

Thuwathu/Bujimulla Indigenous Protected Area

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Prepared by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation on behalf of the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands



LARDIL

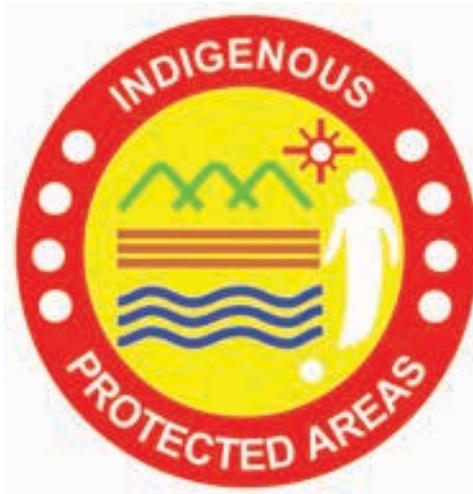


KAIADILT



GANGALIDDA

YANGKAAL



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The Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation would like to acknowledge and thank the following organisations for their ongoing support for our land and sea management activities in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria:

- Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Community (SEWPaC)
- Queensland Government Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP)
- Northern Gulf Resource Management Group (NGRMG)
- Southern Gulf Catchments (SGC)
- MMG Century Environment Committee"

Photo over page: Whitecliffs, Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of Kelly Gardner.

WARNING: This document may contain the names and photographs of deceased Indigenous People.

Acronyms:

AFMA	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
BSC	Burke Shire Council
CLCAC	Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
DAFF (Cth)	Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DAFF (Qld)	Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
EPBC Act	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act
FQ	Fisheries Queensland
GoCCFA	Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association
GRAC	Gulf Regional Aboriginal Corporation
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
NPF	Northern Prawn Fishery Industry Pty Limited
NPRSR	Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing
MSC	Mornington Shire Council
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate
QSIA	Queensland Seafood Industry Association
SEWPaC	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

Plan Structure:

The management plan consists of six parts and appendices:

- Part 1:** provides an overview of the development of this Plan, outlines other potential stakeholders, sets out our vision, and briefly describes specific legislation relevant to natural resource management in the Wellesley Islands region.
- Part 2:** describes the aspirations and management objectives of the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands area
- Part 3:** provides an overview of the cultural and environmental significance of our region, including the traditional laws and customs of the four Traditional Owner groups involved with the development of this Plan.
- Part 4:** sets out the management issues relating to the care of our cultural heritage sites and the natural environment and details how we intend to deal with these matters in an action plan.
- Part 5:** sets out our Action Plan.
- Part 6:** illustrates how we propose to implement monitoring and review the various aspects of this Plan.
- Appendix 1:** Environmental Features of the Wellesley Islands
- Appendix 2:** A Summary of the Major Environmental Threats to Species & Habitats of the Wellesley Islands Region
- Appendix 3:** Overview of Commercial Fishing in the Proposed IPA

Contents:

PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
PLAN PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW	1
THE IPA PROGRAM	1
WHY AN IPA FOR THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS?	2
THE PLAN AREA	2
IUCN PROTECTED AREA DEFINITION	5
Selected IUCN Category	5
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN	5
Building on Past Work	5
Consultation Process	6
PROPOSED IPA PARTNERS	6
Commonwealth Government Agencies	6
Queensland Government Agencies	8
Commercial stakeholders	9
PART 2: ASPIRATION STATEMENTS	13
OUR VISION	13
OBJECTIVES OF THE IPA	13
LEGISLATION AND REGULATION	14
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE	15
PART 3: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS REGION	19
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE	19
ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE	20

Contents:

PART 4: MANAGEMENT ISSUES	25
KNOWN ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS TO THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS.....	25
Depletion of dugong numbers in the region.....	25
Depletion of marine turtle numbers in the region.....	25
Commercial fishery operations.....	26
Increased pollution in Gulf waters, increased silt levels and dams.....	26
Pest animals and weeds.....	32
Lack of available baseline data on particular species.....	32
POTENTIAL THREATS TO CULTURE.....	32
Damage to cultural heritage sites across the region and uncontrolled access to country.....	32
Loss of cultural identity.....	33
Sustainable Cultural Harvesting Use of Resource.....	33
NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS IN THE AREA.....	34
Employment Opportunities in Resource Management.....	34
Sustainable Development Opportunities.....	34
Education and Awareness Opportunities.....	35
PART 5: OUR ACTION PLAN	39
SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT OF KNOWN THREATS TO THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS.....	39
Depletion of Dugong Numbers.....	39
Depletion of Marine Turtle Numbers.....	42
Increased Pollutants in Gulf Waters.....	43
Lack of available baseline data.....	47

Contents:

Commercial fishing operations.....	48
Tourism.....	49
Pest Animals and Weeds	50
Commercial Marine Harvesting.....	51
Damage to Cultural Heritage Sites.....	51
ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES	54
Maintaining Cultural Identity.....	54
Employment opportunities	55
Sustainable Cultural Harvesting and Use of Resource.....	58
Sustainable Development Opportunities.....	58
Service Delivery for resource management agencies.....	59
PART 6: IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & REVIEW	63
THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS RANGERS	63
IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT FROM STAKEHOLDERS	63
MONITORING, EVALUATION	66
PLAN REVIEW.....	67
REFERENCES	69
APPENDIX 1: ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES OF THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS	71
APPENDIX 2 A SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS TO SPECIES AND HABITATS OF THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS REGION.....	79
APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF COMMERCIAL FISHING IN THE PROPOSED IPA.....	85



*Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of
Scott Ling, Reef Life Survey.*

Part 1: Introduction and Background

PLAN PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

This plan represents the agreed position of the Traditional Owners, being the Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangalidda Peoples on the management of our sea country¹ within the proposed Thuwathu/Bujimulla Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). It is based on extensive discussion and agreement of Traditional Owners to identify key management problems and opportunities, visions for management of our sea country, management objectives and the actions needed to achieve these objectives.



Township of Gununa, Mornington Island and the Appel Channel - 1984.

This Plan sets out our rights and responsibilities in caring for our country. It does this by strengthening our existing resolve to care for our country using traditional laws and customs - rules for caring for country which have ensured our environment has remained truly pristine over millennia. At the same time, we intend through this Plan to recognise the advantages of supplementing this traditional body of knowledge with “western science” where appropriate, particularly to assist us to deal with present threats. This Plan outlines how we intend to manage country and how we intend to provide for the sustainable use of environmental resources.

While the plan represents our view, it is also based on extensive discussions with other people and organisations with an interest in the region, and identifies areas of cooperation and agreed action, as well as areas where further discussion and negotiation is needed to further the plan’s objectives .

The plan is intended as a living document to guide management actions and will be updated over time to suit changing circumstances and take advantage of new information and is supported through the Commonwealth Government’s IPA program and declaration of the area as an IPA. It is not a government plan however, rather it is designed to inform the reader of the need to approach natural resource management in our region in a culturally appropriate manner and in a way which ultimately benefits the environment and rich natural and cultural resources of the Wellesley Islands.

THE IPA PROGRAM

The Indigenous Protected Area program was first proposed by the Commonwealth Government in 1997 as a scheme to provide effective mechanisms for Indigenous landholders to manage country in a sustainable manner in accordance with the National Reserve System. Now forming part of the Commonwealth’s Caring for Our Country initiative, the three stated goals of the program are to:

1. Support Indigenous land owners to develop, declare and manage IPAs on their lands as part of Australia’s National Reserve System;
2. Support Indigenous interests to develop cooperative management arrangements with Government agencies managing protected areas; and
3. Support the integration of Indigenous ecological and cultural knowledge with contemporary protected area management practices.²

The IPA program has since grown into what has been described as “Australia’s most successful innovation in protected area management and in Indigenous engagement in environmental management.”³ An independent review of the IPA program found that:

- It contributes significantly to the National Reserve System and has been extremely cost effective in contributing to national conservation goals;
- Provides meaningful work opportunities for Indigenous Australians; and
- Operates robust monitoring and evaluation systems.⁴

¹ In the context of this Management Plan, the term “sea country” refers to the islands and marine areas located within the proposed Thuwathu/Bujimulla IPA. ² <http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa/goals.html>

³ Dr. Dermot Smyth pg 2 in Gilligan, B. (2006) “The National Reserve System Programme 2006 Evaluation” Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra. ⁴ The Indigenous Protected Areas Programme 2006 Evaluation by B Gilligan, available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/publications/ipa-evaluation.html>.

The program is recognised as being flexible to meet the needs of the Traditional Owners, while at the same time providing clear management strategies to ensure the sustainable use of the environment and its resources.

The process of declaring an IPA is completely voluntary and is not intended to impact on native title rights and interests in country. Rather, it provides the opportunity to articulate a commitment to care for our country in a manner that is consistent with the IPA program, IUCN protected area management categories and Australia's National Reserve System.

Our involvement in the IPA process and the development of this Plan began in 1996 with the lodgement of the Wellesley Islands Sea Claim (*Lardil Peoples v State of Queensland [2004] FCA 298*). After an 8 year long struggle, our native title to the seas surrounding the Wellesley Islands was recognised by the Federal Court of Australia on 23 March 2004. On 9 December 2008, our native title to the lands and waters in the Wellesley Islands group was also recognised in the consent determination known as *Lardil, Yangkaal, Gangalidda & Kaiadilt Peoples v State of Queensland [2008] FCA 1855*.

WHY AN IPA FOR THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS?

We have watched the IPA program grow since its inception in 1997 with the first declaration at Natawarrina in South Australia, allowing Traditional Owners to articulate their management needs and aspirations over country. Our sea claim was lodged only a year prior, with similar long term goals – to have native title recognised over our sea country with a view to be able to effectively manage our sea country in accordance with our traditional laws and customs to provide for cultural and environmental management.

Over time we have seen the IPA program deliver substantial benefits to Indigenous communities across Australia, offering training and funding required to manage country. We are hopeful that the IPA program will provide us with the opportunity to enhance the capacity of our Rangers, promote the invaluable work

that they do on country in the protection and conservation of biodiversity, and to acknowledge that our contribution as Traditional Owners in maintaining our environment for future generations.

We believe an IPA is an appropriate scheme under which to manage our country. We are proud of our unique cultural and environment aspects of our sea country and believe the flexibility of the IPA program will allow us to meet our cultural obligations in caring for country. Native title gave us legal recognition of our right to manage country and the IPA helps provide the financial assistance, as well as national and international recognition to develop and actively manage country.

An IPA declaration will open the door to other funding opportunities to manage country. With active management will also come an increase in employment (both directly and indirectly); economic growth in the community and an overall increase in the well-being of all in our communities.



Gununa today. Photo courtesy of Dermot Smyth.

THE PLAN AREA

The proposed area for inclusion in this IPA incorporates the area of the original Wellesley Islands Sea Claim⁵ boundary (which includes more sea country than the

determination area). This is the area that forms our traditional sea country and as such we have a duty to protect it.

The majority of the islands within the region are also included as IPA, being:

- Forsyth
- Sydney
- Wallaby
- The Bountiful group
- Fowler
- Pisonia
- Andrew
- Rocky
- Linge Leah
- Bessie
- Margaret
- Moondalbee
- Bayley
- Allen
- Horseshoe
- Francis
- Albinia
- Jirke
- Manowar
- Beahgoo
- Douglas
- Little Allen
- Locus Rock
- Tulburrerr

This area is recognised by adjoining Traditional Owner groups as the traditional country of the Lardil, Yangkaal, Kaiadilt and Gangalidda Peoples. The extent of this area has never been disputed with our neighbours, the Garawa People to the west and the Kukatj People to the east, all being represented by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The proposed management area provides a logical management boundary across a region facing similar threats and issues, eliminating the gaps provided for in the Sea Claim determination. This allows for the effective management of our country using a mix of “legal and other means” – as envisaged in the IUCN protected area guidelines

Please see Map 1.1. showing the proposed management boundary.

⁵ *Lardil Peoples v State of Queensland [2004] FCA298*. ⁶ The source document for the information contained within this section is: Dudley, Nigel (ed.) 2008 *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*. IUCN, Gland.



IUCN PROTECTED AREA DEFINITION

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as 'A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.'⁶ This definition recognises Indigenous resource use and customary land management can be in harmony with - and contribute to - biodiversity conservation objectives on protected areas.

Selected IUCN Category

There are six different categories of protected areas established by the IUCN system. After careful consideration we have determined that Category V best described our management regime. The definition of Category V is below:

“CATEGORY V: Protected Landscape/ Seascape: protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation”

Definition:

A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value; and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.

The primary objective of Category V protected areas is to protect and sustain important landscapes/seascapes and the associated nature conservation and other values created by interactions with humans through traditional management practices.

Other objectives of category V protected areas are:

- To maintain a balanced interaction of nature and culture through the protection of landscape and/or seascape and associated traditional management approaches, societies, cultures and spiritual values;
- To contribute to broad-scale conservation by maintaining species associated with cultural landscapes and/or by providing conservation opportunities in heavily used landscapes;
- To provide opportunities for enjoyment, well-being and socio-economic activity through recreation and tourism;
- To provide natural products and environmental services;
- To provide a framework to underpin active involvement by the community in the management of valued landscapes or seascapes and the natural and cultural heritage that they contain;
- To encourage the conservation of agrobiodiversity⁶ and aquatic biodiversity;
- To act as models of sustainability so that lessons can be learnt for wider application.”

We believe the description and objectives of category V protected areas is the best fit with the description of our country and how we intend to continue manage it. Our creation stories explain how our ancestors shaped the environment by their movements through our country and beyond. Our traditional laws and customs, which determine the way we interact with the environment, have continued to shape the natural values of the Wellesley Islands region over the past millennia. We manage the country in this manner, using the resources of the region as part of our traditional interaction with country. We conduct increase ceremonies to ensure appropriate levels of resources are available for consumption, and other types of ceremonies to ensure the appeasement of our ancestral beings.

The natural values of the region are testament to our sustainable management of country and we will continue to manage country in this way.

With the proclamation of the Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Reserve there exists some areas of overlap in the general use zone of the reserve where the Commonwealth Government has applied the IUCN Category VI (protected area with sustainable use of natural resources). This overlap will remain for the life of the management plan, though maybe reviewed by at the ten year review of the Commonwealth Marine Reserves management plan.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN

Building on Past Work

There has been a great deal work undertaken by Traditional Owners in developing this Management Plan, some of which includes work that is directly linked to this initiative, some of which formed part of other initiatives but which is in some way linked to the outcomes sought here. This work includes:

- **The Wellesley Islands Sea Claim:** A vast amount of information relating to the traditional laws and culture of the native title holders was documented and recorded during the preparation and trial of this claim. This includes the recording and documentation of traditional knowledge relating to environmental management of our country, the mapping of sacred sites and places of significance, and the documentation of our traditional fishing and hunting practices and of the regional systems of law relating to access to our country.
- **Involvement in GulfMAC:** A seat of the board of the Gulf Management Fisheries Advisory Committee to the Minister of Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries (GulfMAC), as well as two observer positions, were allocated to CLCAC. This Committee directly advised the Queensland Minister for Primary

⁶ The source document for the information contained within this section is: Dudley, Nigel (ed.) 2008 *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*. IUCN, Gland.

Industries & Fisheries and consisted of all stakeholders in the Gulf fisheries. This committee was disbanded towards the conclusion of the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Management Plan review in 2009. Traditional Owners were then offered a seat on the Technical Advisory Group committee for the review which concluded in 2011.

- **Envirofund project - Enhancing opportunities for Traditional Owners for participation in natural resource management in the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria:** This large workshop convened by the Carpentaria Land Council in 2004 involved all nine Traditional Owner groups from the southern Gulf region and included discussion of how best to involve Traditional Owners in natural resource management projects.
- **Northern Regional Marine Plan:** In 2004-05, traditional owners were involved with the development of *Living on Saltwater Country*, a literature review and consultation report summarising information on Aboriginal rights, use, management and interests in northern Australian marine environments.



Photo courtesy of Jack Juhel

- **Dugong & Marine Turtle Project Regional Activity Plan:** This Plan was developed in 2005 by the Carpentaria Land Council with funding from the North Australian Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) to determine particular management issues involving these two culturally and environmentally significant species.
- **The Thuwathu/Bujimulla Sea Country Plan:** Developed in 2006 by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, this Plan is the result of extensive consultation to determine and document Traditional Owner aspirations for the management of their traditional sea country and focussed on how other stakeholders could assist the Traditional Owners in meeting these management goals. One of the implementation strategies of the *Thuwathu/Bujimulla Sea Country Plan* was to consider the establishment of an IPA in the Wellesley Islands.

Consultation Process

We have developed this Plan through consultation, supported by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. These consultations took place as: one-on-one discussions with individuals with the right to speak for particular areas of country; in small-group sessions involving up to five or six individuals with particular knowledge about country; in large group sessions involving entire language groups; and during meetings involving all traditional owner groups in the region.

As a part of the consultation process we have identified other potential interested parties and commenced discussions with many of these groups. A large stakeholder consultation was hosted by Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation in June 2009 where representatives of these groups were invited to meet with Traditional Owners (a list of representatives that attended is included at Appendix 4).

Additional consultations will continue to take place throughout 2010 as one-one-one meetings between CLCAC, Traditional Owners and other interested parties to incorporate their views into this management plan.

We openly invite dialogue from the above identified stakeholders and others. We accept that everyone may not welcome the management regime we propose, but do not wish to see that as a reason to prevent negotiations taking place. This document is designed to foster engagement between parties

PROPOSED IPA PARTNERS

Through our presence in and our constant monitoring of the Wellesley Islands, we are aware of who visits our country and for what purpose. From this, we can readily identify those parties who may be considered stakeholders in the management of our country and whose collaboration we seek to achieve the goals and objectives of the IPA.

The following organisations have been identified as stakeholders and proposed IPA partners to collaborate in the implementation of this plan:

Commonwealth Government Agencies

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC)

SEWPaC has been a huge support throughout this planning process and continues to be instrumental in the delivery of services by the Wellesley Islands Rangers through the "Working on Country" and IPA initiatives. Through the continued delivery of ranger services the rangers will be in a position to deliver many of the environmental outcomes in line with the Commonwealths Business Plan.

Rangers across the southern Gulf of Carpentaria region continue to gather data concerning many endangered, threatened and vulnerable species listed in the EPBC Act with a view to providing government and non-government scientists with population trends and habitat health filling many of the current information gaps for this region.



Traditional Owners fishing. Photo courtesy of Dermot Smyth.



Old Fish Trap, Mornington Island Wharf.



Afternoon at Birri Lodge Beach.



Typical saltpan that covers Mornington, Denham and Bentinck Islands and the adjacent mainland.

Another important role that SEWPaC plays in our region is the accreditation of export fisheries under the EPBC Act. For example, the Management Plan of the Northern Prawn Trawl fishery has been accredited by SEWPaC under EPBC Act, acknowledging that the fishery's actions will not have unacceptable or unsustainable impacts on the environment.

Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)

AFMA is the agency responsible for management of the Northern Prawn Fishery across northern Australia, under an agreement between the Commonwealth, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australian Governments. In addition to being accredited under the EPBC Act (see above), the Northern Prawn Fishery has been accredited by the Marine Stewardship Council, an

independent international body that assesses the sustainability of fisheries around the world.

Further information on the Northern Prawn Fishery, including location of permanent closures, is provided in Appendix 3.

We would like to work more closely with AFMA to enhance their capacity for enforcement within the region and to ensure ongoing sustainability of the fishery consistent with the status of our region as an IPA. With training our rangers would be well placed to extend AFMA's enforcement capability in this very remote region in a far more cost effective manner than AFMA is able. We would also welcome any feedback that have on our proposed management strategies and appreciate if they could liaise between ourselves, NORMAC (Northern Prawn Trawl Fishery Ministerial Advisory Committee) and NPF Industry Pty Ltd (representative organisation for licenced prawn fishers) to ensure the continued sustainability of the prawn fishery, while also providing for a Traditional Owner harvest.

DAFF Biosecurity (formerly AQIS)

Our rangers are perfectly placed within the region to serve as a "frontline" in defending Australian shores from infectious diseases, weeds and other pests. Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) Biosecurity (formerly AQIS) has provided training to rangers in weed and pest identification and reporting skills and we hope to further develop this partnership over time for the mutual benefit of both parties, with the increased capacity of the rangers and the increased capabilities of DAFF Biosecurity to fulfil their objectives.

Queensland Government Agencies

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)

Fisheries Queensland within DAFF is the agency responsible for the management of all the commercial and recreational fisheries within the proposed IPA area, with the exception of the Northern Prawn Fishery (see above). These multi-species fisheries are



Clara Foster, Valerie Douglas, Velma Peter, Tommy Wilson and Junie Gilbert discussing the Sea Country Plan. Photo courtesy of Dermot Smyth.

managed according to the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Management Plan 1999 under the *Fisheries Act 1994* (Qld).

The *Gulf Management Plan* has the following objectives:

1. maintain inshore fin fish stocks at sustainable levels; and
2. protect spawning target species; and
3. minimise unintended adverse effects of fishing on protected wildlife; and
4. provide a viable commercial fin fish net fishery that gives economic and social benefits to the local, regional and State economies; and
5. provide a recreational fishery that gives economic and social benefits to the local and regional economies; and
6. satisfy the traditional or customary fishing needs of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

In 2004, the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria commercial line, net, trawl and crab pot fisheries were each approved as a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.⁷ The then Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (now DAFF) submitted ecological assessments on each fishery in order to demonstrate they were being managed in an ecologically sustainable manner. Continued export approval for species harvested in the fisheries was contingent upon each fishery meeting a range of recommendations made by the Australian Government's Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC). Further information on the Gulf Inshore Finfish Fishery is provided in Appendix 3.

Through collaboration in the management of the IPA we welcome the opportunity to develop a solid working relationship with Fisheries Queensland (FQ). With the establishment of the Wellesley Islands Rangers we are in an exclusive position in the lower Gulf to offer assistance to Fisheries Queensland (and Biosecurity Queensland) to

patrol the region with regular frequency and report any suspicious activity. (Such assistance is already provided to the Australian Government's DAFF Biosecurity involving the identification and reporting of weeds and other potential pests, illegal foreign fishing vessels and marine debris.)

Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (NPRSR)

As well as our recognition as the Traditional Owners of sea country across the Wellesley Islands region, exclusive Native Title was granted to us over many of the islands, including Rocky and Manowar and the Bountiful Islands. These islands are considered of high environmental value (in addition to their importance to our culture and traditions).

The environmental significance of Rocky and Manowar Islands is already recognised with their inclusion on the National Estate Register (please see Appendix 1). We are aware of NPRSR's interest in gazetting the Bountiful Islands as National Park and we would welcome the chance to discuss the establishment of a joint management arrangement to assist NPRSR in their endeavours to protect this pristine group of islands.

Local Government

All of the Wellesley Islands fall under the jurisdiction of the Mornington Shire Council. The Wellesley Islands Rangers are now in a position and indeed do assist Mornington Shire Council in meeting its obligations under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*. With the creation of the Gulf Regional Aboriginal Corporation⁸ we can further develop the efficiency of Council operations, in particular infrastructure development, as a single body to consult and provide guidance.

The Wellesley Islands Rangers can assist Council with its responsibility to manage visitors to the islands with the implementation of an education program and enforcement of Council's permit system.

COMMERCIAL STAKEHOLDERS

Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association (GoCCFA)

The Gulf of Carpentaria fishery is estimated to contribute approximately \$12 million to the Queensland economy on an annual basis⁹. We see the chance to add to the value of this fishery by creating a "Traditional Owner Friendly" endorsed fishery symbol for commercial products in an increasingly socially responsible marketplace. Part of this process would be for us to provide cultural heritage awareness training to those commercial fishers who are active in the Wellesley Islands region. The first of such training programs was held in August 2010. Together with the GoCCFA we are investigating ways of having such training recognised as a required accreditation on the Masters of Operation (requirement for all skippers of commercial fishing vessels).

NPF Industry Pty Ltd

NPF Industry¹⁰ is a not-for-profit company that represents the interests of almost all the licenced prawn trawl fishers operating across northern Australia. We are keen to improve our communication with prawn fishers to help them understand the cultural and traditional use values of our sea country and to work with them to ensure that the Northern Prawn Fishery continues to maintain its sustainability accreditation with the Marine Stewardship Council.

Other commercial stakeholders

Other commercial interests include the many tourism operators present in the region. There are two established fishing resorts, Birri Lodge (located on Mornington Island) and Sweers Island Fishing Lodge. As part of the IPA process we again see an opportunity to add value to the experiences offered by these enterprises by incorporating local Indigenous tours, sale of paintings and other artefacts organised by appointment at the respective lodge, while at the same time ensure the protection of our precious cultural heritage.

⁷ Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage 2004. Assessment of the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Fishery available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/fisheries/qld/fin-fish/pubs/finfish-assessment.pdf>. ⁸ The GRAC is a prescribed body corporation under the Native Title Act 1993 and holds all Native Title rights and interests on behalf of the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands region. ⁹ State of Queensland (2011). Guidelines for Commercial Operators in the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fin Fish Fishery. DEEDI, pg 3. ¹⁰ <http://npfindustry.com.au/>.



Barge mooring facility, Mornington Island.







Part 2: Aspiration Statements

OUR VISION

Our spiritual connection with our traditional country, along with the management of our natural resources has continued without interruption since time immemorial to the present day. We have never left our traditional country, we have never stopped our cultural practices, we have never stopped relying on our country to feed our families and we were never physically dispossessed, displaced or outnumbered by Europeans or other settlers.

Our islands, coasts and sea country are still relatively clean, healthy and productive environments, largely free from the impact of towns, cities and industrial development that has occurred elsewhere in Australia. There are no government environmental or natural resource management agencies based within our traditional country - the nearest are two Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol Officers based in Karumba. We believe that the combination of our unbroken cultural connection with our sea country, the health of our environments and the absence of government management agencies provides us with unique challenges, responsibilities and opportunities to take a leading role in caring for our sea country.

We are aware that government laws and policies apply over our traditional country, that commercial fishers hold licences to extract resources from our sea country, that recreational fishers and tourists travel from all over the world to enjoy our country and that mining companies and others depend on our sea country for transport and other purposes. We wish to develop cooperative working relationships with all these interest groups.

In return, we expect all those with an interest in the



Prawn trawler in Gulf waters. Photo by AFMA

southern Gulf to respect our traditional laws and customs and our native title rights and interests, our long association with our country and our culture, our need to sustain our families, and our inherited right to care for and manage our country. We also expect those who benefit economically from using our sea country to recognise our right to a fair share in the commercial use of our natural resources to enable our communities to develop economically and socially.

Our vision is to empower our people, as the Traditional Owners and the native title holders of the land and waters of the Wellesley Islands, to manage the environment in a sustainable manner based on our traditional laws, culture and knowledge in collaboration with our government and non-government partners for the benefit of the whole community.

OBJECTIVES OF THE IPA

In particular we seek to:

1. manage the land and waters in the Wellesley Islands region in a culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable manner;
2. manage the natural resources of the Wellesley Islands region in a culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable manner;
3. advocate for the rights, interests and responsibilities of our people in the Wellesley Islands region in relation to activities that impact upon our lands and waters;
4. promote education, training and employment of our people in traditional and contemporary land and sea management practices, natural resource management and conservation activities;
5. promote, for the primary benefit of our people, the responsible development of commercial and other enterprises associated with the use and management of land and waters;
6. Ensure the sustainability of Indigenous commercial and recreational resource use throughout the IPA.
7. protect our sacred sites and areas of significance in land and waters;
8. promote the continuation of our culture, knowledge and language and protect our intellectual property rights; and

9. actively educate the wider non-Indigenous community about our responsibilities in caring for country, specifically in traditional and contemporary land management practices, cultural heritage and conservation activities.



Photo courtesy of DAFF (Qld).

LEGISLATION AND REGULATION

We do not traditionally distinguish between the management of our sea country and our land. Under our laws and customs, land and sea are managed together as a whole. Unfortunately, Governments do not always see natural resource management in the same way. Instead they tend to compartmentalise various aspects of the environment into discrete units. Then, various levels of government and their agencies are assigned “responsibility” to manage these different aspects. This leads to a complex arrangement and a confusing system which relies upon various pieces of legislation across two jurisdictions, all of which imposes restrictions on how we use and manage our sea country.

Neither the Commonwealth nor the State of Queensland has sole jurisdiction for our sea country. The geographical boundary of Queensland waters extends from the “baseline” (generally coincidental with the low

water mark) to three nautical miles.¹¹ Generally speaking, the Commonwealth has power under s.51 of the Constitution to make laws with respect to the seabed and waters above the closure lines of the States – that is beyond the three nautical mile limit.

This situation can create confusion for us, especially as there has never been any active or sustained government management of sea country in our region by either the Commonwealth or the State.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (the “EPBC Act”) is the primary Commonwealth law dealing with the creation and management of protected areas. The EPBC Act provides for the listing of nationally threatened native species and ecological communities, native migratory species and marine species. Specifically, the EPBC Act protects

Australia’s native species and ecological communities by providing for the identification and listing of species and ecological communities as threatened, the development of conservation advice and recovery plans for listed species and ecological communities and the development of a register of critical habitats.

We are interested in discussing the scope of the operation of the EPBC Act in the Wellesley Islands. There are two islands within our traditional sea country that were listed on the Register of the National Estate for their outstanding natural features (Rocky Island and Manowar Island - a detailed description of these two islands appears Appendix 1, table 1.2). Further, the entire Wellesley Islands region has also been listed on the Register as an “Indicative Place”¹².



Australian Customs officers on board an illegal fishing vessel in Northern Australia. Photo courtesy of Australian Customs Service

¹¹ See the *Coastal Waters (State Powers) Act 1980* (Cth) – referred to as the “State Powers Act”. ¹² Following amendments to the *Australian Heritage Council Act 2003*, the Register of the National Estate (RNE) was frozen on 19 February 2007, which means that no new places can be added, or removed. The Register only continued as a statutory register until February 2012.

As the guardians of our traditional sea country we welcome protection for the unique values of our country - though it would be appropriate if we were informed of such processes prior to their commencement.

One of the constraints of an IPA is the absence of legal enforcement of the management regime. Nonetheless, we see the IPA as a Traditional Owner led collaborative framework that can coordinate management of the area effectively through the combined authorities and responsibilities of all partners – Indigenous, government agencies and resource users – to achieve agreed IPA goals.

All of the Wellesley Islands above high water mark now falls under the local government jurisdiction of the Mornington Shire Council. Currently there is no planning scheme for the shire, which means there are no policies under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (Qld) to regulate development in the shire. Development is assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Council, with Ministerial approval required for issuing a sub-lease for development. Without careful management, this has the potential to create a situation where there are uncoordinated developments occurring across the shire with the potential to impact negatively on land and sea management. Any future development of a planning scheme for the shire should be consistent with the traditional laws and customs of the Wellesley islands and only developed with the informed consent of the traditional owners.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Gulf Regional Aboriginal Corporation (GRAC) was incorporated on 8 November 2008 with the roles and responsibilities as the Prescribed Body Corporate and a Registered Native Title Body Corporate. The GRAC has a constitution which establishes the rules for membership, electing a board of directors, the running of community meetings, duties of the board, liability of members and directors alike, etcetera. The GRAC is a registered Indigenous Corporation with rules operating in accordance with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous

Corporations. As such the GRAC is the legal entity that holds the Native Title Rights and Interests of all the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands.

Overseeing the development of the Thuwathu/Bujimulla IPA is a steering committee largely consisting of Traditional Owners. To avoid the duplications of duties and to reduce the potential confusion created by the existence of separate management structures it was resolved at a community meeting in September 2010 the GRAC Board of Directors sit as the Traditional Owner representatives on the IPA Steering Committee.

To facilitate the cohesive development of policies and procedures and coordination between agencies and stakeholders in the management of the IPA, it is proposed that the IPA Steering Committee should meet once or twice per year (as required) and include representatives from the following organisations and government agencies:

- GRAC
- SEWPaC
- NPRSR
- DAFF (FQ)
- EHP
- AFMA and/or NPF Industry Pty Ltd
- Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association

This Steering Committee is designed to foster a working relationship between these varying agencies and interest groups. Collectively, the agencies and organisations represented on the IPA Steering Committee will bring their respective authorities, responsibilities and commitments to achieve the goals and objectives of the IPA.

It is also understood that not all representatives will necessarily attend all meetings of the IPA Steering Committee, depending in priority agenda items, competing commitments and budgetary constraints.



Barge unloading goods at Mornington Island wharf.



Juwarn. Photo courtesy of Cameo Dalley, AERC, University of Qld.



Mundalbi Reef.



Cardinal Fishes off Manowar Island.



Mundalbi Reef-Thabugan.



Cod.



Golden Trevally.



Harlequin Sweetlip.



Coral Trout.

These photos courtesy of Reef Life Survey.

Coral Bommie. Photo courtesy of Reef Life Survey.



Part 3:

The significance of the Wellesley Islands region

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Wellesley Islands comprise the traditional country of the Lardil, Yangkaal and Kaiadilt Peoples and part of the traditional country of the Gangalidda People. We regard our sea country as extending inland to include the salt pans and mud flats reached by the highest tides, and extending across the sea out as far as the eye can see. This is the area largely covered by this Management Plan.

Within each of the four language groups there are separate family groups whose members have inherited rights to particular areas of land and sea country. In this region we have a tradition of nominating an "estate boss" who has authority to grant access to the estate and its resources. This person is responsible for protecting those resources. This person is known as the *dulmada*



Beche de Mer developmental fishery licences are available in the Gulf. Photo courtesy of DPI&F

in Lardil, Yangkaal and Gangalidda, and the *dulmarra danga* in Kaiadilt.

Though we live on the land, the focus of our culture, economy and daily lives is on the sea. Our creation stories passed down by our ancestors tell us of the origins of our marine environments and resources. Many of our stories link our individual language groups across the region.

On Mornington Island, for example, the extensive fish traps around the island are attributed to the work of the first three Lardil People (*Maarnbil, Jirn Jirn and Diwaldiwal*), who brought culture and language to the island and who are now represented by three rocks rising from the sea near the eastern end of the island. The fish traps in Kaiadilt country on Bentinck and Sweers Islands are the work of the ancestral Black Crane and Seagull.

The ancestral Dugong (*Bijarra*) emerged from a freshwater hole on Gangalidda country 17km inland, proceeded down a water course to the sea, through the saltwater to the offshore islands and eventually went westwards to Yanyuwa country (around Borrooloola). On its journey to the sea the Dugong was speared, its flesh turning to rocks along the way.

The Shark Dreaming also travelled from Gangalidda country, out to the Wellesley Islands and eventually westwards to Yanyuwa country. On the way, the Shark Dreaming was responsible for planting seeds of the Cycad tree along the northwest coast of Mornington Island and elsewhere in the region. We see the groves of cycad trees now growing on Mornington as evidence of this ancient journey.

Of particular significance is the body of sacred knowledge that deals with the mythic history of the Rainbow Serpent (*Thuwathu* or *Bujimulla*), which maintains a potent presence in the sea today. The presence of the Rainbow Serpent can be seen in cyclones, waterspouts and rainbows, and has the power to cause a special type of sickness known as *Markiriil* in Lardil.

Our stories also tell of the creation of our islands as the result of the Dreaming journeys that cut through the land to make channels for the sea, which was our way of documenting the rise of the sea level in the past. This cultural knowledge is consistent with what scientists believe about the rise of the sea level that began about 18,000 years ago and which stabilised about 6,000 years ago.

The coastlines of our islands and mainland are rich in named places, often used to identify adjacent offshore sea areas. Many prominent marine features, such as reefs, rocks, oyster banks or sand bars also have their own specific names. Among these named sites are special 'story places' where significant events happened in the past, where we carry out ritual activities to maintain particular animal or plant species, or which are responsible for making tidal floods, cyclones or strong winds.

The existence of estates across our sea country is part of our system of marine tenure. It is a system through which we divide rights and interests in relation to the sea. These estates however, only exist by virtue of the communal ownership of Traditional Owner groups/language groups over our sea country. We know the

extent of our language groups' country across the region, the extent of our family estate within that greater area of country, the appropriate behaviour inside and outside our country, and can identify the owners of other estates within our groups' traditional country.

Environmental significance

The Wellesley Islands are a unique and wondrous place.

Compared to most other regions of Australia, there has been very little scientific research on the specific environment of the Wellesley Islands region and there are still new environmental discoveries occurring throughout this region. For example, only within the last few years

did Geoscience Australia scientists "discover"¹³ the existence of a tropical reef system within our traditional waters. This discovery was considered important as Gulf waters were previously thought to be too shallow and too warm to support such an ecosystem. This reef system is approximately 100km in length and supports a thriving array of sea-life including soft sponges, corals, giant clams and shellfish. Figure 2.1 shows the areas surveyed by Geoscience Australia and the sonar image of the extent of Mundalbi Reef.

There have also been more recent research findings that suggest that our marine turtle populations are genetically distinct from other populations. Current scientific thought also suggests there could be two genetically

distinct populations of dugongs in the Wellesley Islands region¹⁴. We are directly involved with the conduct of research to determine this matter.

Our sea country's diverse environments include extensive mangrove forests, vast salt pans, estuaries, beaches, rocky shores, large seagrass beds, reefs and other marine areas. The mangrove forests, containing 27 species of mangrove, are particularly important as nursery grounds for many marine species that we depend on and that are essential to commercial and recreational fisheries. The inter-tidal and sub-tidal seagrass beds surrounding many of the islands and along the mainland coast are critical to the survival of local populations of dugongs and some marine turtle species. A research survey during the 1980s found that eight out of the known fifteen Queensland seagrass species occur around the Wellesley Islands (and this fact was confirmed by a QPIF survey completed in 2007).

Three species of dolphin (Bottlenose, Irrawaddy River and Indo-Pacific Humpback) and three species of whale (Roqual, False Killer and Pilot) are found in our sea country. However, the most important marine mammal is the dugong, which is a major source of food for us as well as being central to our identity as saltwater people. Aerial surveys during the late 1990s indicate that about 3,000 dugongs live around the Wellesley Islands. Two other aerial counts have occurred since that time and the numbers have proven to remain constant over this period of time. The latest survey was conducted in September 2007 and though numbers counted were similar, the researcher involved with all three surveys believes this number to be very conservative with numbers closer to 5,000 being more realistic.¹⁵

Six of the world's seven species of marine turtles are found in our sea country. Green turtles and Flatback turtles nest in large numbers on beaches in the Wellesley Islands, making this region of international significance for the future of these species. Marine turtles and their eggs continue to be an important part of traditional food and we are committed to ensuring that we use this resource in a sustainable manner.

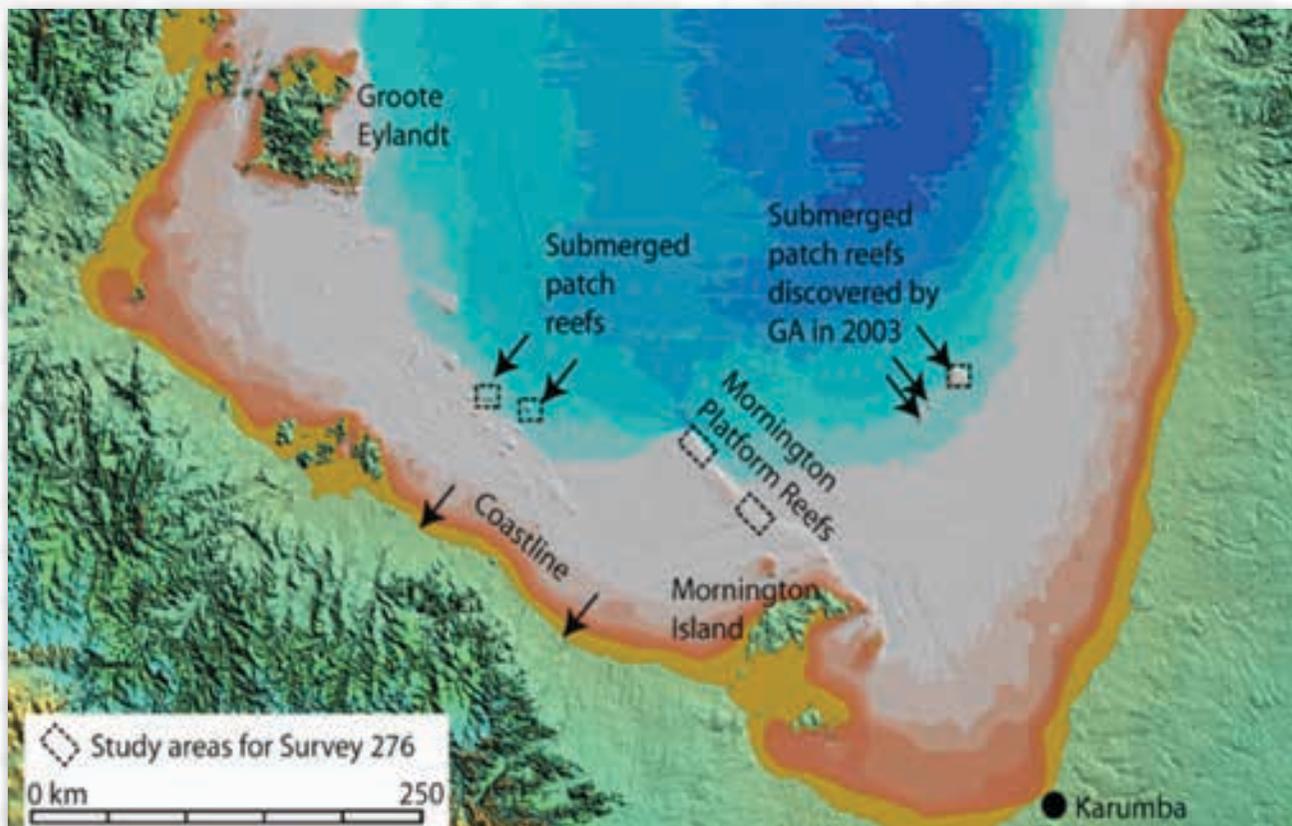


Figure 1.2. Sonar imagery of Mundalbi Reef, north-west of Mornington Island. Geoscience Australia. (2003) http://www.ga.gov.au/image_cache/GA6247.jpg

¹³ This was hardly a discovery to us, but rather a well kept secret of the Traditional Owners! ¹⁴ Prof. Helene Marsh – per. comm. 18 Sep. 2008. ¹⁵ Per. Comm. Prof. Helene Marsh 18 Sep. 2008.



Bush Rod Fishing - Mornington Island Dancers, Woodforde 2005. Photo courtesy of Woomera Aboriginal Corporation

Over 300 fish species have been recorded in the shallow waters of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. We have a long tradition of harvesting many of these species using stone fish traps, nets, hooks and lines, and we continue to depend on fish catches to feed our families.

The environmental features of the Wellesley Islands can be summarised as follows¹⁶:

General

- Collection of thirty islands and rocks in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria.
- Only Queensland islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria.
- The vast majority of the land is Aboriginal held land and subject exclusive Native Title.

Turtles

- The group (particularly North Bountiful, South Bountiful, Pisonia and Rocky Islands) support a major green turtle nesting rookery, one of four in Australia. This population is genetically different from east coast populations.
- Only remaining site in Australia where major inter-tidal basking of inter-nesting green turtles occurs.

- The larger islands have been recorded as a nesting site for Olive Ridley turtles.
- Bountiful and Pisonia Islands support major nesting populations of Flatback turtles, one of six significant breeding sites in Australia.



