

Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)

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.

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The Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2024 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made, including acknowledgement that the estate is now named Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) (gazetted December 2016). There has been no change to the plan's original management intent and direction.

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Park size:	131.63 ha
Bioregion:	East Cape York Marine
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Marine
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook

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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Throughout the Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) Management Statement 2013 (this document) the term ‘Wuthathi National Park’ is used to refer to the protected area estate (gazetted 16 December 2016 under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*).

Vision

Wuthathi National Park consists of two continental islands and one pinnacle rock that rise out of the waters of the Great Barrier Reef east of Cape York Peninsula’s Cape Grenville. They are part of Wuthathi Country.

Wuthathi 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.

Wuthathi National Park is a natural and cultural landscape with a strong sense of remoteness and wilderness. Exposed stony slopes stained red with lichen, pockets of green vegetation, sheltered bays and sandy beaches gives scenic appeal to the Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) Islands. Visitors will fully enjoy environmental and cultural values of the park.

Conservation purpose

Wuthathi 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. It is a biologically diverse group of islands featuring three regional ecosystems of biodiversity concern. The islands are important for a large variety of mainland and marine wildlife, including the hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata* and at least 19 species of migratory sea birds.

Protecting and presenting the area’s values

Landscape

Wuthathi National Park is 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.

- The Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) are located 25km east of Cape Grenville/Shelburne Bay. The group consists of three continental islands without individual gazetted names—all make up Wuthathi National Park. A 300ha reef surrounds the three islands which are referred to as: Northern Island, which is 1,020m long and 690m wide with a wind-swept summit, large areas of exposed rock, shallow soils and wetlands of pandanus and mangrove.
- Middle Island, which is 1,120m long and 1,010m wide with steep rolling hills and a freshwater soak which forms an ephemeral creek.
- Little (or South) Island, which is an exposed stone pinnacle 200m long and 80m wide.

Regional ecosystems

The park has four regional ecosystems:

- Northern and Middle islands have of concern giant speargrass *Heteropogon triticeus* and lemon-scented grass *Sarga plumosum* closed tussock grassland on granite slopes regional ecosystem.
- Northern Island also has of concern *Pemphis acidula* low closed mangrove forest.
- Middle Island has of concern sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* closed hermland.
- Little Island is bare ocean rock with closed hermland and grassland.

Regional ecosystems of biodiversity concern are outlined in Table 1.

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 52 species of animals have been identified, of which five are listed as being of conservation significance under the *Nature Conservation Act* (Table 2). Nineteen bird and two reptile species are listed in international conventions (Table 3). However, the islands are not listed as a key site 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 pearlting. No places or items are registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* on the Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) Islands, however:

- The islands were historically visited by Eastern Torres Strait Islanders for a number of reasons including stone for weapons.
- the freshwater soak on the middle island demonstrates some historical stone work used to pool the water for collection. Water from this source was used when building the Raine Island tower in 1844 and by pearlting luggers.
- the islands were known to have been used by stranded passengers from numerous shipwrecks in the area. The Northern Island has what are thought to be names of stranded survivors carved into rock.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) Islands have scenic appeal, a sense of remoteness and provides a totally natural, self-reliant visitor experience. While camping is permitted there are no formal visitor sites or access tracks.

Commercial activities are permitted year round with maximum group sizes determined for each island to retain the island experience for all visitors. The steep edges of Little Island make access difficult.

No visitor information has been produced for the islands. Public information about the islands is being developed. The Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) Islands lie east of the designated shipping channel. The height of these islands and their distinctly red appearance makes them easily visible from a long distance at sea. There are no designated anchorages or public moorings in waters surrounding the Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) Islands.

Partnerships

The Wuthathi Land Transfer Indigenous Land Use Agreement was registered in 2018 and covers Wuthathi National Park.

Wuthathi 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. The Wuthathi (Sir Charles Hardy Group) island's ecosystem of humus and grassland on expansive rocky areas is highly susceptible to fire damage. Growth of wooded timber is naturally limited here and fire would burn the humus layer leaving only exposed rock. Seabird nesting would also be adversely impacted by inappropriate fire management.

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

Wuthathi Land Trust, Nursey-Bray M and Australian Conservation Foundation 2004 *Wuthathi Land and Sea Management Framework Integrating Culture and Country*.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Natural values 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>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"> • little tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i> • sooty oyster catcher <i>Haematopidae</i> • beach stone-curlew <i>Esacus magnirostris</i> • hawksbill turtle <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i> • vegetation monitoring plots.
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities A low-key self-reliant and sustainable visitor experience is provided. Tourism activities enhance visitor opportunities.</p>	<p>Maintain commercial access to the islands of the Charles Hardy Group with group sizes managed to maintain the remote island experience for the users of each island.</p> <p>Tourism and visitor opportunities are informed, where practicable, by culturally appropriate cross-cultural information from the Traditional Owners.</p>
<p>Pest and fire management Natural and cultural values are maintained through strategic cross-cultural fire and pest management regimes.</p>	<p>Utilise QPWS pest and fire management system for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring and control (containment/eradication) of pests • fire management, including prevention, where no fire required. <p>Manage fire on park with a goal of prevention and exclusion, except for authorised management and/or where practicable Traditional Owner purposes.</p>
<p>Partnerships Wuthathi National Park is jointly managed between the Traditional Owners and QPWS by building strong collaborative working relationships. The importance of the park to Traditional Owners will be recognised.</p>	<p>Work closely with Traditional Owners and consult regularly over management direction and issues.</p> <p>Use best endeavours to facilitate site visits to discuss management of islands.</p> <p>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
3.2.30	<i>Pemphis acidula</i> +/- low closed forest. Restricted to coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays	Of concern
3.2.32	<i>Lepturus repens</i> closed hermland. Restricted to sand cays.	Of concern
3.12.29	<i>Heteropogon triticeus</i> and <i>Sarga plumosum</i> closed tussock grassland on continental islands.	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
Plants – none classified as being of conservation significance				
Animals				
<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>Anous stolidus</i>	common noddy	-	✓	-	-
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	ruddy turnstone	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	curlew sandpiper	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	Mongolian plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	estuarine crocodile	✓	-	-	-
<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 phaeopus</i>	whimbrel	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	bridled tern	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	common 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 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