



Australian Government

Department of Defence

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

# WELCOME

Hello and welcome to the first newsletter for the Quail Island Air Weapons Range Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Hazard Reduction Project.

We've had a busy and productive start to the project with early burn off milestones achieved and plenty of interest from the media.

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep all stakeholders informed of the latest news from the project. Be it important meetings and discussions on the mainland through to the physical search activity on Quail, Bare Sand and Djadjalbit Islands, this newsletter will keep you up to date about all aspects of the project. In this first edition we'll report on the background to the project, our achievements so far, what's planned for the rest of the year, outline the interest we have received from the media, explain the nature and role of the exclusion zone and introduce you to one of our project team members.

If there is any information you would like to contribute to the newsletter or if there is any part of the project you would like to read more about, please send your contribution or query through to David Pembroke at [david.pembroke@contentgroup.com.au](mailto:david.pembroke@contentgroup.com.au) or 02 6273 0232.



## THE BACKGROUND

The Quail Island Air Weapons Range is located 65kms west of Darwin. It was used by the Royal Australian Air Force as a high explosive practice bombing target range between 1945 and 1979. While the RAAF has conducted surface clearance of the unexploded ordnance on the islands in the bombing range, (Quail, Bare Sand and Djadjalbit), it was agreed in 2009 to undertake a thorough removal of the UXO in the area. The project, which will run over the current and following two dry seasons, began on 9 May. This year's activity is due to be completed before 31 October.

## THE PROJECT BEGINS

The team from Airborne Solutions, our contractor engaged to reduce the long spear grasses on the islands, began work on 9 May. The limited burn was completed on the 20 May and was successful in providing an excellent clearance from which to begin the visual search for UXO on the islands.

Only two of the islands, Quail and Djadjalbit, required burning and large areas were left untouched on both islands to provide wildlife refuges.

G-Tek Australia Pty Ltd, the contractor commissioned to undertake the search for the UXO, then marked the islands in a network of grids to assist the search process. The visual search began 21 May and is continuing.

G-Tek is conducting a shallow search using hand-held electromagnetic equipment and magnetometers – down to half a metre.

## NEXT STEPS

The visual and shallow search will continue over the next 8-10 weeks. At the end of that process all of the range debris will be gathered in a single area on the islands before being removed. Specialist Defence bomb disposal personnel will then render safe any UXO.

As well as being an essential component of the clearance procedure, the removal of the surface and shallow material will prepare the sites for the next stage which is scheduled to begin in the 2012 dry season.

G-tek are also in discussions with the Larrakia Development Corporation to organise the employment of indigenous members on the project.

## EXCLUSION ZONE INFORMATION

In order for the project to be completed safely, Defence has activated an exclusion zone around the islands. The exclusion zone is a circle of 5,500 metres radius from the centre of Quail Island, an area of approximately 9,500 hectares. Defence accepts that there are some organisations and individuals who have a genuine need to access the exclusion zone. For example, researchers from Charles Darwin University have been visiting Bare Sand Island for some years to observe Turtles nesting. Tourism operators such as Turtle Tours have also been guiding tours to Bare Sand Island. Established activities such as these will only be allowed to proceed with permission from Defence. Anyone wishing to visit the exclusion zone needs to contact Project Manager, Major Geoff Robinson at [geoff.robinson1@defence.gov.au](mailto:geoff.robinson1@defence.gov.au) or 02 6266 8534. Permission to access the area will be subject to conditions and approval granted on a case by case basis.

## PROTECTING THE TURTLES

Defence appreciates the importance of Bare Sand Island as a turtle nesting area.

The Bare Sand Island Sea Turtle Research Project, run by the Charles Darwin University, is an important conservation project that has been running since 1996. It is the longest running study of its type in Northern Australia and provides vital information to ensure the protection and conservation of Flatback Sea Turtles. Defence is co-operating with the university to make sure that every reasonable measure is implemented to protect the turtles. All project work is being conducted during the day to avoid turtle nesting activity which occurs at night.



Turtle tracks leading to and from the sea

## MEET THE TEAM

Major Geoff Robinson, is the project Manager for the Quail Island Air Weapons Range Unexploded Ordnance Hazard Reduction Project. Major Robinson, a qualified bomb technician, has been in the Army for 27 years. Based in Canberra as part of the Property Services Group within Infrastructure Division, Major Robinson is responsible for the day to day management of the project. Prior to this project, Major Robinson was seconded to the Australian Federal Police for 2 years as Defence technical liaison officer in the Australian Bomb data centre. Major Robinson lives in Canberra with his wife and three children.



Turtle hatching

## IN THE NEWS

The public notification of the commencement of the project (published in the NT News on 7 May) drew immediate interest from the media. The NT News, ABC Radio, ABC Television News, ABC Stateline, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age all sent reporters, photographers and cameramen to cover the story. Mr Michael Healy, Assistant Secretary Property Services, is Defence's spokesman for the project. He has conducted a media tour of the islands and completed interviews with the ABC radio morning program in Darwin and ABC television. A 7.30 report story on the project can be viewed at the following link

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2011/06/17/3247136.htm>

A big thank you to Kelly Cooper, Defence media (Northern Territory), for organising the media visit to Bare Sand Island.

Thanks again for your ongoing interest in the project. Just a reminder that if you do have any questions or if there is any information you would like to share with us about the project please make contact with Major Geoff Robinson at [geoff.robinson1@defence.gov.au](mailto:geoff.robinson1@defence.gov.au), 02 6266 8534, 0419 659 426 or David Pembroke at: [david.pembroke@contentgroup.com.au](mailto:david.pembroke@contentgroup.com.au) or 02 6273 0232, 0416103229