

Possession Island National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	508ha
Bioregion:	East Cape York Marine
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Marine
Local government estate/area:	Torres Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook



Possession Island, looking east. Photo: NPRSR.

Legislative framework

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Aboriginal Land Act 1991</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection 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
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Vision

Possession Island National Park rising from the blue waters on the west of the tip of Cape York Peninsula will protect the values of this continental island fringed by beaches, rocky headlands and mangroves. Open woodlands, grasslands and hummocky hills provide an extension of nearby mainland vegetation communities isolated by a narrow channel. Tiny Eborac Island, off the northern tip of Australia, will continue to protect sparse vegetation on a rocky continental island.

Possession Island National Park will be effectively managed to ensure the natural and cultural values and processes are protected and presented. The importance of the park to the Gudang and Kaurereg peoples will continue to be recognised. The national park will be jointly managed by building strong collaborative relationships with these Traditional Owners.

Possession Island National Park, although close to the tip of Cape York Peninsula, will retain a strong sense of remoteness and wilderness.

Conservation purpose

Possession Island National Park consists of two islands: Possession Island, (Bedanug or Tuidin) situated to the west of the tip of the Cape York Peninsula and Eborac Island to the north of the tip. Possession Island National Park and surrounding waters are not part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Natural and cultural values are collaboratively managed with Traditional Owners.

The park is also important for a diversity of wildlife including 64 species of birds (including 15 species of international significance), 42 species of plants, five species of mammals and 15 species of reptiles and amphibians.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

Possession Island and Eborac Island are living cultural landscapes rich in traditional and contemporary significance for Traditional Owners. There is strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates. They lie approximately 10km north north-east of the coastal Northern Peninsula Area communities of Seisia, Umagico and Injinoo. The close proximity to the mainland means both islands are essentially an extension of the continent with similar natural resources present. Possession Island lies on a connecting ridge with a water depth of only approximately five metres over it.

Possession Island is remarkable for the number of hummocks on it. It contains a mixture of eucalypt woodland on lower slopes, with a grassy understory, shrubs, open heath, with vine forest and tussock grasslands leading down to sandy beaches and also a small mangrove forest near a creek. The shores of the island are reef-fringed except near the northern extremity and the west side of the southern extremity where it is cliffy.

Eborac Island is small, basically rocky and steep, with pandanus communities, mangroves and dwarf shrubs present. A navigation aid (unmanned light) is on the 39m summit with associated helipad.

Regional ecosystems

The park has 18 regional ecosystems mapped, of these 10 have a biodiversity status that is of concern and one has a status of endangered. Ecosystems of biodiversity concern are outlined 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. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) records indicate that 42 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 84 species of animals have been identified of which three are listed as being of conservation significance under the *Nature Conservation Act* (Table 2).

One species each for birds listed as endangered little tern *Sterna albifrons*, vulnerable beach stone-curlew *Esacus magnirostris* and near threatened black-necked stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* and 15 bird species are listed under international conventions, as summarised in Table 3.

Aboriginal culture

The *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* provide 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 and consultation with Traditional Owners is required to determine what information can be shared and documented.

Shared-history culture

European contact was initiated on 22 August 1770 by Lieutenant James Cook, onboard HM Bark *Endeavour*, when he landed. He had already noted natives ashore—one of which had “a bow and a bundle of arrows, the first we had seen on this coast”—all of whom dispersed before he landed. He hoisted the English Coulers (sic) claiming the

land “in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third and took possession of the whole eastern coast from the above latitude down to this place by the name of New South Wales, together with all the bays, harbours, rivers and islands situate upon the said coast”.

A monument to commemorate Cook’s landing, on a cliff on the north-western side, was unveiled by Premier J. Bjelke-Peterson in 1970 but by 1976 vandals had stolen the bronze plaque. In 1988 the Torres Strait Historical Society planned to reconstruct the plaque as a bicentennial project, with the assistance of the Royal Australian Navy and Commonwealth Department of Supply and Transport supplying the lighthouse maintenance vessel, M.V. *Cape Moreton*. A new plaque was installed on 29 May 1988 and dedicated by a Naval Guard of Honour and Archbishop on 21 August 1988.

In 1846 John Sweatman, Petty Officer on board the *Castlereagh*, noted the small schooner *Ariel* of Chusan anchored and engaged in collecting trepang and tortise shell among the islands which was one of two or three vessels employed in the trade. In the 1880s four vessels were engaged in pearling within the area. A grave with headstone on Possession Island on the mainland southern side, records “Jione Taukave E Rotuma Ia Ala Oktop 25 1881 Ono Mafua 21 on Fau” which may be related to a fatality associated with those activities. Gold mining was initiated in the 1890s on Possession Island, in the north-western quadrat near the present Cook Monument with an adit constructed, horse-drawn hopper/rail transport system, small ore-crushing stamping mill and associated domestic dwellings. The remains of most of these items remain visible today. By 1921 John Thomas Embley, working many small rich reefs, had mined gold to the value of £15,000.

In 1921, a 6m² concrete tower navigation aid (at 39m) was constructed with a range W20nm/R15nm/G15nm.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

There are few visitors to this remote island. There are no formal visitor sites or access tracks on the islands.

There are no designated anchorages or public moorings in waters surrounding Possession or Eborac islands. Both islands lie outside of the usual shipping channels.

Partnerships

Possession Island National Park is managed by QPWS to protect cultural values, species of conservation significance and regional ecosystems. A joint management framework is provided by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

The islands are thought to retain a high level of natural integrity, with minimal pest animals or pest plants issues. Cane toads *Rhinella marina* have been observed in the old mine adit on the north-western side of Possession Island but have not been recorded elsewhere on the island. Cane toads are a concern as they are not recorded and known to occur on Torres Strait islands. Regular assessments and inspections of national park islands are undertaken.

Fire management

QPWS fire management regimes detail a mosaic of fire frequency, intensity and season consistent with the desired ecological guidelines of the vegetation communities involved and protection of cultural values at Possession Island. Although planned burn proposals for Possession Island have been prepared by QPWS, they have never been implemented as the island is burnt approximately every two to three years, by other sources. Setting up vegetation monitoring plots on Possession Island would provide good baseline data, information on effectiveness of existing fire management and guide any possible future actions if required.

There has been no recorded fire history on Eborac Island and QPWS does not implement any planned burn program as it is a rocky continental island with sparse vegetation.

The long term history of fire management is not fully documented although recent history is recorded in QPWS systems.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities</p> <p>Provide a low-key self-reliant and sustainable visitor experience.</p> <p>Tourism activities enhance visitor opportunities.</p>	<p>A1. Bush camping will be permitted upon application.</p> <p>A2. Monitor visitor use and identify an area or areas where camping activities can be contained to minimise impacts over whole of island and surrounding reef.</p>
<p>Regional ecosystems</p> <p>Conserve the diversity and distribution of natural plant and animal communities (particularly significant species) representative of the East Cape York Marine bioregion.</p>	<p>A3. 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"> • the of concern regional ecosystems • the beach stone-curlew • vulnerable green turtle and hawksbill turtle • vulnerable coastal sheathtail bat.
<p>Pest and fire management</p> <p>Natural and cultural values are maintained through strategic cross-cultural fire and pest management regimes.</p>	<p>A4. 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 planned burns and prevention where fire is not required. <p>A5. Install vegetation monitoring plots in representative areas of Possession Island to better record and document effectiveness of fire management and guide future actions.</p> <p>A6. Undertake management steps with a goal of no fires in the park, except for authorised management and/or where practicable, Traditional Owner purposes.</p> <p>A7. Determine the presence/distribution of cane toads on Possession Island and investigate/implement control actions if feasible.</p>
<p>Joint management</p> <p>Possession Island National Park is jointly managed between the Traditional Owners and QPWS by building strong collaborative working relationships.</p> <p>The importance of the park to Traditional Owners will be recognised.</p>	<p>A8. Work closely with Traditional Owners and consult regularly over management direction and issues.</p> <p>A9. Use best endeavours to facilitate site visits to discuss management of islands.</p> <p>A10. 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		Of concern
3.2.2	Semi-deciduous vine thicket on coastal dunes and beach ridges.	Of concern
3.2.3	<i>Melaleuca dealbata</i> +/- <i>Acacia crassicaarpa</i> open forest. Occurs in dune swales on the west coast.	Of concern
3.2.4	<i>Melaleuca leucodendrata</i> +/- <i>M.dealbata</i> open forest. In dune swales and swampy areas.	Of concern
3.2.6	<i>Casuarina equisetifolia</i> woodland. Occurs on foredunes.	Of concern
3.2.19	<i>Leucopogon yorkensis</i> +/- <i>Asteromyrtus brassii</i> open heath on old beach ridges.	Endangered
3.2.24	Closed herbland of mixed graminoids and forbs. Occurs on exposed foredunes.	Of concern
3.12.4	Notophyll vine forest of <i>Welchionendron longivalve</i> on Torres Strait Islands.	Of concern
3.12.20	Evergreen notophyll forest dominated by <i>Welchionendron longivalve</i> on headlands.	Of concern
3.12.29	<i>Heteropogon tritceus</i> +/- <i>Sarga plumosum</i> closed tussock grassland on continental islands.	Of concern
3.12.31	Themeda triandra 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>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	black-necked stork	Near Threatened	-	Low
<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>	beach stone-curlew	Vulnerable	-	Low
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	hawksbill turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	Critical
<i>Taphozous australis</i>	coastal sheath-tail bat	Vulnerable	Near Threatened	High

Table 3: Bird species listed in international agreements for Possession Island National Park

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Actis hypoleucos</i>	common sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	red-necked stint	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Charadrius leuschenaultii</i>	greater sand plover	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	eastern reef egret	✓	-	-	-
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	hawksbill turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	lesser frigatebird	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>	white-throated needletail	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian tern	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	bar-tailed godwit	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	whimbrel	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	bridled tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>	lesser crested tern	-	✓	-	-
<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	grey-tailed tattler	-	✓	✓	✓

Bonn – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement