

# Lustrous fruits of Broome's

The pearling industry has left its dark days behind and is bringing together diverse cultures to farm the ocean treasure

Report  
**Steve Butler**  
Pictures  
**Nic Ellis**



The eyes say it all as Tiara Lawford gazes past a perfect 20mm pearl and out on to the Broome land her people have called home for generations.

Valued at \$75,000, the pearl harvested last week at the picturesque headquarters of Willie Creek Pearls is a rare find. Although Ms Lawford's eyes sparkle as much as the prized jewellery item as she cradles it in her index fingers, for her there is a deeper meaning.

The 20-year-old said she used her role as a tour guide for Willie Creek Pearls, one of five such operations in Broome, to boost her self-pride and to act as a role model for her siblings and her people.

"Just to be a role model for my younger siblings is probably the most important thing and even for just the town itself," Ms Lawford said on a break between the heavy tourism traffic on the plot about 38km from Broome.

"My family has been here all their lives. We all grew up fishing here and tourism is such an important play to us here in Broome. I remember when I used to sit on the rocks and see the boat and I used to wave to them as a kid, now it's me waving to all the children on the rocks."

Ms Lawford is one of two Aboriginal tour guides for Willie Creek Pearls, but just one of many human faces who make up the region's diverse,



Tiara Lawford with a freshly harvested pearl.

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Willie Creek pearl farm has three resident crocodiles.

but lucrative, pearling operation. And it is 36km out to sea from Willie Creek where it is at its most raw.

Here is where a tapestry of different cultures collide among the employees tending

to the delicate process of growing up to 30,000 oysters in the open ocean. Beside them there are humpback whales breaching, dolphins playing, irukandji jellyfish lurking, sharks and birds feeding on

massive fish bait-balls and even the odd turtle popping its head up for a look at the goings-on.

It is quite a spectacular scene.

Autore Pearls head technician Steve Rothwell seeds up to 400 oysters a day on the rolling sea . . . and he claims to be one of the slower operators on the 30m 1974 mothership. But as technical as the process is, there is a thriving camaraderie among the 29 crew members, who are on the ship for up to 12 days at a time.

"You're basically living, working and eating together and we get on really well," Mr Rothwell said.

"We have barbecue nights on

the roof of the boat and pearlery's long table dinners at sea, so it's all good fun. We have three cooked meals a day with all the trimmings and the best part is at the end of the day sitting on the end of the boat having a beer and chewing the fat."

Willie Creek Pearls operations manager Paul Birch, a former Dunsborough-based winemaker, said a joint venture with Autore Pearls to open a hatchery in Broome was a sign that the secretive "dark days" of the pearling industry had been replaced with a growing sense of collaboration.

"The industry is coming together and understanding the

## Why Batman is still a bachelor and how Catwoman had

David Betancourt

It turns out Bruce Wayne is still the DC Universe's most eligible bachelor.

To recap, after a months-long engagement and a whole lot of hype building up to a wedding in DC Comics' Batman series, Batman/Bruce Wayne and Catwoman/Selina Kyle did not get married in the 50th issue of writer Tom King's run.

All kinds of bat-signals went off when the New York Times revealed the plot twist the Sunday before the issue's publication on July 4. Most of the rage

from fans was from the major happenings of issue No. 50 being online before fans could read it.

But is anyone actually upset that Batman and Catwoman didn't get married? The bad bat-buzz briefly overshadowed what can be considered one of the best single issues DC has produced in their "rebirth" era of publishing.

Another indication things just weren't meant to be came in the debut issue of Catwoman's new series (written and illustrated by Joelle Jones), released on the same day as the wedding issue. The Catwoman cover featured a

warning not to take in a single page unless the wedding issue had already been read or fans would risk spoilers — meaning the wedding plans likely went quite awry. Catwoman is one of DC's most intense anti-hero personalities. It's hard to see her sharing her own series with Batman on every page because she tied the knot.

King used his first 50 issues of Batman to build on one of the sexiest and most complicated on-again, off-again relationships in comics. He's also taken full advantage of Batman's rogue's gallery, including Bane,

Poison Ivy, a buffer/meaner Riddler, and the Joker. But what has helped this series escape the long shadow of the earlier five-year Batman run of writer Scott Snyder and artist Greg Capullo is that King dared Batman to take off his mask and have Bruce Wayne take a deep look at himself and ask whether he could ever truly be in love.

Perhaps the two most shocking aspects of issue No. 50 were that Bruce Wayne did indeed want to give love a shot, but Catwoman realised that by marrying him, she'd be alleviating some of the pain necessary

for Batman to exist. Catwoman was the real hero in issue No. 50 because she knew she didn't have it in her to end Batman, even though she loved Bruce Wayne. Or who knows? Maybe she loves Batman more and didn't want Bruce Wayne only.

The point is, she knew she couldn't go through with it, no matter how cool her dress looked (it was designed by Jones).

King had a chance to mend Batman's heart with his keyboard. Heartbreak is what defines every aspect of Batman. The pain of the tragedy of losing

# bumper harvest



Hiro Akune seeds oysters on the pearly mothership off Broome.



Long lines at sunset in the estuary at the Willie Creek pearl farm.

necessity to share some information or to collaborate to obtain information," Mr Birch said.

"It's changed a lot from the days of blackbirding, when indigenous women were made to dive off pearl luggers to collect shell in what was effectively slavery, through to the days when ships were coming back so laden with shell that they were almost going to sink.

"We're now into an era when we're looking towards science to look into issues that will allow us to compete on a world scale. The industry is a lot better than it was, but we need to keep our focus."

Willie Creek Pearls chief executive Sally Hollins said tourism numbers this year had been cut because of a big wet early in the year, good weather in the southern part of the State, expensive flights and fewer cruise ships visiting the region.

But it had not dimmed her passion for her pearls.

"They really are quite beautiful and when one comes out like that, it just reminds you how extraordinary these things are," she said after the \$75,000 pearl was revealed.

"Our entire business revolves around the pearl. People come here to see how it's created, how the oysters are grown, how

we seed and harvest a pearl and then they take one home as a souvenir.

"For nature to have created something quite so stunning and quite so perfect is extraordinary. No female can wear a set of lustrous pearls and not feel better. It's really life itself . . . out of adversity can come something gorgeous."

Mrs Hollins said her company was soon hoping for approval to expand Willie Creek's 5000sqm facility, which is home to three resident crocodiles, to help offer a better "spat (larvae) to showroom" tourism experience.

**The Weekend West was hosted by Willie Creek Pearls**

# to be cruel to be kind to her lover

his parents to a murder committed right in front of him has always been Batman's unlimited fuel supply. When given the opportunity to bring some relief to that broken heart through matrimony, King instead decided to break it again — and that emotional blow made Batman even stronger.

Artist Mikel Janin provided stellar artwork, enhanced by frequent pin-up illustrations that appeared every two pages by various artists at DC, including co-publisher Jim Lee, Jason Fabok, Mitch Gerads and Frank Miller. Janin's pencils told the

current story while the pin-ups served as beautifully illustrated backgrounds to the captioned words of letters Batman and Catwoman wrote to each other.

In those letters, King writes a Batman telling Catwoman he's willing to let love into his heart and a Catwoman who tells Batman why she realises she could never let that happen. The cat may have got out of the bag early, but even if you knew how this one was going to end, you still wanted to read it for yourself.

Leaving Batman stranded at the altar is just the beginning. **Washington Post**



**Catwoman and Batman had a complicated romance.**  
Picture: DC Entertainment

# Human failing on neutral grounds



## OPINION

Zoltan Kovacs



**B**ill Stickler told members of a book club that he could not remember the last time he heard or read the word "spinster". The president of the Society of Pedants (WA) said it was an unpleasant word that had dropped out of everyday currency. He was pleased to see the back of it.

He was talking to club members about politically correct language and how social changes led to language changes. The first part of his talk was reported in last week's column.

He said "spinster" had been generally used with insulting connotations to suggest that there was something wrong with women who chose not to marry. Strangely, the men's equivalent to "spinster" — "bachelor" — did not carry such connotations.

In any case, "spinster" had faded naturally from Australian speech and writing as a result of changes in social attitudes. These amounted to a general understanding that if a woman chose not to marry, it was a valid and respectable choice of a lifestyle and nobody's business but hers.

In other words, the demise of "spinster" was not a consequence of political correctness. Similarly, the use of words ending in "-ess" — as in "actress" — to designate women in various occupations was diminishing as a result of social change.

Mr Stickler quoted Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage: "With varying degrees of success, specifically feminine-gender artistic terms like 'actress', 'authoress', 'editress', 'poetess', 'paintress' and 'sculptress' have been replaced by the traditionally male-only term — for example, 'actor', 'author', 'editor' — on the valid grounds that there is no need for a separate term. . ."

Fowler pointed out that there was no more need for such specifically feminine-gender terms than there was for the old words "interpretress", "philosopheress" and "tutoress", now obsolete.

However, the campaign to rid the language of a wider range of gender-specific terms was an unreasonable attempt to impose the restrictions and artificiality of politically correct language — or, as he preferred to call it, the precious lingo of self-serving virtue signalling.

For example, it seemed that some people objected to the use of the words "wife" and "husband" for people in heterosexual marriages. Thus the gender-neutral "partner" was increasingly used instead of "husband" or "wife".

"Partner" could be applied to a business associate, a fellow tennis or bridge player. It did not capture the special nature of the marriage relationship, of which a form of partnership was only one element.

He believed the use of "partner" diminished the importance of marriage by suggesting that it was merely a type of partnership. However, even "partner" was to be preferred to the insufferably artificial "significant other" for describing someone in a marriage or another type of romantic relationship.

If "husband" and "wife" were to be run out of town for being gender specific, which words would be the next to be declared unacceptable for the same reason? Perhaps "mother", "father", "son" and "daughter", all precise and gender-specific terms, would attract the malignant attentions of politically correct extremists intent on changing the language to fit their social philosophies.

Mr Stickler said he instinctively resisted campaigns to change how language was used. However, he had sympathy for people who wanted to do away with "mankind". He accepted that its symbolism was offensive to many people because it excluded half of humanity.

He preferred to use "humankind" or "the human race". Of course, these terms did not satisfy some campaigners for language change because "man" appeared in them. He wondered about what term they would come up with to replace "human", which they seemingly wanted to ditch.