

October 2014



# Turtle Talk

E-news for members & friends of the



Our Network was formed in response to the turtle crisis caused by 2011's very hot summer, when many of Perth's metropolitan lakes dried up resulting in widespread turtle deaths and a mass rescue of debilitated turtles.

Although our official name is Turtle *Oblonga* Rescue & Rehabilitation Network Inc., or TORRN for short, we will also be using Turtle *Oblonga* Network as a trading name.

WE CAN NOW ACCEPT TAX DEDUCTIBLE  
ONLINE DONATIONS. SO IF YOU ARE  
FEELING GENEROUS PLEASE CLICK HERE



[www.givenow.com.au/turtleoblonganetwork](http://www.givenow.com.au/turtleoblonganetwork)

## NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the network Brandon & Jessica !

Congratulations to Lisa, our Turtle Taxi in  
Mandurah, on the arrival of Koby.  
Mother, father & son all doing well.



## NOTICEBOARD

### CAN YOU HELP US OUT ???

#### EDUCATORS NEEDED



WE WOULD LOVE SOME  
HELP DESIGNING  
TURTLELY EDUCATION  
PACKAGES AND  
RESOURCES FOR  
SCHOOL KIDDIES.

PLEASE CONTACT **KAREN**  
IF YOU HAVE SOME  
FREE TIME AND WOULD  
LIKE TO GET INVOLVED.

#### CALLING ALL TURTLE TAXIS



WE NEED MORE NETWORK MEMBERS TO TAKE  
ON THIS ROLE IN ALL SUBURBS.  
PLEASE CONTACT **DIANNE** TO FIND OUT MORE  
ABOUT WHAT IS REQUIRED TO TAKE ON THIS  
IMPORTANT ROLE.

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### HOME CARERS WANTED

PLEASE CONTACT **DIANNE** IF YOU HAVE SOME  
SPARE TIME AND TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT  
THIS FULFILLING ROLE.





## TURTLE PHONE & RESCUES

**IT'S AN EGG, IT'S AN EGG . . .  
MAKE THAT 15 EGGS !**

It was late on a weekday afternoon when I received a call from Rescuer Katie about a turtle laying eggs in an unsuitable location. I gathered my gear, entered the address into the SatNav and headed off - all was well until I reached the intersection of Nicholson Road and Roe Highway at peak hour. Three lanes, bumper to bumper, at a standstill in both directions when we hear an ambulance behind us . . . you want to go where? Somehow we all managed to move over, onto verges and anywhere else possible to allow the ambulance through. I had thought the bottleneck might be due to an accident but, "no", it was just the normal peak hour traffic for that intersection and the immediate vicinity.

After reaching the site far later than expected, I was very grateful to see Katie and large number of excited children waiting for me. They weren't difficult to spot.

As I unpacked my gear I was bombarded with each child's excited account of the egg laying . . . all at once !

Katie had spotted the turtle out of water heading toward a large sandpit\* containing playground equipment and in her concern for its safety had taken the turtle back to the water from whence she promptly returned. When you've got eggs to be laid, the eggs must be laid; there's no crossing of the legs possible! By this stage, it must have been urgent as the turtle stopped well short of the playground and chose to nest at the base of a sapling which had a mound of woodchips at the base.

I had to dig by hand so as not to damage the eggs. In the slow (for the excited children) process, I was exposing small white roots. At the sight of each white root the children became excited as I had told them that the eggs were white . . . it's an egg, it's an egg !



Of course, while all of this is happening I'm being bombarded by some great turtle questions from the children. We retrieved 15 beautiful eggs which had a blush-pink hue and they are now incubating with an estimated hatch date of any time from 30 April next year. We'll let the children know when the eggs hatch and send them some photos. As well we'll be inviting them to the hatchlings' release.

*Continued...*





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Thanks to Katie, Ariya, Zali and their friends Ethan, Emily, Aiden, Zak and David for safeguarding the turtle and her eggs. Thanks too to Katie for the pictures, and for her excellent "crowd" control skills.

*\* It's not unusual for urban turtles to lay their eggs in playground sandpits; they don't have too many options these days. We're thinking of starting a campaign with Councils called "Roses for turtles". As we also find turtles nest in rose gardens. Some long rose gardens between the lake and parallel to the road could prevent turtles from crossing busy roads into suburban gardens to lay their eggs.*

## PEOPLE REALLY DO CARE



*A surprisingly similar story submitted by another turtle taxi member...*

Late one September afternoon the turtle phone rang and we received a report of a turtle who was laying her eggs in the playground sand at a Park near the city - I sprang into action! Upon my arrival a short time later, and as I was getting my gear out of the car a group of young kids ran straight towards me - I obviously look like a turtle person? - yelling *"she's up to 10!", "we made sure she that she was safe", "I can't wait to tell my friends", "My mum's taking pictures" and my favourite, "This is the best day of my life!!"*

The parents had ensured that help was on the way, remained on site standing guard and were watching on as the mamma turtle laid her eggs. I also watched on (my first time in person) as she continued to lay with the kids counting ...11...12...13...14...

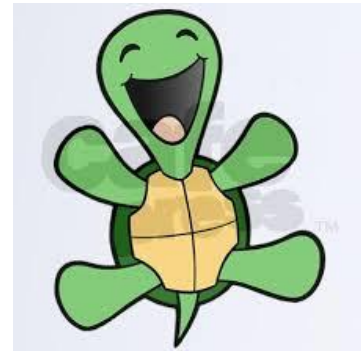
I had some interesting encounters and answered lots of amusing questions from the kids and the many others who came along to sticky beak during the process... A group of young guys playing footy nearby came over to see what was going on... *"silly place for a turtle to lay it's eggs"* one said, *"that's why she's here"* someone replied whilst pointing at me, at which time I felt I needed to say *"Hi"* and wave to the 20 or so people currently observing who simultaneously looked towards me.

Another group packing up after a picnic... Dad said *"look it's a long necked tortoise", "actually it's a turtle"* I said, *"turtles have flippers"*. Dad replied, *"marine turtles do"* I said, explaining *"turtles live in water, tortoises on land, our turtles come out of the water to lay their eggs"*. Dad sheepishly said *"were going home now, I know nothing about turtles"*.

Many people happened to come past walking their dogs, including some very cute Pugs and adorable Boston Terriers that I would normally coo all over, but all were told in no uncertain terms by me and the kids to restrain them or get lost! Most that stopped to watch were all saying *"wow"* and *"amazing"*. The kids helped me hand out lots of "What to do if you find a turtle" leaflets as we all waited for her to finish laying her 16 eggs!!!

I took mamma back to the lake whilst the kids guarded the nest. I had to hold them back from "helping" me extract the eggs. These precious 16 eggs are now safe and we hope to report some good news next year if they successfully hatch. The kids are counting down the days and hope to watch as some cute hatchlings are eventually released next year.

## EGG-CITING TIMES AHEAD ☺



## POSTSCRIPT . . .

*It appears that we are re-writing the knowledge base for oblongs....*

*The published data tells us their egg incubation period is approximately 220 days; yet we recently had a hatchling emerge from one transplanted clutch after a whopping 321 days !*

*Find out more about little Mason later....*



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## VETERINARY PROFILE



**DR RICHMOND LOH**

BSc, BVMS, MPhil, MANZCVS (Aquatics & Pathobiology), CertAqV, CMAVA

Dr Loh's skill set is unique, having been admitted as a Member of the Australian & New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists (ANZCVS) by examination in the subjects of "Aquatic Animal Health" and in "Pathobiology". As "The Fish Vet", he provides veterinary services for a range of clients and they include individual pet fish owners, public aquaria, retailers, wholesalers and fish farmers (ornamental and food fish). He has published two books entitled, "*Fish Vetting Essentials*" and "*Fish Vetting Medicines - Formulary of Fish Treatments*". He has also produced an instructional DVD, "*Fish Vetting Techniques and Practical Tips*". He is now working on several more publications. He is also active on social media.

Follow Richmond on: [Facebook "Fin Page"](#) - [YouTube](#) - [Blog](#) - [Linkedin](#) - [Twitter](#)

Find out more about "The Fish Vet" and his services at: [www.thefishvet.com.au](http://www.thefishvet.com.au)



### We recently asked Richmond a few questions....

**Tell us why you became a Veterinarian...** I've grown up loving to watch wildlife documentaries, and nature and science captivated me from a very young age. With this, everyone always told me I should be a vet... and so I did!

**Your involvement with TORRN...** I initially got involved by doing the diagnostics, and later, I employed the help of my father with expert skills in pottery, to make a few clay models of the long-necked turtles. See pic in [Turtle Talk July 2014](#) on Page 5.

**So how do you anaesthetise a fish?** I've uploaded a video on zebrafish anaesthesia which can be viewed at this [link](#). It details how anaesthesia is done, and how you recognise the different stages of anaesthesia.

**And how do you operate on a fish in water?** Fish are anaesthetised in water, but for surgical procedures, they are taken out of the water. Provided the body is kept wet and the gills are irrigated, fish can be kept anaesthetised, and out of water, for procedures that may take as long as an hour.

**What sort of people are your clients? fish farmers, exotic fish breeders, fish owners, etc...** All of the above. Being one of very few aquatic veterinarians in Australia, I have to be rather versatile. To me, all fish are beautiful, regardless if they're ugly stonefish or the majestic lionfish. My patients range from the humble pet goldfish and axolotls, to more expensive koi, ornamental fish retailers, ornamental fish farmers, food fish farmers, public aquaria (including AQWA at Hillaries) and more. I am an adjunct lecturer at Murdoch University and so I teach veterinary students on fish health matters on a regular basis. I also contribute articles to several journals and present at conferences locally and overseas. In my spare time, I make contributions on the internet via my social media platforms for example [facebook.com/thefishvetdrloh](https://facebook.com/thefishvetdrloh) and blog at [thefishvet.com](http://thefishvet.com). I love the variety of work fish vetting affords me.

**Being a fish vet seems like an incredibly complicated difficult thing to do.** It was rather complicated when I first started because it was a road of discovery. Unlike the veterinary students now, fish medicine was not taught at university. It was a lot of self-education, forming networks with other helpful



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colleagues and improvisation. Because this road was a long process, I have published books and a DVD, and uploaded videos available on my website to help other veterinarians who'd like to serve the aquatic community.

More recently, there is a group called the World Aquatic Veterinary Medical Association ([wavma.org](http://wavma.org)), where fish veterinarians all over the world can exchange notes and seek advice from each other. Since its inception in 2006, we've had more than 620 veterinarians and veterinary technicians/nurses, from than 50 countries become members of the WAVMA. So, if I come across something I don't know, I simply send the WAVMA a query and someone, somewhere, will help me with the problem. It is the most supportive group, bound by our passion for aquatics, and one which I am most humbled to serve as the President this year.



PHOTO CREDITS: RICHMOND LOH

**Your turtle experiences...** Back in Malaysia, I had lots of different pets, among them, the red-eared sliders and soft-shelled turtles. The one that I was most fond of was a soft-shelled turtle I caught from a local river. I grew him from a carapace length of 4cm to over 15cm. One holiday season, I brought him with me to my grandparents' place. One morning I discovered he was missing. I suspect it was my naughty cousin who let it out because we always fought. I cried inconsolably for a few days and looked for him everywhere.

**Your favourite animal? apart from fish/turtles that is...** Are there any other animals apart from fish and turtles? I like all sorts of aquatic creatures from dragonfly larvae and the diving beetle, to the yabbies and prawns, and frogs and reptiles. I enjoy keeping freshwater critters the most.

**Your favourite holiday destination...** Truthfully, my favourite holiday destination is my grandmother's place in Malaysia. It was semi-rural and there are wild animals, semi-domesticated farm animals, stray dogs and lots of fishes in the rivers and drains. There are my childhood friends and not a long way to all the yummy foods. This is the one place where all my relatives would gather for special occasions. My second favourite place would be any of the freshwater springs in Florida, USA. I found myself visiting a few of them and it felt like I was swimming in one giant aquarium! Brilliant water clarity and with abundant fishes, terrapins and even snakes! Apparently manatees congregate in some of them during the winter.

**What do you get up to in your spare time...** I enjoy playing with my son and spending family time and catch up with friends. I toy around with my backyard aquaponics and look after quite a number of fishes including koi, goldfish, catfish, silver perch, saratoga and many others.

**What do you plan to do in your retirement...** Asking me this question already? Just a couple of years ago, the bouncers at clubs and staff at liquor stores were asking if I had ID to substantiate my age. I'd be doing more travelling to see family, friends, fishes and places. I'd love to be baby-sitting grandchildren. I'm sure I'll have some sort of project on the go, otherwise I'd get bored. All these will depend on what funds I have then.

**Something we might not know about you...** If I told you, then it wouldn't be something you might not know☺ I used to be not too bad on the basketball court, and my favourite position was small forward, priding myself for getting rebounds and blocking shots made by opponents 1-2 feet taller than myself.



If you know of someone who might like to be the next featured profile, please email [Karen](mailto:karen@turtleoblong.com).





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## TURTLE REHAB & RELEASE

### THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE AS A TURTLE CARER

What a busy couple of weeks it has been for injured turtles! Firstly came 'Popeye' who had no shell or bony injuries, but suffered some kind of trauma to his head, which left him with marked soft tissue damage to the head and a bulging left eye, with bleeding trauma. Quite sad actually, but Popeye still had some fight in him. He was placed in my care with prescribed oral and topical treatments for his bulging eye. Popeye gained a little strength each day and his bulging eye slowly showed some decrease in the swelling. I was certain he was in with a chance.

Unfortunately Popeye had a Vet re-assessment which revealed his eye was not functional and he would have found life in the big world difficult. Whilst it is sad to deal with, we all know when caring for these creatures that not all can be saved. So with the loss of Popeye to the pearly lakes of turtle heaven another two needed my care....

I currently have a male named 'Lucky' who was found on the back lawn of a house in suburbia with the family dog playing with him!!!!!! How lucky was Lucky...? He sustained a couple of canine grazes to his lower carapace but the most severe injuries were skin erosions and puncture wounds on the top of his head. Lucky is currently doing really well. At first the challenge was to give his medications orally as he certainly knows how to hold his mouth shut tight. Today I offered Lucky some chicken liver and left him for a few hours with the food and to my relief he ate most of it - yay! So what goes in must come out so we will see if he defecates in the next day or two, then I will be very happy that everything is functioning well.

The second turtle currently in my care is 'Maggie' who was found in a car park with magpies around. She has pressure sores and some abrasions on all of her feet, legs and her plastron. She is receiving betadine baths and freshwater swims, but mostly I am dry docking her to allow her wounds to repair. Maggie will be reassessed again after her week of treatments. Maggie is a little underweight, so let's hope I can fatten her up.

I have offered her food but she has not yet eaten, hopefully she will very soon.

I will keep you all posted with their progress. Cheers and may all our days be happy turtle days ☺



### LUCKY MASON

We had given up all hope of the clutch hatching when one day (321 days later) I walked past the foster nest site and saw that a tiny little turtle had emerged. It appeared dead but sprang to life after being warmed in my hand for a short time. Unfortunately only 1 of the 13 eggs hatched.

Little 'Mason' was only 3.67g on hatching, but currently weighs 4.81g after chowing down a diet of mosquito larvae which he/she adores. Mason goes out into the big pond during the day to get some sunshine and is learning to catch fish, but is an inside tub at night. Once Mason gains a little more weight, he/she will be released back to its home lake.



### BEYOND CUTE

Unusually, we recently had two little juvenile females in care. As the first was a bit thin on admission she was admitted into care in with Member Alan order to increase her weight slightly before release. This little juvenile was reluctant to eat until she was joined by another juvenile who stimulated her natural greed which in turn stimulated the new addition's desire to eat.



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Many turtles in rehab won't eat as it's such a foreign environment for a wild animal. Housing compatible co-specifics together can encourage eating eg I'm not hungry but you're not having it !

Here's Alan's story...

## TURTLE 101...

Just a short note for your turtle newsletter from a new turtle carer....

Well having eventually put the ponds together the instant family arrived a day apart, much to our dogs displeasure as they are never happy sharing our time with others. With some trepidation I set forth into this business and soon found out the two I have here, still unnamed, are only here for the food.

It took some time for them to settle down and sort out what they like to actually eat. The younger one does not relish river prawns but is partial to white bait and liver. None of this food does much for the water and in fact the flies quite like it and the smell after only a short while is distinctive, that word by the way describes it well by the spelling of the middle 5 letters. The water is good liquid manure for the garden, especially the citrus.

These animals have many advantages in their ease of handling, They eat at all hours, mostly at night it would seem or something else is eating the food, they don't complain, appear to get along well together and don't want to stay any longer than absolutely necessary. These juveniles which we think are girls, will be moving on quite soon as they look longingly over the edge of the pond/tub at the far horizon.



One of the most interesting parts of the exercise was to actually get the food, but the starter pack for the kids came from a great helper who has a fish trap made from soft-drink bottles: the turtles think the resulting feral Gambusia fish are delicious.

So until I get a turtle which has some medical problems of one sort or another I'll leave the story here go to the pond to have a chat to the girls to discuss their departure.

## COMMUNITY NEWS

### HARVEST LAKES RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

#### Pearl the Powerhouse!!

These signs were kindly donated to the Harvest Lakes Residents' Association by L J Hooker's, Atwell Branch.

Thanks to Pearl and the Residents' Association for your efforts to keep our turtles safe!!!







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## TURTLE TRAVELS

### AMY'S AFRICAN ADVENTURES ...THAT'S NOT A ROCK!

Last month Committee Member Amy attended the *International Congress on Parasites of Wildlife* in Kruger National Park, South Africa (who could say no?!). From blood-borne parasites in leopards, to giant ticks found on the sloth, the conference was interesting to say the least. Having also managed to schedule in a sunrise/afternoon/sunset/night drive every day, Amy also got to learn a thing or two about the local wildlife from experienced guides within the park. Whilst seeing the big-five was definitely a highlight of her trip, particularly a rhino road-block (right) and a pride of lions trying to hunt down a giraffe (luckily the giraffe escaped!); encountering some of the less obvious locals was also very memorable.

Being well-known for stopping safari vehicles for what turned out to be rocks, this rock turned out to be a particularly striking leopard tortoise [*Stigmochelys (Geochelone) pardalis*] with its characteristic pyramid-shaped, decorative scutes.



Unlike the oblong turtle, the leopard tortoise is a terrestrial herbivore, which feeds mainly on grasses and other plant material. This gentle giant is one of the biggest species of tortoise in the world, and is capable of exceeding 40kg (Mader, 2006)!

Whilst leopard tortoises aren't out to hunt us down like their other African friends, they do have a very large beak that is capable of biting. In most cases however, leopard tortoises will retract their feet and head into their shell as a defensive mechanism if threatened - something our little oblongs are unable to do for protection.

Please email [Karen](#) your travel stories particularly about turtles to be featured in future E-News editions.





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## EVENTS PAGES

### GENERAL MEETINGS

Our last General Meeting was well attended and after the meeting we viewed a variety of short turtle surgery videos - removal of an ear abscess, egg removal, shell repair, fishhook removal and the pinning of a leg - you have to be a turtle person to understand. At that point the meeting was thrown into disarray with news of a swan which needed rescuing. The swan had a hook embedded in its beak through a nostril. Ouch! Being turtle people the Swan was bundled into a turtle tub and covered with towels while the wildlife network went into action. Fortunately, we knew that there were several WA Seabird Rescuers at Darling Range Wildlife Centre in Martin that afternoon so a pickup was soon arranged. Hook and line entanglement injuries are a major problem for Seabird Rescuers. The injuries can be life-threatening but if the bird can still fly they're almost impossible to catch until close to death. There's much publicity about abandoned fishing line but the problems are caused by fishermen who, when accidentally catching a bird, cut the line allowing the bird to go free with its injuries instead of slowly hauling it in and calling for help from WA Seabird Rescue (WASR).

The Swan went to WASR carer Marg in Mandurah. The hook was easily removed and the wound treated. The Swan was enjoying a pool of sparkling clean water and lots of grass when he was spooked by another of the birds in Marg's care - a Southern Giant Petrel which got out of its enclosure causing the Swan to take off (or as we say "self released"). Although the Swan would never have seen a Southern Giant Petrel before it may have sensed that the Petrel was a carnivore. Another of WASR's mainstays, Craig, spotted the Swan in the estuary and plans to catch it for return to its mate at the Kent Street Weir.

The next General Meeting, our final for the year, will be held on **Sunday 2 December** and whilst we're planning a special Christmassy get-together please don't expect a Swan rescue as well!!!



### TURTLE PHD

### RESEARCH PRESENTATION

**"Enhancing urban biodiversity: Approaches based on habitat selection by *Chelodina oblonga*, a native freshwater turtle"**

**By:** Caitlin Bartholomaeus

**Date:** 20th November 2014

**Time:** 5.00 - 6PM

**Location:** Cockburn Wetlands Education Centre,  
184 Hope Road Bibra Lake

**RSVP:** Please with any dietary requirements to  
<mailto:cdunn01@cockburn.wa.gov.au>

**by Wednesday November 12<sup>th</sup> for catering purposes.**



PHOTO CREDIT: Caitlin Bartholomaeus



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## NATIONAL THREATENED SPECIES DAY

- 7 September 2014

Thanks to all of our volunteers and those who dropped in to see us on NTSD!! We had a great time down in Fremantle with our friends at Project Numbat, Friends of the Western Ground Parrot, Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre and Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise. We hope to be involved in an even bigger and better event next year!!



PHOTO CREDIT: Kaarakin Facebook

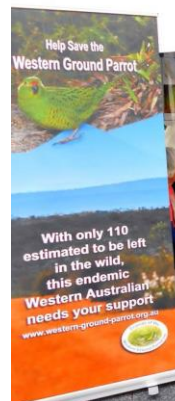


PHOTO CREDIT: Friends of the Western Ground Parrot Newsletter



PHOTO CREDIT: Karen Cavanough



PHOTO CREDIT: Project Numbat Newsletter



Nurla, Project Numbat's mascot!

PHOTO CREDIT: Kaarakin Facebook



Kaarakin's Rex showing us what she thought of turtles!

PHOTO CREDIT: Sandy Shailles





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## WORLD ANIMAL DAY - 4 October 2014

Thanks to the wonderful Penny, the Environmental Education Officer at the Piney Lakes Environmental Education Centre, for organising such a great event. TORRN was pleased to be part of it for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year.



There's that pesky numbat again!



ALL PHOTO CREDITS: Penny Musgrove



## SPREADING THE WORD

### E-NEWS, ONLINE & SOCIAL MEDIA

- PICS: If you have any pictures of Oblong turtles (and/or stories about them) for inclusion into the next Turtle Talk OR the website/Facebook page, then **Karen** would love to hear from you.
- OLD STUFF: Have you been out of the loop or want to re-read something? Find previous editions of the TURTLE TALK E-News [here](#).
- UPDATES/NEW STUFF: We recently updated the [Donate](#) and [Events](#) page.
- WEBSITE: We welcome your suggestions and comments about our website see: [www.turtleoblonganetwork.org.au](http://www.turtleoblonganetwork.org.au)
- FACEBOOK: We are currently sitting on **442** likes and counting! Please **LIKE US** and share things of interest with your friends, as this may also assist us in gaining more likes and subsequent members.

### AND SPEAKING OF MEMBERSHIP.....

- INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS : 121
- GROUP MEMBERSHIPS : 2

To those of you who are receiving/reading this newsletter, but have not yet officially joined us as a member - please do so! Numbers count. Just by becoming a member you are helping. The more members we have, the more supporters our turtles have which will be of benefit when we are lobbying on their behalf. Membership is FREE but you'll still need to complete a membership form. [Download our Membership Form](#).

### CHANGED ADDRESS, EMAIL OR PHONE?

Remembering that we might need to mobilise our forces in the event of emergency, it would be great if our lists of members were always up to date.

Email **Karen** any changes to your contact details!!



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## JUST FOR LAUGHS...



## CONTACT US

If you have some spare time and would like to get more involved - please get in touch with us ...

### TORRN COMMITTEE MEMBERS & CONTACTS



### TORRN COMMITTEE

<u>Chair</u>	Karen Pye
<u>Secretary</u>	Dianne Hunter
<u>Treasurer</u>	Carla Tassone
<u>Membership</u>	Karen Cavanough

### Committee Members

Michelle Hazelwood  
Deborah Lavigne  
Dr Amy Northover  
Sandy Shailes  
Dr Lian Yeap

### EMERGENCY MOBILES

#### PERTH METROPOLITAN:

0424 727 411 - East Metro\*  
0424 727 624 - South Metro\*  
0414 476 867 - North Metro\*

*\*If, for any reason, the number in your area doesn't answer, please call one of the other numbers.*

#### REGIONAL WA:

0428 984 445 - Albany  
0438 813 919 - Margaret River  
0437 910 054 - Busselton