

**Community history, Chinese
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Politicians**

Kevin Fong (b. 1963)

In 1999, Kevin Fong became President of the Shire of Broome, Western Australia. He was already Managing Director of Goolari Media Enterprises and a past President of multicultural festival Shinju Matsuri. His father, William Fong, is the son of Broome pioneer Fong Sam, and his mother Vicki is a descendant of John Septimus Roe, the first Western Australian Surveyor-General.

(From interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 4830, 2001, *Chinese Australian Oral History Partnership/Post-War Chinese Australians*, National Library of Australia:)

Kevin Fong: There are people [at naturalisation ceremonies] who feel so honoured that a third generation Broome boy is actually making them an Australian citizen...whereas people who don't have an understanding of equality actually look at me and say: 'Who's this black Chinaman making me an Australian citizen?'

[When Shinju Matsuri began in the 1970s] businessmen actually did it in a way where it involved what I call cultural gatekeepers of the Malay, Chinese and Japanese communities in the process...when I took over in '97 as the Shinju President, it was to make the point that you can't throw rocks from the side; you've got to join in...And we certainly did bring it back to the community...the theme was Chinese one year, Malaysian one year and Japanese another year. And rather than the patrons being a white pearler or a white businessman or a politician, the actual patrons were the cultural gatekeepers...We have a Carnival of Nations, which is an expression of all the cultures, not just Asian cultures and indigenous cultures...a demonstration through culture of food, dance and the arts. We also have Pet Parades. We have the Gala Ball. We have pearl-meat cook-ups. We have Fishing at the Jetty competitions...basically about 68 events over a 10-day period...From '98 onwards they now have a respectful opening as the start

of the festival...basically it acknowledges all the people who have contributed to the pearling industry...the involvement of the families that are still alive...a nice quiet respectful opening...It's a bit like what you do on Anzac Day—just reflect on all the people that we've lost.

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Diana Giese: What do the people of Broome really care about?

Kevin Fong: They're very passionate and committed about the environment... and Gantheaume Point, which is basically our own Kings Park...It was people power that actually stopped that [development]...it's a very culturally significant area...

Diana Giese: It's [under the control of] the Rubibi Land Council, isn't it?

Kevin Fong: Yes—and environmentally it also has a number of rare species, and coastline, and in environmental terms it's very fragile. And a consortium of developers basically wanted to build a resort...The state government was so arrogant, and the process basically ignored the local community and the local Shire...And what happened was that people dug and researched and lobbied, and at the end of the day, the people won. [The resort was not built.]

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Diana Giese: You make the future of Broome sound really exciting. Do you think your kids will make their lives in Broome as well?...

Kevin Fong: I've often thought about that myself...in another 10 year's time my older daughter starts going to high school—

Diana Giese: But she can go to high school in Broome now, can't she? Unlike your generation that had to go away.

Kevin Fong: I don't know. I'm still in a dilemma about whether she will go to high school in Broome...

Diana Giese: You went away—and you say that was an experience you found useful...

Kevin Fong: You learned to grow up very quickly. And you learn independence, and you learn different people's views, and you learn that you're not the only person in the world...

Diana Giese: You'd like to introduce her to a wider world than Broome?

Kevin Fong: Absolutely.

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