



With permission: Conway Burns

K'gari (Fraser Island)

World Heritage Advisory Committee – Communiqué

23-25 February 2022

The inaugural meeting of the K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee (KWHAC) was held 23-25 February on K'gari (Fraser Island) on the country of the island's Traditional Owners and Native Titleholders, the Butchulla people.

KWHAC comprises an independent chair and fifteen members and provides advice to the State and Federal Government on matters relating to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage of the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage area from a First Nations, Scientific and community perspective.

The meeting was the first for over two years while a new governance structure for the Committee was finalised and the implementation of a single Advisory Committee for the island with equal representation from the Butchulla community, community and scientific/technical advisors.

The lapse of the Committee came at a particularly challenging time for the island, which has suffered two major bushfires and was subject to both the Periodic (IUCN) and Outlook (UNESCO) monitoring and reporting cycles during the interim. Unfortunately, there was no collective and independent advice for the State and Federal Government during this gap period, highlighting the importance of maintaining continuity.

The Committee appreciated the in-person attendance of Martin Dallen (in addition to Shane Dagwell, who attended online) as representatives of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE).

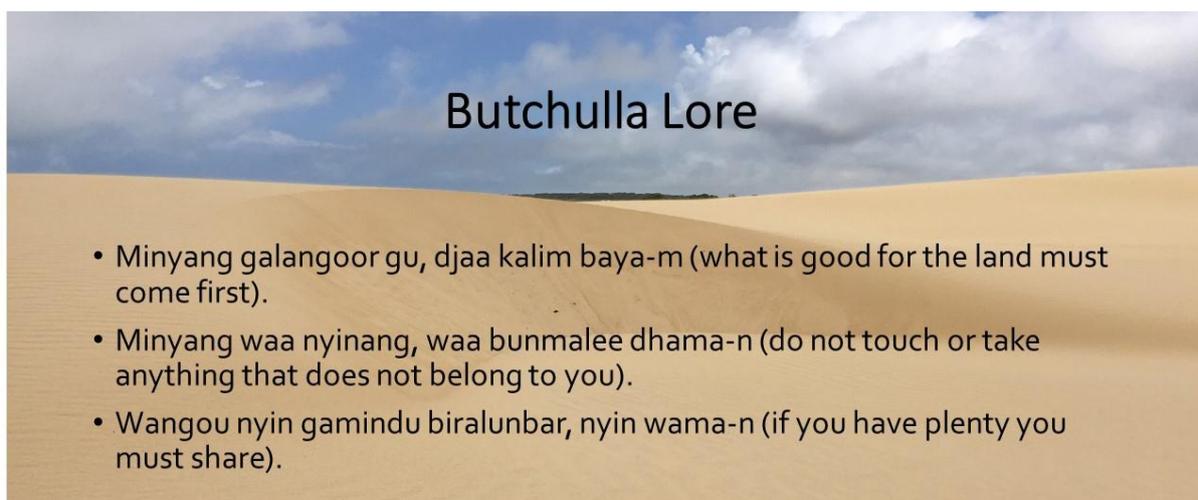
KWHAC welcomed Toni Thwaites as the property's new Executive Officer and congratulated the Queensland Government for their review of World Heritage Governance. Attendees supported the new committee structure as it creates greater efficiency and collaboration opportunities for the K'gari World Heritage property.

Cultural Protocol

A cultural protocol for the KWHAC is under development in conjunction with the Butchulla peoples. The protocol will guide culturally appropriate engagement with Butchulla people and country.



Based on the three Butchulla lores, the protocol will acknowledge the Butchulla people as critical to the effective stewardship of K'gari and maintenance of the island's Outstanding Universal Value.



Cooloola-Great Sandy Region National Heritage List Nomination

The Committee was excited to learn that the Cooloola-Great Sandy Region had met the National Heritage threshold of outstanding heritage value to the nation under four of the nine National Heritage criteria for natural heritage values. But sadly, the nomination could not progress without free, prior and informed consent from both the Butchulla and Kabi Kabi peoples. The nomination of the 'Cooloola extension' to the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage property has been a longstanding focus of previous Advisory Committees.

Members noted an **urgent need** for an Indigenous cultural heritage assessment for both K'gari and the Cooloola-Great Sandy Region and further consultation with the Butchulla and Kabi Kabi peoples once Native Title has been determined for the latter (scheduled for later this year). The Butchulla people indicated their support for a re-nomination for Butchulla country that includes cultural values.

Given the region's significance to the nation (and World), the Committee recommends that the Great Sandy World Heritage Area be retained on Australia's World Heritage tentative list until an Indigenous cultural heritage assessment and further consultation with the Butchulla and Kabi Kabi peoples can be undertaken (and urgently seeks funding for to this to occur).

Impacts of the 2019 and 2020 K'gari bushfires

During the 2019 and 2020 bushfires, over 88,000Ha of the island were burnt, impacting the island's vegetation, fauna and ecosystems. Bushfires have affected the north and central regions of K'gari and a smaller area (1350Ha) at the island's south.

The Inspector-General of Emergency Management (IGEM) K'gari (Fraser Island) bushfire review recommended: "The Queensland Government works with the Commonwealth Government to review the Project Agreement for World Heritage Management - to ensure Queensland and Australia continue to meet their obligations under the World Heritage Convention to protect, conserve and present our World Heritage properties". The Committee supports this recommendation.

The Committee congratulated the Queensland Government and the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) for their initial and ongoing assessments of the bushfires and implementing a \$390,000 *K'gari Ecological Action Plan* (from the Director-General's Reserve) to support recovery on the island.

Following excellent rainfall in 2021 and 2022, vegetation is recovering well except coastal *Casuarina equisetifolia* woodlands and *Banksia integrifolia* woodlands on the frontal beach ridges and high dunes. The lack of regeneration of the dominant tree species in these areas is a major concern and will require further monitoring and potential intervention.

The Committee congratulated the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation for reintroducing traditional cultural burns to the island and highlighted the need for all managers to focus on fire management for the island's remaining vegetation (to reduce impacts to refugia).

Resourcing

Resourcing for K'gari continues to be a major concern in all aspects of the World Heritage property's management, with more funding needed for rangers, compliance, engagement, research and implementation.

The Committee urges both Governments to increase resources available to the K'gari World Heritage property's managers to meet our obligations under the World Heritage Convention.

Previously, the Advisory Committee advised the introduction of a tourism levy for K'gari to increase revenue available to the Butchulla people to enable greater participation on the island (although the Queensland Government has not yet adopted this).

The Committee acknowledged the University of the Sunshine Coast and the BAC for the *K'gari Research Symposium – K'gari towards 2050* held in November 2021 and provided the outcomes report from this event. A Working Group was formed to progress a prioritised research prospectus for the World Heritage property.

During their term, KWHAC members will also support the development of a Climate Adaptation Plan and a K'gari World Heritage Strategic Plan to inform a review of the Great Sandy Management Plan (and Values-Based Management Framework).

The Committee continues to push for visitation numbers to K'gari to be monitored and published, to enhance risk management and appropriate resourcing for the island. The island's visitation was estimated to be 400,000 to 450,000 people a year but could be considerably higher.

The Committee reiterated that accurate visitation data for the World Heritage property is critical to future management and resourcing for K'gari and must be collected and published.

Threats to K'gari

Threats to the island include Climate Change and its associated risks of drought, bushfires, sea-level rise and flooding (causing erosion and lake infill), weeds, pests and diseases.

The Committee acknowledged the Australian Government for their support of the BAC's Matilda (Tilly) Davis through an Australian Heritage Grant, enabling her work monitoring myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) and identifying threats to cultural values on the island in conjunction with the Queensland Government's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. However, this work urgently needs to be continued to enable germplasm collection to take place – safeguarding K'gari's vegetation.

Other pests of concern include feral cats (*Felis catus*) and African big-headed ants (*Pheidole megacephala*) - both currently unmanaged on K'gari. Imminent threats include the soil-borne

Phytophthora (that could be introduced on footwear), yellow crazy ants *Anoplolepis gracilipes* (established nearby at Hervey Bay and Maryborough) and tea shot-hole borer *Euwallacea perbrevis* (established in South East Queensland) – all of which would have devastating impacts to K'gari.

Using K'gari as a case study, the Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis, the Australian Government's Environmental Biosecurity Office and FINIA (the natural integrity alliance for K'gari) recently developed a set of risk-based decision support tools for pre-border biosecurity planning.

The Committee supported the development of a K'gari Biosecurity Management Plan and the need for further funding for dedicated biosecurity officers to continue surveillance, monitoring and germplasm collection.

Updates

In addition to updates from both the Department of Environment and Science (DES) and DAWE, KHWAC members were briefed and invited to comment on the following activities currently underway for the World Heritage Property:

- Sustainable Visitor Management and Carrying Capacity Study (being undertaken by EarthCheck on behalf of the DES)
- K'gari Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy (led by Fraser Coast Regional Council and funded through an Australian Heritage Grant)
- QPWS Operational Update and the Orchid Beach Wongari (Dingo) Fence Project
- Mur'rindum (Black-breasted Button-quail) Conservation Project (led by the BAC's Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers and funded through a Queensland Government Community Sustainability Action Grant)
- Development of a Wetlands of Queensland Book (featuring K'gari) and K'gari Field Guidebook (under development by the Queensland Wetlands Program and Queensland Museum).

A tour of a myrtle rust site, a Mur'rindum future monitoring site and the Eurong waste transfer facilities was also undertaken on K'gari by committee members on the final day of the meeting.