As a coastal community, the Gumbaynggirr people are very dependant on the ocean and rivers for food. They not only go fishing and spearing for fish, but also seek out other marine and estuarine organisms such as abalone, urchins, pipis, oysters and crabs.

From ocean rock-platforms, Gumbaynggirr people commonly collect **gugumbal** (turban snails - see Fact Sheet 5), nerites (*Nerita atramentosa*) and various other shell species. They also collect sea urchins, which are broken open to consume the roe (eggs).

“[Nerites] don’t grow much bigger than about 2cm, so you need to gather a lot to get a good feed. And it’s mainly the little black ones that we gather. [We then] cook ‘em up in a billy and get them out of the shell with a pin or needle.”

“When you get ‘em [urchins] nice and big, you can crack ‘em open and eat the eggs, the roe; its like caviar but better I think [...] I love ‘em. When I see lots big and good like that, I sit there on the rocks and break ‘em open and have the biggest feed ever.”

*Uncle Milton Duroux*

**Did you know?**

The Garby Elders say that oysters spawn during the months that contain the letter ‘R’ and you should therefore not collect them at this time.

Various other organisms are also collected and eaten. Wood-boring shipworms (*Teredo* spp.), or cobra (**nyarrigan**), are often found in pieces of timber and fallen trees in estuaries and are very popular. *Nyarrigan* are caught in the winter months; they are no good in summer as they are too tough. To catch them, the timber is split, and they are then shaken out and eaten raw. According to the Garby Elders, they taste a lot like oysters, and the best animals are found in oak logs.

“We only get cobra from upstream, where the fresh and salt water meet; that is where they are fat and soft.”

*Uncle Keith Lardner*

The Garby Elders search creeks and estuaries for **ngaduun** (crabs) and **barliin. gurr** (oysters), both of which are considered ‘good tucker’. Oysters can be found along the banks of estuaries - one of the Garby Elders’ favourite spots is at Jewfish Point.

Did you know?

The Garby Elders say that oysters spawn during the months that contain the letter ‘R’ and you should therefore not collect them at this time.

Various other organisms are also collected and eaten. Wood-boring shipworms (*Teredo* spp.), or cobra (**nyarrigan**), are often found in pieces of timber and fallen trees in estuaries and are very popular. *Nyarrigan* are caught in the winter months; they are no good in summer as they are too tough. To catch them, the timber is split, and they are then shaken out and eaten raw. According to the Garby Elders, they taste a lot like oysters, and the best animals are found in oak logs.

“We only get cobra from upstream, where the fresh and salt water meet; that is where they are fat and soft.”

*Uncle Keith Lardner*

The Garby Elders search creeks and estuaries for **ngaduun** (crabs) and **barliin. gurr** (oysters), both of which are considered ‘good tucker’. Oysters can be found along the banks of estuaries - one of the Garby Elders’ favourite spots is at Jewfish Point.
in the Corindi River. Although, today, knives and hammers are used to remove *barliin.gurr*, they were previously just smashed with a rock. Mud crabs are highly sought after and are found hidden amongst the mangroves.

In order to find pipis (*garlaany*) on the beach, harvesters wriggle their toes around in the shallow water at the tide line, collecting those found under-foot and those forced to the surface. The cooler months, in late autumn and winter, are the best times for collecting *garlaany*. Pipis are best collected just before and after the high tide as, at these times, they are feeding near the surface of the sand.

Another food item prized by the Garby Elders is the abalone which was often harvested from the rock platforms at Mullawarra and Corindi. Abalone can only be found at the lowest tidal levels and below, so you have to get wet to collect them! They can be cooked whole after tenderising (by gently pounding the flesh with the palm of your hand), or chopped up finely and seasoned with lemon and pepper.

Although not a big part of the Garby Elders’ diet, prawns (*wurrjay*) are also collected in early summer from lakes and larger estuaries. *Wurrjay* are caught by first raking the sand and then scooping them into a net. The bigger animals are eaten and the smaller ones used for bait; however, in recent years, it has been rare to catch prawns that are large enough to eat.

**Please note** that NSW Department of Primary Industries bag and size limits apply.

Photos: Paul Butcher; Kathryn James; Margie Mohring; Michael Rule, Steve Smith.