

# Saunders Islands National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	61.33ha
Bioregion:	East Cape York Marine
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Marine
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook



South Bird Island and Magra Islet, Saunders Islands National Park. Photo: NPRSR.

## Legislative framework

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Aboriginal Land Act 1991</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976</i>
✓	<i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>

## Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
✓	China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

## Thematic strategies

✓	Level 2 Fire Management Strategy
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## Vision

Saunders Islands National Park is a collection of coral sand cays that rise out of the pristine waters of the Great Barrier Reef in Cape York Peninsula's Shelburne Bay. They are part of Wuthathi Country.

Saunders Islands National Park will be effectively managed to ensure the natural values, cultural values and processes are protected and presented, and the importance of the park to Traditional Owners is recognised. The national park will be jointly managed by building strong collaborative relationships with Traditional Owners.

Saunders Islands National Park has a strong sense of remoteness and wilderness. The group's mosaic of habitats is alive with a variety of mainland and marine wildlife, particularly roosting and nesting sea birds. Visitors will fully enjoy environmental and cultural values of the park.

## Conservation purpose

Saunders Islands National Park and surrounding marine park waters are part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Natural and cultural values are collaboratively managed with Traditional Owners.

Twelve coral sand cays vegetated with a mix of woodland, grassland, herbland and mangroves together make the Saunders Islands a biologically diverse group of islands. These are important for a large variety of mainland and marine wildlife, including species of conservation concern, 21 species of migratory sea birds and one of Queensland's largest breeding and roosting populations of the black noddy *Anous minutus*.

## Protecting and presenting the park's values

### Landscape

The Saunders Islands are a living cultural landscape rich in traditional and contemporary significance for Wuthathi Traditional Owners. There is a strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates.

Saunders Islands National Park is located in the north of Shelburne Bay approximately 20km south-east of Captain Billy Landing. Two islets and two groups of islands make up the park:

- the Macarthur Islands, located in the north-west of the park on the south-west of Bushy Islets Reef. The Macarthur islands consist of four islands referred to as Macarthur A, B, C and D. Macarthur A is a small vegetated sand cay with a shingle bank on its eastern side. It is linked by a large reef flat to Macarthur B, C and D which are small beach rock islands
- the Bird Islands, located in the centre of the park, consisting of two islands referred to as North Bird and South Bird. North Bird is made of four islands linked by reef flat; the main island is a vegetated sand cay measuring 250m long and 100m wide and situated in the group's north-west. South Bird is made of two low elongated sand cays on a system of beach rock
- Saunders Islet, a large vegetated sand cay located on the north-eastern end of Thrush Reef, measuring 590m long, 270m wide and 4m above sea level. The island features a small area of inter-tidal coralline beach rock on its western side and broad sand spit extending southwards
- Magra Islet, a small vegetated sand cay on the south-west edge of Cockburn Reef below the Cockburn Islands. It has a triangular appearance and measures 310m long, 128m wide and 3m above sea level with two long sand spits extending from the islet. Coralline beach rock runs along the western and north-western sides.

### Regional ecosystems

The park has eight regional ecosystems:

- Macarthur A has an of concern regional ecosystem consisting of sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* closed herbland and a fringing mangroves on its western side. Macarthur B's ecosystem is primarily red mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* and large-fruited orange mangrove *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* closed mangrove forest. Macarthur C and D are exposed ocean rock with sparse herbland on sand and some fringing mangroves
- North Bird island includes the of concern evergreen notophyll vine forest restricted to beach ridges on coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays regional ecosystem. In addition, although not identified by available regional ecosystem mapping, internal records indicate a community of the endangered *Pisonia grandis* forest exists with a canopy height up to 18m. The other three islands are predominantly red mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* and large-fruited orange mangrove *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* closed mangrove forest
- South Bird island is a closed mangrove forest with red mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* and large-fruited orange mangrove *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* closed mangrove forest
- Saunders Islet is mostly vegetated with a mixed flat of grasses and herbs plus areas of *Melaleuca viridiflora* and *Melaleuca saligna* woodland in sinkholes
- Magra Islet has *Melaleuca viridiflora* and *Melaleuca saligna* woodland in sinkholes and *Eucalyptus tetradonta*, *Corymbia clarksoniana* and *Corymbia tessellaris* woodland on coastal plains.

Regional ecosystems of biodiversity concern are further detailed in Table 1.

## Native plants and animals

The islands retain a high level of natural integrity and provide important habitat for roosting and nesting sea birds, some terrestrial birds and some marine wildlife. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) records indicate that 30 species of plants have been identified but none are listed as being of conservation significance under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

QPWS records indicate that 51 species of animals have been identified of which six are listed as being of conservation significance under the Nature Conservation Act (Table 2). Saunders Islet provides breeding habitat in summer for the vulnerable green turtle *Chelonia mydas*. Both Saunders Islet and Magra Islet provide breeding habitat all year for the vulnerable hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricate*.

Twenty-one bird species and three reptile species are listed in international conventions (Table 3). North Bird Island is a significant breeding site for the black noddy with breeding season numbers varying between 4,000 to 10,000 breeding pairs. This location is unusual in the birds nest here in the mangroves in preference to the *Pisonia grandis* forest. Saunders Islet and Magra Islet are significant breeding sites for three species of tern. None of the islands in Saunders Islands National Park are listed as key sites in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy.

## Aboriginal culture

The *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* provides the primary legislative framework across all tenures for the management and protection of Indigenous cultural heritage through mechanisms such as cultural heritage management plans and culturally appropriate registration of cultural places and items.

Further research is required to determine what information can be shared.

## Shared-history culture

Early contact history of the Shelburne Bay area dates back to the early 1800s through activities, such as vessels surveying the area and pearling. Numerous shipwrecks are found in the area including some that are protected under the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*. However there are no places or items registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* on the Saunders Islands.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Saunders Islands have scenic appeal, a sense of remoteness and provide a totally natural, self-reliant visitor experience. No formal visitor sites or access tracks are in place. Camping is not currently permitted in Saunders Islands National Park; however this may change if a planning exercise finds that it is appropriate.

Commercial activities to the Bird Islands are permitted all year, and on a seasonal basis between April and August to the Macarthur Islands, Saunders Islet and Magra Islet.

Restricted access area closures on a seasonal basis between 1 September and 31 March are recommended by QPWS in relation to sea bird and turtle breeding on the Macarthur Islands, Saunders Islet and Magra Islet.

No visitor information has been produced for the islands. Public information about the islands is being developed.

The designated shipping channel runs between the Saunders Islands. There are no designated anchorages or public moorings in waters surrounding the Saunders Islands.

## Partnerships

Saunders Islands National Park is managed by QPWS to protect cultural values, species of conservation significance and regional ecosystems representative of the East Cape York Marine bioregion. A joint management framework is provided by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*.

Through this framework partnerships may also be developed with interested parties such as tourism operators and researchers.

There is a cooperative focus between the State and GBRMPA for complementary management of national park islands and surrounding marine parks (State and Commonwealth).

## Other key issues and responses

### Pest management

The islands are thought to retain a high level of natural integrity, with minimal to no pest animals or pest plants on record. Regular assessments and inspections of national park islands are undertaken.

### Fire management

QPWS does not actively burn the islands. Sea bird nesting could be adversely impacted by inappropriate fire management. Sand cays could be susceptible to erosion after burning. If QPWS or Traditional Owners felt there was a need for planned burning a thorough assessment of the natural and cultural values and processes would be jointly undertaken to assist decision making.

The long-term history of fire management is not fully documented and no recent history of fire has been recorded on the national park.

## References

- GBRMPA 2008, *Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area*. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Townsville.
- King BR 1989 Seabird Islands No. 193: Magra Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland. *Corella* 13, 47–48.
- King BR and Limpus CJ 1985 Seabird Islands No. 150: Bird Islands, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland. *Corella* 9, 73–74.
- King BR and Limpus CJ 1989 Seabird Islands No. 192: Saunders Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland. *Corella* 13, 45–46.
- Wuthathi Land Trust 2010 *Wuthathi Country Planning for a healthy growing community: Strategic Community Plan 2009 to 2013*.

## Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p><b>Natural values</b></p> <p>The diversity and distribution of natural plant and animal communities (particularly significant species) representative of the East Cape York Marine bioregion is conserved.</p>	<p>A1. Explore declaration of seasonal restricted access area closures between 1 September and 31 March for the Macarthur Islands, Saunders Islet and Magra Islet to protect values for migratory species and species of conservation significance.</p> <p>A2. Review monitoring objectives for species of conservation significance on the park and support monitoring programs that achieve these objectives. Particular focus will be on monitoring objectives for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i></li> <li>• sooty oyster catcher <i>Haematopididae</i></li> <li>• beach stone-curlew <i>Esacus magnirostris</i></li> <li>• hawksbill turtle <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i></li> <li>• green turtle <i>Chelonia mydas</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b></p> <p>A low-key self-reliant and sustainable visitor experiences provided.</p> <p>Tourism activities enhance visitor opportunities.</p>	<p>A3. Maintain commercial access to the Macarthur Islands, Saunders Islet and Magra Islet on a seasonal basis between April and August, and to the Bird Islands with group size management for North Bird Island.</p> <p>A4. Tourism and visitor opportunities are informed, where practicable, by culturally appropriate cross-cultural information from the Traditional Owners.</p>
<p><b>Joint management</b></p> <p>Saunders Islands National Park is jointly managed between the Traditional Owners and QPWS by building strong collaborative working relationships.</p> <p>The importance of the park to Traditional Owners will be recognised.</p>	<p>A5. Work closely with Traditional Owners and consult regularly over management direction and issues.</p> <p>A6. Use best endeavours to facilitate site visits to discuss management of islands</p> <p>A7. Fulfil actions identified in Indigenous Land Use Agreements and Indigenous Management Agreements once they are developed.</p>

## Tables – Conservation values management

**Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems**

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
3.2.28	Evergreen notophyll vine forest on beach ridges on coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays.	Of concern
3.2.29	<i>Pisonia grandis</i> low closed forest. Restricted to a few scattered sand cays	Endangered
3.2.32	<i>Lepturus repens</i> closed herbland. Restricted to sand cays.	Of concern

**Table 2: Species of conservation significance**

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
<b>Plants</b> – none classified as being of conservation significance				
<b>Animals</b>				
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	estuarine crocodile	Vulnerable	-	Low
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	hawksbill turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>	beach stone-curlew	Vulnerable	-	High
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	sooty oystercatcher	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	High

**Table 3: Species listed in international agreements**

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	ruddy turnstone	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	curlew sandpiper	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	red-necked stint	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	Mongolian plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	estuarine crocodile	✓	-	-	-

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	eastern reef egret	-	✓	-	-
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	hawksbill turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	lesser frigate bird	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Fregata minor</i>	great frigatebird	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	-	✓	-	-
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Numenius minutus</i>	little curlew	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	whimbrel	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	bridled tern	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	black-naped tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	brown booby	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>	lesser crested tern	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	grey-tailed tattler	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	lesser yellowlegs	✓	-	-	-
<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	common sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	Terek sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓

Bonn – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement