Kimberley to Cape – my story

Clare Taylor, Coordinator

I fell in love with Northern Australia whilst exploring for diamonds in the Northern Territory - a helicopter would drop me off along a dry creek bed with a shovel, sieve and sample bags... I’d be alone in the bush for a couple of hours and the silence, the vastness and the outback colours got under my skin...

I also worked as a geologist in west Africa, south America and Europe, travelling the world and, as an aside, leading volunteer youth teams in amazing places like Svalbard and Costa Rica. My heart however was yearning for more than geology so after a few years I ended up back at university starting a PhD. My supervisor persuaded me the Fitzroy River in the west Kimberley was the place to study, so I was back in Northern Australia! My thesis on the floods and floodplain of the Fitzroy was awarded a distinction in 2000 and shortly after I was back in the real world consulting for the Institute for Regional Development at the University of Western Australia on an amazing diversity of contracts.

Achievements here lead to work in river policy and river restoration with the WA state government’s Water and Rivers Commission, including six months working in the Kimberley acting as District Manager for the region and putting together a book on Kimberley rivers and floods. I was then lucky enough to be appointed the water and rivercare facilitator for WA by the federal government, one of eight across Australia. This was the most incredible job with a lot of free range to make things happen across the whole state. I set up a network, initiated and organised workshops, translated and synthesised documents, contributed to policy, collated and circulated an e-news letter and created connections and partnerships. During this time I also undertook short assignments for the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge Research Hub in Darwin, and on an international water, food and poverty project based in Sri Lanka. All good things come to an end however, and it was time to move on when my partner got work in Canberra in 2009.

Another good thing started here however with the National Water Commission, where I worked on national water allocation planning and management and environmental water. I also was fortunate to be selected for the first Peter Cullen Trust leadership program, an inspiring and reflective experience that increased my self confidence. I took my NWC work to Darwin when we moved there in 2011 and completed projects on overallocation, low flows and ecosystem services. Downsizing of the Commission meant I faced moving back to Canberra or leaving, but luckily the North was an easy choice...

When I saw the advertisement for the Kimberley to Cape Coordinator position I thought ‘that’s very ambitious’ and ‘is there a mandate for this initiative?’ and was nearly too scared to apply but was also excited by its scope and possibilities. And when I was offered the job in 2013 I took it on the condition that we scoped it for 6 months to determine the level of support for such a big idea. I even had to use long service leave to top up my pay for a few months until I secured a little more funding. The rest is history so to speak - there is lots of interest in Kimberley to Cape. It’s a really timely, brave and necessary initiative (and is sometimes a little overwhelming!)

At this stage my key roles are facilitating collaboration, aligning messages, coordinating effort and catalysing action to help keep country connected and healthy, and to promote sustainable development. I focus on work which has strong utility and that supports groups doing great on-ground work and/or strategic policy work. We are just over a year old now and have a long road ahead… it’s a critical time for Northern Australia and I’m looking forward to Kimberley to Cape becoming an increasingly effective, well supported and long-term initiative!

For more information please contact me, Clare Taylor, at Kimberleytocape@iinet.net.au or please see www.kimberleytocape.net.au.