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Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Scientific Advisory Committee Communiqué July 2018



Critical - Myrtle Rust

The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) notes with extreme concern the likely implications of Myrtle Rust spreading across the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area. This fungal plant pathogen has the potential to severely impact both Melaleuca (paperbark) swamps, a key ecosystem on the island, and even more significantly on the sub-tropical rainforest. The island's rainforests that grow from sand dunes, are a key value and are internationally recognised as a major part of the property's inscribed Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). These impacts of Myrtle Rust could potentially include the highly significant deterioration of the island's existing ecosystems, or at least cause a major change of species composition. These ecosystem changes are a direct threat to the property's OUV and its integrity. The Committee recognises that the significant potential impact of Myrtle Rust extends far beyond K'gari. Thus the SAC strongly recommends that the draft National Myrtle Rust Action Plan, once finalised, be immediately adopted by both the Federal and State Governments.

The Committee further recommends that a monitoring and management strategy for Myrtle Rust be implemented on K'gari. Myrtle Rust is established on the property, but as yet major damage has not been observed. We consider K'gari an excellent pilot location to establish a long-term monitoring program to assess impacts of Myrtle Rust on native flora. The rapid establishment of monitoring plots in Melaleuca swamps, rainforests and in other Myrtaceous communities, including the iconic Satinay forests, is also strongly advised. Ongoing general monitoring of the spread and impact of Myrtle Rust is also necessary. Further, because K'gari appears less affected so far, it may be a strong candidate for the collection of germ plasm and seeds of susceptible species, before infection occurs. We suggest that the newly established Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers could play a lead role, noting that Myrtle Rust also threatens Butchulla cultural heritage which encompasses natural values. Additional funding would be required to enable this leading role to occur. As biosecurity is primarily a Federal matter, we request that the Federal government consider providing emergency funding to enable an effective response before it is too late.

Other matters

The SAC welcomes the inclusion of Butchulla observers on the committee. We are very grateful for the insightful and valuable contributions during the meeting and strongly encourage a permanent presence and input to the committee.

The SAC endorses the proposed new Field Guide book for the 25th Anniversary of the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area. The Field Guide is being produced by the Queensland Museum as part of the MOU between Queensland DES and the Queensland Museum. Committee members have been invited to be involved and look forward to contributing to the book.

The Committee welcomes the provision of data on visitor numbers. We encourage further refinements, notably the inclusion of passenger numbers on the ferries, as this will enable accurate total numbers to be determined. The Committee notes that the existing visitation strategy contains key information on the data requirements and encourages QPWS to refer to that document for direction in this area.

The Committee is enthusiastic to support Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area 25th Anniversary activities and was impressed by the proposed future activities. The Committee will work to support the Channel 10 documentary, photo competition and science night.

The Committee notes the presentation on the new Biodiversity and Ecosystem Climate Adaptation Plan. Because of the short lead time, it may not be possible to provide an official committee view but individual members are keen to participate in the feedback process.