

## A last word

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The work reported on in this volume is the culmination of nine years of data gathering stemming from the original baseline surveys on Barrow Island. Not surprisingly, this has resulted in one of the most comprehensive terrestrial invertebrate surveys ever performed on an offshore island on this continent. There are other substantial surveys, but these have generally focussed on specific taxonomic groups, rather than the whole spread reported here.

The ability to carry out work of this depth and spread would not have been possible without the continuing support of the company involved in the current developments on this island. The baseline surveys were originally conducted to fill a knowledge gap: a need to know the invertebrate assemblages on Barrow Island before construction commenced for the Gorgon Project. This gap needed to be addressed to support the company's obligations under Ministerial Conditions for quarantine surveillance and monitoring programs during and after the development. This project highlights the value of researchers forming partnerships with industry. It is unlikely that a study of this depth and length would be funded by a government grant, or from any other funding body. Such grants seldom last for more than three years, the expectation being that answers should have been obtained by that time.

A further lesson from this study is the value of creating a good working relationship with the industry involved. To this end, this has been assisted by the company having a number of academically-orientated personnel who understand the requirements and way of thinking of the researchers who carried out this work. Conversely, it also demonstrates the value of engaging with academic researchers who understand the needs

and requirements of a company to address gaps in knowledge in relation to the environmental impact of their activities. Sceptics might point to the risk that independent researchers could be muzzled from releasing their results. We have not found this to be an issue, provided the company is allowed the opportunity to review material to ensure that it is not inflammatory and represents scientific findings based on the results presented, as is the case with any scientific article.

A study of this taxonomic depth could not have been carried out in-house by the small research team in the Curtin University Entomology Laboratory. Rather, we have utilized the skills of almost 40 taxonomists throughout Australia and overseas, many of whom have contributed chapters in this volume. This excellent co-operation has been made possible by the building in of taxonomist's fees into the project costings. Through this, we have been able to offer recompense for the time spent by those who have assisted us with identifications. Without such funding we would not have had so many of the specimens identified past family level. This is perhaps a lesson for others who might be planning studies like this. Currently, we have identified 2397 morphospecies, 556 of which have formal names and 1641 have their photos on PaDIL ([www.padil.gov.au/](http://www.padil.gov.au/)).

Our interaction with these taxonomists has flagged a number of concerns for future studies. By categorising the taxonomists by age decile, we see that the age profile is heavily skewed to the older age classes (Figure 1); one taxonomist was in his nineties when he assisted us! Of further concern is the tenure of the people who assisted us: 14 were in secure tenured employment, 12 were retired scientists who still carry on their work, 12 were employed on contracts, possibly with

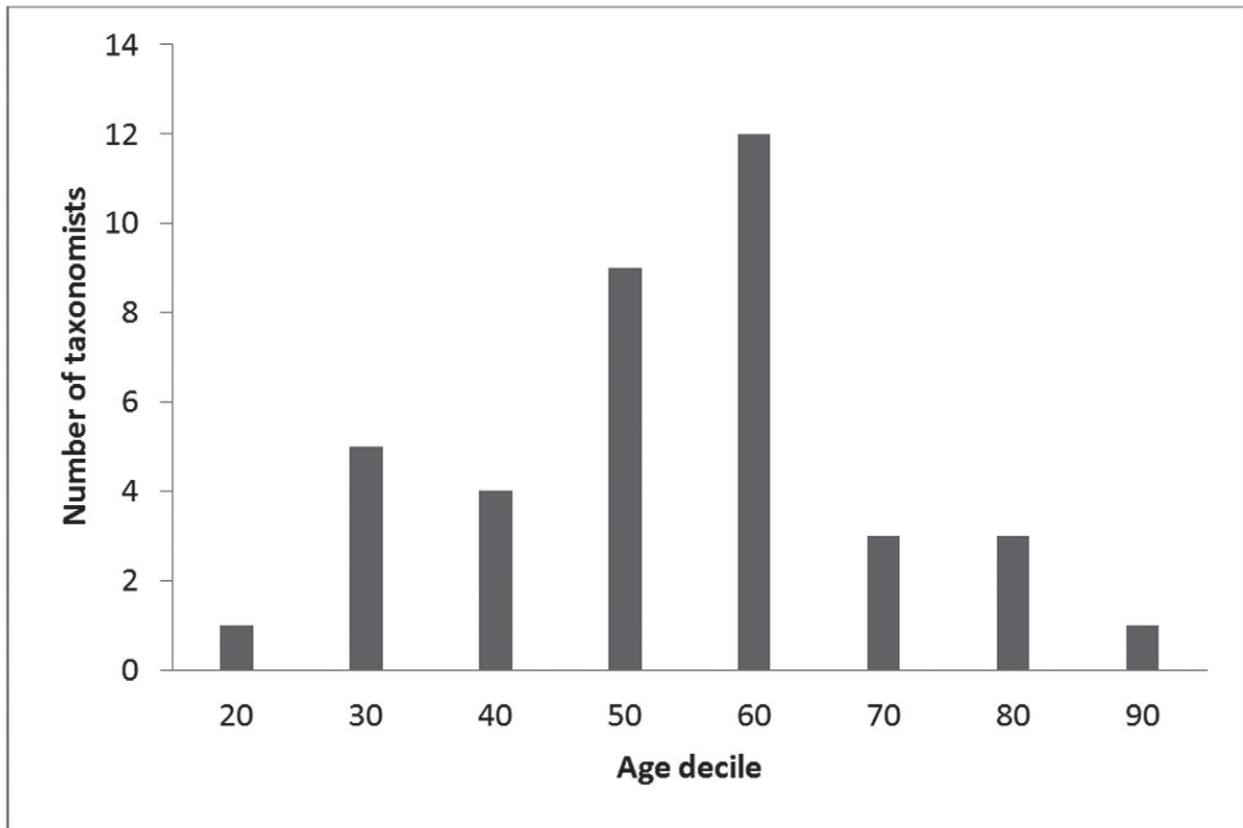


FIGURE 1 Age profile of the taxonomists who have assisted with identification of the Barrow Island material.

uncertain futures, and one was an amateur. One retired taxonomist in the penultimate age decile has since passed away, leaving limited capacity in this country to identify specimens in his area of specialisation (Courtney Smithers; Psocoptera). Without these taxonomists, several of whom may not be active much longer, we could not complete a study like this unless further taxonomists are

trained and able to secure stable employment. Our impressions at conferences is that it is not so much a lack of young, trained taxonomists, rather it is the lack of opportunities for them to apply their skill set via secured employment so that they can continue with this work. Whether it is training, employment or both, this is clearly an urgent matter for government and universities to address.