

# Sandbanks National Park

**Management Statement**

2013



*The Department of Environment, Science and Innovation acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. We recognise their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.*

*The department is committed to respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the Human Rights Act 2019.*

*This management statement does not intend to affect, diminish, or extinguish native title or associated rights.*

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All due diligence and care has been taken in the preparation of this document based on the information in the 2013 management statement. The department holds no responsibility for any errors or omissions within this document. Any decisions made by other parties based on this document are solely the responsibility of those parties.

The Sandbanks National Park Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2024 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the statement's original management intent and direction.

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Park size:
Bioregion:
QPWS region:
Local government estate/area:
State electorate:

**Legislative framework**

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area</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
✓	Recovery plan for marine turtles in Australia

**Thematic strategies**

✓	Level 2 Fire Management Strategy
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## Vision

Sandbanks National Park comprises two low sandbanks emerging from the clear waters of the outer Great Barrier Reef amongst a long system of sandbanks running parallel to the mid Cape York Peninsula coastline.

Sandbanks National Park will be effectively managed to ensure the natural and 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.

Sandbanks National Park has a sense of remoteness and wilderness. It remains a delicate, isolated island ecosystem. During breeding season the sandbanks are alive with vulnerable green turtles *Chelonia mydas* and an array of nesting seabirds enjoying the safety of the remote haven. For these reasons the park is best enjoyed only from the surrounding Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Commonwealth).

## Conservation purpose

Sandbanks National Park is part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and is made up of Sandbank 7 and Sandbank 8. Natural and cultural values will be collaboratively managed with Umpila Traditional Owners. Together Sandbanks 7 and 8 provide critical habitat for a variety of migratory species and marine wildlife.

Sandbanks National Park was first gazetted as a national park under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975* in 1989 and was then gazetted under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* in 1994.

## Protecting and presenting the area's values

### Landscape

Sandbanks National Park is a living cultural landscape rich in traditional and contemporary significance for Umpila Traditional Owners. There is strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates.

Sandbanks 7 and 8 are located north-east of Princess Charlotte Bay and directly east of Cape Sidmouth. They are in the top part of a system of 10 sandbanks that begin adjacent to Princess Charlotte Bay and end south-east of Cape Direction.

The sandbanks are surrounded by unnamed reefs numbered 13-061a, b and c (Sandbank 7 Reef) and 13-056 (Sandbank 8 Reef). They are north of the 'First Three Mile Opening' in the Great Barrier Reef, which is the first opening of this size north of Cooktown between the inner reef and the open ocean.

Sandbanks 7 and 8 are both comprised of uncemented coarse coral sand with no central rock platform. Vegetation makes Sandbank 8 more stable than the other sandbanks in the system, most of which are ephemeral. The size of the sandbanks can vary in response to extreme weather events.

Sandbank 7 is approximately 350m long by 90m wide and rises to 0.76m above mean high water springs. The surface is typically submerged by the highest tides and storm surges. Inter-tidal coralline beach-rock buffers its northern, southern and eastern sides.

Sandbank 8 is approximately 300m long by 120m wide and rises to 1.36m above mean high water springs. Coralline beach-rock and a number of conspicuous coralline boulders buffer its western and southern reef flats.

### Regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem mapping is not yet available for the park. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) information identifies that Sandbank 7 has minimal vegetation consisting of seasonal coastal grasses and herbs while Sandbank 8 is sparsely vegetated with permanent coastal grasses and herbs including the of concern sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* closed herbland. There is no woody vegetation or fresh water.

### Plants and animals

Sandbanks 7 and 8 retain a high level of natural integrity and provide important habitat for roosting and nesting seabirds and turtles. Five plant species have been identified on Sandbank 8 but none are listed as being of conservation significance—bulls head vine *Tribulus cistoides*, stalky grass, *Achyranthes aspera*, *Boerhavia albiflora* var. *albiflora*, and *Halophila ovalis*.

Thirty-eight animal species have been identified on and around the sandbanks. Three have conservation significance (Table 1). The park is of particular importance for green turtle breeding. During breeding season, an average of up to 200 breeding females per night have been recorded on Sandbank 7 and 400 breeding females per night on Sandbank 8. With severe weather events and high tides sometimes overtopping Sandbank 7 between January and March, the success of turtle nesting is uncertain.

Twenty-four bird species listed on international agreements have been recorded in the park (Table 2). Sandbank 7 is particularly important for the brown booby *Sula leucagaster* and the black napped tern *Sterna sumatrana*. Sandbank 8 is particularly important for the brown booby, common noddy *Anous stolidus* and sooty tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*. The green turtle *Chelonia mydas* is also recorded on the park.

## Aboriginal culture

At the time of preparing this management statement there is no current native title claim or Indigenous Land Use Agreement over the national park. Sandbanks National Park is part of Umpila country and further research and consultation with Traditional Owners is required to determine what information can be shared.

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

## Shared-history culture

Early contact history for the Princess Charlotte Bay area dates back to the early 1800s, when pearling fleets operated in the area. While the mainland features significantly in archaeological references and shared maritime history, there are no known items of significance in the park.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

The park's remoteness means the area is visited infrequently. The sandbanks are surrounded by marine national park zone (green zone) which limits certain activities such as fishing. Reef number 13-061a located between Sandbanks 7 and 8 is a preservation zone (pink zone) which does not allow public access.

All year restricted access areas are recommended for Sandbanks 7 and 8 given their significance for roosting and nesting seabirds, migratory birds and turtles.

No formal visitor sites or access tracks are in place. Commercial activities are not permitted. The islands have boundary signs stating the national park name with pictograms to regulate activities where relevant.

The park sits on the eastern edge of the designated shipping channel. There are no designated anchorages or public moorings in surrounding waters.

## Education and science

At the time of preparing this management statement there was no visitor information about the national park on the department's website.

Given the remote location the park is not often visited by researchers. Any research undertaken must be conducted under a relevant authority.

Sandbank 8 is a key monitoring site in the Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (Turner 2002).

## Partnerships

In time all national parks in the Cape York Peninsula Region will be dedicated as national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. This enables joint management by Traditional Owners (represented by a land trust) and the department under an Indigenous Management Agreement. Through this framework partnerships may also be developed with interested parties such as researchers. It is anticipated that future management of this park will be as national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land).

There is a cooperative focus between QPWS and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for complementary management of the World Heritage area, including national park islands and surrounding marine parks (State and Commonwealth).

## Other key issues and responses

### Pest management

The islands have retained a high level of natural integrity, with no pest plants or animals recorded. Regular assessments and inspections are undertaken.

### Fire management

Planned burning is not undertaken and campfires are not permitted as seabird nesting would be adversely impacted and the sandbanks would be susceptible to erosion after burning.

### References

Turner M 2002, *Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area*. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

## Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p><b>Landscape</b> Scenic amenity values of the park are protected consistent with the overall character of the park and landscape settings.</p>	A1. Ensure infrastructure is minimal and consistent with the character of the park and landscape setting.
<p><b>Native plants and animals</b> Conserve the diversity and distribution of natural plant and animal communities, particularly species of conservation significance and migratory birds.</p>	<p>A2. Explore declaration of restricted access areas for Sandbanks 7 and 8 to protect roosting and nesting seabirds and turtles.</p> <p>A3. Review monitoring objectives for species of conservation significance and support monitoring programs that achieve these objectives. Monitoring should be directed at little tern, green turtle and brown booby, particularly the breeding success of green turtles on Sandbank 7.</p>
<p><b>Aboriginal culture</b> The park is jointly managed by Traditional Owners and QPWS by building strong collaborative working relationships. The importance of the park to Traditional Owners is recognised.</p>	<p>A4. Work closely with Traditional Owners and consult regularly over management direction and issues.</p> <p>A5. Use best endeavours to facilitate site visits to discuss management.</p> <p>A6. Fulfil actions identified in Indigenous Land Use Agreements and Indigenous Management Agreements once they are developed.</p>
<p><b>Education</b> Information about the park is readily available.</p>	A7. Provide information about the national park on the department's website.
<p><b>Pest and fire management</b> Natural and cultural values are maintained through strategic cross-cultural fire and pest management regimes.</p>	<p>A8. Utilise QPWS pest and fire management system for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring and control (identification/eradication) of pests</li> <li>• fire management, including prevention, where no fire required.</li> </ul> <p>A9. Continue to restrict the use of fire in the park.</p>

## Tables – Conservation values management

### Table 1: 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>Animals</b>				
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	High
<i>Sternula nereis</i>	fairy tern*	Least concern	Vulnerable	Low

Note: The fairy tern was recorded just once in 1985 on Sandbank 7.

### Table 2: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	CMS	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	common noddy	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Ardea modesta</i>	eastern great egret	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Ardenna pacifica</i>	wedge-tailed shearwater	-	-	✓	-
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	ruddy turnstone	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris alba</i>	sanderling	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	curlew sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	lesser sand plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	✓	-	-	
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	eastern reef egret	-	✓	-	-
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	lesser frigate bird	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Fregata minor</i>	great frigatebird	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian tern	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	bridled tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Pandion cristatus</i>	eastern osprey	✓	-	-	-
<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Pacific golden plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	roseate tern	-	-	✓	-
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	black-naped tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sula dactylatra</i>	masked booby	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	brown booby	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sula sula</i>	red-footed booby	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>	lesser crested tern	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	grey-tailed tattler	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Tringa incana</i>	wandering tattler	✓	✓	✓	-

BONN (CMS) – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement