

Frankland Group National Park

Management Plan

1998

Prepared by: **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment and Science**

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The Frankland Group National Park Management Plan 1998 has been extended in 2023, in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the plan's original management intent and direction.

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Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Frankland Group National Park will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that are proposed to form the basis on which day to-day management decisions are made.

This plan was prepared in May 1998, in accordance with s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Act). In 2023 the plan was extended, in keeping with s 120G of the Act. For further information on this plan or the planning process, please contact the Department of Environment and Science at ParkManagementPlans@des.qld.gov.au.

This management plan was prepared by Department of Environment and Science staff. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

1. Management directions and purpose

1.1 Management directions

Frankland Group National Park is one of 13 island national parks in the Cairns Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP), all of which will be managed in a co-ordinated, strategic manner to provide for a range of conservation and recreational settings.

The national park islands of the Frankland Group are dedicated under *the Nature Conservation Act 1992* and must be managed in accordance with s 17 of the Act:

- to provide for the permanent preservation of their natural condition to the greatest possible extent
- to protect and present their cultural and natural resource values; and
- to ensure that the only use of the islands is nature based and ecologically sustainable.

One of the prime purposes of management is to preserve the highly significant natural and cultural values of the islands whilst providing and managing a range of visitor settings.

The islands will generally be managed to maintain them in an undisturbed state with visitor numbers kept to levels which have a low impact on the islands and the experience of fellow users. No permanent facilities, other than management related infrastructure, will be permitted. Use will be closely monitored for adverse impacts on the islands' values.

Conflict between commercial operators and private recreational users will be minimised by separating these user groups where possible and by restricting the currently permitted large-scale operation to Normanby Island. No further permits will be issued for large-scale commercial operations (i.e., more than 15 persons). Small-scale commercial operations of a suitable nature may be considered. Efforts will be made to ensure that local recreational use is not displaced by commercial tourism.

The park has no permanent ranger presence but is visited regularly by marine park Rangers. No facilities are provided, other than the toilets on Russell Island. Visitors need to be self-reliant. The islands are suited to those who wish to birdwatch, snorkel on the adjacent reefs and generally engage in minimal-impact, nature-based recreational activities in a natural undeveloped setting.

The national park islands of the Frankland Group and the Commonwealth-owned Russell Island and their surrounds will be managed in a complementary manner. Continued close co-operation between Department of Environment and Science (DES) and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is essential if key natural values of the Frankland Group are to be protected.

In managing the Frankland Group National Park, opportunities will be provided to traditional owners, stakeholders and the general community to be involved in and consulted about planning and management. Involvement of traditional owners will be promoted. This plan is not intended to erode or extinguish any native title rights.



Map 1. Frankland Group National Park location map

1.2 Purpose

The major purposes of management will be to ensure that:

- island fauna, in particular breeding seabirds, and their habitats are conserved and protected
- the diversity of vegetation types is maintained
- rare and threatened species are identified and conserved through specific management strategies
- the natural setting is maintained to provide recreational opportunities consistent with a peaceful, low intensity, undeveloped, semi-wilderness experience
- the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with traditional affiliations to the islands are recognised; and
- feral animals and noxious plants are controlled and eradicated if possible.

2. Basis for management

2.1 Bioregional context

The Frankland Group comprises five continental islands surrounded by fringing reefs, located 10km offshore from the mouth of the Russell-Mulgrave Rivers and 45km south of Cairns. They are of significant conservation, recreational and educational value due to their diverse landforms; flora and fauna; cultural associations and sites; and undisturbed, remote setting.

The island Group is within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). Four of the islands, High, Normanby, Mabel and Round are national parks under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The intertidal area around these islands is part of the Cairns State Marine Park. Part of the fifth island, Russell Island, is a Commonwealth lighthouse reserve - the balance is a National Park Zone under the Cairns Section of the GBRMP, as are the fringing reefs of Norman by and Mabel Islands. The waters surrounding Russell and Round Island are zoned Conservation Park, while High Island reef and waters are a Habitat Protection Zone. The area is a No Structures Sub zone (i.e., pontoons or other structures are not allowed).

The Frankland Group is one of the few island groups in the Cairns Section of GBRMP easily accessible to small private vessels in most weather conditions and still relatively free from commercial tourism development. Because of these factors, and their outstanding natural beauty, the islands have very high social and recreational value for the Cairns and surrounding local communities.

2.2 Values

2.2.1 Geology and landform

The islands are outcrops of weathered metamorphic rock,

once part of the coastal mountain range, separated from the mainland by a rise in sea level. Mabel and Round Islands are smaller rocky outcrops, Normanby and Russell Islands are high islands with elevations up to 165m above sea level and attached sand spits with areas of 6ha and 20ha respectively. High Island, 10km to the north of the other islands, is a steep rainforest clad island and, at 69ha, is the largest of the group.

The island landforms are diverse and contrasting, including shallow rocky reefs, mangroves, sand spits, beaches, open woodland, exposed rock faces and dense rainforest.

Extensive fringing reefs encircle the islands.

2.2.2 Plants and animals

The flora of the islands has not been extensively studied but may contain species of conservation significance.

The islands have a high diversity of vegetation communities including lush tropical rainforest on the rugged high rocky areas, low woodlands on sand spits supporting beach she oak *Casuarina equisetifolia*, beach almond *Terminalia arenicola*, Cardwell cabbage *Scaevola sericea* and octopus bush *Argusia argentea*. Beach dunal vegetation is dominated by goatsfoot *Ipomoea pescaprae*, sea bean *Canavalia rosea* and mangrove communities, predominantly *Avicennia marina*.

Eleven species of birds have been recorded including the little tern and the beach stone-curlew (vulnerable), black naped tern, osprey, white-breasted woodswallow, pied imperial-pigeon and a variety of honeyeaters and large raptors.

Russell Island supports a colony of black flying fox which roost in the rainforest canopy near the lighthouse. A small insectivorous bat is found in the caves on the rocky island adjacent to the sand spit.

2.2.3 Cultural heritage

The islands are part of 'sea country' of the Yidinji and Gungandji peoples. The waters and fringing reefs around the islands are still the focus for traditional use of natural resources. A fish trap has been reported at High Island, but a cultural heritage survey has not yet been undertaken.

Captain Cook named the islands in 1770 after two 18th century sailors - the Lord of the Admiralty and his nephew both named Sir Thomas Frankland. A short-lived beche-de-mer station was established in 1866.

The islands were used as a base during exploration expeditions in 1848 and 1873.

The lighthouse on Russell Island, built in 1929 and converted to solar power in 1989, is an important link in the chain of navigation aids along the coast. The wreck of a steel boat lies off Normanby Island, and a wreck has been recorded off High Island. No formal assessment of these wrecks has been undertaken.

2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic

The islands have a high scenic value due to their relatively natural state. The slopes, covered in dense green vegetation, rise in strong contrast against the backdrop of clear blue open waters, varying shades of blue-green reef flat shallows and coral sand beaches. There is no evidence of human activity or disturbance on the islands when viewed from the water.

2.2.5 Scientific and educational

The geological, biological and historical characteristics of the Group provide excellent material and opportunities for educational and research programs.

2.2.6 Recreation and tourism

The major recreational value of the Group lies in its natural condition and its easy accessibility to mainland population centres.

High Island is a popular site for recreational fishing and a well-used anchorage for trawlers during the day. It is also highly favoured by the local community for camping although, this is limited by the small area which can accommodate only a small number of campers.

Russell Island can accommodate a larger number of campers and is the most popular island destination for recreational camping in the Cairns Section of GBRMP. No commercial camping is allowed. Groups from local schools have camped on the island, although facilities are limited.

A single commercial tour operator, authorised for 100 persons, conducts a regular day trip to Normanby Island. This operation has a commercial activity permit which allows access to the national park component of the island (i.e., beyond the beach) and to the surrounding waters.

One other commercial activity permit has been issued. This allows access to High and Round Islands but is limited to twice weekly access for a total of ten persons. Records indicate present use levels are minimal.

The reefs around the islands are diverse and provide excellent snorkelling opportunities. Marine Park operators have access to waters adjacent to the islands on a limited basis but are excluded from accessing the intertidal area (i.e., beach).

Limited forms of fishing and collecting are allowed in the waters surrounding the islands.

3. Management strategies

3.1 Native plants

Current situation

Plant communities include rainforest, beach, open woodland and mangrove systems. Camping activities have damaged sand spit vegetation.

Desired outcomes

- Diversity of island vegetation communities is maintained.
- Visitor impact on vegetation is minimised.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- A plant survey of High, Russell and Normanby Islands will be undertaken.
- The condition of campsites and tracks will be surveyed, and a monitoring program implemented to assess their impact on vegetation.
- Degraded areas not revegetating naturally will be planted with endemic species.
- Use levels will be monitored and visitor numbers reduced if necessary.

3.2 Native animals

Current situation

Small populations of breeding seabirds are present from September to March including the little tern and the beach stone-curlew. Migratory waders use the islands and intertidal reefs. Substantial flying fox and insectivorous bat colonies exist. No systematic fauna surveys have been undertaken.

Desired outcomes

- Breeding seabirds remain undisturbed.
- Waders continue to use the area in transit.
- Visitor impact on vertebrate fauna is minimised

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- A fauna survey of High, Russell, Normanby Islands will be undertaken. Seabird counts will be undertaken during the breeding season.
- Access to the sand spit on Normanby Island will be restricted by fencing the area. This will be undertaken during summer, as required, to protect the breeding little tern colony when it is resident there.

3.3 Introduced plants and animals

Current situation

The black rat has been introduced to Russell and Normanby Islands. Exotic plants on Russell and Normanby Islands include corky passion vine, snakeweed, lantana and rattlepod.

Desired outcomes

- The islands are free from introduced plants and animals.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- A survey will be undertaken to locate and map weed infestations. Programs will be established to eradicate introduced species.

- Effectiveness of eradication measures will be monitored.
- Visitors will be advised to check their clothing and equipment for weeds and grass seeds before landing.

3.4 Fire management

Current situation

Island vegetation may be severely damaged by fire, especially during dry (winter) conditions.

Desired outcomes

- Risk of wildfire is minimised.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Wood burning fires are prohibited.
- Gas barbecues will be installed on Russell Island.
- Visitors to High Island will need to provide own fuel/gas stoves.

3.5 Landscape, soil and catchment protection

Current situation

The islands have high natural and scenic values and landscape diversity. Areas in the vicinity of the campground and some of walking tracks are degraded. Mooring/anchoring and diving may damage the fringing reefs

Desired outcomes

- The high scenic and natural values of the islands are maintained.
- Activities which degrade the landscape or physical integrity of the islands and reefs do not occur.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Walking tracks maintained and monitored for erosion from use, water channeling and wind.
- Tracks within vegetated areas are discouraged.
- Visitor numbers, camping and other activities maintained at low levels.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.

3.6 Cultural heritage

Current situation

The Frankland Group appears to have evidence of regular traditional use. No surveys have been undertaken. The Group and its fringing reefs are part of the traditional 'sea country' of the Yidinji and Gungandji peoples.

Desired outcomes

- The cultural and heritage values of the islands are recognised and presented where appropriate.
- Traditional use of the islands continues.
- Aboriginal people with traditional affiliations to the area are involved in park management.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Document the cultural and heritage values of the islands.
- Traditional custodians and community Rangers are involved in the management of the islands.

3.7 Recreational and tourism

Current situation

There are high levels of local recreational use. Russell Island is the most popular recreational camping island in the Cairns Section of the GBR. Fair weather anchorage is available.

Normanby Island is visited daily by a commercial operator. Another, smaller-scale, commercial operator has access to Round and High Islands.

Desired outcomes

- Access to the anchorage is maintained.
- Visitor impact on island biota is minimised.
- Impact of visitor levels on the experience of fellow users is minimised.
- Water-based recreation is non-intrusive, in line with desired visitor use settings.
- Local recreational use is not displaced by commercial tourism.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

Day use:

Normanby Island

- One commercial operator only will be permitted to operate at Normanby Island, with a maximum of 100 passengers per day. No increase on existing permitted numbers will be considered. No additional commercial activity permits will be issued.

Other islands

- Only small-scale commercial operations (15 or less persons) will be considered for future access on a limited basis, i.e., a maximum of 50 days per year per operator (weekends excepted).
- Only one operator to access any island at any one time.
- Commercial operators will not be permitted to access the islands on weekends, with the exception of the existing operation on Normanby Island. Operations will be of a nature compatible with desired low use setting and visitor experience.

Camping:

Russell Island

- 5-6 campsites will be provided. Maximum number of persons per campsite will be 4.
- Maximum group size will be 10 persons, except for school groups, where 20 students plus 4 supervisors will be the permitted.
- A maximum of 20 persons permitted at any one time.

High Island

- 3 campsites will be provided. Maximum group size will be 8 persons at the larger site, with 3 on each of the two smaller sites. Maximum length of stay at any campsite is 7 nights - reducing to 4 nights during peak periods.
- No commercial camping will be permitted.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported. Visitor experience and expectations will be monitored.
- Seaplane, helicopter or hovercraft access not permitted except in emergency situations and for AMSA (marine safety) maintenance.

3.8 Education and interpretation

Current situation

Island park guide is available. Marine Park Zone maps are available.

Desired outcomes

- Visitor information is readily available, both pre-visit and on-site signs.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Update the island park guide incorporating new information as required.
- Sign informing visitors of conditions which apply on Russell and High Islands will be erected at Deeral boat ramp.
- Copies of management plan to be provided to park users through fishing clubs, marine outlets, local service stations and at the Deeral boat ramp.

3.9 Complementary management of adjoining areas

Current situation

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park - the adjacent marine park is managed under provisions of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.

Franklands Island sector is a sensitive location, designated for low use, i.e.

- maximum of 15 visitors per vessel (including crew)
- one vessel per day permitted to Frankland Group location
- access by booking only (unless exempt)

Desired outcomes

- The national park and adjacent marine park are managed under their respective legislation in a coordinated and complementary manner.
- The national park island will be managed to low water in a manner consistent with the management of the national park.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Encourage ongoing liaison within DoE, and between DoE and other agencies, to promote coordinated and complementary management, particularly with regard to:
 - development and revision of policies and zoning and management plans
 - visitor management and permit issue arrangements; and
 - public contact and information.
- Baseline surveys of the fringing reef will be undertaken. Re-survey every 2-3 years will assess impacts

3.10 Plan implementation and monitoring

Desired outcomes

- Management plan is successfully implemented and desired outcomes achieved.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Performance indicators established to allow monitoring of plan implementation and effectiveness of management strategies.
- Visitor impacts to the day use area on Normanby Island will be specifically monitored.