

Howick Group National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	776ha
Bioregion:	East Cape York Marine
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Marine
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook



Howick Group National Park: Ingram Island.
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>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
✓	Level 2 Pest Management Strategy

Vision

Howick Group National Park is part of the Howick Group of islands, a collection of continental islands and cays that pepper the Great Barrier Reef off shore from Cape Melville National Park between the Jeannie River and Cape Melville.

Howick Group 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.

The Howick 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

Howick 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 Howick 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 25 species of migratory birds. Bewick, Ingram, Newton and Howick islands also have a strong place in regional shared-history.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

The Howick Group is a living cultural landscape rich in traditional and contemporary significance for the Traditional Owners¹. There is a strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates.

The Howick Group is located south-east of Cape Melville approximately 130km north-east of Cooktown. The Howick Group consists of 19 islands, 10 of which are not protected areas—Murdoch, Morris, Sinclair, Coquet, Houghton, Leggatt, Noble, Watson, North Barrow and Wilson Rock. Howick Group National Park islands are:

- Beanley Island located in the mid-east of the group. A 15.1ha elongated low wooded isle complex with adjoining narrow islets of mangroves, with a canopy height of 6m, sheltering behind shingle and rubble banks lying on the south-west side of the reef
- Bewick Island located in the mid-west of the group. A 148ha wooded island with tidal lagoons lying between shingle ridges
- Hampton Island, is the southern-most island in the group. An 18.2ha low wooded mangrove cay
- Ingram Island located in the mid-east of the group. An 11.1ha well-developed wooded sand cay nearly surrounded by beach rock
- Newton Island located in the centre of the group. A 28.7ha low wooded continental island with a smaller adjoining sand cay and internal lagoon
- Howick Island located in the south-east of the group. A high continental island 32.4ha in size, with three granite formations, the highest point on the island reaching 56m above sea level
- Combe Island located in the north-east of the group. A 3ha elongated, roughly triangular vegetated sand cay
- Stapleton Island, the northern-most island. A 5.1ha elongated narrow sand cay with a 5m high central ridge of sand and coral rubble and short sand spits at each end
- South Barrow Island is located in the north-east of the group on the same reef as North Barrow Island, adjacent to Barrow Point and Ninian Bay. A 3.4ha continental island reaching an elevation of 35m above sea level, this island is leased to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority for the purposes of operating a navigation light. A Cook Shire Council esplanade is located between the protected area boundary and the marine park.

Regional ecosystems

The park has nine regional ecosystems, five being of biodiversity concern. Queensland Parks and Wildlife and Service (QPWS) information identifies:

- Howick and South Barrow having of biodiversity concern *Themeda triandra* tussock grassland regional ecosystem. Howick Island also has of biodiversity concern ecosystem *Premna serratifolia* closed scrub, *Lepturus repens* closed herbland and notophyll vine forest on beach ridges
- Hampton, Newton, Beanley and Bewick as low wooded mangrove islands. Of biodiversity concern *Avicennia marina* +/- *Ceriops tagal* low open forest is located on Hampton Island. Bewick Island boasts a high diversity of vascular plants, a dense mangrove wetland with 10 species and canopy height of up to 12m and the of biodiversity concern *Lepturus repens* closed herbland ecosystem
- Ingram, Combe and Stapleton as small sand cays. Of biodiversity concern *Premna serratifolia* closed scrub and *Lepturus repens* closed herbland is located on Ingram Island and of biodiversity concern *Lepturus repens* closed herbland is located on Stapleton Island.

Regional ecosystems of biodiversity concern are outlined in Table 2.

¹ The specific clan or language group for Howick Group National Park is not clear as the Aboriginal Land Claims to Cape Melville National Park, Howick Group National Park, Clack Island National Park and Nearby Islands, Report of Land Tribunal 1994 at the time did not cover these islands which were later inclusions. Anthropological reporting for the entirety of the areas will help to clarify the situation.

Native plants and animals

The islands retain a high level of natural integrity. QPWS records indicate that 114 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 78 species of animals have been identified, of which eight are listed as being of conservation significance under the Nature Conservation Act (Table 2). There are 25 bird species and four reptiles listed under international conventions (Table 3). Stapleton Island is a significant breeding habitat and Ingram Island, listed as a key site in the Coastal Bird Monitoring and Information Strategy, is a breeding site for the endangered little tern *Sternula albifrons*.

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, including pearling, trochus and bêche-de-mer activities. No places or items are registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* on Howick Group National Park; however the area features significantly in archaeological references and shared maritime history including that:

- in 1819 Lieutenant Phillip Parker King onboard survey vessel HBM *Cutter Mermaid* assigned navigational numbers to the Howick Group
- several unmarked graves on Bewick, Ingram, Newton and Howick islands may be associated with early pearling and bêche-de-mer activities
- Watson Island is named after Mary Watson who, with her child and Chinese employee, perished there in 1881 after leaving Lizard Island in a cut down iron tank. A monument erected in 1886 still stands in Cooktown in memory of the event
- there are remnants of a gold mine located on Howick Island and remnants of the residence of Ian Idriess, the Australian bush adventure author who wrote *Madman's Island* in honour of the determined miners.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Howick Group has scenic appeal, a sense of remoteness and provides a totally natural, self-reliant visitor experience. There are no formal visitor sites or access tracks. 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 designated shipping channel runs between the islands of the Howick Group. A marine park designated 'cruise ship' anchorage is located in waters adjacent to Ingram Island. Commercial tours are permitted all year to Howick Island, with group size constraints, and are permitted to Ingram, Beanley, Bewick, Newton and Hampton islands all year.

All year restricted access areas are recommended by QPWS for Stapleton and Combe islands based on their significance for roosting and nesting seabirds and turtle nesting. Further information and consultation is required to include Ingram Island in this process.

Partnerships

Howick 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 (GBRMPA) 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 national park islands are undertaken. The islands retain a high level of natural integrity; however some pest animals and pest plants are present. While none of these are declared pests, they are of management concern and include the black rat *Rattus rattus* with potential to cause a decline in some native animals and pest plants such as leucaena *Leucaena leucophala* and snakeweed *Staphytarpheta jamaicensis*. These pests are also present on nearby islands, such as Coquet, and are being managed by QPWS in an effort to contain any further spread.

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 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 1985 Seabird Islands No. 157 Stapleton Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland *Corella* 9, 89–90.

King BR, Godwin M and Rees G 1985 Seabird Islands No. 158 Combe Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland *Corella* 9, 91–93.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Regional ecosystems</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 the declaration of restricted access areas for Stapleton, Coombe and Ingram islands in accordance with their habitat values for migratory species and species of conservation significance.</p> <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. Focus will be on monitoring objectives for species of conservation significance listed in Table 2 and of concern regional ecosystems listed in Table 1.</p>
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities</p> <p>A low-key self-reliant and sustainable visitor experience is provided.</p> <p>Tourism opportunities enhance visitor opportunities.</p>	<p>A3. Maintain year round commercial access to Howick Island with group size constraints and Beanley, Bewick, Newton and Hampton islands.</p> <p>A4. Tourism and visitor opportunities are informed, where practicable, by culturally appropriate cross-cultural information from the Traditional Owners.</p>
<p>Pest and fire management</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 systems. Fires are managed for authorised use and/or where, practicable, Traditional Owner purposes.</p>
<p>Joint management</p> <p>Howick 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>A6. Work closely with Traditional Owners and consult regularly over management direction and issues.</p> <p>A7. Use best endeavours to facilitate joint site visits to discuss management of islands</p> <p>A8. 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
3.1.2	<i>Avicennia marina</i> +/- <i>Ceriops tagal</i> low open forest , landward side of mangroves.	Of concern
3.2.28	Evergreen notophyll vine forest on beach ridges on 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
3.12.31	<i>Themeda triandra</i> tussock grassland on headlands and islands on acid volcanic rocks.	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>Caretta caretta</i>	loggerhead turtle	Endangered	Endangered	Critical
<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: 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	✓	✓	-	-

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris alba</i>	sanderling	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	curlew sandpiper	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	red-necked stint	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Caretta caretta</i>	loggerhead turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	greater sand plover	✓	-	-	✓
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	estuarine crocodile	✓	-	-	-
<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>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern	-	✓	-	-
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	bar-tailed godwit	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Numenius minutus</i>	little 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 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>Tringa incana</i>	wandering tattler	✓	✓	✓	-
<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