Kevin Scholes & Bradley Wilson fitting a satellite tracker to turtle as part of the NAILSMA Dugong & Marine Turtle Project

Dugong

- Third largest dugong population of dugong in Queensland (4,067+s.e723).

Birds

- 28 bird species listed under the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement.
- 114 species of birds.

- 31 bird species listed under the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement.
- 1 bird species listed as endangered in Queensland.
- 1 bird species listed as vulnerable in Queensland.
- 5 bird species listed as rare in Queensland.
- 1 bird species listed as endangered on a national level and vulnerable on a state level.
- 36 birds species listed in Appendix II of the Bonn Convention.
- North Bountiful Island supports the largest Crested Tern breeding colony recorded in the world.
- South Bountiful Island supports the second largest breeding colony of Roseate Terns (threatened in the Northern Hemisphere) in eastern Australia.
- Manowar Island supports a Least Frigatebird colony which contains about 60% of this species in Australia, which is the largest rookery in eastern Australia.
- Rocky and Manowar Islands support the largest Brown Booby nesting populations in eastern Australia and the Coral Sea.



Stone fish trap wall on low tide. Photo courtesy of Cameo Dalley, AERC, University of Queensland

¹⁶ From Wellesley Islands Environmental Features. From: Perry, T.W., Blackman, J.G., Craven, S.A. 1997. *A Review of the Natural Values of the Wellesley Islands, Final Report to the Australian Heritage Commission*. Canberra.

Flora

- 8 species of seagrass.
- 27 mangrove species.
- Pisonia Island has the only stand of *Pisonia grandis* to the west of the Great Barrier Reef and is the type locality for the species. There is only c. 180 hectares remaining of this tree in Australia.
- Beach Thick-knee (Sv) are common throughout the islands.
- 58 genera of marine phytoplankton (1 cyanobacterium, 20 dinoflagellates and 37 diatoms).
- Over summer the productivity of phytoplankton in shallow waters (<30m) is much higher than in deeper offshore waters.
- 299 species of terrestrial plants in 66 families.
- The islands are the type locality for at least 9 plant species, some of which were first collected by Matthew Flinders.
- 2 plant species listed as rare in Queensland.

Other mammals

- 1 marine mammal species listed a vulnerable in Queensland.
- 2 marine mammal species listed as rare in Queensland.
- 1 marine mammal species listed in Appendix II of the Bonn Convention.
- 6 terrestrial species of mammals, including the only listing of brush-tailed tree-rat (*Conilurus penicillatus*) in Queensland.

Reptiles and amphibians

- 2 marine reptile species listed as vulnerable on a national level and endangered in Queensland.
- 27 species of marine reptiles.
- 2 marine reptile species listed as vulnerable on both a national level and in Queensland.

- 2 marine reptile species listed as vulnerable in Queensland.
- 1 marine reptile species listed as endangered on both a national level and a state level.
- 5 marine reptile species listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Bonn Convention.
- 2 marine reptile species listed in Appendix II of the Bonn Convention.
- 42 species of terrestrial reptiles in 9 families and 27 genera.
- 8 amphibian species in 2 families and 5 genera.
- 14 species of sea snake known to occur, with 70% caught in waters less than 15m deep.

Fish and crustaceans

- The only records in the Australia region for the gray sharp nosed shark (*Rhizoprionodon oligolinx*) and the wide saw fish (*Pristis pectinata*);
- The ornate numb fish (*Narcine* sp.) is only known to occur from the Gulf, Arafura Sea and Torres Strait;
- Demersal fish and cephalopod catch rates and species richness is greater in nearshore waters in summer than winter (Rainer 1984);
- 18 cephalopods species.
- 9 species of penaeid prawns.
- 9 scyllarid and 3 pallinurid lobster species.
- **Table A1.1 in Appendix 1** provides a list of all the islands in the Wellesley region and some of the significant features of each.
- Rocky and Manowar Islands are listed on the National Estate Register and there is an Indicative Place listing for all of the islands in the region on the Register of the National Estate. **Table A1.2 in Appendix 1** include extracts from the Register.



Wellesley Islands Ranger, Dirk Loogatha with Michael Rasheed from DAFF on the seagrass survey, Aug. 2007.



Prof. Helene Marsh discussing results of aerial count of dugong and marine turtles with Burketown Queensland Indigenous Land & Sea Rangers.



L-R: Aaron Kelly, Sarah Isaac (Coordinator), Kevin Scholes, Lawrence Burke, Maxwell Gabori & Dirk Loogatha.



Sea patrol including ghostnet collection and data entry.



Part 4:

Management Issues

KNOWN ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS TO THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS

The environment of the Wellesley Islands region is often described as pristine. The area is remote and has not been subject to the adverse effects of over-development as with other more populated regions in Australia. Our traditional culture is also strong due to the isolation of the region and the efforts of our Elders to continue cultural practices since European settlement.

Notwithstanding this, there are a number of immediate environmental threats to the region that need careful management to ensure this unique landscape remains intact for the enjoyment of future generations. These key threats are discussed below. Further information on threats to particular species is given in **Appendix 2**.

Depletion of dugong numbers in the region

Over the past decade we have noticed a decline in the number of dugong in the Wellesley Islands region. There are many factors said to be contributing to this decline, including an unknown level of Traditional Owner harvest. Across northern Australia, there is concern that Traditional Owners are taking too many dugongs, that the rules of customary take are no longer being adhered to and that the use of powered boats makes hunting extremely efficient.

While from a cursory glance there is some substance to this argument, we object to the fact that Indigenous people seemed to be targeted as the only factor contributing to the decline in dugong numbers. We are well aware of other pressures exerted on dugongs by ghost nets, pollution, loss of seagrass meadows and other

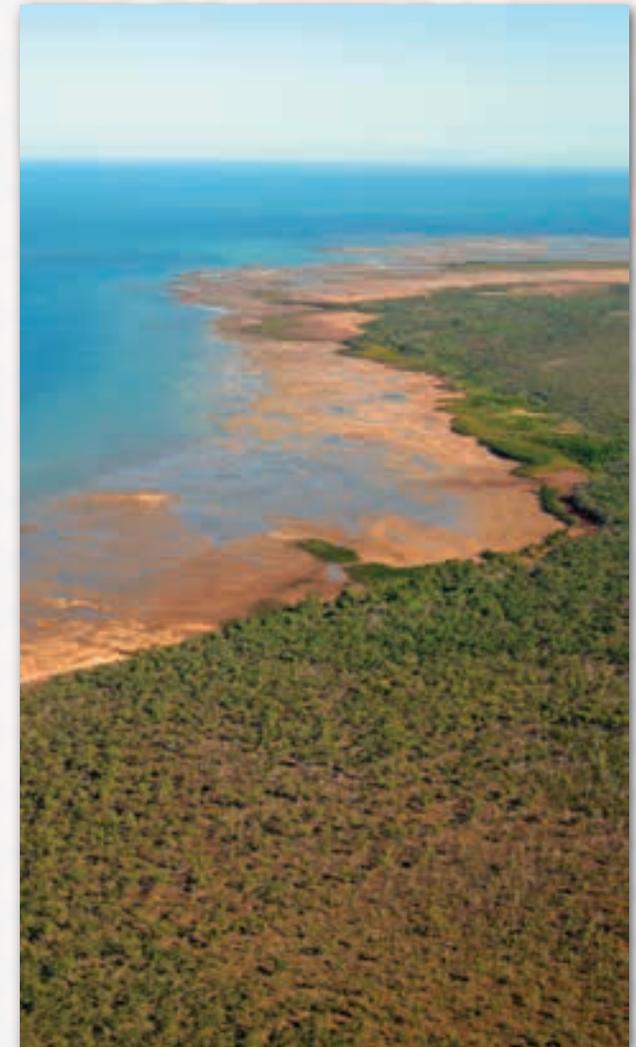
forms of environmental degradation, boat strikes, climate change and other human impacts.

Our hunters have also been reporting sick and underweight dugongs, many of which have unusually coloured fat. We know of other regions, for example in the Torres Strait, where the bioaccumulation of toxins in dugong means there are some risks associated with eating particular parts of the animal. We are now concerned that other resource users are contaminating the water with by-products that could be causing this strange phenomenon in our waters.

Depletion of marine turtle numbers in the region

Over the past decade, we have noticed a decline in the number of turtles across the Wellesley Islands region. As with dugong populations, there is concern that Traditional Owners are taking too many marine turtles. Many Lardil People have voiced their concern over the apparent over-harvest of eggs from readily accessible beaches on Mornington Island. There are no current management practices in place to monitor the amount of eggs being taken by Traditional Owners and the use of four wheel drives on nesting beaches is also an issue that needs to be addressed.

Notwithstanding this, we must again object to the fact that Indigenous people seemed to be specifically targeted as the only factor contributing to the decline in turtle numbers. We are well aware that other pressures exerted on turtles include ghost nets, pollution, reduction of available food sources and other forms of environmental degradation, boat strikes, climate change and other human impacts.



Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of DAFF (Qld).

In recent years our hunters have also reported increasing numbers of sick, underweight turtles, many with unhealthy looking black fat. A numbers of dead turtles have been found washed up on beaches. For example, over a one month period July-August 2007, three Green turtles and three Hawksbill turtles were found washed up over a 5 kilometre stretch of beach on the east coast of Mornington Island. We have also seen turtles floating on the surface unable to dive and we have noticed the presence of diseases such as fibropapilloma (a wart like virus with unknown causes).

It is estimated that over 400 turtles, mainly Olive Ridley and Hawksbill, become entangled in ghost nets in the Gulf of Carpentaria every year.¹⁷ There is also scientific evidence to suggest that the presence of certain heavy metals in the water could have a major impact on the ability of marine turtles to feed, with zinc in solution depriving turtles of their sense of smell¹⁸. An increase in silt levels can also lead to seagrass meadows being smothered, reducing the availability of this important food reserve for turtles. Other marine organisms on which turtles feed (e.g. jellyfish) can be impacted by commercial fishery operators. We do acknowledge that since the introduction of turtle exclusion devices (TEDs) in the Northern Prawn Trawl Fishery, the incidents of accidental catch of marine turtles has been greatly reduced and we appreciate that this industry strives to improve the efficiency of such devices.

Feral pigs and wild dogs, both of which occur in large numbers on Mornington Island, are major predators of turtle nests. Goannas have also increased their predation of nests, which could be the result of a reduction of other available food sources. We are in the process of developing suitable barriers to prevent these threats impacting upon nests and implementing control methods to reduce the number of feral animals across the region. Other Traditional Owner groups from saltwater country (particularly in the Northern Territory) have also told us they have seen an increase in the number of nests becoming flooded during the incubation stage. There is currently no indication this is happening in our sea country, however we will continue

to monitor nest sites to determine the extent of any possible problem.

Recently we became aware that a mineral exploration company has applied to conduct exploration along the beaches of Mornington and Bentinck Islands. These tenements, if approved, would cover the entire coastline of both islands. Sand mining will obviously have a major impact on turtle nesting sites. We are strongly opposed to this application for exploration, knowing it could destroy our cultural heritage and heavily impact upon our environment.

Commercial fishery operations

In our view, there is limited enforcement of fishery operations in the seas surrounding the Wellesley Islands. There is no Commonwealth Government agency that deals with fisheries matters, and only two Queensland Government Queensland Boating and Fishing Patrol officers present in Karumba. Whilst we appreciate that most commercial fisheries operators try to do the right thing by the environment, our presence on-country puts us in a unique position to monitor their activities.

We are also concerned about by-catch issues. Gillnets used by barramundi fishermen pose a significant threat to dugong and turtle. Other marine organisms on which dugong and turtle feed, are also impacted by commercial fishery operations. It is difficult to determine whether this has contributed to a loss of available food and therefore impacted upon abundance of these culturally significant species.



Barge delivering goods & services to Mornington Island.

We still regularly see certain operators flouting fisheries regulations. For example, we often see fishermen setting crab pots that do not carry the required identification marks and in numbers grossly in excess of their entitlement. The chance of being caught in this remote region is very limited due to the lack of physical presence of fisheries agencies in the region.

Increased pollution in Gulf waters, increased silt levels and dams

The presence of ghost nets in our country is regularly reported by Traditional Owners and others. As noted, above, these nets are entangling dugong and turtle and reducing their numbers. Our rangers try their best to patrol the region, however due to limited resources not all nets can be recovered in a timely manner. The area of sea country alone covered by this management plan is approximately 16,600km² with only eight rangers and two vessels to patrol the area.



Morning Glory cloud formation.

¹⁷ Ibid. Pg81. ¹⁸ Personal comm. with Dr Col Limpus Sep. 2007.

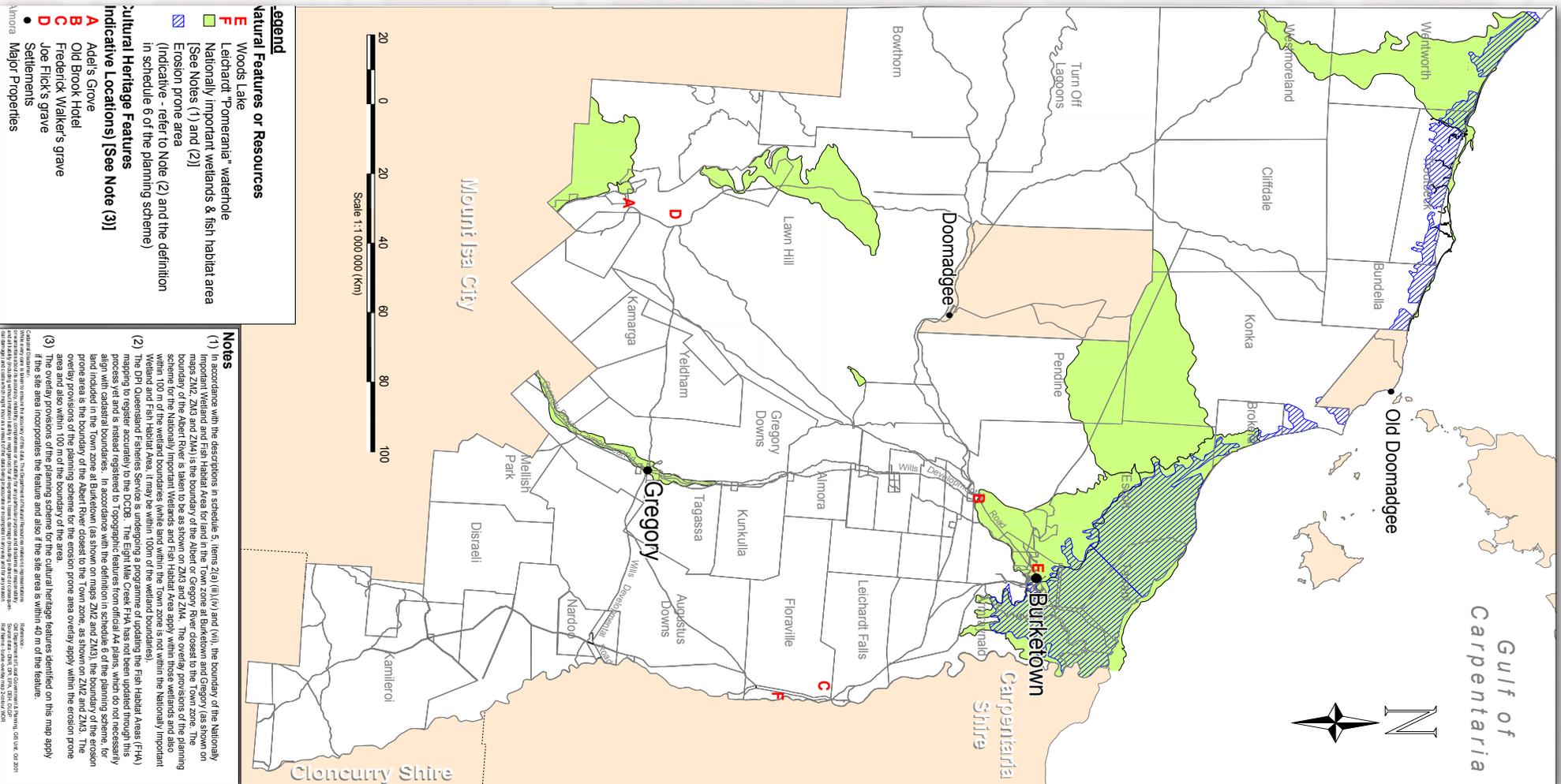


Mornington Island and the Appel Channel. Photo courtesy of DAFF (Qld).

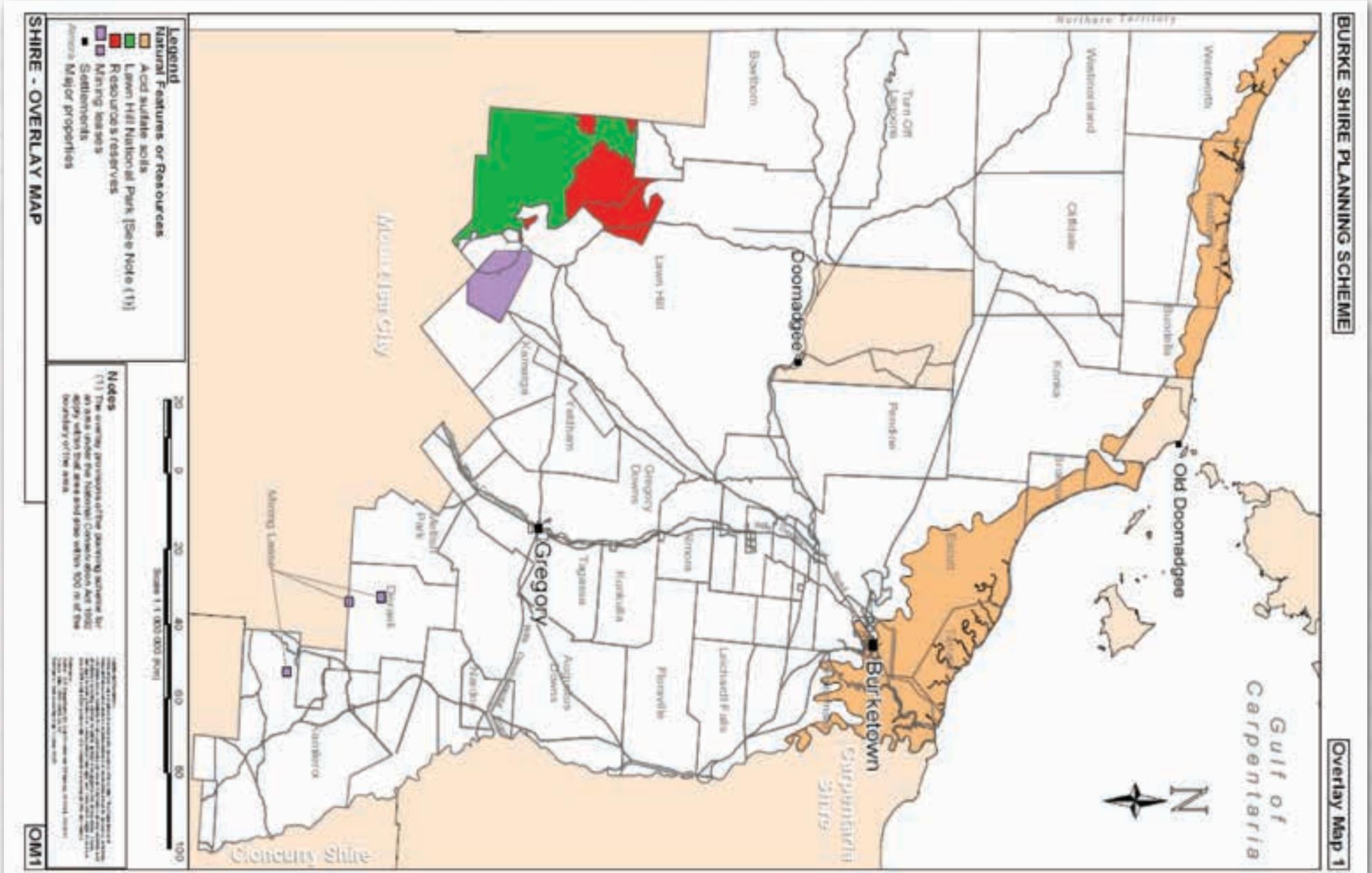
We are also concerned that pollutants are entering our sea country, particularly with the use of the Gulf as a major transport corridor. Contaminants can be lost overboard when transferring loads from one vessel to another at sea, as well as in storm events and at initial loading points on the mainland.

There are no known introduced exotic marine organisms in the Gulf of Carpentaria, however this does not mean that we do not see this issue as a potential threat to the region. There are hundreds of international shipping movements through the Gulf of Carpentaria each year and dozens of these vessels move through the Gulf in close proximity to our sea country. For example the *Wunma*, the Oz Minerals barge traverses the roadstead out of Karumba on a daily basis, meeting up with international vessels transporting zinc concentrate to Europe. It is clear that such movements could potentially lead to the introduction of exotic pests in our pristine marine environment.

Another source of pollution is runoff from the adjacent mainland coast from pastoral properties and the scouring of riverbanks during the wet season. Our mainland coast is highly erosion prone and even the process of cattle meandering over these areas can lead to serious erosion problems. These sediments have significant effects on the environment due to the presence of abundant acid, iron, aluminium, manganese and possibly other heavy metals. Acid and metal contaminants can deleteriously affect the ecosystem. The increase of silt levels can also lead to seagrass meadows being smothered, reducing the availability of this important food reserve for dugong and other species.



Map 4.1. Map showing areas considered vulnerable to erosion throughout Burke Shire (Provided courtesy of Burke Shire Council)



Map 4.2. Map showing areas where acid sulfate soils are present throughout Burke Shire (Provided courtesy of Burke Shire Council)



Ghost net patrol, Pisonia Island.



Ghost net patrol, Pisonia Island.



Ghost net patrol, Bountiful Island.



Normanton Ranger Lance Rapson helping with ghost net patrol.



Ghost net patrol, Bountiful Island.



Ghost net patrol, Mornington Island.



Ghost net patrol, Pisonia Island.



Ghost net patrol, Pisonia Island.



Ghost net patrol, Bountiful Island.

Map 4.1 depicts known erosion prone areas across Burke Shire, right along the coastal strip.

Map 4.2 shows acid sulphate soil areas within the shire which largely correspond to the same areas known to be erosion prone. This means that any disturbance to the soils in this area will most likely produce acid sulphate leachate.

There is a rising awareness within the community in general as to the importance of the wet season flush of nutrients into the Gulf as runoff from salt pans and waterways (a phenomenon known as estuarine outwelling). The large seasonal fresh-water runoff in the region directly contributes to the high productivity levels of our waters. We are astounded that this awareness does not seem to reach our elected officials in Federal Government with some politicians calling for the damming of northern rivers and an end to the “waste” of water every wet season. We know of at least two major tributaries of the Wild River declared Gregory River catchment that have been dammed and the waters used for irrigation and stock watering. We are strongly opposed to such activities and will fight all future proposals that divert water out of these river systems.

In 2008 we became aware of an application to create a large ponded-pasture area along the Alexandra River. This application was successfully opposed by the Kukatj People, the Traditional Owners for the area. If it had proceeded, the application would have resulted in a 10m high weir being constructed across the Alexandra River, which flows into the Leichhardt River.

Pest animals and weeds

The introduction of pests and weeds to the islands has had a profound impact on our sheltered ecosystem. Feral pigs and wild cattle are plentiful on Mornington Island and have degraded our pristine freshwater holes and soaks. Feral cats and dogs prey on our abundant bird colonies and cane toads have invaded both Sweers and Bentinck Islands. Species such as rubber vine have invaded fore-dune areas, creating impenetrable thickets

preventing turtles from reaching nesting sites. A variety of weeds such as rubber vine, calotrope, leucaena and bellyache bush choke our country, kill our native vegetation or damage natural habitats, and reduce our enjoyment of country.

While there are no known exotic marine organisms in our region, there is rising concern relating to the possible spread of tilapia throughout the Gulf. This highly invasive group of fish species found and eradicated from one Gulf River system, the Mitchell River. Tilapia dominate their habitat with fast reproduction out competing native species for food and disturbing plant beds with nest building.

LACK OF AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA ON PARTICULAR SPECIES

There have been a lot of scientific reports written about the environment of our region. What appears to be a common theme is the lack of available baseline data on species present, and little or no monitoring of most species to determine population trends. While we believe our country is in good shape we need this type of information to be certain. Furthermore, the extent and long-term impact of the threats is largely unknown. While there has been some risk analysis undertaken in the region, the accumulative effects of threats have rarely been studied.

POTENTIAL THREATS TO CULTURE

Damage to cultural heritage sites across the region and uncontrolled access to country

All of the four Traditional Owner groups involved with the development of this management plan are concerned about the increasing number of visitors to our region. Every visitor to Mornington Island is technically required to obtain a permit from the Mornington Shire Council prior to their arrival. Over recent years, however, the practice and enforcement of this requirement has diminished to the stage where it is rare for a permit to be obtained at all. This has led to the problem that many

people visiting the region, whether for work or leisure, are unaware that all of the land of the Wellesley Islands are Aboriginal leased land or otherwise is freehold land held in trust for Aboriginal people and all other people require permission to be there. They are also unaware that the traditional laws and customs concerning access and use of the islands and the surrounding seas, and that offence is caused when those laws and customs are not acknowledged and observed. Visitors can also be unaware that there are sacred sites right across our country, including dangerous story places, and areas that may be closed for sorry business or for environmental management reasons. It is disturbing to us that many of our sites are being unintentionally desecrated by visitors that do not realise that even their presence on country can transgress our traditional law and destroy the significance of a site.

We also believe it is necessary for us to introduce a cultural induction for all visitors to Mornington Island. This would include any visitor who intends to stay for more than one day. The induction program itself could be developed by our Rangers in close collaboration with our Elders.

In December 2008 exclusive Native Title was recognised over the majority of the Wellesley Islands. It is not only a traditional law and custom that requires permission of non-Traditional Owners to access these islands, but also a legal requirement. We do not permit camping on any of the islands for cultural and environmental reasons.

Gangalidda People with country on the mainland coast also experience similar problems on the mainland section of their traditional country. The Gangalidda People own several pastoral leases along the coast between Burketown and the Northern Territory border. Despite regular surveillance of the main road accessing these properties Traditional Owners still regularly find tourists camped on their lands without permission. Gangalidda People also have exclusive Native Title rights and interests over these leases. Gangalidda do not permit camping on any of these properties.

Loss of cultural identity

A problem not uncommon across all sections of society is a loss of cultural identity in younger generations. As the recent native title claims demonstrate, the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands have continued to

maintain traditional laws and customs. Those laws and customs include specific rules in relation to access to country, and rules in relation to resource use, such as seasonal availability, increase ceremonies, closures for sorry business, behaviour on country, and bush medicines.



Bradley Wilson teaching his son Sage about turtles. Photo courtesy of Cameo Daly, AERC, University of Queensland.

The ongoing maintenance of those laws and customs and the passing on of traditional knowledge is important to the future management of the IPA area. It is those laws and customs, and traditional knowledge, which have ensured the IPA area has the cultural and environmental values that exists today. The ability of traditional knowledge to assist with filling scientific knowledge gaps on particular species is also well documented.¹⁹

Our Elders understand that younger people have many competing priorities. We have noted that in many communities those other priorities have led to a loss of culture and knowledge about the environment and the part culture plays in its management. Part of the Action Plan for the IPA area is designed to take steps to ensure that does not occur for the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands.

Sustainable Cultural Harvesting Use of Resource

We do not believe there is an issue with the amount of dugong and turtles that are taken as a food source and for cultural reasons in our waters. However, we understand that discrete areas within the overall landscape of our sea country can be over-utilised for this purpose. To combat this problem we proposed to close

¹⁹ See for example National Oceans Office. (2004) Key Species – A description of Key Species in the Northern Planning Area. National Oceans Office, Hobart, Australia.

particular areas to hunting on a seasonal basis, or even a permanent basis. For example the Gangalidda People have proposed to permanently close some areas adjacent to the mainland coast to hunting, whilst the families of Charlie Bush Bay (Mornington Island) have proposed a short-term closure of this area to allow numbers to replenish.

We are keen to utilise the “Indigenous Subsistence Fishing Survey Kit” to ascertain if there are any marine resources that are being harvested at unsustainable levels.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS IN THE AREA

Employment Opportunities in Resource Management

Until the end of the 2012-13 financial year we have funding for 7 Indigenous Rangers and one Ranger Coordinator all based on Mornington Island.²⁰ From this point in time the Gulf Regional Aboriginal Corporation will be in a position to effectively manage the ranger unit and the IPA components. As the capacity of our rangers has increased some government agencies have requested their involvement in conducting certain activities in the region. DAFF Biosecurity (formerly AQIS) has asked our rangers to collect information on possible diseases, weeds and other potential threats and Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service have asked our rangers for assistance in managing Finucane Island, the only National Park in the region. As a professional unit our rangers undertake patrolling of both land and sea country, monitoring and reporting, and scientific surveys. Our unique knowledge of the region places our rangers in an advantage in obtaining and disseminating this information and monitoring any changes in country. This is something that “outside” agencies could not achieve as effectively or as efficiently.

The capacity of our rangers grows every day, however we need further scientific (technical) advice and training to ensure the best delivery of environmental outcomes occurs and we would welcome the provision of this training within the region.



McKenzie River on Bentinck Island. Photo courtesy of DAFF (Qld).

We would like to see the ranger unit expand even further initially through a junior ranger program, then cadetships and finally with traineeships being offered. We believe the opportunity for our people to be involved and become rangers in caring for our country as our culture and traditions require is too important to let pass.

Over time we expect to see the number of rangers employed fulltime to increase to allow for additional ranger bases to be established on Bentinck Island and along the mainland coast

Sustainable Development Opportunities

Tourism

We realise our country is a unique and beautiful place. We appreciate that people from across the world want the opportunity to visit and experience what this region

has to offer first hand. Despite some problems associated with this visitation we do not want to deprive people from being able to come to our country as long as visitation occurs in an environmentally sustainable manner and is culturally appropriate.

There are currently two tourism operations catering for guests found within the Wellesley Islands region, being Birri Lodge on Mornington Island and Sweers Island Resort. We would like to work in conjunction with these two operations to complement their existing facilities. For example, the Kaiadilt People would like to allow people to stay for short visits on Bentinck Island to undertake cultural tours of the islands and possible tours of nearby turtle nesting sites. The Kaiadilt People also anticipate a small amount of arts and crafts being available for sale.

²⁰ This valuable funding is provided by the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage & the Arts through the Federal Government's Caring for Country initiative.

Likewise tourists from Birri Lodge would also have the opportunity to attend cultural tours conducted by the Lardil People. An established arts & crafts centre also exists on Mornington Island with many paintings being exhibited both nationally and internationally.

Commercial fishing

Some Traditional Owners have expressed an interest in starting their own commercial fishing venture. Provided such activities were run according to the same rules as other commercial fishing operations in the region, this would be a sustainable activity that could provide employment and income for locals as well as another employment stream for our youngsters to become involved.



Photo courtesy of DAFF (Qld).

Access to existing commercial fishing licences in the Gulf fishery is very restricted and licences can prove difficult to obtain. Licences sell on the market for anywhere from \$80,000 and beyond, depending on the entitlements attached. Many fishermen now prefer to lease their licences for approximately \$1,200 per month. Either option is a lot of money for us.

As a starting point some members of the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association have offered to take on some of our youngsters from time to time so they can determine if they are interested in a career in commercial fishing. We greatly appreciate this offer and look forward to this strengthening of the relationship developing between us through this process.

Commercial harvest fisheries

There has always been a commercial element to the traditional fishery of the Wellesley Islands, though not recognised by the *Native Title Act 1993*. The beche-de-mer (trepang) trade has been occurring between the Wellesley Islands region and the Maccassans for centuries. Over recent years, there has been renewed interest from the commercial sector in this valuable market. We have been approached by two fisheries operators keen to enter into a Developmental Fisheries Licence to take beche-de-mer from our sea country. At the time, we did not agree with the approach of these companies, however we are keen to exploit this resource for ourselves, on the proviso it is done sustainably and in a culturally appropriate manner. We have many sites of significance in the littoral zone and appreciate the environmental sensitivity of this area and do not wish to degrade habitat or over-exploit this resource.

Education and Awareness Opportunities

In an effort to combat the potential decline in traditional knowledge by the younger generation our rangers conduct regular visits to Mornington State School. During these visits rangers explain their work activities in maintaining the health of our country and the traditional laws associated with this care. Dance, art and cultural connection to country are all taught.



Whitecliffs, Mornington Island.

From late 2010 the rangers will begin in earnest to conduct school excursions and holiday camps for Mornington State School students. Already exchanges with other schools have occurred where students from the mainland have visited to experience one of these culture camps. These cultural camps will take small groups of children to visit outlining areas to explain the significance of the areas, its management, traditional hunting and gathering techniques and other activities.

In April 2010 through the CLCAC we have employed a Traditional Owner in the capacity of Community Engagement Officer. The role of this individual is to further develop the work of our rangers in educating our community in the joint role of traditional and western science in managing our country, and also to explain the benefit of scientists and other outside land management agencies working with our rangers.



Wellesley Islands Rangers 2012: (front left to right) Maxwell Gabori, Dirk Loogatha, Ezra Scholes, Kevin Scholes. (Back left to right) Lawrence Burke, Aaron Kelly, Bradley Wilson, Alfred Williams.



Sea country patrol.



Part 5: Our Action Plan

SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT OF KNOWN THREATS TO THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS

Depletion of Dugong Numbers

In order to gain a better understanding of this sometimes emotive issue, we propose to conduct a long-term survey of how many dugongs our hunters are taking throughout the year. The type of data we anticipate collecting includes:

- i. Age (juvenile, adult)
- ii. Sex
- iii. Obvious signs of injury or sickness
- iv. Size
- v. Duration of hunt/effort and date
- vi. Approximate location of catch
- vii. Number of other dugongs seen at the same time

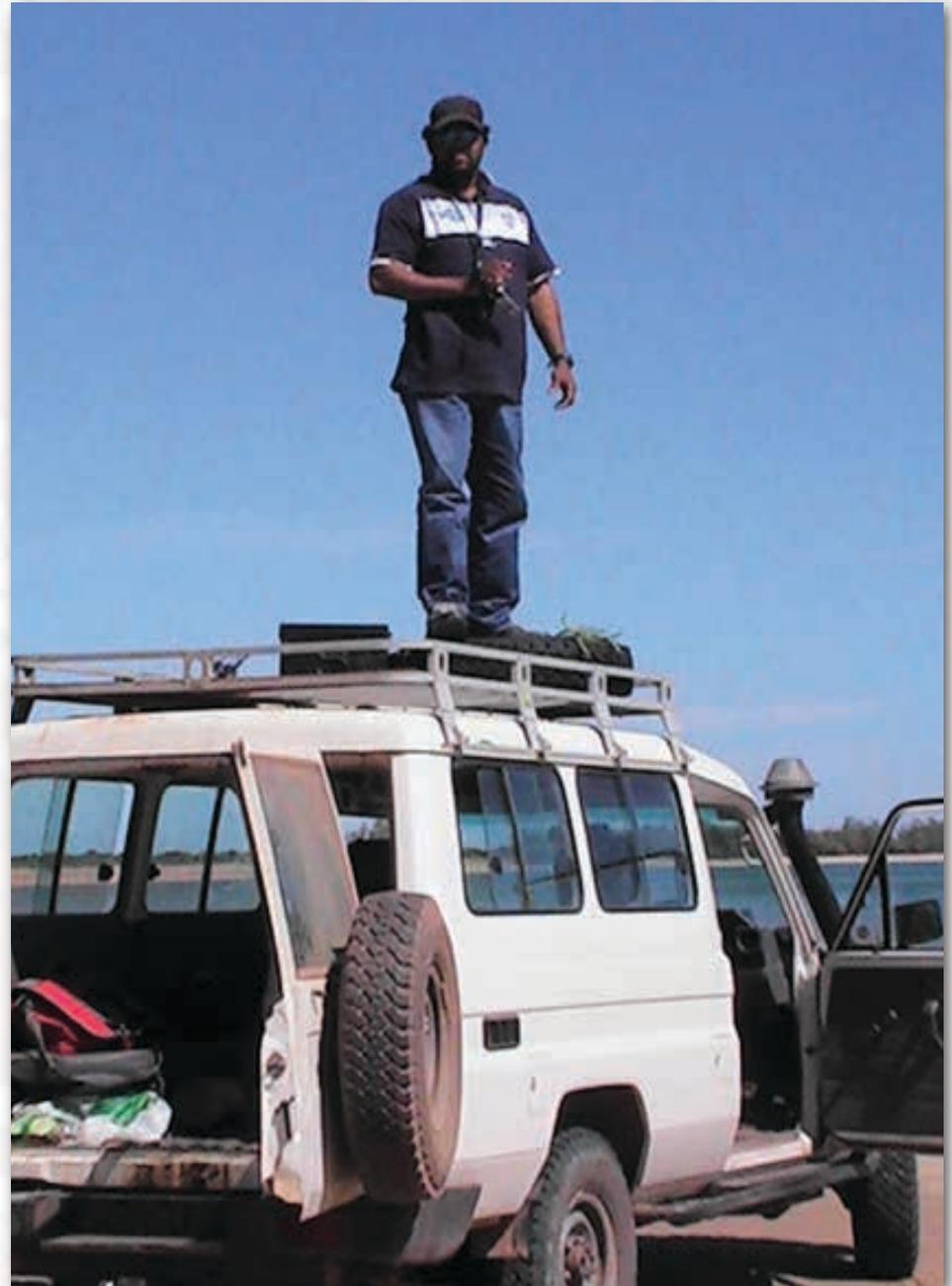
Through a process negotiated with Traditional Owners, this data will be collected on a fortnightly basis by the Wellesley Islands Rangers over several years. The rangers will visit known hunters in the community to collect information. The development of a database will be critical to determine where major hunting areas are, where area closures should be located and whether management techniques are having a positive effect on dugong numbers.

ACTION TABLE: Dugongs

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Sick and/or underweight dugong being found	Wellesley Islands Rangers to regularly patrol sea country.	High	Wellesley Islands Rangers to undertake training in necropsy sampling.	Ongoing
	Take necropsy samples as required.		Necropsy samples collected and sent for analysis.	Ongoing
	Record appropriate data.		Database used to store results.	
Unknown level of Traditional Owner harvest	Wellesley Islands Rangers to undertake survey of known hunters on a regular (e.g. fortnightly) basis.	Medium	Database used to collate survey results. At least two years to complete, but five preferred.	Completion by 2015
Unreliable and unquantified by-catch data	Undertake regular ranger patrols of sea country to ensure fisheries operators are conforming to regulations.	Low	Ranger presence on country will encourage fisheries operators to obey regulations.	Ongoing
	Encourage scientific research to establish better picture of by-catch species and quantity in the Gulf.		Long-term goal to have rangers delegated authority under the Fisheries Act to have enforcement capabilities.	2015
Degradation through smothering, increased turbidity etc	Monitor seagrass meadows Educate wider community, particularly pastoralists, concerning the flow-on effects of many of their activities.	Medium	Wellesley Islands Rangers to monitor seagrass meadow in accordance with Seagrass-Watch Program. Rangers to involve Mornington Island State School children in monitoring activities through the mentoring program. Database use to store results.	Ongoing



Wellesley Islands Rangers on seagrass mapping exercise. Photos courtesy of DAFF (Qld).



Beach patrol.



Wellesley Islands Rangers on seagrass mapping exercise. Photos courtesy of DAFF.



Ghostnet patrol. Photo courtesy of Lisa Buchanan, Working on Country.



During sea country patrols, our rangers will also record all sightings, discovery of sick or injured dugongs, and the number and location of feeding trails through seagrass meadows.

We would like to work with the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen’s Association and the Northern Prawn Trawl Fishery to negotiate seasonal closures to important dugong feeding and breeding grounds within our sea country.

Depletion of Marine Turtle Numbers

A number of important considerations need to be highlighted in regard to the management of marine turtles. Firstly, recent research has identified the green turtle population of the Wellesley Islands region as being genetically distinct to east-coast populations and thus careful management of this population will need to occur to ensure their survival. Secondly, marine turtles do not migrate and nest every year, but rather there can be several years between these events. This means that accurate data predicting population trends of marine turtles needs to be collected over at least ten years.²¹ It also means that if an event has a significant impact on turtles now, it could be several years before the full effects on numbers is realised.

As with dugong, we propose to conduct a long-term survey of how many turtles our hunters are taking throughout the year and to collect similar data on a fortnightly basis by the Wellesley Islands Rangers over several years. The rangers will visit known hunters in the community to collect information and to develop a database to determine where major hunting areas are, where area closures are best located and whether such management techniques will have a positive effect on turtle numbers. Our rangers will conduct regular patrols of sea country and take necropsy/biopsy samples from any deceased or obviously sick turtles they discover. Samples will then be sent to the appropriate agencies for analysis.

ACTION TABLE: Marine Turtles

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Unknown causes of sick turtles and fatalities	Wellesley Islands Rangers to regularly patrol sea country. Take necropsy samples are required. Encourage scientific research. Rangers to undertake water quality testing/ monitoring.	High	Rangers will receive training in water quality and necropsy sampling and become highly proficient at undertaking tests.	Ongoing
Unknown level of Traditional Owner harvest	Wellesley Islands Rangers to undertake survey of known hunters on a regular (e.g. fortnightly) basis.	Medium	Database used to collate survey results. At least two years to complete, but five preferred.	2015
Unreliable and unquantified by-catch data	Undertake regular ranger patrols of sea country to ensure fisheries operators are conforming to regulations. Encourage scientific research to establish better picture of by-catch species and quantity in the Gulf.	Low	Ranger presence on country will encourage fisheries operators to obey regulations. Long-term goal to have rangers delegated authority under the Fisheries Act to have enforcement capabilities.	Ongoing 2015
Over-harvest of turtle eggs and other forms of human disturbance of nesting sites	Seasonal closure of beaches on Mornington Island – no take policy in closed areas. No vehicular traffic on closed beaches.	High	Rangers monitor nesting sites and record hatchling rates over time.	Ongoing
Ghost nets	Wellesley Islands Rangers to continue ghost net cleanup.	High	Removal of ghost nets on a continuing basis. Reduction in marine fauna becoming tangled in nets.	Ongoing
Predation of nests by animals	Wellesley Islands Rangers to develop and trial various barriers to prevent predation.	Medium	Determine best methods to address problem and continue to install over nests. Increase in hatchling numbers over time.	Ongoing Ongoing
Increased occurrence of nesting site drownings	Monitor nest sites to determine extent of threat. Relocate nests as appropriate.	Low	Record number of nests requiring relocation in database.	Ongoing
Commercial harvest of jellyfish	Objection to harvest of jellyfish due to un-investigated impact on turtles as a food-source	Low	Denial of developmental fishery permit by DAFF (FQ)	Ongoing when required

²¹ NAILSMA (2006) Dugong and Marine Turtle Knowledge Handbook – Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge of Dugongs & Marine Turtles in Northern Australia, Tropical Savannas CRC & National Heritage Trust. pg62.

The Lardil People have proposed to close certain beaches during nesting season to limit the take of eggs. The Wellesley Islands Rangers will patrol nesting sites to enforce the no-take policy from these beaches. On beaches where there is a no-take policy on turtle eggs, the beach will be closed off to all four wheel drives. Quad-bikes will be utilised by the rangers to patrol the area to enforce the closure and monitor nesting sites. We are in the process of developing suitable barriers to prevent feral pigs and wild dogs impacting upon turtle nests and implementing control methods to reduce the number of feral animals across the region.

