

# Denham Group National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	90.7ha
Bioregion:	East Cape York Marine
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Marine
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook



Boydong Island and Milman Islet. Denham Group 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
✓	Recovery plan for marine turtle in Australia
✓	Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

## Thematic strategies

✓	Level 2 Fire Management Strategy
✓	Level 2 Pest Management Strategy

## Vision

Denham Group National Park is a collection of vegetated coral and sand cays that pepper the Great Barrier Reef off shore from Jardine River National Park. Denham Group National Park is part of Gudang Country and Yadhaykenu Country.

Denham Group 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 Gudang and Yadhaykenu Traditional Owners.

The Denham Islands are alive with a variety of mainland and marine wildlife including a mosaic of ecosystems and species of conservation concern. These qualities remain a prominent feature of cultural, natural and scenic value.

## Conservation purpose

Denham Group 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.

The Denham Group's mix of island landscapes results in high species diversity. The islands are important for a large variety of mainland and marine wildlife including species of conservation concern and 27 species of migratory birds.

## Protecting and presenting the park's values

### Landscape

The Denham Group is a living cultural landscape rich in traditional and contemporary significance for Gudang Traditional Owners and Yadhaykenu (Cairncross people) Traditional Owners. There is a strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates.

Denham Group National Park is located off shore from Jardine River National Park 25 kilometres (km) north-east of Captain Billy Landing and 70km south-east of the tip of Cape York Peninsula. Six Islets and one island make up the park being:

- Sinclair Islet—located in the north of the park. It is a small 4.1 hectares (ha) vegetated sand cay that rises 2 metres (m) above sea level
- Milman Islet—located in the north of the group on the same reef as Aplin Islet. It is a 22ha densely wooded sand cay that rises 5m above sea level. Beachrock fringes the western side of the island. The northern end and eastern side of the island feature scattered beach rock outcrops
- Aplin Islet—located in the centre of the group, on the southern end of the same reef as Milman Islet. It is a small 4.9ha shingle mangrove island that rises 2m above sea level. The northern end has coarse sand and shingle which extends to the centre of the island, otherwise the island is completely beach rock coral conglomerate
- Cairncross Islets—located in the centre of the group cover 20.2ha. The three islets are referred to as Cairncross A, B and C and are interconnected by a chain of sand and coral rubble spits. Cairncross A is the largest of the group rising 4m above sea level and supporting a complex closed forest
- Cholmondeley Islet—located in the south of the group on the north-west end of a drying reef. It is a 0.5ha vegetated sand cay rising only 2m above sea level
- Wallace Islet—located in the south of the group. It is an oval shaped 2.2ha cay composed of coral sand and reef rubble with a line of intertidal coralline beach rock on its eastern side
- Boydong Island—most southerly island in the group. It is a 10.5ha coral rubble and sand low wooded isle with a sand spit extending from its north-west end and broken slabs of beach rock in the north east.

Non-protected area islands with similar features located near the group are: Bushy Island, Douglas Islet, Halfway Islet, Jardine Islet, East Islets and Little Boydong Islet.

### Regional ecosystems

The park has seven regional ecosystems, five being of biodiversity concern:

- Sinclair Islet is vegetated with grassland and scattered shrubs including of biodiversity concern sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens*
- Milman Islet is densely vegetated with of biodiversity concern evergreen notophyll vine forest with an average canopy height of 10m and fringing of biodiversity concern *Premna serratifolia* closed scrub
- Aplin Islet is vegetated with a combination of succulent herb mats, of biodiversity concern *Pemphis acidula* mangrove forest, of biodiversity concern evergreen notophyll vine forest with a canopy height of up to 10m and a small area of endangered *Pisonia grandis* forest on the adjacent shingle bank
- Cairncross A features one of the most diverse and highly developed forests on any cay within the Great Barrier Reef with few other coral islands having equivalent species diversity or native species. Its vegetation complex includes a central clump of the endangered *Pisonia grandis* forest, a spectacular example of the of biodiversity concern evergreen notophyll vine forest closed-forest with 90% canopy coverage providing a dark cool environment for robust growth of vines, epiphytes, ferns, palms and wild ginger. Cairncross B and C are vegetated with of biodiversity concern *Pemphis acidula* low closed forest and sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* closed hermland
- Cholmondeley Islet has 70% coverage by grass and shrubs including the of biodiversity concern sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* closed hermland with shrubs forming a dominant layer in some areas
- Wallace Islet is vegetated by the of biodiversity concern sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* closed hermland and features a stand of pure *Pisonia grandis* on the northern third of the islet

- Boydong island has 70% dense canopy cover, mainly consisting of the biodiversity of concern evergreen notophyll vine forest plus occurrences of the of biodiversity concern *Pemphis acidula* low closed forest and sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* herbland.

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. QPWS records indicate that 19 species of fungus and 101 species of plants have been identified one of which, the Cooktown Orchard *Dendrobium bigibbum*, is listed as being of conservation significance under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

QPWS records indicate that 84 species of animals have been identified on Denham Group National Park. Seven are listed as being of conservation significance under the Nature Conservation Act, (Table 2). Milman Islet supports nesting populations of the vulnerable hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricate* and green turtle *Chelonia mydas*. Milman Island is unique in the Great Barrier Reef in that it has a resident population of amethystine pythons *Morelia amethystinus*.

Twenty-seven bird species are protected under international conventions for migratory birds (Table 3). Eighteen of these have been recorded on Boydong Island. The elongated reef flat at Wallace Islet is highly significant for roosting and feeding populations of a variety of birds.

## Aboriginal culture

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.

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

## Shared-history culture

Early contact history dates back to the early 1800s. No places or items are registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* on Denham Group National Park, however, the area features in archaeological references and shared maritime history including that:

- in 1819 Lieutenant Phillip Parker King onboard survey vessel HBM Cutter Mermaid named the Cairncross Islets after giving passage to Jane Cairncross and her husband Supreme Court Judge Field
- in 1834 castaways from the Charles Eaton shipwreck near Cape Grenville were ferried in canoes to Boydong Island by Murray Islanders who saved and raised two of the surviving boys
- Cairncross Reef bares two ship wrecks, the ketch Esme lost in 1901 and the wooden lugger Spede lost in 1902
- in the early 1900s Sinclair Islet was used by trochus fishers as an onshore processing base.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Denham Group has scenic appeal, a sense of remoteness and provides a totally natural, self-reliant visitor experience. No formal visitor nodes or access tracks are in place. No visitor information has been produced. Public information about the islands is being developed.

Public day use of the islands is mainly by visitors from cruising yachts and fishing vessels. The Denham Group are located on the eastern edge of the designated shipping channel. The Cairncross Islets are located in the channel. A designated 'cruise ship' anchorage is located next to Boydong Island. Commercial tours are:

- permitted all year to the Cairncross Islets
- permitted to Boydong Island and Sinclair Islet, outside the seasonal closure between 31 September to 1 March each year
- not permitted to any other area of Denham Group National Park.

Based on their significance for roosting and nesting seabirds and turtle nesting, restricted access areas are:

- approved all year for Aplin Islet and Milman Islet, which are both fully surrounded by a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park preservation zone

- recommended by QPWS for Boydong Island, Cholmondeley Islet and Sinclair Islet between 31 September and 1 March each year.

## Partnerships

Denham Group 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 with QPWS and Traditional Owners is provided by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, and the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*.

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

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

## Other key issues and responses

### Pest management

Regular assessments and inspections of the national park islands are undertaken. The islands retain a high level of natural integrity; however, non-declared pest animals and pest plants have appeared and are of management concern. These pests include the black rat *Rattus rattus*, which has the potential to cause a decline in some native fauna and has been removed from Boydong Island. There is ongoing monitoring of Boydong and nearby islands for any incidental occurrences. The coconut *Cocos nuciferus* also occurs on several islands in the group.

### Fire management

QPWS does not actively burn the islands. Seabird nesting could be adversely impacted by inappropriate fire management. Sand cays could be susceptible to erosion after burning. If QPWS or Traditional Owners feel there is 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 2002, Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville.

King BR, Hicks J and Oldroyd A 1989 Seabird Islands No. 190: Cholmondeley Island Great Barrier Reef, Queensland. *Corella* 13, 41–44.

King BR, Limpus CJ, Hicks J and Oldroyd A 1989 Seabird Islands No. 191: Wallace Island Great Barrier Reef, Queensland. *Corella* 13, 43–42.

Loop KA, Miller JD and Limpus CJ 1995, Nesting by the Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) on Milman Island, Great Barrier Reef, *Australia Wildlife Research* 22, 241–252.

Walker, T.A (1991) Pisonia islands of the Great Barrier Reef Part 1. The distribution, abundance and dispersal by seabirds of *Pisonia grandis*. *Atoll Research Bulletin* No. 350, 1–23.

## 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. Manage environmental values for migratory species and species of conservation significance using tools such as education and restricted access areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all year for Aplin Islet and Milman Islet (already implemented)</li> <li>• each year on a seasonal basis between 1 September and 31 March for Boydong Island, Cholmondeley Islet and Sinclair Islet (recommended).</li> </ul> <p>A2. Review monitoring objectives for species of conservation significance and of concern regional ecosystems in the park and support monitoring programs that achieve these objectives. Particular focus will be on monitoring objectives for species of conservation significance and of concern regional ecosystems, for example the endangered <i>Pisonia grandis</i> Forest.</p>
<p><b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b></p> <p>A low-key self-reliant visitor experience is provided without damaging natural and cultural values.</p> <p>Tourism activities occur sustainably.</p>	<p>A3. Maintain commercial access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Cairncross Islets all year</li> <li>• Boydong Island and Sinclair Islet with a maximum group size of 10 persons at any one time outside of the seasonal closure.</li> </ul> <p>A4. Tourism and visitor opportunities are informed, where practicable, by culturally appropriate cross-cultural information from the Traditional Owners.</p>
<p><b>Pest and fire management</b></p> <p>Natural and cultural values are maintained through strategic cross-cultural fire and pest management regimes.</p>	<p>A5. Utilise QPWS Pest and Fire Management System for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring and control (containment / eradication) of pests</li> <li>• fire management for protection of natural and cultural values.</li> </ul> <p>A6. Manage fire on the park with the goal of exclusion or prevention, except for authorised management and/or where practicable Traditional Owner purposes.</p>
<p><b>Joint management</b></p> <p>Denham Group National Park is jointly managed between the Traditional Owners and QPWS by building strong collaborative working relationships and agreements.</p> <p>The importance of the park to Traditional Owners will be recognised.</p>	<p>A7. Work closely with Traditional Owners and consult regularly over management direction and issues.</p> <p>A8. Use best endeavours to facilitate joint site visits to discuss management of islands</p> <p>A9. 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
3.2.29	<i>Pisonia grandis</i> low closed forest. Restricted to a few scattered sand cays.	Endangered
3.2.28	Evergreen notophyll vine forest restricted to beach ridges on coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays.	Of concern
3.2.30	<i>Pemphis acidula</i> +/- low closed forest. Restricted to coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays.	Of concern
3.2.31	<i>Premna serratifolia</i> closed scrub. Restricted to coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays.	Of concern
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>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	High

**Table 3: Bird species listed in international agreements**

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	common noddy	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	ruddy turnstone	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris alba</i>	sanderling	✓	✓	✓	✓

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Calidris canutus</i>	red knot	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	great knot	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	greater sand plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	eastern reef egret	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	lesser frigate bird	✓	-	✓	✓
<i>Fregata minor</i>	great frigatebird	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	bar-tailed godwit	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	whimbrel	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	bridled tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Pacific golden plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	roseate tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	black-naped tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sula leuogaster</i>	brown booby	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>	lesser crested tern	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	crested tern	✓		✓	-
<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	grey-tailed tattler	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Tringa incana</i>	wandering tattler	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	greenshank	✓	✓	✓	✓

Bonn: Bonn Convention

CAMBA: China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA: Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA: Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement