third – 'eco refugees'.

(1)   The term 'intergenerational change' in the Australian context is not only about the current seniors, but more importantly, that cohort that will become the next generation of older Australians - the growth of which will be the big challenge for our society over the next 25 years. This represents the demographic 'boom' of those born between 1946 and 1964. The early cohort (those born in 1946) will turn 65 in 2011 – only a matter of four years away! As these Australians age - the increase of the older old – those over 85 years, will rise from 9 per cent of those over 65 in 1996 to 20.1 per cent by 2051.

Alongside these demographics, the dependency ratio – which is the number of people over 65 against the numbers of working age – is also important. Not surprisingly, the balance is shifting. In Australia in 2001 it was 19 per cent – in other words, there were 19 people over the age of 65 for every 100 people of working age. This has increased from 17.1 per cent in 1991 a growth of around 2 per cent each decade nationally[viii].

In Western Australia, a higher proportion of elderly residents already live in coastal places such as Albany. At the last census in 2001 the over 65s here were at 23 per cent. Predictions are suggesting that there will be more seniors than young people aged 19 and under by 2031 in this state, and there will be a heavy impact on the capacity of the dependency ratio.

Let's look a little more closely at the **baby boomers.** We know that they will be better educated, healthier, wealthier and more self-sufficient than any other previous generation of Australians. They are considering their life cycle change or 'ageing' in different ways to that of their parents' generation. For some time now I have been predicting that many of this cohort will not want to leave work early – for many, careers are only now beginning to bear fruit. This will have a decided impact not only on the governance of this country (as baby boomers may never give up power) but also on decision making about the future, and where and how we age – what services we seek and what environment we wish to live in.

An important aspect of this is health and access to health services is being perceived differently by the baby boomers compared with their parents' generation. Health is seen as 'wellness' – it is also increasingly, seen as a 'right'. Alternative medicines are also part of this demand and baby boomers, who are more educated and more politically aware, are also likely to become involved in discussion of key health issues, including the euthanasia and stem cell debates. Importantly for Albany – this attitude to health will make increasing demands on some aspects of our health care system – while it may well reject other aspects seen as 20th century – such as nursing homes & retirement villages. It will certainly become a demand for choices.

The rates of separation and divorce have also impacted on traditional caring networks such as the immediate family - as women remain in paid work. In addition, such networks may simply not be available due to the increased mobility and the childlessness of many couples. Changing relationship patterns are becoming ever more complex in Australia as there is an increase in re-marriage, in never being married and in gay or lesbian relationships. While friends and a familiar environment remain the major[ix] determinants of healthy ageing, it is predicted that many will be living alone, and with the current demographics, possibly nowhere near any kin who can support them. For example, in 2001 of the 65 year olds and over in Western Australia, 19 per cent of men were living alone and 40 per cent of women

were doing so. This is likely to increase and will have a direct impact on places and community infrastructures.

Much of the rhetoric about baby boomer ageing includes discussion about their wealth. There is a need to be cautious against homogenising this. In many parts of Australia – particularly in non-metropolitan environments – there is little or no provision in regard to self-funded superannuation. For example, it needs pointing out that superannuation was denied for many women as they moved through paid work as casuals or part timers. In our planning for the future we should not forget that many baby boomers will not have the income essential to plan for a comfortable retirement - so it is really important that we don't just assume that they are all 'cashed up'.

(2)   The second group seeking a sea-change are those who are searching for place as a life cycle need. Where once we tended, as a society, to settle into place and remain in place, now the **lifestyle seekers** consider 'in migration' (within country) as almost a 'necessity'. We see this in the cities too, as aspirational home ownership becomes a driver for new home buyers.

The search for place – becomes part of the transition in lifestyle – searching for place is therefore the next metamorphosis or radical change and it is this aspect that connects the sea-change idea to place – because in searching for their change, this largely aspirational cohort has started to identify some factors associated with quality of life to determine their sense of place. As a result, some places may feel – to continue to use our watery metaphors – as if they are being 'swamped' by this cohort.

What are some of the characteristics that are driving the sea-change phenomenon in Australia? First and foremost – it is largely a force **driven by** water. It is Australia's yearning for a piece of the beach that first gave the movement its impetus. Over 80% of Australians live 50 kms. from the coast. It is largely still a coastal phenomenon – and on the eastern seaboard – where it has been strong for over a decade – many places that were once sleepy fishing villages – or simply shacks in the sand dunes – are now larger settlements attempting to manage 'city environments and city planning challenges'.

Another characteristic is associated with what we could call a search for a quality of life – that is, that the place the lifestylers are seeking needs to have some desirable characteristics. These are associated with amenity: with arts, culture, recreation, the capacity to continue to earn income if wanted as well as accessibility to the capital city and access to land. Increasingly there are also demands around technology and access to broadband etc.

There is another, important aspect to this sea-change 'wave' – one we could perhaps consider as its 'tidal' nature. By this I mean not only the visitors that come for holidays – as they have always done – but rather those people who are buying properties, but not living in them permanently – perhaps as investment, perhaps as anticipation to the future. This also adds to the stresses on infrastructure and on planning for such intermittent visitors.

There remains a finite amount of coastal land with such characteristics despite amazing attempts to create more. Specifically, canals on the Gold Coast, in Mandurah and now proposed for Esperance - are attempts to create the necessary environment – it seems if nature can't provide it – we will create it.

There is still much of Australia's coastline undeveloped – some is not habitable – some is protected – but most that can be settled has now been developed. In terms of the sea-change 'wave' – Albany, and the Great Southern coastline more broadly – are among the last places available. That is why our experience of the sea-change in Albany needs to be tempered with lessons learned from other places in our state and in other states. These lessons are being shared through the National Sea-change Task Force. There are local factors that will determine how this community prepares for the demands the sea-change wave brings.

(3) The third factor, is an emerging one, but one I predict will be increasingly important – the **eco refugee**. As climate change impacts on lifestyle, we will be experiencing not only higher temperatures in the lower latitudes of Australia, but also changes in weather patterns. This will mean more hot days, storms, drought etc. as well as increased predictions of bush fires, of dengue fever transmission and a loss of fragile habitat for flora and

fauna. Certainly the Great Southern has also had its wake up call over the past few months[x]. Another concern that is linked to the eco-refugee to which the paper returns to shortly, is the question of terrorism.

We need to see these 'eco-refugees' not as those who have no country[xi], but rather as those who have the resources to make decisions to avoid the worst of climate change impacts. They can therefore choose to live anywhere. Climate change, therefore, will become a class issue and those who can afford to create their own place will be able to lessen its impact. Those who have fewer resources will be impacted more.

Researching the Great Southern

The reason why these 'sea-change' issues have become important in terms of current research and development is connected, in a very important and immediate way, to the concept of sustainability and conservation. As we experience rapid population growth, pressure is increasingly put not only on resources and infrastructure, but also on the environment around us. These complex pressures need to be understood in more detail in the places in which they are happening. Albany is not alone here certainly – but the changes occurring here and the responses and strategies being developed, are very immediate. Certainly some drivers are global ones with local impacts. Climate change is one example, but on the positive side, so are some of the solutions that other communities are testing. Keeping abreast of information, evidence and lessons from other parts of the world is crucial if we are to be making good decisions about futures for our region.

This research is the contribution that I am making as part of a five year conservation and sustainability project underway at Curtin University of Technology. The project: *'Sustaining Gondwana'* has the south coast region as its 'focus' to enable research on the intersections between social, environmental and economic sustainability issues. The research program, currently being undertaken by four research fellows under the supervision of four professors – is linked with similar colleagues exploring other problems in

Britain, USA, China and South America – through our granting organization – the Alcoa Foundation.

Our work in this region ranges from exploring eco-mimicry; broad scale analysis of vegetation and land use; environmental management around bio sphere reserves and community autobiography as a way of understanding community identity. Thanks to the generosity of Integrated Tree Cropping (ITC) members of the research team are located at their office building in Aberdeen Street when in Albany.

Impacts and lessons learned

It is important to see sea-change as a succession of waves. The first wave was perhaps largely a retirement phenomenon, but the current cohorts are not simply retirees, and therefore the impacts are now much more complex than Albany simply becoming a retirement centre. It may not, in the future, be a retirement phenomenon at all as the next wave will increasingly bring with it the eco-refugees. This latter group is one that we are not yet factoring into our planning.

We are all waiting on the next Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data expected later this year. It is common sense to recognise that if the three characteristics of the current wave are essentially people who can afford to make a change, others are also being attracted to sea-change communities. People have always been attracted to places that are seen as growing and dynamic. In addition, with the service industry as one of the fastest growing, the cohort seeking their sea-change are looking for services of all kinds thus encouraging others, looking for work, for business opportunities, for entrepreneurial activities to this place. This increasingly complicates the demographics and therefore our predictive and strategic thinking.

Consider the city around you and the kinds of services that are in town now that perhaps were once only available in Perth. It seems certain that sea-change communities will have to deal with a possible future in which they

become full service centres for the predominant cohort – who ever that is. The predominant cohort for many decades in Albany was the agricultural community. Over the past decade this has shifted. Who will it be in the future?

On the eastern seaboard communities experiencing their sea-change have some lessons for Western Australia. In New South Wales, Noosa has become a 'sponge' city soaking in the resources from outlying communities, including the labour needed to maintain these services. In Queensland, all the services once maintained in Maryborough – sometimes for well over 100 years – such as the hospital – have moved to the 'new' sponge city of Hervey Bay. In South Australia – Victor Harbor, a town that was originally 'one hour too far away' – was a small settlement of 5,000 when its sewerage infrastructure was established. It now has 12,000 residents and in the summer swells to 40,000.[xii]

What are the infrastructure and services issues here? According to the Sea Change Task Force[xiii] they include:

- transportation
- water
- waste treatment and sewerage
- community facilities
- health services
- services for the frail aged
- education and training facilities
- emergency and crisis services
- coastal management
- information technologies

and

- tourism facilities

In Albany, the pressures on local services and infrastructures are being experienced on a regular basis as we can see from the changes to the port, to

the marina, the increasing development on the coast and the demands of tourism operators.

The other important economic outcome of the sea-change phenomenon is that, ironically, many of these communities have actually become far too expensive to live in. Many coastal centres act not only as sponges, but also 'donuts' – the centre is wealthy and those who serve live around its edges. A warning for Albany as the 'sea-changer' lifestyle can become a class issue. Do we really want only those who can afford it to be able to enjoy it?

There are some interesting anecdotes about wealth buying not only lifestyle, but also privacy, security and safety. In New Zealand's South Island, the City of Queenstown has experienced what one report has called a 'terrorism inspired land boom'[1xiv]. Property there is now more expensive than Auckland's CBD and real house growth prices have shot up over 144% in the past 12 years, and land prices has risen 400% in the past 20 years. In 2004 alone values increased by 25% and since September 11, 2001 by 70%[xv].

Queenstown is about as far as you can get away from the anxieties of terrorism – it is seen as a 'safe haven' and the once 'tyranny' of distance is now actually seen as a plus. Tasmania is experiencing something similar. Those who can afford it are seeking their sanctuaries. Busselton is also well known as being the home of wealthy North Americans who work in Seattle and commute.

Reflections

For Albany, which was at one time also considered 'an hour too far away' the wave is on our doorstep and our relative isolation is no longer a barrier, but an attraction as is our pristine environment.

What we can already see is that such communities will have a disparate population – those who serve and those who are being served. This can already be observed in some places in Western Australia, where the social

ecology of the rapidly growing communities are becoming monocultures. This dynamic impacts mostly at the local government level. It may mean that people who can't afford to live here may not be able to continue to enjoy the place they love – they may have to move, simply because they have no economic 'buying power'.

Where does this leave us? Sea-changes are becoming increasingly more expensive to manage – so people are turning to other options - the so-called 'tree change'. One example is the community of Dalyellup near Bunbury that has grown at 6.4 per cent over the past 5 years[xvi]. As such land becomes more valuable - people may be 'moved along' into environments that have available housing, but may have absolutely no familiar connections for them in terms of kinship or friendship ties. In some cases, these may be small rural environments – communities who may resent their arrival. All of these factors will impact on our infrastructure and community resources.

For those with resources who are moving to these communities their demands are becoming the framework by which they are defining their own life style and the infrastructure and services they expect to support it. Evidence to date shows that they will be using their skills to find pathways to their own concept of place and their demands will become increasingly strident.

As a society, until recently, we have made some assumptions about the future based on the recent past without considering the new drivers for change. One of these – particularly relevant to Albany - is the assumption that the community will continue to volunteer. Much of our community governance structures in the Great Southern region are based on people volunteering their time and energy. Will these new 'immigrants' (either baby boomers or lifestylers, or eco-refugees?) volunteer their time? or will the 'non retired' baby boomer continue to operate in the public sphere in a way that does not enable the time to volunteer? There is some early anecdotal evidence that those buying into lifestyle, demand that this lifestyle be provided to them, but are not prepared themselves to volunteer their time to maintain the necessary services. This has implications not only for our emergency services, for

example, but also sport, both of which rely heavily on volunteering to survive. However, we need to move beyond anecdote and get some facts behind our instinctive thinking.

As the largest cohort in the next wave, it is critical that we understand the baby boomers better. For example, the changing expectations regarding retirement from public life[xvii], and I predict a similar change in expectations will emerge as we connect the 'skills' shortage, with the demand from the baby boomers to stay in public life (power) in the future. 'Retirement' as a concept of withdrawing from public life is an early 20th century phenomenon, one that will not survive into the 21st. Instead, we will look back on this transition (or sea-change) as the time we 'reconstructed' our societal understandings of work and lifestyle and in turn, our assumptions of 'community'.

I conclude by posing a series of questions: consider first, in Albany how much do we really 'know' about the 'who' of sea-changers? their aspirations, their attitudes to place? or to sustainability? or their understanding of the impact they are having on place and their potential demand for resources? To what extent are we basing future decisions on the past experience, rather than current, relevant evidence?

How much of our policy planning is being undertaken using incorrect (misguided) assumptions? How much of the spatial dynamic of place are we considering in such planning? Do we know where people will be moving next? What do we know about who they are likely to be and where they will come from? How will their aspirations and values impact on our communities? How are we planning to incorporate their values and aspirations into our future planning?

These challenges require a whole of community interest and discussion and to return to Ariel's 'something rich and strange' – provides us with a vital and necessary opportunity to establish what we understand to be the important aspects of the Albany that we value.

We should come to such discussions about the future with good evidence, conscious of the external demands that are being placed on our

communities here and now. I look forward to continue to be actively involved in continuing dialogue with you all about the future of the places we cherish.

End notes

i This paper formed a presentation sponsored by Skywest, The University of Western Australia and ABC Radio at the Skywest Lecture Series in Albany on Wednesday, 14th February, 2007. I thank all those present at this lecture for their interest and contributions. Some comments have been incorporated into the paper. I also acknowledge the support of my colleagues at Curtin and thank Philip Marsh for assisting in the editing of this paper.

ii See http://www.seachangetaskforce.org.au/

iii Albany is Western Australia's oldest city – established in 1826. It is located on Princess Royal Harbour a deep-water port, and is about 400km. south east of Perth. It is serviced by good quality roads and by air. It is the regional centre for a number of small communities and is currently experiencing a rapid rise in housing development; business development and industrial activities. 'Long before Europeans considered the possibility of the existence of a Great South Land, the Aboriginal Mineng people had occupied the area which surrounds King George Sound and Oyster and Princess Royal Harbours. Radiocarbon dating of material exposed during archaeological excavation of Aboriginal sites near Oyster Harbour dates this occupation as far back as 18,850 years ago'. (see http://www.albanytourist.com.au/pages.asp?code=20 accessed on 27.02.07.

iv For those interested see Hunt, T. (2004) *Building Jerusalem. The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*. Phoenix: London.

v Massey, D (1994) *Space, Place, and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press:Minneapolis: 153.

vi I have written about this in some detail in Stehlik, D. (2001) 'Out there': Spaces, places and border crossings. In S. Lockie & L. Bourke (eds) In *Rurality Bites. The social and environmental transformation of rural Australia.* Pluto Press:Annandale, NSW. 30-44.

vii http://www.potw.org/archive/potw190.html retrieved 6th March 2007

viii Haberkorn, G. Kelson, S., Tottenham, R. & Magpantay, C. 2004. *Country Matters: Social Atlas of Rural and Regional Australia.* Bureau of Rural Sciences: Canberra. 19

ix National Rural Health Alliance. 2004. *Older People and Aged Care in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia, A Discussion Paper*. Aged & Community Services Australia & National Rural Health Alliance, July.; Davenport, C. 2003. *Active Ageing Taskforce*, 2003, Report And Recommendations, Government of Western Australia, Minister for Community Development

x At the time of writing, Esperance was recovering from a violent and unusual summer storm and the Porongorups National Park had been destroyed by bushfire.

xi In a recent newspaper article, 'climate refugees' were identified as 'the future victims of global warming' such as the Inuit, sub-Saharan Africans and even the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. 'Eco-refugees' are different in that they can choose to leave. (see *The Advertiser*. 24.02.07 p.72 'Global crisis warning as millions of climate refugees flee a tidal wave of change').

xii *The Australian*, 16 May, 2005, p.7).

xiii Gurran et al (2006) *Meeting the Sea Change Challenge*. p. 46.

xiiixiii *The West Australian*. 29 December 2005: 13.

xiv ABC TV *Foreign Correspondent*. 20TH Sept. 2005 – http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2005/s1462321.htm accessed 1.2.07)

xv (http://www.hnzc.co.nz)

xvi At a pace 'unmatched in regional Australia'. *The West Australian*. 29 December 2005. p13.

xvii A humorous but nevertheless telling phrase is that '70 is the new 55'.

ALCOA FOUNDATION'S CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILTY PROGRAM

Sustaining Gondwana is a strategic initiative of Curtin University of Technology that has been funded by the Alcoa Foundation's Conservation and Sustainability Fellowship Program and by the University. Its aim is to research conservation and sustainability issues along the south coast of Western Australia, from Walpole to just east of Esperance. The vegetation and fauna of this area is so diverse that it is considered to be one of the world's bio-diversity hotspots. The five year program, which is connected internationally with other Universities and Sustainability Institutes, was launched in November 2005.

The initiative is co-ordinated by four cabinet members, professors Daniela Stehlik, Jonathan Majer, Fiona Haslam McKenzie and Dong-ke Zhang. Six postdoctoral fellows are being appointed to work on issues related to this region, and their research will be augmented by activities of the cabinet members themselves as well as their graduate students. It is anticipated that the findings will be published in journals, conference proceedings and books. However, there is a need to communicate early findings, data sets and activities of group members in a timely manner so that stakeholders can benefit from outputs as soon as they become available. This is the aim of the *Sustaining Gondwana Working Papers* Series, which will be produced on an occasional basis over the life of the initiative.

The papers are not subject to peer review, but are edited by cabinet members in order to maintain standards and accuracy. Contributions from researchers and practitioners who are active in the region of focus can also be considered for publication in this series.

For further information about Sustaining Gondwana or the program Working Paper Series, please contact: strongercommunities@curtin.edu.au or visit
http://strongercommunities.curtin.edu.au
For the global program see:
http://www.alcoa.com/global/en/community/info_page/Foundation.asp