As suggested in relation to our concerns for the management of dugong populations, we would like to work with the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association and the Northern Prawn Trawl Fishery to negotiate seasonal closures to important turtle feeding and breeding grounds within our sea country.

Our rangers need further resourcing to be able to conduct and expand the scope of the work they are undertaking with the Carpentaria Ghost Net Project. There is a substantial area to cover and not sufficient resources to do so.

Increased Pollutants in Gulf Waters

Our rangers can conduct monitoring of sea water quality to test for contaminants. Four different sites are proposed for testing of heavy metal contaminants, turbidity and silt levels. Samples will be sent for analysis of possible heavy metals present every six months. We also need to educate the wider community in relation to the consequences of large amounts of silt washing off the mainland into the sea.

ACTION TABLE: Pollutants

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Ghost nets	Regular zoned patrols across country. Collection of all nets discovered and tagging of all nets too large for immediate removal.	Medium	Reduction in the amount of rubbish found on beaches and the amount of animals being potentially caught in nets.	Ongoing
Decrease in seawater quality	Water quality testing methodology established.	Medium	Rangers trained in water sampling techniques. All results entered in database to monitor quality over time.	2013
	Rangers trained in water quality sampling.	Medium		2013
	Rangers to collect samples of seawater from designated locations twice a year for heavy metal analysis.	Medium		Ongoing
	Rangers undertake turbidity sampling four times a year at designated locations to monitor quality.	Medium		Ongoing



Marine debris. Photo courtesy of Dermot Smyth.



Turtle tracks on Bentinck Island. Photo courtesy of DAFF Biosecurity.



Turtle nesting.

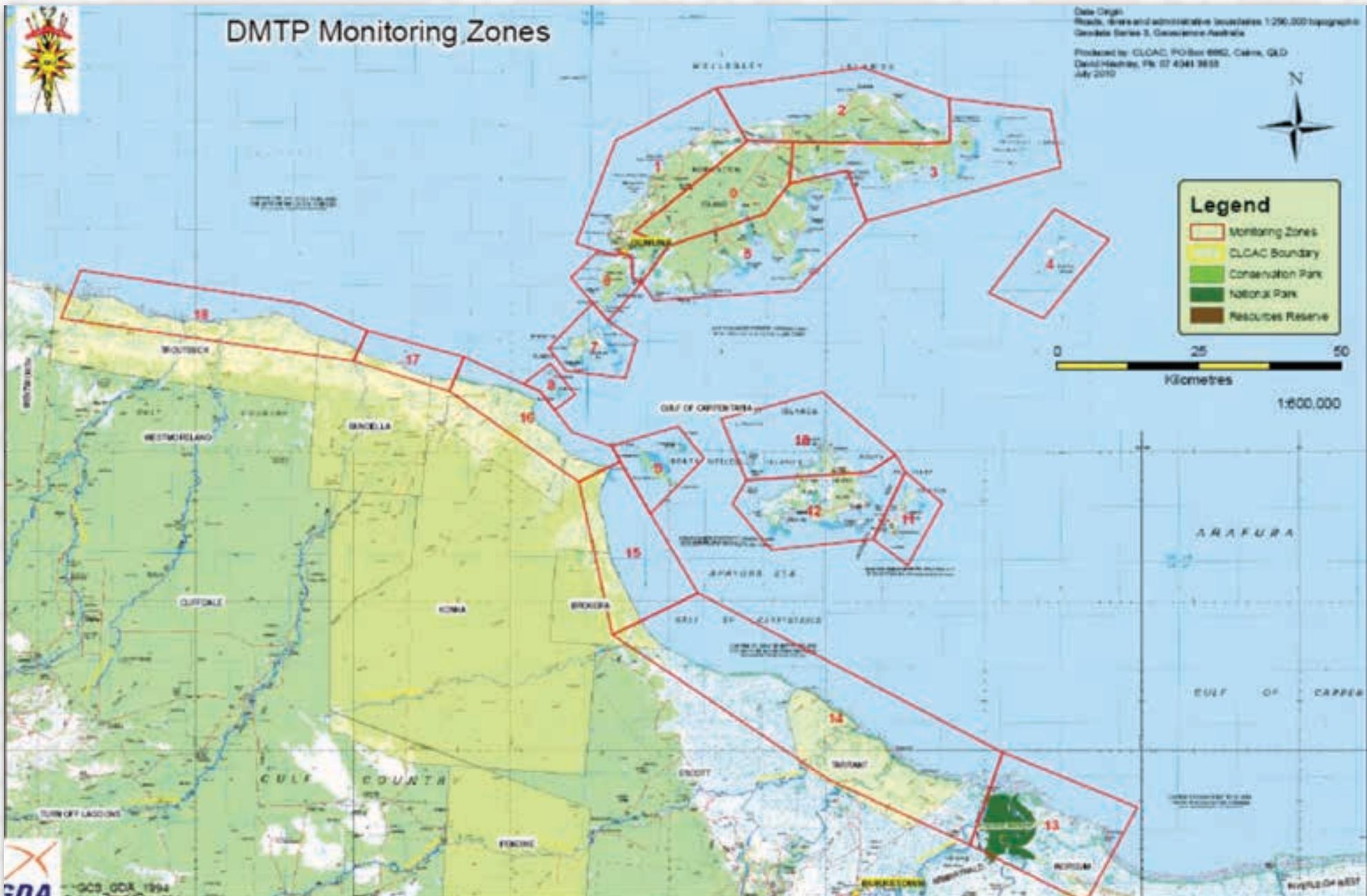


Green turtle inter-tidal basking at Turtle Island. Photo courtesy of DAFF Biosecurity.



Turtle on beach.





Map 5.1: Ranger monitoring zones for sea patrols.

Lack of available baseline data

As part of the process of developing this management plan we have become aware there is a serious shortfall in scientific knowledge concerning many species in our region. Such shortfalls include species population levels and trends and overall habitat health. It is important that these baseline values be established to ascertain the effectiveness of our management plan and day-to-day ranger activities. We actively invite scientists involved in research projects applicable to our region, visiting researchers, etc to work with our rangers in what will be a mutually beneficial arrangement to collect environmental information across the region.



Woomera dancers. Photo courtesy of Dermot Smyth

ACTION TABLE: Baseline Data

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Lack of information concerning many species in the region	Encourage scientific research in the region. Establish a database to store all monitoring activities Ranger surveys undertaken on a regular basis to monitor population trends and ecological health.	Low	Results of monitoring will be available to government and researchers on request. Database will become a valuable asset over time for natural resource management.	Ongoing
Lack of recorded traditional knowledge ecological knowledge	Rangers to interview and record Elders on traditional names and uses of plants and animals to develop a handbook of traditional knowledge incorporating western scientific names and other basic information. Compile traditional ecological knowledge from publications by anthropologists and other published sources.	Medium-High Medium-High	Interviews with Elders digitally recorded and saved. Information on traditional ecological entered into database and handbook developed over time. Previously published information on traditional ecological knowledge available in easily accessible format.	Ongoing with handbook completed by 2015.
Unknown level of traditional fishery	Wellesley Islands Rangers to adapt and conduct "Indigenous Subsistence Fishing Survey Kit"	Medium	Rangers trained in survey techniques. Level of traditional fishery established. Figures to be provided to DAFF (FQ) – traditional fishery accounted for in Fin Fish Management Plan etc.	Completed 2015

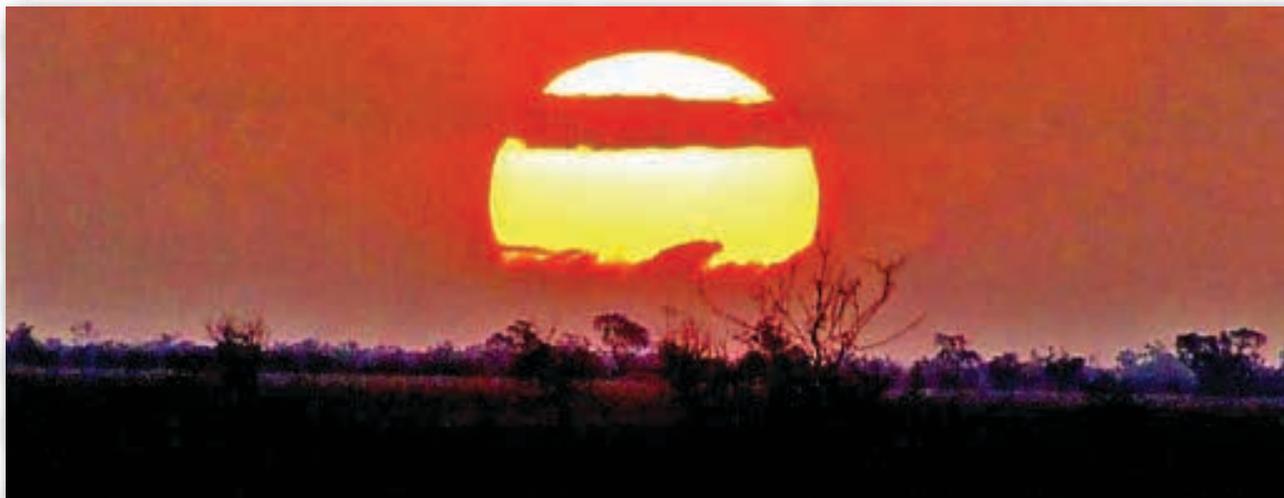


Photo courtesy of Kelly Gardner.

Commercial fishing operations

We hope that infringements by the commercial fishery can be reduced as a result of our rangers patrolling sea our country on a regular basis. Eventually, we would like to see our rangers fully trained in fisheries enforcement and receive the appropriate delegations from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) – Fisheries Queensland.

As outlined above, we would like to work with the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen’s Association (GoCCFA) and the Northern Prawn Trawl Fishery to negotiate seasonal closures to important feeding and breeding grounds within our sea country and inshore closures for sorry business. In return for these closures, we propose to develop a “Traditional Owner Friendly Fishery” Symbol for the commercial sector to use as an economic incentive to buyers in an increasingly socially aware market place.

The GoCCFA has agreed to cultural heritage induction training for all commercial fishermen who operate within the Wellesley Islands region. The commercial fishermen have suggested this training be compulsory and form part of the Master of Operations, much in the same way as Interaction with Protected Species training is required by all vessel Masters.

Building upon this idea, under the proposed Traditional Owner Friendly Fishery Symbol all commercial fishers would be required to attend a cultural heritage induction to operate in the management area and to be entitled to use the symbol. In an increasingly socially-aware marketplace such a symbol can have a real economic benefit to fishers adding value to their products. Participation in the scheme is voluntary, though it is eventually hoped failure to participate will result in the exclusion of the fisher from the management area.

As all the Wellesley Islands are Aboriginal Lease Lands and now subject to exclusive Native Title, we ask that no commercial fishing operator land on any of the islands, other than in areas where permission has been expressly granted, except in the case of emergency. In such circumstances, we would appreciate being notified as soon as possible to ensure the safety of the crew and to assess any possible resulting damage to the area.

ACTION TABLE: Commercial Fishing

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Infringements	Patrolling (negotiation of potential enforcement role). Proposed development of endorsed fishery symbol.	Medium/ High	Reduction in illegal fishing activity, greater protection for cultural heritage sites located in the littoral zone, reduction in conflict between fishermen and Traditional Owners	Ongoing 2013
Overfishing and fishing in traditional fishing grounds	Negotiate a Cultural Heritage Management Protocol.	Medium	Greater protection for cultural heritage sites located in the littoral zone, reduction in conflict between fishermen and Traditional Owners.	2013
	Lobby DAFF (FQ) to re-establish discrete fisheries areas (e.g. east-coast and Gulf crab fisheries)	Medium		2013
	Compulsory cultural heritage induction training for commercial fishermen operating within the Wellesley Islands region	High	Commercial incentive for commercial fishermen to undertake cultural heritage induction to potentially limit fishing effort to those having completed training.	2014
	Creation of a Traditional Owner endorsed fishery symbol for use in the market place		Commercial incentive for fishermen to undertake training with creation of a “Traditional Owner Friendly Fishery” Symbol.	2013
	Lobby for the reduction of non-Indigenous fishing effort through a buy-back of licences &/or compensation for reduction in access to areas	High	Reduction of commercial fishing effort in the region and greater access for Traditional Owners to marine resources	2015
Unknown level of traditional fishery	Wellesley Islands Rangers to adapt and conduct “Indigenous Subsistence Fishing Survey”	Medium	Rangers trained in survey techniques Level of traditional fishery established. Figures to be provided to DAFF (FQ) – traditional fishery to be recognised and allocated for in “Inshore Finfish Management Plan”	Completed 2015
Protection of cultural heritage sites and traditional laws and customs	Cultural heritage induction training for all commercial fishermen operating in the Wellesley Islands region	Medium	Strengthening of relationship between Traditional Owners and commercial fishermen	Completed and ongoing as required
	Obtain support from DAFF (FQ), AFMA and relevant commercial fishers’ organisations for recognition of cultural heritage induction training on Master of Operation tickets		Increased protection for cultural heritage sites in inshore areas	
	Creation of a Traditional Owner endorsed fishery symbol for use in the market place			2014

Tourism

Whilst tourism numbers are quite low due to the remoteness of the region and the lack of knowledge in relation to the unique natural and cultural wonders of the area we are aware that numbers of visitors are on the rise. The advent of cheaper, but more sophisticated GPS systems available on the market has corresponded with an increase in the number of private recreational fishermen entering our waters, often with dangerous consequences.

For example, in 2010 there was a marked increase in call-outs for the Volunteer Marine Rescue organisations due to unseasonably late rain and rapid deterioration in weather conditions.²²

There are many dangerous places in our waters and the weather can change quickly without warning. We do not wish to see people come to harm on our country. There are also dangerous places on our country where spirits can do you harm if you are not accompanied by the right people for that area. Because of this camping on all islands is prohibited.



ACTION TABLE: Tourism

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Unauthorised access to country	Introduction of permit system	Medium	Reduction of unauthorised access	2013/2014
	Cultural heritage induction for all over-nighting visitors and semi-permanent residents	High	Increased protection of cultural heritage sites	2013/2014
	Visitor brochures for regional tourism information offices	High	Improved relationship between Traditional Owners and semi-permanent visitors Increase in cultural tourism	2013/2014



Whitecliff.

²² Paul Poole, Vice President, Gulf Zone, Volunteer Marine Rescue Queensland – Per. Comm. 09/06/2010

Pest Animals and Weeds

Pest animals and weeds are currently the main threat to the terrestrial environment of the Wellesley Islands. In recognition of the importance of this threat CLCAC has developed a Pests and Weeds Management Plan, in combination with the fire guidelines, setting out in detail the key threats and planned management actions to be taken by CLCAC Land and Sea Rangers to deal with these threats.

Key actions from this plan are summarised below. For more detail see the Wellesley Islands Management Guidelines in Appendix 3.



Calotrope invades huge areas across many islands.

ACTION TABLE: Pests and Weeds

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Weeds and pests impacting on turtles, birds and other native species	Cane toads on Bentinck and Sweers Islands need to be eradicated before they spread to other islands. Bird surveys of the island need to be completed to ascertain appropriate treatment.	Medium	Bird surveys of both Bentinck and Sweers Island by Wellesley Islands Rangers.	Twice yearly
			Eradication of cane toads from the region.	2014/1015
	Weeds on Mornington Island in particular need to be chemically treated and eradicated. Fire regimes can assist in follow-up measures.	High	Rangers trained in chemical handling, use and transport.	Completed
	Monitor impact of feral animals on fresh water holes	Medium	Eradication or significant reduction of weeds from Mornington Island.	Ongoing
	Implementation of Pest & Weed Management Plan	High	Reestablishment of traditional fire regime on Mornington Island.	2015
	Community education to eradicate weeds from domestic gardens	Low	Record interactions between introduced species and turtle/bird nesting sites	Ongoing
			Increase in fledgling numbers over time.	
			Mapping to monitor weed distribution and success of treatment type.	Ongoing
			Fencing (if required) of significant fresh water features	2011-4
			Increased assistance from Mornington Shire Council in weed and pest management, particularly around town areas	2013
	Eradication of all potential weed species from town areas	2014		



Morning glory. Photo courtesy of Noel Henderson.

Commercial Marine Harvesting

We are keen to investigate the potential of low-impact sustainable harvest of species we have traditionally traded, such as beche-de-mer. We do not wish to see the overexploitation of any of our natural resources. This includes the issuance of developmental fishery permits without the necessary viability studies to ensure harvest levels are sustainable and do not impact on other marine resources (e.g. jellyfish harvest impacting on available food for turtles). We resent outside organisations wishing to visit our country, take our resources and not offer anything to Traditional Owners. We rely on these resources to feed our families now and into the future and we know once a resource is depleted it can take years to regenerate, and sometimes never.

Damage to Cultural Heritage Sites

Indigenous cultural heritage can be both physical (e.g. an artefact), or spiritual. It is impossible for visitors to our country to detect spiritual sites of significance. Some of these sites can be dangerous and some can be damaged by mere presence on country. It is of great offence to us when such desecration, often unintentional, occurs. It is for this reason we would like to educate people visiting our country about our laws and customs. We propose to introduce an induction for all people travelling to our country, to ensure the wellbeing of all.



Forsyth Island burial site restoration project.

ACTION TABLE: Marine Harvesting

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Investigate potential for Indigenous low-impact beche-be-mer (teping) harvest and possible joint venture	Conduct viability studies with scientists to determine level of sustainable harvest and economic return.	Medium	Development of sustainable harvest of beche-de-mer	2014/2015
	Support Traditional Owners in the development of wild harvesting of resource licences.		Economic return to the community	2015/2016
			Employment opportunities	2015/2016
Restriction of developmental fishery permit for high/medium impact beche-be-mer harvest	Objection to issue of developmental fishery permits by DAFF (FQ)	Medium	No issue of permits	Ongoing when required
	Conditions placed on issued permits should objection not be successful – i.e. defined area of harvest; Traditional Owner involvement; monitoring of take and sustainable levels of take established		Conditions on the issue of permits and monitoring by independent scientists	Ongoing when required
Restriction of developmental fishery permit for the harvest of jellyfish	Objection to issue of developmental fishery permits by DAFF (FQ)	Medium	No issue of permits	Ongoing when required
	Conditions placed on issued permits should objection not be successful – i.e. defined area of harvest; Traditional Owner involvement; monitoring of take and sustainable levels of take established		Conditions on the issue of permits and monitoring by independent scientists	Ongoing when required

ACTION TABLE: Cultural Heritage Sites

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Damage to cultural heritage sites	All visitors to Mornington Island will be required to undergo a cultural induction (this includes health-care professionals, police, teachers, contractors etc).	High	Establishment of a protocol for the delivery of the cultural induction by the Wellesley Islands Rangers on a fee-for-service arrangement.	2013/2014
	To visit areas outside of Gununa (on Mornington Island) non-Traditional Owners will require permission.	Medium	Develop an ILUA with Mornington Shire Council to restrict access to Mornington Island outside of the township.	2013/2014
	Restoration of exposed burial sites on Forsyth, Bentinck and Mornington Islands.	Medium/low	Remediation works on all islands with exposed burial sites.	Ongoing as required
	Restoration of stone fish traps.	Medium/low	Remediation works of all damaged fish traps.	Ongoing as required



Biosecurity issues - borers washing ashore in debris.



Chemical weed work.



Chemical weed work.



Chemical weed work.



ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Maintaining Cultural Identity

We propose to interview our Elders to record traditional knowledge in relation to natural resource management. As part of these interviews, information will be recorded on plant and animal species, including the traditional (language) names, western/scientific name and the traditional and contemporary uses of the species. A handbook will be developed over time recording this information for day-to-day use by the Rangers and also as an education resource for schools.

A database will be created to store information from relating to the day-to-day activities of the Rangers in caring for country. Both the Wellesley Islands Rangers and the Burketown based Wild River Rangers have been trained in the use of the i-Tracker and Cyber Tracker units. This has become an essential monitoring tool and will continue to play an increasingly vital role in the development of our database information.

Rangers will visit schools at Mornington and Burketown to run sessions on topics such as traditional medicine, seagrass-watch, traditional hunting methods, cooking, language, seamanship and traditional bushcraft. This is seen as an important part of ranger work to facilitate the transfer of traditional knowledge from Elders to the younger generation.

School camps will also be hosted by the Rangers on-country where features of the cultural and environmental landscape will be explained to children. Elders will be invited to participate to encourage interaction between these different generations and to reinforce respect for the knowledge Elders hold about caring for country.

ACTION TABLE: Cultural Identity

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Loss of cultural identity	Rangers to visit school regularly to talk about work and culture.	Low	Increase in school attendance rates. Increase in literacy and numeracy skills.	Ongoing
	Rangers to conduct school camps twice yearly with Elders in attendance.	Medium	Increase in traditional knowledge transfer to younger generation.	Ongoing
	Rangers to conduct interviews with Elders and digitally record.	Medium	Digital record of traditional knowledge preserved for future and family.	Ongoing
	Rangers to gather information from Elder regarding traditional names and uses for plant and animal species.	High	Traditional Knowledge Handbook for rangers' immediate use. Preservation of this knowledge.	Ongoing, with completion of Handbook by 2015
	Conduct an annual Ranger Open Day in the community.	Low	Raise awareness of the work they are doing.	Annually
	Develop fire management plan based on traditional fire regimes.		Interviews of, and visits to country by Elders Reintroduction of traditional mosaic fire regime	Ongoing interviews Fire management plan finalised by 2013



Ranger Lawrence Burke at school. Photo courtesy of Cameo Dalley.



Lawrence teaching dance.

Employment opportunities

The Department of the Environment and Heritage's 2006 review of the IPA program noted that:

"Indigenous sea rangers are the eyes and ears along Australia's most remote northern coastline. They are the guardians of local knowledge, providing invaluable backup for Police, Fisheries, Conservation, Customs and Quarantine. Indigenous sea rangers routinely tackle a diverse caseload involving surveillance and monitoring, marine debris clean-up, animal rescue and cultural educational activities. Sea rangers need to be properly trained and resourced to keep illegal fishing vessels, feral animals and diseases from reaching Australian shores. To date, most Indigenous sea ranger positions have been funded through CDEP and appropriate resources to effectively support the program have not been available"²³

The review went on to note that a properly funded and integrated ranger program would engage Indigenous land and water managers, enabling more efficient use of the available on-ground resources and expertise, better coordination and prioritisation of activities within the 'caring for country' framework across conservation areas; and a more educationally engaged and experienced pool of young people.²⁴

The Wellesley Islands Rangers are a fledgling group, having been formed in July 2007. In the short time they have been together, however, they have successfully completed studies in Land Conservation Management Certificate III, outboard maintenance, GIS/GPS training; iTracker, compliance and investigation training, Seagrass-Watch, turtle-tagging, dugong biopsy techniques, satellite tracking of turtles, some AQIS and Customs training, interviewing techniques, leadership training, team-bonding sessions, time management, burial site restoration, traditional knowledge recording, advanced chemical handling and bird survey techniques.

The capacity of the Wellesley Islands Rangers will develop over time as they undertake additional training. Further funding and resourcing of this group is required to ensure this important work continues. Further scientific

(technical) advice/training is required in turtle and dugong necropsy work, fisheries sampling, biodiversity survey work, water quality sampling and enforcement.

ACTION TABLE: Employment

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Increase local skilled employment opportunities in natural resource management	Conduct an annual Ranger Open Day in community	Medium	Raise awareness within the community of the work of the rangers and potential career stream.	Annually
	Rangers to visit festivals, workshops and conferences (e.g. Woodford Folk Festival, National Indigenous Land & Sea Management Conference)	Low	Raise awareness of the valuable work of the rangers and lobby for additional resourcing. Increase the capacity of rangers.	Ongoing
	Rangers to participate in Employment Expo at Mornington State School	Low	Increased interest in school aged children in caring for country and becoming rangers.	Ongoing
	Continue to lobby for additional ranger resourcing through funding agencies	High	Additional funding for ranger places, increased training opportunities for rangers, increase in ranger bases across the islands.	Ongoing



Plane crash memorial, Gunana 2006.

²³ The Indigenous Protected Areas programme - 2006 Evaluation by Brian Gilligan, p.39. ²⁴ Ibid at 40.



Wellesley Islands land claim determination and celebration – 9 December 2008, presided by Justice Spender (QUD7/2006)



Wellesley Islands land claim determination and celebration – 9 December 2008, presided by Justice Spender (QUD7/2006).

Sustainable Cultural Harvesting and Use of Resource

There is some concern amongst Traditional Owners that too many turtles and dugong are being taken from popular hunting grounds. To establish whether there is a problem with the amount being taken our rangers will undertake community consultations to determine the amount taken and where from predominantly.



Sustainable Development Opportunities

Certain Traditional Owners have expressed their desire to develop sustainable tourism operations on their country or in collaboration with existing tourism operators (such as the fishing lodges/resorts). Initially these opportunities would involve the sale of locally produced arts & crafts to tourist visiting these operations, but could be extended to include cultural tours of country and eventually Traditional Owner owned accommodation where tourists could experience a host of activities promoted by Traditional Owners.

Also possible are joint ventures with particular developmental fishing activities proposed for the region, such as beche-de-mer and jellyfish harvest. We are very keen to discuss these ideas with companies wanting to come to our region and work with Traditional Owners.

ACTION TABLE: Sustainable Harvesting and Use of Resources

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Localised over-harvest of turtle eggs	Closure of local beaches for egg collection based on harvest data and community consultations	Medium	Rangers to advise community of closure and provide general education around the closure Rangers to patrol beaches and enforce closure	Ongoing
Potential localised over-harvest of turtle	Localised closures in some estates Closures along the mainland coast	Low	Rangers to monitor the level of take in particular known hunting areas across the region Community consultations to occur to determine closures	Ongoing
Potential localised over-harvest of dugong	Localised closures in some estates Closures along the mainland coast	Low	Rangers to monitor the level of take in particular known hunting areas across the region Community consultations to occur to determine closures	Ongoing

ACTION TABLE: Sustainable Development

Issue	Traditional Owner Management Response	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
Commercial marine harvest	Enter into joint venture arrangements to establish the viability of beche-de-mer developmental fishery Enter into joint venture arrangements to establish the viability of the jellyfish developmental fishery	Medium	DAFF (FQ) only to issue permits after consultation with Traditional Owners. DAFF (FQ) only to issue permits for developmental fisheries on condition joint venture arrangements with Traditional Owners takes place.	As required
Tourism	Enter into arrangements with existing fishing resorts to develop cultural tourism opportunities	Low	Opportunities to sell arts & crafts locally and to have cultural tours of country.	2013/2014



Above and right: IPA consultation and workshop 2009.

Service Delivery for resource management agencies

Our rangers are perfectly placed to offer service delivery to both government and non-government agencies working in the lower Gulf of Carpentaria and are keen to develop their capacity in this regard. Rangers already work with DAFF Biosecurity (formerly AQIS) undertaking marine debris, weeds, feral animals surveys and patrols for foreign fishing vessels. Over time and with the assistance of DAFF (FQ) and NPRSR it is hoped our rangers will receive enforcement powers under fisheries legislation and investigation powers the *Nature Conservation Act*.

We would request all agencies operating in our region work alongside our rangers to develop their capacity for this type of work. Our rangers live and work within the region, know the region intimately and are a cost effective alternative to bringing in outside officers to undertake similar activities.

We still see evidence of illegal foreign fishing vessels in the lower Gulf, despite effort of government to stem these incursions. Our rangers can offer a cost effective solution to conduct surveillance of the region.



Sea country patrol.

ACTION TABLE: Service Delivery

Issue	Priority	Expected outcomes/activities	Time frame
DAFF Biosecurity (formerly AQIS)	High	DAFF Biosecurity to provide training for rangers	Ongoing
		Service agreements established for rangers to undertake agreed activities	Completed
		Surveillance of country to ensure biosecurity maintained	Ongoing
DAFF (FQ)	High	Training for rangers in fisheries evidence collection and compliance	Initial training completed. Remaining training to be delivered over time.
		Reduction of fishing infringements over time	Ongoing
Ghostnets Australia	High	Service agreements established for ranger to undertake net collection	Completed
		Rangers actively collect all ghost nets discovered in the Wellesley Islands region	Ongoing
Mornington Shire Council	High	Service agreement established for rangers to undertake weed eradication in town areas Rangers	Completed









Part 6:

Implementation, monitoring & review

This plan has been developed by the Traditional Owner community with the assistance of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. The action plan will be implemented by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation over the next five years.

THE WELLESLEY ISLANDS RANGERS

The Traditional Owners, with the support of CLCAC, strongly believe that we are best placed to achieve the most cost effective methods of environmental management in this remote locality. We hold a vast amount of ecological knowledge specific to the region, its seasons and its species. Traditional Owner management also fulfils Traditional Owner responsibility to care for country, thus raising the motivations of the community as a whole to 'care for country'. Feedback given to rangers by Traditional Owners (and other stakeholders/interested parties) will also be an important monitoring tool.

Success of this management plan will initially be measured against the amount of information that is collected by the Wellesley Islands Rangers and entered into the appropriate database maintained by CLCAC. Reports will be able to be generated on all aspects of the collated information for use by rangers across the Gulf region and any other agencies upon request. The success of the database will only be realised after at least two-years of data collection. Over time, the database will become an essential reporting tool on the health of the environment of the region. Success will also be measured by the number of requests we receive from government agencies and researchers for access to information held in the database, and in our Rangers obtaining further contracts from other agencies such as AQIS and Customs.

The introduction and use of the i-Tracker/Cyber Tracker system has greatly enhanced the capacity of the Wellesley Islands Rangers to monitor the outcomes of this management plan. Already activities are being achieved and the level of their success measured accurately. This system generates full reports on all ranger activities and can produce maps plotting weed spread and eradication efforts, turtle and dugong migration paths, feeding grounds etc. Photographs documenting the success or failure of particular activities are also capable of being linked to these reports. All information collected is entered into the database for long term monitoring of results of activities/patrols.

Patrols of sea country occurring on a regular basis (i.e. at least once per week weather permitting) will be essential to this management approach and will be a further measure of success. Physical outcomes for the environment, such as a recorded increase in dugong abundance, will take several years to document, but should become apparent over time.

We expect that over time the qualifications held by our rangers will also increase. For example, a key long-term measurable outcome in this regard will be the delegation of appropriate powers under legislation for our Rangers to undertake enforcement of Fisheries Regulations.

In the event of the declaration of an IPA over the Wellesley Sea Country region as proposed in this management plan, we will need funding to assist in the implementation of the management actions. Progress reports will be provided to any agency that provides such funding.

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT FROM STAKEHOLDERS

In order for the ranger program to have the capacity to fully implement, monitor and review the management activities outlined in this plan we will require assistance from various government agencies in the way of funding, training and the provision of appropriate infrastructure. We are very grateful to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities for funding our rangers through the Working on Country program. What is currently lacking is the availability of trainers to travel to this remote region and train our rangers in discrete activities such as turtle necropsy and biopsy sampling, biodiversity surveying techniques, water quality sampling, fisheries enforcement etc. Our rangers desperately require this training to ensure a full host of monitoring activities can occur.

Further negotiations are also required in relation to the Cultural Heritage Management Protocol. We appreciate the ongoing consultations between Traditional Owners and CLCAC with the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association and hope to finalise such arrangements in 2014.

The table below set outs from our perspective areas showing agreed support from these stakeholders and issues of ongoing negotiation.

ACTION TABLE: Agreed Implementation Support

Interested Party	Agreed Support	Further Negotiations Required
DAFF (FQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a protocol for the assessment of new/developmental fisheries in the region that includes the Traditional Owners in the beginning of the application process, rather than a right to be informed and comment on proposals at the conclusion of the assessment process; Establish a line of communication between Traditional Owners and DAFF (FQ) to improve the working relationship between them and to provide a clear pathway for the DAFF (FQ) to communicate with Traditional Owners; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a partnership with DAFF (FQ) to develop primary industry enterprises and undertake biodiversity surveillance; Review of existing area closures (these were initially created without Traditional Owner consultations taking place); Negotiate training and possible resourcing of rangers to undertake the Indigenous Subsistence Fishing Survey across the region; Discuss potential DAFF (FQ) investment of funds and resources to assist with the running of the proposed Indigenous Fisheries Forum; Possible training and resourcing rangers to become Authorised Officers under the <i>Fisheries Act 1994</i> (Qld) to enforce Fisheries Regulations in the region (currently only 4 Authorised Officers in the entire Gulf of Carpentaria: 2 based in Weipa and 2 based in Karumba.). This is a long-term goal of the community and the Wellesley Islands Rangers with the support of the GoCCFA and GulfMAC; Creation of a "Traditional Owner friendly" endorsed fishery scheme; Inclusion of cultural heritage induction training as part of the Master of Operations.
DATSIMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiate resources and funding to assist the Traditional Owners to include cultural heritage sites on the Queensland Register.
NPRSR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a working relationship between the NPRSR and Traditional Owners; Reconfirm NPRSR support for the creation of an IPA across the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion on the creation of new Fish Habitat Areas along the mainland coast (Gangalidda traditional country) Training for rangers, especially in water quality assessment; Creation of a shared management regime for the Bountifuls, Rocky and Manowar Islands; Creation of a Marine Park (Qld) in State Waters underpinning the Wellesley Islands IPA; Discuss the establishment of a higher level of protection for critical marine habitat around Bountifuls, Rocky and Manowar Islands (such as Marine National Park) Possible training and resourcing the rangers to become Inspectors under the <i>Marine Parks Act (Qld)</i> to enforce Marine Parks regulations in the region; Training and resources for rangers to implement conservation management, including workshops with wildlife experts such as Dr Col Limpus.
AFMA (including NORMAC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Prawn Trawl fishers to complete cultural heritage awareness training prior to the commencement of the 2013 prawn trawl season; Open invitation for Traditional Owner representatives to attend NORMAC meetings; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renegotiate existing area closures around the islands to afford Traditional Owners with a greater level of privacy on homelands (currently trawlers are reported in extremely close proximity to the shore) and to encourage prawn fishers to be respectful of the legally recognised traditional custodians of the region (original closures were created without Traditional Owner consultation); Discuss potential AFMA investment of funds and resources to assist with the running of the proposed Indigenous Fisheries Forum; Request a Traditional Owner representative be elected to a seat on NORMAC to provide a clear line of communication between the Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands region and the management of the Northern Prawn Trawl Fishery.

Interested Party	Agreed Support	Further Negotiations Required
NPF Industry Pty Ltd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishermen to undertake cultural heritage awareness training (beginning of barramundi season). Support the development of a "Traditional Owner friendly" endorsed fishery scheme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate communication with CEO of NPF Industry with a view to building relationship with between traditional Owners, Rangers and licence prawn fishers operating in The Wellesley Islands Region. Negotiate proposed Cultural Heritage Management Protocol.
Tourism operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support from tourism operators to be negotiated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop access protocols with tourism operators and other visitors to the region as part of the negotiations with these organisations
GoCCFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishermen to undertake cultural heritage awareness training (beginning of barramundi season). Additional training for rangers in commercial fishery compliance. Support the development of a "Traditional Owner friendly" endorsed fishery scheme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop access protocols with commercial fishermen and other visitors to the region as part of the negotiations with these organisations; Agreement on area closures within region.
General outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of ranger work protocols/procedures and work plans based on management issues identified in the management plan; Capacity development of rangers, including possible fee-for-service arrangements with government agencies – e.g. Australian Customs and Border Security Service, DAFF Biosecurity, Fisheries Queensland inspection & enforcement etc.; Creation of a "Traditional Owner friendly" endorsed fishery scheme Increase in community awareness of potential environmental risks/hazards; Increase in community participation in NRM projects; Increase in knowledge transfer to younger Traditional Owner generation; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop access protocols with tourism operators, commercial fishermen and other visitors to the region as part of the negotiations with these organisations; Develop a cultural induction for all visitors to the region with delivery by the Wellesley Islands Rangers; Increase in the awareness of the community both within the region and beyond of the activities of the Wellesley Islands Rangers; Establishment of a positive working relationship between the Traditional Owners and other stakeholders within the region; Decrease in domestic violence rates within the Gununa community; Increase in school attendance rates and both literacy and numeracy skills of Mornington State School; Establishment of clear communication pathways for rangers to be able to report back to various government departments/agencies on the conditions of the region (many ecological reports on the region are critical of the knowledge gaps that still exist in relation to many species present in the region).



Elizabeth River, Mornington Island.



Morning Glory cloud formation. Photo courtesy of DropBears.



Fishtrap, Forsyth Island.



Top end of Mornington Island.



Scheduled burn for weed work.

MONITORING, EVALUATION

The Traditional Owners, with the support of CLCAC, strongly believe that we are best placed to achieve the most cost effective methods of environmental management in this remote locality. We hold a vast amount of ecological knowledge specific to the region, its seasons and its species. Traditional Owner management also fulfils Traditional Owner responsibility to care for country, thus raising the motivations of the community as a whole to 'care for country'. Feedback given to rangers by Traditional Owners (and other stakeholders/interested parties) will also be an important monitoring tool.

The target outcomes and timelines set out in the management action tables above will provide effective reference points for monitoring the implementation of this management plan over time. These targets will be complemented with year by year project targets contained within specific funding agreements.

Success of this management plan will initially be measured against the amount of information that is collected by the Wellesley Islands Rangers and entered into the appropriate database maintained by CLCAC. Reports will be able to be generated on all aspects of the collated information for use by rangers across the Gulf region and any other agencies upon request. The success of the database will only be realised after at least five-years of data collection. Over time, the database will become an essential reporting tool on the health of the environment of the region. Success will also be measured by the number of requests we receive from government agencies and researchers for access to information held in the database, and in our Rangers obtaining further contracts from other agencies such as DAFF Biosecurity and Customs & Border Security.

The introduction and use of the I-Tracker/Cyber Tracker system has greatly enhanced the capacity of the Wellesley Islands Rangers to monitor the outcomes of this management plan. Already activities are being achieved and the level of their success measured accurately. This system generates full reports on all ranger activities and



can produce maps plotting weed spread and eradication efforts, turtle and dugong migration paths, feeding grounds etc. Photographs documenting the success or failure of particular activities are also capable of being linked to these reports. All information collected is entered into the database for long term monitoring of results of activities/patrols.

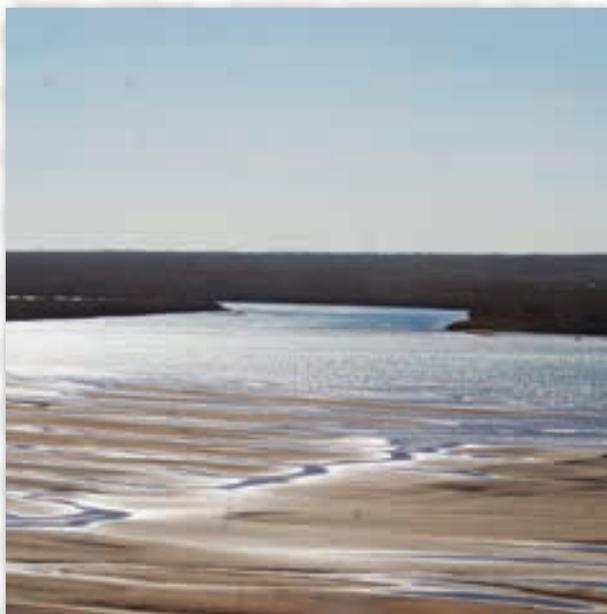
Patrols of sea country occurring on a regular basis (i.e. at least once per week weather permitting) will be essential to this management approach and will be a further measure of success. Physical outcomes for the environment, such as a recorded increase in dugong abundance, will take several years to document, but should become apparent over time.

We expect that over time the qualifications held by our rangers will also increase. For example, a key long-term measurable outcome in this regard will be the delegation of appropriate powers under legislation for our Rangers to undertake enforcement of Fisheries Regulations.

Following the dedication of an IPA over the Wellesley Sea Country region as proposed in this management plan, we will seek funding and partnerships to assist in the implementation of the management actions. Progress reports will be provided to any agency that provides such funding.

PLAN REVIEW

Our culture is dynamic and has been continually adapted over time to reflect the changing environment. Like our culture this plan too is dynamic and will be amended over time to reflect the successes or failures of our management strategies. Our rangers are charged with the important and challenging task of managing country in a manner that is responsive to new emerging threats and changes in western scientific knowledge and practices. This plan will be reviewed on an annual basis as will the complementary ranger work plans to ensure the targets within the management plan continue to be met.





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Fish trap.



Aerial view of Manowar Island. Photo courtesy of SEWPAC.



Aerial view of rocky. Photo courtesy of SEWPAC.



Aerial view of rocky. Photo courtesy of SEWPAC.



Frigate bird colony on Manowar Island. Photo courtesy of SEWPAC.

Appendix 1: Environmental Features of the Wellesley Islands

Table A1:1 Traditional names and significant environmental features of the Wellesley Islands

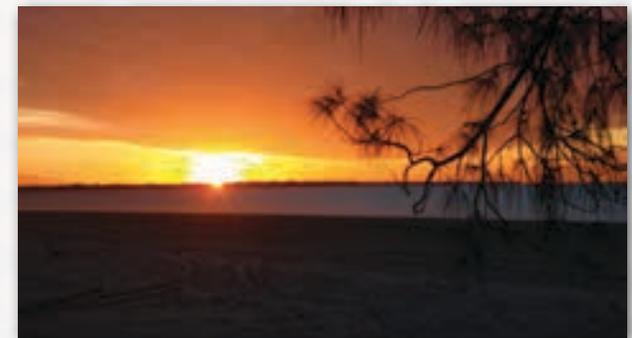
Whitefella name	Traditional Name	Language group	Island area (ha)	Significant features
Mornington Island		Lardil	100,138.92	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 important wader roosts • Floraville sandstone outcrop and associated vegetation • Freshwater streams with permanent waterholes and freshwater swamps • Important seagrass beds • High diversity of terrestrial and marine communities • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites • Significant saltpan and saltmarsh areas
Bentinck Island		Kaiadilt	13,872.57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small freshwater lake, freshwater streams • Important seagrass beds • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites • Significant saltpan and saltmarsh areas
Denham Island	Bathungan	Yangkaal	3,044.24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freshwater swamps • Diverse terrestrial vegetation • Significant tidal flat • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites • Significant saltpan and saltmarsh areas
Forsyth Island	Mayiyanba (or Mayenba)	Yangkaal	1,844.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding seagrass beds • Significant tidal flat • Important dugong area • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites
Wallaby Island	Lingnoonganee	Lardil	1,181.94	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance and well developed frontal dunes
Sweers Island	Ringurrng	Kaiadilt	1,131.98	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kaiadilt cultural sites and continuing traditional use • Links with European exploration and development of northern Australia
Allen Island	Dijara (Yangkaal); Ngaarrkinab (or Thaliwirndiwuru) (Kaiadilt)	Kaiadilt & Gangalidda	1,034.29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites • Possibly geologically distinct from the rest of the Wellesley Islands group

Whitefella name	Traditional Name	Language group	Island area (ha)	Significant features
Sydney Island	Langunganji	Lardil	1,028.65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Important seagrass beds
North Bountiful Island	Kalngkawa	Lardil	418.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest recorded Crested Tern breeding colony in the world • Used as a nesting rookery by part of a major Green Turtle population
Bayley (or Robert) Island	Jurrmanki	Yangkaal & Gangalidda	253.99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites
Horseshoe Island	Dijir (or Jawari, or Dararrbayi)	Kaiadilt, Yangkaal & Gangalidda	167.86	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Well developed mangrove community
Francis (or Pains) Island	Marrangkarba	Yangkaal & Gangalidda	100.84	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Important seagrass beds
Fowler Island	Barthayi	Kaiadilt	93.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Fish traps and other important Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites
Albinia Island	Dalwayi	Kaiadilt	89.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance
South Bountiful Island		Lardil	60.93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a rookery by part of a major Green Turtle population
Pisonia (or Turtle) Island	Meldan or Meldanga	Lardil	60.59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only stand of <i>Pisonia grandis</i> west of the Great Barrier Reef and the type locality of the species • Used as a rookery by part of a major Green Turtle population
Andrew Island	Walbadiin (or Kuriyalkan)	Yangkaal	58.92	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance
Jirke Island			48.87	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Well developed mangrove community
Rocky Island	Kalamburriya	Lardil	46.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listed for environment and cultural significance on the National Estate • Largest Brown Booby nesting population in eastern Australia and the Coral Sea (together with Manowar Island) • Major Green Turtle nesting rookery
Beahgoo Island		Lardil	20.40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Well developed seagrass beds
Lingeleah Island		Lardil	18.54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance
Forsyth North Banks	Wunhan (?)	Yangkaal	12.43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoals and banks of geomorphologic interest • Low disturbance

Whitefella name	Traditional Name	Language group	Island area (ha)	Significant features
Bessie Island	Bildi-Kaarrku	Kaiadilt	12.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Surrounding waters are deeper than is usual for the Wellesley Islands
Douglas Island	Nathayiwinda	Kaiadilt	11.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance • Possibly supports an unusual terrestrial plant community
Little Allen Island		Yangkaal, Kaiadilt & Gangalidda	10.71	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silver Gull rookery on the island may be the largest recorded at a low latitude
Margaret Island	Karndingarrbayi	Kaiadilt	4.63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low disturbance
Manowar Island	Delmerriya or Wudma	Lardil	4.35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest Least Frigatebird colony in eastern Australia • Largest Brown Booby nesting population in eastern Australia and the Coral Sea (together with Rocky Island)
Ivis Island		Yangkaal	1.99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ephemeral island in a rich marine environment • Outstanding seagrass beds • Significant tidal flat • Important dugong area
Southeast Bountiful Island		Lardil	1.36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second largest breeding colony of Roseate Terns in eastern Australia
Locust Rock		Kaiadilt	0.82	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geomorphologic interest • Some nesting by Eastern Reef Egret, Crested Terns and Silver Gulls, and possibly also the White-bellied Sea eagle
Moondalbee Island	Mundalbi	Lardil	0.61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephemeral island of geomorphologic interest
Tulburrerr Island	Bendaa	Lardil	0.41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephemeral island of geomorphologic interest



Sea eagle.



Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of Scott Ling, Reef Life Survey.

Table A1.2: Extracts from the National Estate Register:

WELLESLEY ISLANDS AND SURROUNDS²⁵

Photographs: None

List: Register of the National Estate

Class: Natural

Legal Status: **Indicative Place**

Place ID: 102028

Place File No: 4/07/289/0003

Nominator's Statement of Significance:

Certain islands in the Wellesley Group have important bird rookeries occurring on them. In particular these include: North Bountiful Island which supports the largest crested tern (*STERNA BERGII*) breeding colony recorded in the world; Southeast Bountiful Island, which has the second largest breeding colony of roseate terns (*S. DOUGALLII*) in eastern Australia, a species which is threatened in the northern hemisphere; Manowar Island, which supports a least frigatebird (*FREGATA ARIEL*) colony which contains about 60 % of this species in Australia; and Rocky and Manowar Islands, which together support the largest brown booby (*SULA LEUCOGASTER*) nesting populations in eastern Australia and the Coral Sea.

The Wellesley Islands are important as migratory bird habitats. Twenty-eight birds from the area are listed under the Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement, and 31 species of bird are listed under the China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement.

The seagrass beds around the Wellesley group of islands are significant feeding grounds for the third largest population of dugong (*DUGONG DUGON*) in Queensland, and are also significant feeding grounds for green turtles and many commercial fishing species, including prawns.

The Wellesley Island Group is significant as a major breeding site for a number of marine reptiles. A number of islands, particularly North Bountiful, South Bountiful, Pisonia and Rocky Islands, support a major green turtle (*CHELONIA*

MYDAS) nesting rookery, one of only four in Australia. This population is genetically different from east coast populations. In addition, these islands are the only remaining site in Australia where major intertidal basking of interesting green turtles occurs. The larger islands of the Wellesleys have been recorded as a nesting site of the olive ridley (*LEPIDOCHELYS OLIVACEA*) turtle. Bountiful and Pisonia Islands support major nesting populations of flatback turtles, one of six significant breeding sites in Australia.

The Wellesleys constitute the only records in the Australian region for the gray sharp-nosed shark (*RHIZOPRIONODON OLIGOLINX*) and the wide saw fish (*PRISTIS PECTINATA*).

The Wellesley Islands are important as habitats for a number of rare, endangered and uncommon animals and plants. These are: common death adder (*ACANTHOPHIS ANTARCTICUS*), black-necked stork (*EPHIPPIORHYNCHUS ASIATICUS*), Radjah shelduck (*TADORNA RADJAH*), painted snipe (*ROSTRATULA BENGHALENSIS*), eastern curlew (*NUMENIUS MADAGASCARIENSIS*), sooty oystercatcher (*HAEMATOPUS FULIGINOSUS*), Irrawaddy river dolphin (*ORCAELLA BREVIROSTRIS*) and Indo-Pacific hump-back dolphin (*SOUSA CHINENSIS*), which are listed as rare in Queensland; the estuarine crocodile (*CROCODYLUS POROSUS*), beach thick-knee (*ESACUS NEGLECTUS*), little tern (*STERNA ALBIFRONS*), dugong (*DUGONG DUGONG*) and flatback turtle (*NATATOR DEPRESSUS*) which are listed as vulnerable in Queensland; star finch (*NEOCHMIA RUFICAUDA*) which is endangered in Queensland; loggerhead turtle (*CARETTA CARETTA*) which is endangered both in Queensland and nationally; green turtle (*CHELONIA MYDAS*), and hawksbill turtle (*ERETMOCHELYS IMBRICATA*) which are both vulnerable in Queensland and nationally; leatherback turtle (*DERMOCHELYS CORIACEA*) and olive ridley turtle (*LEPIDOCHELYS OLIVACEAE*) which are both endangered in Queensland and vulnerable nationally. The plant, *DODONAEA OXYPTERA*, is also found on the islands and is considered rare in Queensland. Many of these species are also recognised as rare or endangered under the Bonn convention, including 36 species of birds, one marine mammal, and 7 marine reptiles.

Pisonia Island has the only stand of *PISONIA GRANDIS* to the west of the Great Barrier Reef and is the type locality for the species. There is only c. 180 ha remaining of this tree in Australia.

The Wellesley Islands constitute an important research area, with numerous research projects being undertaken on the islands and in their surrounding areas by research organisations such as CSIRO, Queensland Department of Environment, Queensland Department of Primary Industries and James Cook University. There are more than 45 publications reporting research on marine ecology often with reference to conservation or commercial fisheries issues, marine mammals, fish, reptiles and invertebrates and their ecology, seabirds and migratory bird ecology, terrestrial, estuarine and marine plant communities, oceanography, and anthropology of the Wellesley Islands and their surrounding marine environments.

Official Values: Not Available

Description:

It is possible that cultural values, both indigenous and non-indigenous, of National Estate significance may exist at this site, as yet, the Australian Heritage Commission has not identified, documented nor assessed these values.

The Wellesley Islands are a group of 30 islands and rocks situated in the southern section of the Gulf of Carpentaria in north Queensland. The islands experience a strongly seasonal climate, with high rainfall and strong winds during the summer monsoon period. The seas around the islands experience only one tidal cycle per day, large fluctuations in tidal range and are shallow with rock shoals. Mud is normally suspended from the shallow seabed giving rise to turbid waters over much of the area.

The largest island in the Wellesley group is Mornington Island. The island is characterised by laterite sand and gravel deposits, with beach ridges around the periphery. There is little or no natural, permanent freshwater occurring through the Wellesley group, however Mornington Island has two major drainage systems. One system consists of creeks which

²⁵ http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;search=place_name%3Dwellesley%2520islands%2520and%2520surrounds%3Btown%3Dgununa%3Bstate%3DQLD%3Bkeyword_PD%3Don%3Bkeyword_SS%3Don%3Bkeyword_PH%3Don%3Blatitude_1dir%3D%3Blongitude_1dir%3DE%3Blongitude_2dir%3DE%3Blatitude_2dir%3DS%3Bin_region%3Dpart;place_id=102028

run to the north-west side of the island and the other system runs to the south-east. These waterways are only active during the wet season, and in the dry season the headwaters of the larger rivers and streams form a chain of waterholes. Eight major estuaries are associated with the waterways of Mornington island and include salt flats and tidal creeks fringed with mangroves. Numerous freshwater swamps further inland are dominated by sedgeland. The remainder of Mornington Island is dominated by low open woodland with some shrubland with dense closed vegetation along the creeks and rivers. The beach ridges support a community dominated by CASUARINA and SPINIFEX.

Mornington Island supports a number of animal populations including turtles, dugong (DUGONG DUGONG), saltwater crocodiles (CROCODYLUS POROSUS), rodents (RATTUS sp.), black flying-fox (PTEROPUS ALECTO), lesser long-eared bat (NYCTOPHILUS GEOFFROYI), 25 lizard species, 8 snake species, including the common death adder (ACANTHOPHIS ANTARCTICUS), 7 frog species, and an abundance of bird life including the eastern curlew (NUMENIUS MADAGASCARIENSIS). Many migratory birds, such as least frigatebird (FREGATA ARIEL), Eastern reef egret (EGRETTA SACRA), Mongolian plover (CHARADRIUS MONGOLUS) and Caspian tern (HYDROPROGNE CASPIA) occur on the island.

Manowar Island occurs 3.1 km north of Mornington island. It consists of conglomerate cliffs, 20 m high which fall directly to the sea on the north-western and eastern sides. A plateau slopes to the south-west from where the island extends into an unstable shingle bank. The island is mainly bare with AMARANTHUS INTERRUPTUS in some sections and a small amount of ELEUSINE INDICA and SESUVIUM PORTULACASTRUM. Manowar Island supports a large least frigatebird (FREGATA ARIEL) colony with more than 1000 pairs nesting. A brown booby (SULA LEUCOGASTER) colony of more than 300 breeding pairs also occurs at this location.

Rocky Island is a rocky, vegetated plateau with a shallow depression, possibly excavated during phosphate mining operations, forming a shallow lagoon during the wet season. The western shoreline is a steep shingle beach backed by a broken conglomerate cliff 2-5m high. The eastern and northern beaches are coralline sand and slope down to

shallow, rocky reef platforms with abundant coral, that extends up to 200 m from high tide mark. The island is dominated by a cover of AMARANTHUS INTERRUPTUS with some clumps of SESBANIA aff. ACULEATA in the central depression. Significant populations of brown booby (over 20 000 birds reported in the 1960's), and a breeding colony of over 200 Australian pelicans (PELECANUS CONSPICILLATUS) occur on the island. The northern and eastern shores are important nesting beaches for green turtles (CHELONIA MYDAS) which also bask on the beaches and coral reef flats.

Pisonia Island is a sand island with a high margin and lower interior, located off the north-east tip of Mornington Island. It is vegetated by coastal dry rainforest up to 2 m high which includes CLEOME VISCOSA, IPOMOEA PESCAPRAE, LEPTURUS REPENS, figs (FICUS sp.), PLUMBAGO ZEYLANICA and IPOMOEA MACRANTHA). Several tall to low tree stands also occur on the island including PISONIA GRANDIS, MORINDA CITRIFOLIA and HIBISCUS TILIACEUS. The island is an important site for hundreds of nesting green turtles and a small nesting colony of little terns (STERNA ALBIFRONS).

The Bountiful Islands include North Bountiful Island, which is dominated by deeply weathered laterite deposits with sandstone, siltstone, mudstone, beach and sand dune deposits, and South Bountiful and South-east Bountiful Islands, which are sand islands with sand dunes and recent calcarenite beach ridges. North Bountiful Island supports a predominantly grassland community with a few scattered eucalypts, casuarinas and mangroves. This island is an important habitat for crested terns (STERNA BERGII), bridled terns (S. ANAETHETUS) and roseate terns (S. DOUGALLII). South Bountiful Island is covered in high grass with a few scattered shrubs and occasional trees and is surrounded by rocky reef with some coral growth. Both North and South Bountiful Islands are significant green turtle breeding sites.

South-east Bountiful Island is dominated by a small, steep, flat-topped rock which rises above surrounding dune and beach areas, and is attached to South Bountiful at low tide by a rock platform. Vegetation at South-East Bountiful is dominated by grasses (e.g. SPOROBOLUS VIRGINICUS, ELEUSINE INDICA, LEPTURUS REPENS) and low herbs (eg SESUVIUM PORTULACASTRUM, CLEOME VISCOSA). The main

rocky outcrops on South East Bountiful support a very large colony of roseate terns as well as nesting bridled terns (STERNA ANAETHETUS).

The remainder of the Wellesley Islands group consist of sand islands and rocky islands of sandy laterite forming deeply weathered mesas and wave-cut platforms, interspersed with sand and gravel. The sandy islands generally have no vegetation or have casuarina- or grass-dominated communities with fringing mangroves sometimes present. The rocky islands may have mangrove and salt flat communities along the shore and open woodland and grassland communities on the higher areas. Many of these islands support migratory birds and rare and threatened species of animals.

The seas around the Wellesleys are rich in animal and plant life and many important habitats are located throughout the area. These shallow waters are generally less than 20 m in depth and are heavily influenced by nutrient-enriched, wet season runoff from major rivers around western Cape York Peninsula and the southern Gulf Plains. The seas around the Wellesleys do not tend to mix with the waters of the central Gulf of Carpentaria and thus form an important and localised nutrient source for a range of organisms including seagrasses, plankton and crustaceans such as prawns. This in turn attracts many larger marine animals to the area which feed on these resources. Examples include the dugong (DUGONG DUGONG), many turtles including the loggerhead turtle (CARETTA CARETTA) and hawksbill turtle (ERETMOCHELYS IMBRICATA), 20 species of sea snake, and a number of other marine mammals such as Irrawaddy river dolphins (ORCAELLA BREVIROSTRIS) and Indo-Pacific hump-back dolphins (SOUSA CHINENSIS).

History: Not Available

Condition and Integrity:

Mornington Island and Sweers Island are the only two islands in the Wellesley group which have permanent settlements. On Mornington Island, the settlement includes a number of buildings, airstrip, jetty and many roads and tracks, and small scale cattle and horse grazing. Generally disturbance on this

island is localised, with most of the area intact and undisturbed. Sweers Island is the most degraded of all islands in the group and has a relatively long history of disturbance including small settlements, quarrying and large-scale grazing which caused severe degradation of woodland areas. In addition, feral animals such as the cane toad have been introduced to the island.

Rocky Island was inhabited and mined for bird guano in the 1920's and feral animals were introduced to the site, with black rats prevalent on the island. Denham island has been disturbed in parts by grazing activities, but is still mostly intact and undisturbed. The majority of the remaining islands in the Wellesley group are currently in good condition and are relatively undisturbed. Recreational and commercial fishing is common around many islands (based on Walker 1991).

Location:

About 930,740ha, comprising about 30 islands and rocks associated with the Wellesleys and surrounding waters, including coral, rock and sand outcrops, Gulf of Carpentaria.

ROCKY AND MANOWAR ISLANDS²⁶

List: Register of the National Estate

Class: Natural

Legal Status: **Registered** (14/05/1991)

Place ID: 16008

Place File No: 4/07/289/0002

Statement of Significance:

Rocky Island is the only known locality of an undescribed skink (*LERISTA aff ORIENTALIS*) (Criteria A.1 and B.1). Rocky and Manowar Islands support colonies of the least frigate bird (*FREGATA ARIEL*) and the brown booby (*SULA LEUCOGASTER*) that are amongst the largest in Australia. Manowar Island is one of only three known breeding sites of

the great frigate bird (*FREGATA MINOR*) in Australia and the only site outside of the Great Barrier Reef area. Together, the islands constitute the largest seabird breeding colony in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Rocky Island is also a breeding ground for the endangered green turtle (*CHELONIA MYDAS*) (Criterion A.2).

Official Values: Not Available

Description:

The site comprises two small islands approximately 45km north-north-east of Mornington Island, in The Gulf of Carpentaria.

Manowar Island is approximately 350m by 230m with an area of about 4.6ha rising to 25m in the north. The island consists of a low conglomerate stack with 20m sea cliffs on the north and west sides with the plateau sloping south east to an unstable shingle bank. Most of the island is bare rock with a sparse sward of *DACTYLOCTENIUM RADULANS*, *AMARANTHUS INTERRUPTUS* and *SESUVIUM PORTULACASTRUM* on the flatter part. In the north and east along the cliff top are groups of loose boulders to 1.5m high. Bynoe's gecko (*HETERONOTIA BINOEI*) is present among rocks. The brown booby (*SULA LEUCOGASTER*), the least frigate bird (*Frigata ARIEL*) and the great frigate bird (*Frigata MINOR*) have been recorded nesting. Manowar is one of only three known breeding sites of the great frigate bird in Australia and the only site outside of the Great Barrier Reef region. Other birds recorded on Manowar island include the eastern reef egret (*EGRETTA SACRA*), Australian pelican (*PELECANUS CONSPICILLATUS*) and the silver gull (*LARUS NOVAEHOLLANDIAE*).

Rocky Island is approximately 560m by 350m with an area of about 12.5ha rising to 10m in the south. The island consists of a rocky plateau with a steep shingle beach to the west backed by a broken conglomerate cliff to 4m. The northern and eastern beaches are coralline sand and slope down to shallow Rocky Reef platforms. Most of the plateau is covered by a low herb and grassland consisting of *ELEUSINE INDICA*, *Dactyloctenium RADULANS*, *BRACHIARIA subquadripata*, *AMARANTHUS INTERRUPTUS*, *Chamaesyce ATOTO*, with a

few plants of *TRIBULUS terrestris* and *SESBANIA aff ACULEATA*. The north and east shores are major nesting beaches for the endangered green turtle (*CHELONIA MYDAS*). Bynoe's gecko and an undescribed skink (*LERISTA aff ORIENTALIS*) occur among the rocks. Large numbers of the brown booby nest on the island and other birds recorded breeding include the Australian pelican, least frigate bird, bridled tern (*STERNA ANAETHETUS*) and the crested tern (*STERNA BERGII*). Other birds recorded on Rocky Island include the eastern reef egret, silver gull and the lesser crested tern (*STERNA BENGALENSIS*). The islands provide sheltered anchorages for boats and the surrounding waters are used for game fishing.

History: Not Available

Condition and Integrity:

Largely undisturbed. Phosphate miners operated on Rocky Island between 1927 and 1929 and the introduced black rat (*RATTUS RATTUS*) occurs on The Island.²⁷

Location:

About 97ha and 12.5ha respectively, 40-43km north-north-east of Gununa, Mornington Island, Gulf of Carpentaria, comprising the areas above Low Water Mark.



²⁶ http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;search=place_name%3Drocky%2520and%2520manowar%2520islands%3Dtown%3Dgununa%3Bstate%3DQLD%3Bkeyword_PD%3Don%3Bkeyword_SS%3Don%3Bkeyword_PH%3Don%3Blatitude_1dir%3D%3Blongitude_1dir%3D%3Blongitude_2dir%3D%3Blongitude_2dir%3D%3Blatitude_2dir%3D%3Blatitude_2dir%3D%3Bbin_region%3Dpart;place_id=16008

²⁷ Please note – there are two species of black rat occurring on these islands. One of these rat species is not introduced, but rather is a native rat to the island. Its presence on Rocky Island is described as part of our cultural heritage and is a significant story-line running through the seas from *Bathungan* (Denham Island) to *Kalamburriya* (Rocky Island), via Mornington Island.





Above & top: Rangers Kevin Scholes and Ezra Scholes on sea country patrol.

Appendix 2:

A summary of the major environmental threats to species and habitats of the Wellesley Islands region²⁸

Species Group	Known Threats
Dugong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat loss has been identified as a potential source of localised declines in dugong populations – particularly due to cyclonic activity (e.g. increased siltation, mechanical damage and freshwater influx). Potential impact of local habitats from coastal developments around ports (e.g. ore spillages) could affect the ability of dugongs to move between feeding grounds in the south-east Gulf of Carpentaria. Impact on seagrass beds through terrestrial runoff and direct disturbance of habitat. Fishing activities (e.g. commercial barramundi fishing using nets, inshore shark fishing using pelagic nets, bait fishing using nets to catch bait for mud-crabbing, and illegal foreign fishing vessels. Boat strikes and other human impacts. Unknown Indigenous harvest level.
Turtle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trawl bycatch mortality – with the use of TEDS now required by legislation this mortality has reduced considerably. Gill net fisheries kill an unquantified number of turtles annually. Large amount of green turtles killed annually from entanglement in ghost nets. Threat to key turtle habitat from increased turbidity and agricultural and industrial pollution outflow. Vehicle traffic on beaches is now commonplace on nesting beaches and there can be expected increase in mortality of turtle eggs. Unsustainable harvest of turtle eggs – egg harvest is only sustainable at low levels. Predation of turtle rookeries by native wildlife including goannas as well as pigs and dogs may need to be managed to ensure availability of eggs for human consumption.
Marine snakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trawling appears to be the largest and most obvious threat to sea snakes. As specialist feeders, any increase in the turbidity that impacts on either their prey or their ability to detect their prey would impact negatively on sea snake populations.
Grouper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main potential threats relate to degradation and overfishing. Groupers are generally more abundant on coral reefs. Threats to coral reefs include coral bleaching, nutrification, sedimentation, cyclones, diseases and crown-of-thorn starfish outbreaks. Virtually nothing is known about populations in the region. Difficulty of surveillance of fishing activities and enforcement of fishing regulations due to remoteness of the region, coupled with the high value of groupers. Potential capture of immature groupers by trawling. Potential for trawling to reduce available food resources for grouper. Potential for fishing to remove a significant proportion of immature fish from populations.

²⁸ "Summary of Impacts and Threats" National Oceans Office. (2004) Key Species – A description of Key Species in the Northern Planning Area. National Oceans Office, Hobart, Australia

Species Group	Known Threats
Seagrasses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural cyclonic events (cyclones, increased turbidity from increased runoff). • Seagrass exposed at low tide is likely to be threatened by climate change. • Port and shipping accidents. • Introduced marine pests. • Increased cyclonic activity with climate change. • Potential threat from increased land-based activities (mining, pastoral).
Mangroves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible future negative effects from land-based activities (ponded-pasture). • Loss of traditional knowledge. • Climate change, changes in water temperature and sea level rise.
Corals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global warming and El Nino pose major threats to shallow water corals. • Human impacts through trawling. • Shipping spills, groundings and bottom scouring.
Seabirds & shorebirds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naturally occurring inclement weather conditions (excessive heat, cyclones). • Human disturbance to nesting sites – tourism boats, recreational fishing). • Fishing lines and hooks, ghost nets and other rubbish. • Introduced animals such as cats, dogs, pigs, rats and cane toads can cause considerable damage to nesting sites. • Introduced vegetation (weeds) invading nesting sites. • Pollution. • Potential spillages in the upper catchment that make their way to the sea or at coastal loading ports from mining operations. • Fishing discards – population changes as a result of increased food to some species.
Sharks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted fishing pressure, especially the commercial catch, is significant for some sharks. • Deliberate post-capture mortality (fining) is a potential threat to populations under pressure. • Gill netting and line fishing incidental catch. • Cyclone activity resulting in habitat changes.
Rays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few reliable data available on population structures, fishery catch and bycatch of rays, and commercial and Indigenous fishing impacts unknown. • Species dependent on reefs and corals may be threatened by habitat loss (coral bleaching).
Sawfish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species inability to adapt (due to its biology) to changes within its environment. • Fishing, including commercial net fisheries, demersal prawn trawling, recreational line/net fisheries and Indigenous fisheries. • Habitat degradation due to poor land resource management, water extraction, mining. • Short-term and long-term fluctuations in temperature, oxygen level, mineral content, turbidity, water flow, rainfall, and major changes in river beds.

Species Group	Known Threats
Cetaceans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidental mortality as a result of fishing activities.
Snappers & emperors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main potential threats relate to habitat degradation and overfishing. • Threats to habitat include pollution incidents, nutrification, physical damage from benthic trawling, maritime accidents, cyclones, and damage to coral reefs through coral bleaching, diseases, sedimentation, and crow-of-thorn starfish outbreaks. • Snapper and emperor are likely to be vulnerable to overfishing due to their life-history characteristics and behaviour. • Illegal fishing. • Potential for trawling in the region to reduce available food resources for snappers and emperors.
Mackerels & tunas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable to fishing gear types (e.g. gill nets and line fishing) – potential overfishing. • Lack of effective management and monitoring (e.g. longtail tuna).
Coastal fishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential environmental threats to coastal fishes and their habitats include habitat loss and modification from development, sedimentation and nutrification from agricultural runoff, restricted access to habitats due to construction of dams, weirs, flood mitigation and saltwater intrusion works, and pollution from fuel and oil spills and other waste material. • Bycatch of immature fishes from trawling. • Some species vulnerable to overfishing, leading to localised depletion of coastal fish populations. • Main target species (penaeid prawns) are important prey items for coastal fishes, and often form a large proportion of their diet – trophic implications from prawn harvest.
Molluscs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-collection or overfishing/harvesting. • Destruction of habitats, either naturally by cyclones, or artificially by human activities. • Sporadic, mass mortality of giant clams affecting up to 54% of individuals has occurred in wild giant clam populations in northern Australia; these deaths were caused by an unidentified unicellular organism, apparently a ciliated protozoan.
Squid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvesting of squid using demersal trawls represents a potential threat due to the susceptibility of squid (including egg masses) to capture and mortality, their biological capacity to recover and gaps in current knowledge of their biology and distribution. • Loliginid squid lay demersally attached eggs – location of spawning grounds inadequately known, preferred substrate for egg laying unknown, timing of peak spawning activity at a local level unknown, impacts of trawling on the substrate and survival of squid eggs unknown. • Biomass available for harvesting unknown – no assessments undertaken. • Squid damaged in capture by trawl unlikely to survive discarding. Discard quantities currently unknown but need to be assessed to obtain a better picture of fishing mortality for any future quantitative resource assessment.
Prawns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any changes to fishery management practices in the region (e.g. increased fishing effort) could have a catastrophic impact on prawn stocks. • Overfishing – lack of stock information. • Threats to littoral seagrass habitats are a threat to the tiger prawn populations and the fishery. • Current and proposed resource developments (including in river catchments) (e.g. mining, farming, ports), water resource development and commercial use of natural resources (e.g. fishing) may have an increased impact. • Natural impacts can also greatly reduce the area of productive nursery habitats (e.g. cyclonic destruction of littoral habitats). • Some commercial fishing logbooks do not provide enough discrimination to manage and assess individual species.

Species Group	Known Threats
Crabs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of baseline data and knowledge on crab diversity and species needs. • The modification, destruction or loss of habitats (e.g. trawling, trampling of holes by Indigenous and/or recreational fishers) may lead to a decline in crab biodiversity and numbers. • Prawn trawling practices could lead to direct mortality of most bycatch species concerned. • Localised over-harvesting of crab fauna in areas close to major population centres, camp sites and outstations. • Possible impacts may occur from contamination, chemical spills etc, on a local scale in and around mines, ports and population centres. Contaminants are likely to bioaccumulate along the food chain, including within crabs. Oil, oil dispersants and heavy metals are known to be toxic to crustaceans and modify their burrowing behaviour. • Potential introduction of aquatic pests. • Impacts on the substrate/habitat on which crabs depend (e.g. propeller scaring). • Catastrophic events, such as cyclones. • Global climate change is expected to lead to raised sea level and seawater temperatures. Such changes may have long-term impacts on habitat distribution/composition and species distribution, particularly in coastal habitats such as seagrass, mangroves, salt pans and coral reefs.
Lobsters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged larval phase for spiny lobsters exposes them to changing environmental conditions in oceanic waters; principally ocean currents affected by local events such as cyclones, or large-scale events such as El Nino. • Changes to environmental conditions such as seagrass dieback. • Overfishing.
Bugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prawn trawling – bycatch, incidental mortality.
Beche-de-Mer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overfishing/harvesting – especially higher value species. • Cyclones may cause damage to seagrass beds (nursery areas for juveniles). • Coastal processes – increased nutrient and sediment loads. • Greenhouse changes – changes in coral reef ecology.
Trawl by catch species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge – some threats difficult to identify. • Overfishing – lack of knowledge, management issues, market changes. • Habitat alteration by trawling and natural perturbations such as cyclones – increased turbidity.
Saltpan and saltmarshes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational traffic • Grazing livestock • Potential development





Sea floor off Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of Scott Ling, Reef Life Survey.

Appendix 3: Overview of Commercial Fishing in the proposed IPA

Northern Prawn Fishery²⁹

The Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF) extends from western Cape York Peninsula to the Kimberly coast, including the proposed IPA in the Wellesley Islands region of the Gulf of Carpentaria (see adjacent map). The fishery is managed by the Australian Fisheries management Authority (AFMA) under an agreement with the respective state and Territory governments. AFMA is advised in the management of the fishery by the Northern Prawn Trawl Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC), comprising government representatives and members selected from the commercial prawn trawl industry, a member with environment/conservation expertise and an independent Chair. NORMA currently does not include any Traditional Owners, representatives of indigenous organisations and members with expertise in

Indigenous fisheries. In practice, AFMA also works closely with NPF Industry Pty Ltd, the non-profit company established to represent the interests of licenced prawn trawl fishers, almost all of whom are members of the company.

The NPF targets nine commercial species of prawns including White Banana (*Fenneropenaeus merguensis*), Red-legged Banana (*F. indicus*), Brown Tiger (*Penaeus esculentus*), Grooved Tiger (*P. semisulcatus*), Blue Endeavour (*Metapenaeus endeavouri*), and Red



Reef off the top end of Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of Scott Ling, Reef Life Survey.

²⁹ Further information on the NPF is available <http://www.afma.gov.au/managing-our-fisheries/fisheries-a-to-z-index/northern-prawn-fishery/> <http://www.afma.gov.au/managing-our-fisheries/fisheries-a-to-z-index/northern-prawn-fishery/>.

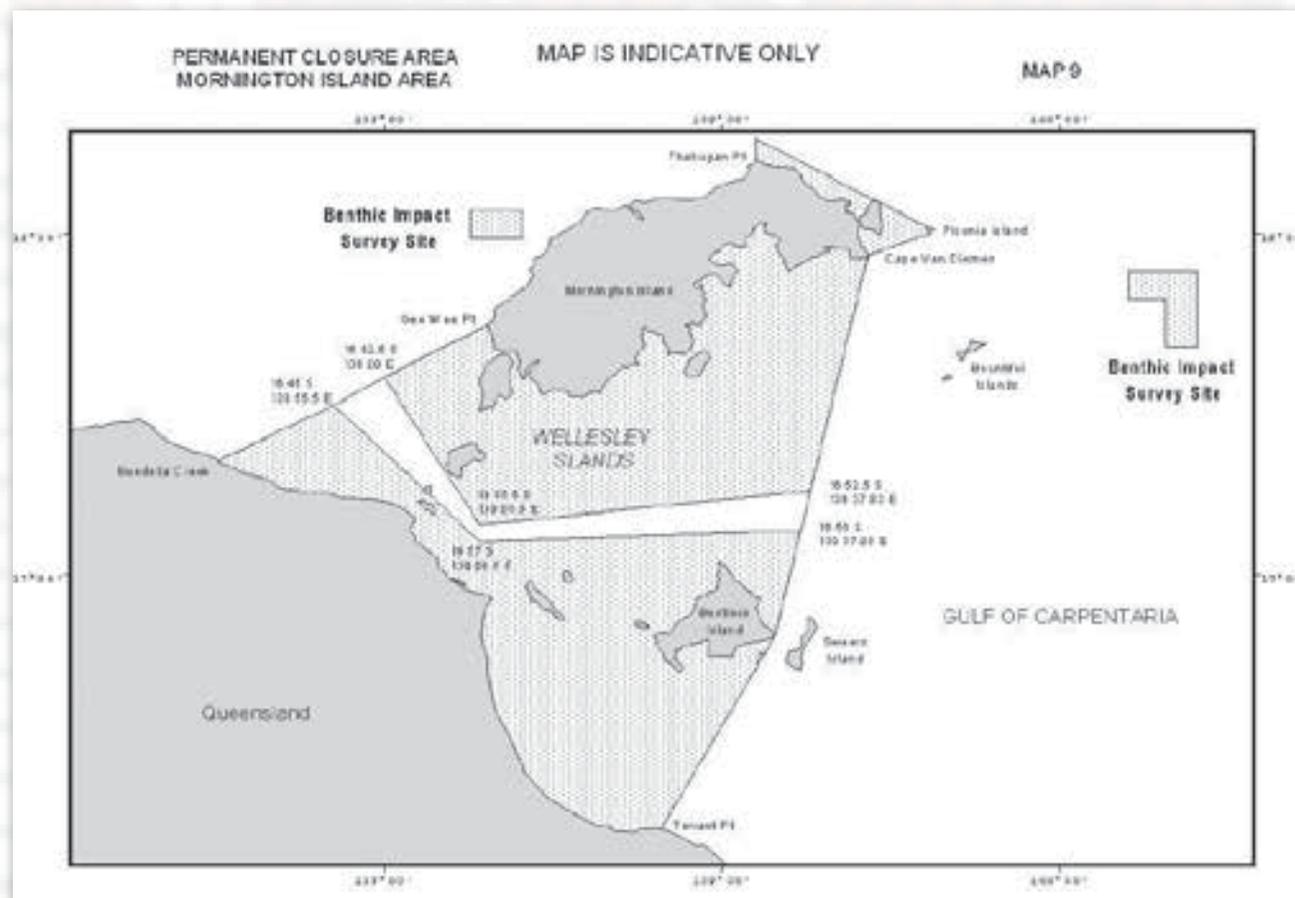
Endeavour (*M. ensis*). Scampi, squid, scallops and bugs are also taken. The NPF is managed through a combination of input controls (limited entry, seasonal closures, permanent area closures, gear restrictions and operational controls) which are implemented under the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Plan 1995 (the Management Plan). The Management Plan also provides for the grant of fully transferable Statutory Fishing Rights that determine the number of trawlers that can operate and the amount of gear that can be used in the NPF.

The Management Plan implements various fishery effort, target species and bycatch species limits. This plan has been accredited under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This accreditation acknowledges that the fishery's actions will not have unacceptable or unsustainable impacts on the environment

An important management tool for protecting sensitive habitats and prawn spawning grounds is the designation of areas permanently and temporarily closed to trawling (see map below).

Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Fishery³⁰

The Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Fishery (GOCIFF) is the most westerly commercial fishery in Queensland. It extends from Slade Point near the tip of Cape York Peninsula to the Queensland/Northern Territory border and operates in all tidal waterways out to the 25 nautical mile line. The multi-species fishery is comprised of an inshore (N3) and offshore (N9) commercial net fishery (see map below), as well as having recreational, Indigenous and charter boat fishing tour operation components.



NPF permanent closure areas



The GOCIFF is within Queensland state waters and is managed by the state government through Queensland Fisheries (DAFF) under the Queensland *Fisheries Act 1994* (the *Fisheries Act*), the *Fisheries (Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish) Management Plan 1999* (the *Gulf Management Plan*) and the *Fisheries Regulations 2008* (the *Fisheries Regulations*). The fishery is managed with the clear objectives of finfish stock sustainability, target species spawning biomass protection, minimal effect on protected species, provision of an economically and socially beneficial commercial and recreational fishery, and satisfying the traditional and customary needs of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

³⁰ For further information on the Gulf Inshore Finfish Fishery see Roelofs (2002).



Reef off Halls Point, Mornington Island. Photo courtesy of Rachel Amini-Yanner.

Management measures used in the GOCIFF are a combination of input and output controls that include spatial and temporal closures, limited licensing, gear and vessel restrictions and fishery monitoring systems (these are outlined in *Guideline 1.1.7*).

The Queensland Fisheries Joint Authority (QFJA) established under the Fisheries Act manages all northern demersal and pelagic finfish in waters relevant to Queensland in the GOC where the fish stocks also occur in Northern Territory and Commonwealth waters. QFJA fisheries operate under complex management arrangements set up under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement and resulting Memorandum of Understanding between the Queensland State and the Northern Territory Governments and the Commonwealth Governments.

In 2004, the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria commercial line, net, trawl and crab pot fisheries were each approved as a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*

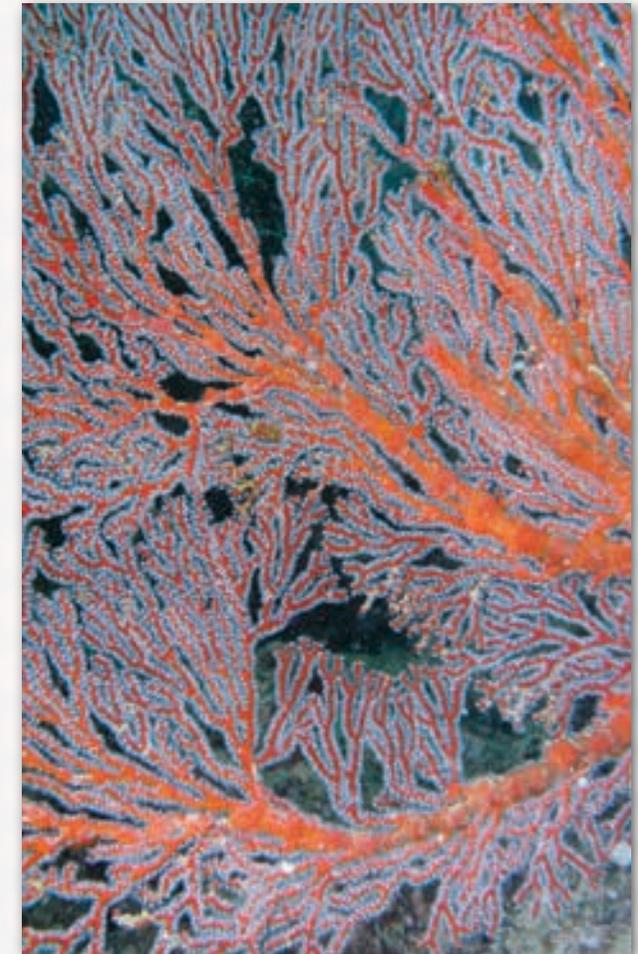
1999³¹. The then Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (now DAFF) submitted ecological assessments on each fishery in order to demonstrate they were being managed in an ecologically sustainable manner. Continued export approval for species harvested in the fisheries was contingent upon each fishery meeting a range of recommendations made by the Australian Government's Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC).

A 2006 Ecological Risk Assessment³² of the Gulf fisheries undertaken by Fisheries Queensland revealed that, based on our current level of knowledge, there is a relatively high risk to the sustainability of two target species in the Gulf net fishery compared to other retained species – guitarfish in the N3 fishery and grey mackerel in the N9 fishery. Ten other species/species groups are considered to have a moderate risk to their sustainability including Spanish mackerel, red snappers, barramundi, threadfins, sharks and mud crabs. Twenty other retained species and another 15 species have either low or negligible risk respectively, to their sustainability.

For species interacting with, but not-retained by a fishery, there were no species considered to be at high risk to their sustainability. Six species/species groups are considered to have a moderate risk to their sustainability from the net fishery (bottlenose dolphins, spartooth sharks and sawfishes), and the trawl fishery (sharks, rays and sawfishes). Six other retained species and another 34 species have low or negligible risk respectively, to their sustainability.

There were no fishery impacts considered to be high risk factors to the sustainability of the marine ecosystem supporting Gulf fisheries. However, some fisher camps in the N3 and crab fisheries were considered to have a moderate risk to the local terrestrial ecosystem. Seventeen fishery-specific impacts are considered to have a low impact on the marine ecosystem, while another 25 fishery-specific impacts have negligible impact on the marine ecosystem.

Fisheries Queensland publishes annual status reports³³ on key species in the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fin Fish Fishery. Through the framework of the IPA Advisory Committee, Traditional Owners and Wellesley Island Rangers are committed to working with Fisheries Queensland and the commercial fishers' representative organisations to continue to improve data collection on fishery impacts and sustainability to the benefit of all stakeholders.



Mornington Island, Reef life survey. Photo courtesy of Scott Ling.

³¹ Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage 2004. Assessment of the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Fishery available. ³² Queensland Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries 2006 *Ecological Risk Assessment of Queensland-managed Fisheries in the Gulf of Carpentaria* – available at http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/documents/Fisheries_SustainableFishing/EcolRiskAssess-GOC-ERA.pdf. ³³ Available at www.fish.gov.au/reports/Documents/DEEDI_2010d.pdf

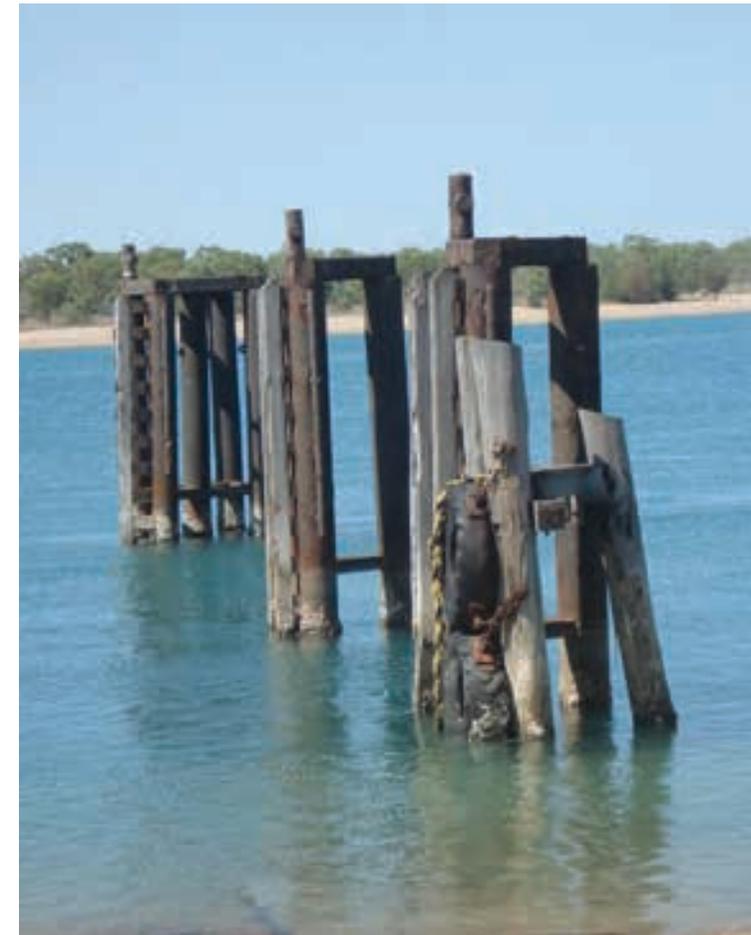












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