

# Flinders Group National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	3,180ha
Bioregion:	East Cape York Marine
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Marine
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook



Flinders Group National Park: Stanley 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>Historic Shipwreck Act 1976</i>
✓	<i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>
✓	<i>Queensland Heritage Act 1992</i>

## Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
✓	China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Recovery plan for marine turtles in Australia
✓	Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

## Thematic strategies

✓	Level 2 Fire Management Strategy
✓	Level 2 Pest Management Strategy

## Vision

Flinders Group National Park is a collection of continental islands and mangrove cays that rise out of Great Barrier Reef waters, situated off-shore from Bathurst Heads between Cape York Peninsula's Princess Charlotte Bay and Bathurst Bay. Flinders Group National Park is part of Yithuwarra country and is widely known for its iconic Aboriginal rock art galleries and shared cultural history.

Flinders Group National Park will be effectively managed to ensure the natural and cultural values and processes are protected and presented and the importance of the park to Traditional Owners recognised. The national park will be jointly managed by building strong collaborative relationships with Traditional Owners.

The Flinders Group's rugged island coastline is marked by distinctive sandstone cliffs, terrace formations and remote beaches. The Flinders Islands teem 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

Flinders 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 Flinders Group is the most biologically diverse group of islands off Cape York Peninsula. Its 12 regional ecosystem types provide a sample of Cape York Peninsula's sandstone vegetation communities including pandanus and palm woodlands, mixed eucalyptus and melaleuca woodland, grassy and shrubby understoreys, wind sheared heath, ephemeral herbs on rock, vine thickets, grasslands and mangroves.

The Flinders Group is important for a large variety of mainland and marine wildlife, including species of conservation concern and 16 species of migratory sea birds. The islands also have a strong place in regional shared-history.

## Protecting and presenting the park's values

### Landscape

The Flinders Group is a living cultural landscape rich in traditional and contemporary significance for Yithuwarra<sup>1</sup> Traditional Owners, particularly the Aba Yalgayi, Aba Warrka Wurriya and Aba Thalpirriya clans. There is strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates.

The Flinders Group is located 3–25 km off-shore from Bathurst Heads. The islands are an extension of the mainland Bathurst Range, a ferricrete cap of Battlecamp Formation sandstone that was deposited about 120 million years ago when the region was submerged.

Eight islands make up the national park being:

- Flinders Island (Wurriima)<sup>2</sup> centred in the middle of the group is the largest island 1,460ha
- Stanley Island (Yindaying) located in the mid north of the group is a 810ha island with castle peaks to the north, a 123m high western table-topped summit and two rugged castellated summits 205m and 186m high that are connected to the western part of the island by a low narrow isthmus
- Blackwood Island (Wakayi) located in the south west of the group is a 228ha long, rocky island with terraces rising to a summit 178m above sea level on its eastern side and three prominent sandstone mounds up to 44m above sea level on its south western side
- Denham Island located in the south east of the group is a 485ha island rising to a summit of 201m above sea level with several other prominent peaks presenting a precipitous coastline
- Maclear Island located between Flinders, Blackwood and Denham islands is a 4.9ha continental island with a closely associated vegetated sand cay
- King Island (Murirma) located in the north east is a 130ha low irregularly shaped mangrove cay with well developed beach rock featuring an apex to the north east and open bushy vegetation covering a flat area behind the beach
- Clack Island, in the north west of the group, is a group of three islands on a common reef with an extensive drying reef flat:
  - Clack Island C, (Ngurromo) 11ha in size, is the main island of the three. The island has cliffs with bare sandstone layers seemingly stacked atop one another and is surrounded by bush fringes and mangroves
  - Clack Island B is a 3.7ha low mangrove island without a gazetted name close to Clack Island C
  - Clack Island A is a 34ha low mangrove island which is currently gazetted as Lot 8 on USL8134 and is not national park.

The Owen Channel runs between Stanley and Flinders islands.

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<sup>1</sup> A variation to this spelling is Yithirwarra. Use of the spelling Yithuwarra is based on the Flinders Group National Park Interpretation Plan with Traditional Owners for the park.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional island names are based on those provided in the Aboriginal Land Claims to Cape Melville National Park, Flinders Group National Park, Clack Island National Park and Nearby Islands Report of Land Tribunal 1994.

## Regional ecosystems

The park has 13 regional ecosystems, four being of biodiversity concern. For example, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) information identifies that Blackwood, Denham and Maclear islands all have mixed vegetation communities including *Eucalyptus tetradonta* woodlands on sandstone plateaus and *Eucalyptus chlorophylla* +/- *Corymbia clarksoniana* on undulating plains. Denham Island also has extensive areas of *Melaleuca viridiflora* low woodlands and of biodiversity concern sub-dominant dwarf open heath and deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine thickets. Clack Island A and the near by Clack B island have red mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* and large-fruited orange mangrove *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* closed forest with grey mangrove *Avicennia marina* and yellow mangrove *Cerriops tagal*. Also occurring are *Premena serratifolia* closed and sparse herblands including the of biodiversity concern mixed herbaceous species on coastal foredunes and beach ridges. Stanley Island is predominantly *Eucalyptus tetradonta* woodlands on sandstone plateaus with areas of red mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* and large-fruited orange mangrove *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* closed forest. Three regional ecosystems of biodiversity concern also occur, rock pavements in Altanmoui Ranges, mixed herbaceous species on coastal foredunes and beach ridges and deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine thicket + *Gyrocarpus americanus* on sandstone hills. Fringing the sheltered bays are closed mangrove forest as found on Clack Island. Flinders Island has the same vegetation type as Stanley Island but without the dwarf open heathland, instead featuring sparse herbland associated with salt plains and saline flats.

Ecosystems of biodiversity concern are outlined in Table 1.

## Native plants and animals

The islands retain a high level of natural integrity and support many species in common with the mainland. They offer a secure island environment not subject to the same level of pest management issues as the mainland. QPWS records indicate that 271 species of plants have been identified two of which are listed as being of conservation significance under the Nature Conservation Act, the near threatened *Operculina brownii* vine and *Acmenosperma pringlei*, a tree from the satin ash family (Table 2).

QPWS records indicate that 111 species of animals have been identified of which ten are listed as being of conservation significance under the Nature Conservation Act (Table 2). Sixteen bird and three reptile species are listed in international conventions (Table 3). None of the islands in Flinders Group National Park are listed as key sites in the Coastal Bird Monitoring and Information Strategy.

## 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.

Flinders Group National Park is listed on the National Estate Register under the *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975* for its internationally renowned extensive Aboriginal rock art galleries, including the 'Ship Shelter' on Stanley Island which contains Aboriginal images of early contact with European settlers.

Traditional Owners have shared relevant information on places of cultural significance to inform interpretation and fire management activities on Flinders Group National Park. Clack Island is of utmost significance with strict access protocols.

Further research is required to determine what information can be shared.

## Shared-history culture

Early contact history dates back to the early 1802 and features significantly in archaeological references and shared maritime history which includes:

- in 1802 when Matthew Flinders, onboard the HMS *Investigator*, sheltered behind a large island he named after his brother Samuel Ward Flinders, the name later being applied to the island group
- Early European study and recording of Aboriginal culture including:
  - in 1821 when Allan Cunningham, botanist onboard RN survey brig *Bathurst*, landed at Clack Island and described the Aboriginal rock pigment painting—only the second such recorded description of Aboriginal art by Europeans in Australia. This was confirmed in 1822 by R.W. Copping, in the Alert, who also took painted turtle shell and skulls (now held in the British Museum). 'Scores and scores' of paintings were noted by Dr. W. Roth, in his capacity of Protector of Aboriginals, in visits during 1898, 1899 and 1902

- in 1927 anthropologists H. M. Hale and N.B. Tindale (South Australian Museum) conducted the first anthropological research at Flinders Island during a three week camp describing Aboriginal ceremonies and activity. This still remains a benchmark study.
- visiting research and survey vessels. Visible reminders include the 'BM datum mark' of the HMS *Dart* carved into a boulder on Flinders Island in 1899 and *The Frederick* wrecked in 1881 on Stanley Reef
- the infamous Mahina Cyclone which decimated the pearling fleet in 1899 and resulted in the loss of over 300 lives
- a World War II military camp, 'radio direction finding' (covert radar) station established in 1942 on Stanley Island and a Mitchell B25 plane wreck near Flinders Island, all registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*
- the Owen Channel which provides one of the only secure anchorages between Cooktown and the Torres Straits. It has been used as a transhipping station for Port Stewart. A commercial centre was located on Apia Spit to service pearling, trochus and beche-de-mer activities, as a sea base for the northern trawl fishery in the 1970s and more recently for the operation of a commercial pearl mariculture lease.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Flinders Group has scenic appeal, a sense of remoteness and provides a somewhat natural, self-reliant visitor experience. Web-based visitor information is available. The Stanley Island Aboriginal art site has been developed to provide visitor access including a walking track from Wongal Beach to the rock art site, viewing platforms and interpretive signs. A day use and camping area is provided on Flinders Island. Visitors are discouraged via interpretive information from going to certain areas including Clack Island for cultural reasons.

Marine park designated 'cruise ship' anchorages are located in waters adjacent to Stanley Island at Wongal Beach and Stokes Bay. The Owen Channel is also used by cruising vessels for a sheltered anchorage. Flinders Group lies next to the designated shipping channel.

Commercial activities are permitted all year to Stanley Island board walk and access track with a maximum group size constraints although not permitted to any other area of Flinders Group National Park.

## Partnerships

Flinders 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 interested parties such as tourism operators and researchers.

There is a cooperative focus between the State and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 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* which has potential to cause a decline in some native animals. Ten species of pest plants have been recorded such as corky passionflower *Passiflora suberosa* on Stanley and Flinders islands.

### Fire management

Fire management history since the 1990s is documented and no recent history of wildfire has been recorded on the national park. There is an overriding principle of protection of cultural values of rock art, burials, and a significant World War II site on Stanley Island. There are a number of vegetation monitoring plots on Flinders and Stanley islands which guide planned burn regimes for the different vegetation types. If QPWS or Traditional Owners feel there is a need to adjust planned burning a thorough assessment of the natural and cultural values and processes would be jointly undertaken to assist decision making.

## References

GBRMPA 2008 Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Townsville.

## Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p><b>Regional ecosystems</b></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. 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 and of concern regional ecosystems.</p>
<p><b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b></p> <p>A low-key self-reliant and sustainable visitor experience is provided.</p> <p>Tourism activities enhance visitor opportunities.</p>	<p>A2. Maintain commercial access to Stanley Island interpretative rock art walk.</p> <p>A3. Tourism and visitor opportunities are informed, where practicable, by culturally appropriate cross-cultural information from the Traditional Owners.</p>
<p><b>Pest and fire management</b></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"> <li>• monitoring and control (containment/eradication) of pests</li> <li>• fire management for protection of natural and cultural values.</li> </ul> <p>A5. Manage fire on park with a goal of prevention and exclusion, except for authorised management and/or where practicable Traditional Owner purposes.</p>
<p><b>Joint management</b></p> <p>Flinders 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> <p>A9. Investigate the declaration of a restricted access area for Clack Islands B and C for the protection of cultural values.</p>

## Tables – Conservation values management

**Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems**

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
3.2.25	Sparse herbland of mixed herbaceous species on coastal foredunes and beach ridges.	Of concern
3.2.31	<i>Premna serratifolia</i> closed scrub. Restricted to coral atolls, shingle cays and sand.	Of concern
3.10.5	Deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine thicket +/- <i>Gyrocarpus americanus</i> on sandstone hills.	Of concern
3.12.34	Rock Pavements associated with mountains and river beds in Iron and Altanmoui ranges.	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
<b>Plants</b>				
<i>Acmenosperma pringlei</i>	A tree from the satin ash family with no common name.	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Operculina brownii</i>	A vine with no common name.	Near threatened	-	Low
<b>Animals</b>				
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	estuarine crocodile	Vulnerable	-	Low
<i>Dugong dugon</i>	dugong	Vulnerable	-	Critical
<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>Kerivoula papuensis</i>	golden-tipped bat	Near threatened	-	Medium
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	High
<i>Taphozous australis</i>	coastal sheath-tail-bat	Vulnerable	-	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 ferruginea</i>	curlew sandpiper	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	green turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	estuarine crocodile	✓	-	-	-
<i>Eretmochelys imbricate</i>	hawksbill turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	lesser frigate bird	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	-	✓	-	-
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern	-	✓	-	-
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern 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	✓	✓	✓	✓

Bonn – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement