

KURTIJAR

LAND AND SALTWATER COUNTRY PLAN

Aboriginal management of land, rivers and coastal areas between the Norman and Staaten Rivers in the southeast Gulf of Carpentaria



Prepared by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
in collaboration with Kurtijar Traditional Owners

JULY 2014

Cover photos: The Gilbert River (© Royal Geographic Society of Queensland's Queensland by Degrees Project, 2008); and Lotus Lagoon on Delta Downs Station, managed and owned by Kurtijar Traditional Owners.

Acknowledgments



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Further Information

Copies of this Plan and further information about implementation of the Plan are available from:
Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
11 Wurrup Street, PO Box 464, Normanton QLD 4890
www.clcac.com.au

CONTENTS

Dedication	2
Vision for Kurtijar Land and Saltwater Country	3
1 Introduction.....	4
2 Kurtijar People and Country	5
3 Our Shared History	7
4 Native Title Claim and Existing Tenures	9
5 Why Our Country is Important to Us.....	11
6 Conservation Significance of Country	13
7 Using and Managing Kurtijar Country	20
8 Potential Threats to Country	31
9 Priority Actions	37
10 Partnerships and Implementation.....	43
References and Further Reading	47
Appendix 1: Lotus Lagoon Species List	48

Dedication

This Land and Saltwater Country Plan is dedicated:

- To the ancestors of all Kurtijar people who cared for our country and passed on our culture for countless generations;
- To all our Elders who continued the traditions of our ancestors and kept our people and culture strong through to the present day; and
- To the generations of Kurtijar people to come who will inherit responsibility for our country and culture into the future.



Lotus Lagoon, Delta Downs Station – managed and owned by Kurtijar Traditional Owners

Vision for Kurtijar Land and Saltwater Country

We are proud of our connection to land and saltwater country and will always look after it.

Our vision is to continue to care for land and saltwater country and to pass our knowledge and values onto the next generation.

Kurtijar people have made a commitment to:

- Protect our culture and country to pass onto future generations;
- Healthy country and healthy people;
- Traditional Owners and Rangers caring for country;
- Strong culture and connection to country;
- Jobs and economic benefits from country;
- Strong partnerships with all stakeholders on country;
- Support the sustainable development of pastoralism on country.



Kurtijar Traditional Owners attending a planning meeting in Normanton February 2014

Front row (L-R): Janet Casey, Barbara Casey, Clarene Rainbow, Rita Harold, Irene Pascoe, Joseph Rainbow
Back row (L-R): Lance Rapson, Thomas Rainbow (child), Michael Gilbo, Cedric Burns, Angeline Pascoe, Leticia Rainbow, Daphne McGillbray, Alita Rainbow, Alfred Pascoe

1. Introduction

We, the Kurtijar people, have developed this Land and Saltwater Country Plan to:

- **Identify the important values** of Kurtijar land and saltwater country and promote an understanding of the threats to those values;
- **Communicate our vision, aspirations and commitments** to sustainably use and manage Kurtijar land and saltwater country; and
- **Set out priority activities** to achieve our vision, aspirations and commitments in collaboration with government agencies, pastoralists, fishing organisations, research institutions and other partner organisations.

The Kurtijar Land and Saltwater Country Plan is a strategic document that provides a framework for our people and our partners to work together to care for all the natural and cultural values of our country, while providing a sustainable livelihood for our community and others with rights and interests in our land and saltwater country. The area covered by the plan includes the land and intertidal coastal region within the area of our native title claim which is currently being developed (see Section 4), as well as the adjacent sea country that is culturally and ecologically connected to our land.

The development of this Plan was facilitated by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC), assisted by two planning consultants in collaboration with the Normanton Ranger Service through the following processes:

- Initial consultation workshop with Kurtijar Traditional Owners in October 2013;
- Initial consultations with CLCAC Normanton Rangers regarding their current land and saltwater country management activities, and their concerns and aspirations for future management of country;
- Research and information collection regarding issues raised at the initial consultations;
- Preliminary discussions with government agencies and other relevant organisations regarding potential collaboration with Kurtijar people and Rangers in future management of our land and saltwater country;

- Preparation of a preliminary summary poster of the Land and Saltwater Country Plan for presentation and discussion at the second round of consultations with Traditional Owners and Rangers in Normanton in February 2014;
- Preparation of a Draft Kurtijar Land and Saltwater Country Plan for presentation at the third round of consultations with Traditional Owners and Rangers in Normanton in April 2014;
- Facilitated discussion between Traditional Owners and invited representatives of government agencies and other organisations with interests in our land and saltwater country during the April 2014 consultation workshop;
- Finalisation of the Kurtijar Land and Saltwater Country Plan based on feedback at the April 2014 consultations;
- Launch of the Kurtijar Land and Saltwater Country Plan at the Implementation Workshop involving Traditional Owners, CLCAC Normanton Rangers, and invited representatives of our collaboration partners.

The development of this Plan builds on existing initiatives by Kurtijar people to strengthen our connection to our land and sea country and to enhance our engagement in caring for our country and culture. These initiatives include:

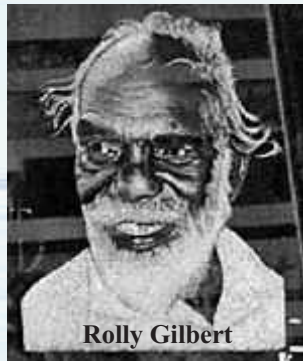
- Development of our native title claim currently underway;
- Establishment of the CLCAC Normanton Ranger Service in 2008, including the appointment of Kurtijar Rangers and Gkuthaarn and Kukatj Rangers (funded through the then Queensland Government Wild Rivers Ranger program); and
- Collaboration with researchers to better understand the natural and cultural values of our land and saltwater country.

2. Kurtijar People and Country

This section describes:

- Who we are as Kurtijar People;
- The extent of our country;
- Who are our neighbours;
- Environments, resources and industries on our country.

Kurtijar People are the Traditional Owners of the land, rivers and saltwater country in the south-east Gulf of Carpentaria between the Norman River and the Staaten River, and extending about 100 km inland – see map on page 6.



Our traditional society was based on patrilineal clans associated with and responsible for specific totemic sites and other culturally and economically important places and areas, and which formed the basis for our law and cultural practices, including rules for selecting marriage partners and the wider kinship structure.

Our neighbouring Traditional Owner group to the west are the Gkuthaarn and Kukatj People. To the north is the Kowanyama Community which is home to several Traditional Owners groups from that region. To the south is the country of the Tagalaka and Ewamian People.

Traditionally our interaction with our neighbours included trading networks and kinship ties through marriage. These links continue to the present day and have expanded to include governance of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, collaboration between Ranger groups, participation in the pastoral industry, sporting competitions and other cultural, social and economic activities.

Kurtijar People are also the owners and managers of Delta Downs pastoral station located on Kurtijar country.

Kurtijar country has a wet-dry tropical climate, with the majority of the rainfall associated with the monsoonal trough occurring from November through to March. The dry season months (April to September) are accompanied by strong south-

easterly trade winds while the wet season typically has lighter winds from the north. This region is prone to severe tropical cyclones during the wet season.

Kurtijar land and saltwater country contains many different environments and resources that sustained our people for thousands of years, including the fish, crab and shellfish resources of the many rivers, creeks and estuaries of the Gilbert River delta. Many of our people now live in Normanton where the Norman River and its estuary is very important for supplying fish, crabs and shellfish to feed our families.



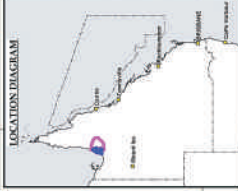
Our people also took care of and sustainably used resources of the extensive woodlands, grasslands, escarpments and sandstone ranges of the Gulf plains, as well as the saltpans, mangrove forests and marine environments. It is this combination of terrestrial, freshwater and saltwater resources that provided such sustainable livelihoods for our people over countless generations.

The rich natural resources of our country have also attracted other people to settle and establish pastoral, fishing, mining, and tourism enterprises in the Gulf region over the last 150 years. While we accept that we must share our country with these new industries, we also expect people in these industries to acknowledge our need to maintain our culture and livelihoods from the country we all now share. This Land and Saltwater Country Plan lays the foundation for how these mutually respectful partnerships can develop and flourish.

Note: The external boundaries of our traditional land and waters are shown generally on the opposite map.

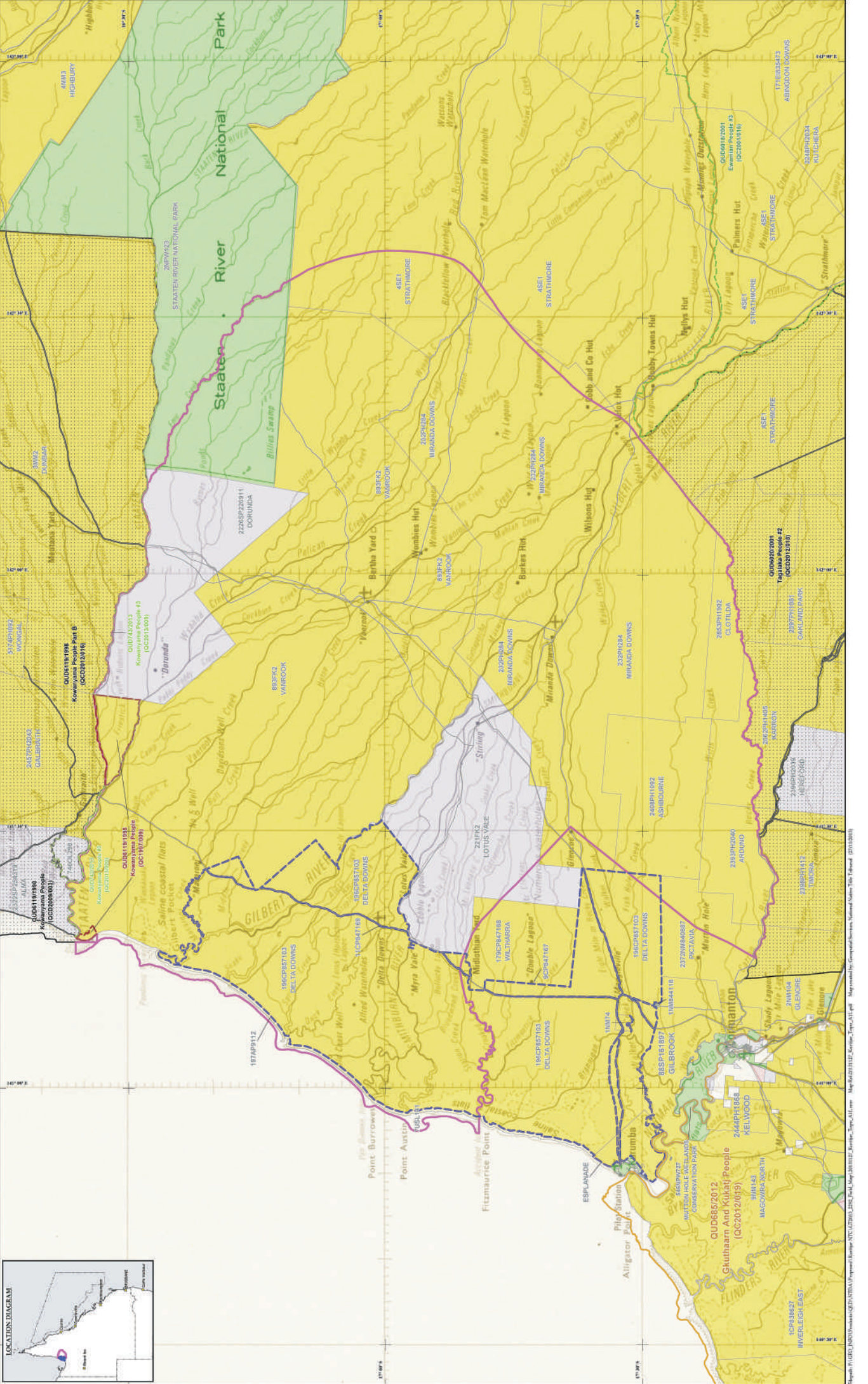
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KILOMETRES



Latitude 445 Longitude 145 as Co-ordinates of Queensland 1984

NOTE: Topographic images should be used as a guide only.
 The map data is derived from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Queensland (DNRE) 2008. The map data is derived from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Queensland (DNRE) 2008. The map data is derived from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Queensland (DNRE) 2008.



3. Our Shared History

This section describes:

- The arrivals of Europeans and their impacts on our people, culture and country;
- Our involvement in the cattle industry;
- History of Normanton Reserve (R78/R79);
- Past and current life in Normanton;
- Recent developments, including establishing the CLCAC Normanton Rangers, and the development of this Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Our people have lived for thousands of years on Kurtijar country – the lands and waters from the Staaten River to the Norman River. These boundaries marked areas where we held strong cultural and linguistic connections with our neighbours along the coast to the north and west.

In the 1600s, European explorers passed along the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and then by land into our country in the 1840-60s. Burke and Wills passed through our country in 1861 and 1862. Soon after, Europeans arrived in the region to settle. Country with good grazing soils was distributed to pastoralists within four to five years and the town of Normanton was founded. As they took up our country it became harder for our people to access important areas for their own survival. This time in our history is especially painful for our people – we used to call it “nokot.nk”, which means “no good time”. During this time we were driven away from our camps, hunting grounds and water sources so that pastoralists could use the area.

Kurtijar People still talk of the massacres of men, women and children that happened at such places as *Inte.r* on the lower Smithburn, *Impe.rih* on the lower Gilbert and *Rokmpak* on Middle Creek¹.

Some of our people were rounded up, chained together and made to walk to the Mitchell River Reserve, now known as Kowanyama. Many of our

¹Bynoe, C. (1992). *Memories of Normanton – An Aboriginal Perspective*.

Elders died fighting for our country, and their struggles are part of our history. Nevertheless, our culture remained strong and we continue to identify as Kurtijar people.

Our people began moving into town camps and were living in awful conditions – many suffering from introduced diseases and malnutrition. In the 1940s, Reserve R78 and then R79 were created to house the growing number of families that were being pushed off country. For decades our people lived here with other neighbouring Aboriginal groups who had also been removed from their country. Life was hard for our people as they suffered many injustices and exclusion from the developing society in Normanton.



**Thawil Thuddawaarn Pikew Reserve
along the Norman River**

As pastoralism grew in the region so did our people's connection to the industry as many were employed to work on stations. Working on stations also allowed our people to stay connected with our traditional lands, which also gave us strength in preserving our culture and language.

Equal pay for Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry in 1968 gave us proper working conditions for the first time, but also led to some of our people having to leave the stations. Our greatest achievement in our pastoral history is the acquisition of Delta Downs Station.

In 1982, Delta Downs Station was purchased by the Aboriginal Development Commission on behalf of our people. In 2002, the lease was handed over to Morr Morr Pastoral Company, all of the shares of which are owned by the Kurtijar



Aboriginal Corporation. This has strengthened our connection to our culture, history and country. Furthermore, it helps us to sustainably develop our country for the economic, social, environmental and cultural benefit of our people.

Butcher Pallew, who was born on Delta Downs Station in 1901, recalled how his family obtained food from the bush – including wallabies, fish, turtles, crabs and wild fruits. The fish were caught in grass fish traps in much the same way his ancestors had done for thousands of years².

Despite what has happened in the past, we still hold connection to our traditional culture, lands, rivers and saltwater country. We feel a strong responsibility to continue to look after it for our future generations. Many Kurtijar People now live in Normanton, but all Traditional Owners have a strong connection to Delta Downs Station.

Morr Morr Pastoral Company employs many Kurtijar Traditional Owners working at Delta Downs, and welcomes and supports all Traditional Owners who wish to visit country on the station. We also have the Kurtijar Land Trust Aboriginal Corporation; and the CLCAC Normanton Ranger group based in Normanton, who help us to protect and manage the biodiversity and cultural values of Delta Downs as part of our cattle enterprise.

The development of this Land and Saltwater Country Plan is the next important step on our journey to honour our cultural obligations and commitment to take care of Kurtijar country, people and culture and to help to guide the

sustainable development of our people and country in collaboration with our government, community and industry partners.



Kurtijar burial grounds near an old camping area outside of Normanton

²Bynoe, C. (1992). *Memories of Normanton – An Aboriginal Perspective*.

4. Native Title Claim and Existing Tenures

This section describes:

- Preparing our native title claim;
- Opportunities arising from possible co-existing native title on pastoral leases as a basis for improved access to country and enhanced collaboration with pastoralists;
- The relationship between native title, land and saltwater country planning and partnership-building for the future management of Kurtijar country.

The Kurtijar People's native title claim is currently being prepared with the assistance of CLCAC. We anticipate that the native title claim area will extend from the Staaten River in the north to the Norman River in the south, and include coastal areas out to the lowest astronomical tide. Details of the native title rights and interests to be claimed and the claim boundaries are yet to be finalised.

The native title claim process is taking place in parallel with, and complementary to, the development of this Land and Saltwater Country Plan. While the two processes involve the same Traditional Owners and largely the same geographic area, the native title claim is a legal process dictated by provisions of the Native Title Act, while the development of the Plan is focusing

on communicating Traditional Owners' values, concerns and aspirations for managing country and partnership building, and is not constrained by legislation.

While the native title claim is fundamentally important in achieving recognition of our inherent legal rights to occupy, use and manage our country, the Land and Saltwater Country Plan provides guidance on how we will exercise those rights in collaboration with Government agencies and other partners.

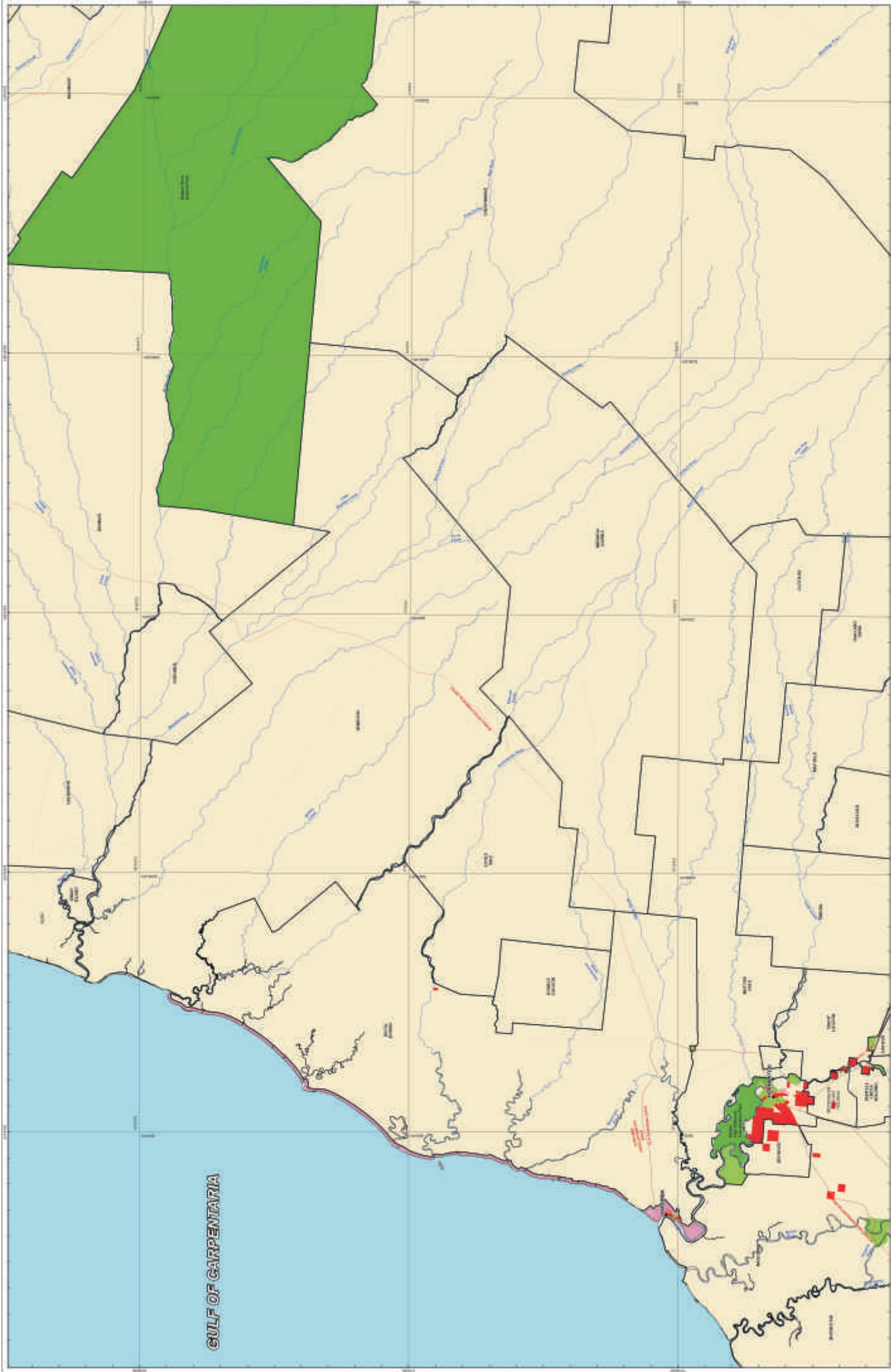
In particular, we are hopeful that recognition of our native title rights and interests over the extensive pastoral lands and the commercial fishing grounds in the river estuaries and intertidal areas will lead to greater mutual understanding and collaboration with participants in the pastoral and fishing industries.

Existing Aboriginal Tenures

For thousands of years we had exclusive ownership over all of our country. Today, we only hold tenure over the properties associated with Delta Downs pastoral station.

Other Tenures

The major other land tenures on our country are mainly pastoral leases and Staaten River National Park, as shown on the map on page 10.



GULF OF CARPENTARIA

- Town
- Water
- Allotment Road
- Secondary Road
- River Road
- Property Boundary
- Proposed
- Leased Land
- Private
- State Land
- National Parks



Scale
0 20 40 Kilometres

Map of land tenure between the Norman River and the Staaten River in SE Gulf of Carpentaria



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5. Why Our Country is Important to Us

This section describes why our land and saltwater country is important to us for:

- Our identity;
- Our livelihood, food, water and medicines;
- Our sacred sites and stories;
- Our language;
- Our cultural knowledge and practices;
- Our cultural authority and responsibility.

Our people and our country are interconnected. It is important for us that country is healthy, and that the younger generations have the same opportunities to know, use and manage the land and rivers as our Elders did. The health of our country and our continuing connection to it gives our younger generations their identity.

One of the most important values of country for us is the rich system of freshwater waterholes and rivers that flow through our country to meet with the saltwater estuaries, mangroves, and sea country.

“Land and water comes together as one”
Kurtijar Traditional Owner



Saltwater country is especially significant for us and we have always had a strong connection to the coast and rivers that provide us with our livelihood. In the past, our families always camped close to rivers and waterholes. The fish, freshwater turtles, and other plants and animals are what sustained us.

Our lives followed seasonal patterns and we moved around country depending on where resources were abundant. Saltwater areas are essential for us because they are a rich source of food. Rivers flowing downstream from catchments in the South are also important because they provide our country with freshwater.



Coastline along Delta Downs Station

Our people know how changes in seasons affect food sources, and also how changes out at sea can affect food sources along the coast. As our ancestors before us, we still walk through the mangroves and to the coast with our Elders to collect mussels and other shellfish. These activities remind us that the land, the rivers and the sea are all connected.

We also work to strengthen our culture and knowledge of country to support land and sea management. Our traditional knowledge about fire management, fisheries, and native plants and animals is vital in understanding natural systems and their sustainability. Our sacred sites are also very important places for us because they provide the connection between country and culture.

We have many areas – sacred sites, camping grounds, burial grounds, and hunting and fishing places – that hold strong cultural values and need to be recorded as part of our living history. Our language is also still used, and we must record words that are important for country, such as the names and uses for plants, animals and bush medicine. For this reason, accessing country allows us to properly manage natural areas and culturally important sites.

Our country and livelihoods are dependent on the health of our rivers and wetlands. We can see clear changes in the state of our water catchments and

coastal areas. Salinisation (salt intrusion) of freshwater systems is becoming more and more evident, and topsoil erosion is a concern as it travels to our coastlines and estuarine systems. The impacts of climate change and pastoral management are both issues that we want to address to keep our country sustainable.

The injustices we faced in the past have not severed our connection to country nor the responsibility we have to it. As a result, we maintain the right to participate in management of land and seas as Traditional Owners of country.



Our country is also important because it is the basis of our economy and employment through Delta Downs Station. Being part of a successful cattle enterprise gives us pride and satisfaction and is now part of our culture.



Many of those working on Delta Downs Station, including Kurtijar Traditional Owners

6. Conservation Significance of Country

This section describes:

- Why our country is important to the region, Queensland, Australia and the world;
- Particular species, environments and areas on our land and saltwater country that have special conservation significance.

Our country is not only important for us, but holds regional, national and international significance for its conservation values. All of our country contributes to the conservation significance of this region, including:

- the extensive waterways of the Gilbert River delta that run through country and drain northward to the Gulf of Carpentaria;
- the estuarine ecosystems that support juvenile fisheries and rich biodiversity;
- the alluvial plains that shape our coasts;
- the grasslands, forests and savannah landscapes.

These distinct natural features are also what support the region's main industries. The native pastures support the region's cattle grazing industry, and the estuarine wetlands and watersheds support the commercial and recreational fishing industries.

Gulf Plains Bioregion

Our country lies within the Gulf Plains Bioregion, an area dominated by extensive coastal areas, alluvial plains, and tropical savannah vegetation. The following land zones exist within the Gulf Plains –

- Tidal flats and beaches;
- Coastal dunes;
- Alluvium (river and creek flats);
- Old loamy and sandy plains;
- Ironstone jump-ups;
- Basalt plains and hills;
- Undulating country on fine grained sedimentary rocks;
- Sandstone ranges;
- Hills and lowlands on metamorphic rocks;
- Hills and lowlands on granitic rocks.

There are 84 regional ecosystems within the Gulf Plains bioregion, three³ of which are listed as endangered and 32 of which are listed as 'of concern' under the Queensland *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

There are also 35 threatened ecosystems in the region, most of which are in decline and 19 of which do not occur anywhere else in the world.



Gulf Plains Bioregion

Cattle grazing on native pastures (within pastoral leases) covers approximately 93% of the Gulf Plains Bioregion, and also a large part of Kurtjar country. Grazing areas have a wide variety of soils, ranging from relatively infertile saline coastal plains to clays and alluvial soils from the wide floodplains and channels of far-reaching alluvial plains and major rivers. Kurtjar country includes a diversity of landscapes, which provide habitats for rich biodiversity, and the diversity of fauna found on grazing properties is usually high.

Management of biodiversity across these landscapes is very important to us because it supports ecosystem services that are valued by ourselves as well as others using country.

³ Regional ecosystems 2.3.39 (Springs on recent alluvium); 2.10.3 (Eucalyptus spp., *Corymbia citriodora* and *Eucalyptus acmenoides* open forest on high plateaus on earths and sands); and 2.10.8 (Springs associated with quartzose sandstone or lateritised sandstone gullies and gorges)

There are 44 flora and fauna species listed as rare or threatened in the Gulf Plains Bioregion. This includes 27 animal species, 10 of which are considered endangered (see table); and 11 plant species, three of which are endangered⁴.

Animal Species	Class	NCA Act 1992 (Qld)	EPBC Act 1999 (Cth)
E – endangered; C – least concern; PE – extinct in the wild; and V – vulnerable			
Australian painted snipe	birds	V	E
Beach stone-curlew	birds	V	
Black-throated finch	birds	E	E
Brush-tailed tree-rat	mammals	C	V
Crimson finch	birds	E	V
Dugong	mammals	V	
Estuarine crocodile	reptiles	V	
Flatback turtle	reptiles	V	V
Freshwater sawfish	cartilaginous fishes		V
Ghost bat	mammals	V	
Golden-shouldered parrot	birds	E	E
Gouldian finch	birds	E	E
Green turtle	reptiles	V	V
Hawksbill turtle	reptiles	V	V
Julia Creek dunnart	mammals	E	E
Little tern	birds	E	
Loggerhead turtle	reptiles	E	E
Masked owl	birds	V	V
Mount Cooper striped lerista	reptiles	V	V
Olive Ridley turtle	reptiles	E	E
Painted honeyeater	birds	V	
Purple necked rock wallaby	mammals	V	
Purple-crowned fairy-wren	birds	V	
Red goshawk	birds	E	V
Squatter pigeon	birds	V	V
Yellow chat	birds	V	
Yellow chat (gulf)	birds	V	

Table: Animal species listed as rare or threatened within the Gulf Plains Bioregion⁵

⁴ *Oldenlandia spathulata*, *Eriocaulon carsonii* and *Eriocaulon carsonii* subsp. *orientale*

⁵ EHP (2014)



© Jun Matsui

Golden-shouldered Parrot
Conservation status: Endangered

Staaten River National Park's large area of monsoon tropical savannah grasslands and melaleuca woodlands are especially important as they provide habitat for the endangered golden-shouldered parrot. Its distribution includes the upper tributaries of the Staaten River, and is estimated to consist of about 1000 birds in the Staaten River NP population.



Great Egret (*Ardea modesta*)
Conservation status: Migratory bird under the EPBC Act 1999, and Japan-Australia and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreements (JAMBA, CAMBA).

Wetland Areas

Wetlands on Kurtijar country are part of two larger catchments that drain into the southern Gulf of Carpentaria - the Staaten and Gilbert catchments.

Our coastline and estuarine wetland systems are part of the Southern Gulf Aggregation, an internationally significant migratory and shore bird wetland area and the largest continuous estuarine wetland in northern Australia. It is also listed under the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia (DIWA) as nationally important. On Kurtijar country, the Staaten-Gilbert Declared Fish Habitat Area protects important sub-tidal and tidal environments that are significant for marine biodiversity conservation and as nursery areas for fish and other marine resources important for the Indigenous, recreational and commercial fisheries in the region.



Karumba coastline, Gulf of Carpentaria

Forming the eastern edge of the Southern Gulf Aggregation is the Mutton Hole Wetland Conservation Park (7,860 hectares), a complex system of estuarine and freshwater wetlands. Previously part of Mutton Hole Station's cattle grazing land, it is now listed on the Register of the National Estate as a natural indicative property⁶. Lying within the Norman River Catchment, the hydrology of the wetland is complex with tidal influences from the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, and rainfall and floods all affecting the Wetland's numerous creeks, channels, lagoons and gilgai hollows (small, shallow depressions).

Vegetation types include saltmarsh, open grassy eucalypt woodland, gutta percha scrub, freshwater lagoon shoreline, riparian zone, and saline mudflat and mangrove fringes. Aquatic life – marine prawns, fish, macro invertebrates - are abundant and vary between different locations and wet and dry seasons.



Mutton Hole wetlands

Estuarine mangroves and freshwater wetlands along rivers of the Gulf Plains bioregion also provide habitat for waterbird breeding colonies. Over a five-year period (2009-2013), Wetlands International worked with the CLCAC Normanton Ranger Group to conduct a study that recorded 32 active colonies in the region, most of which met globally accepted criteria for international importance.

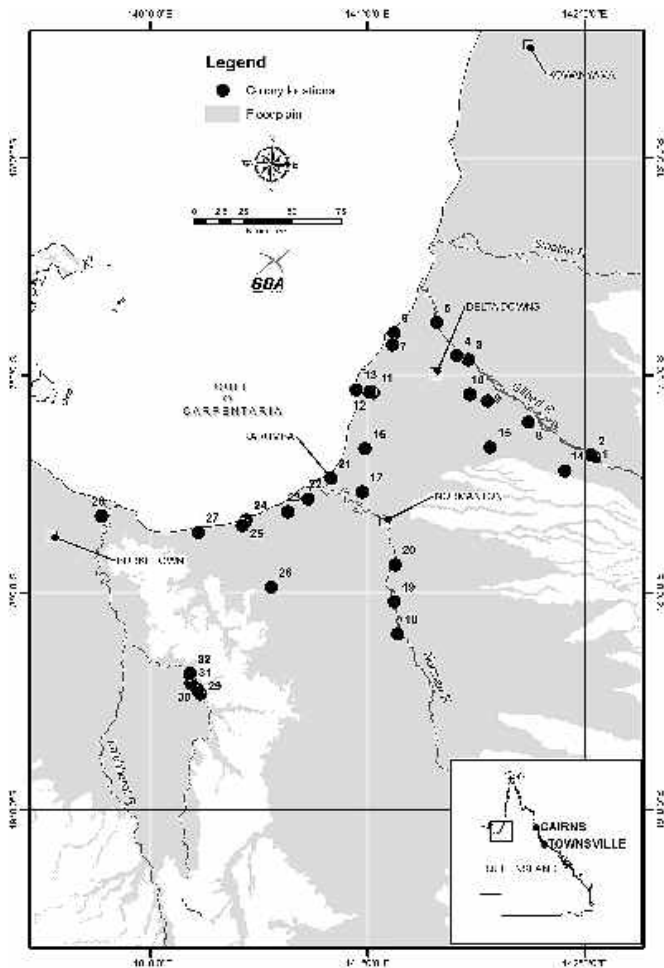
Eleven waterbird species were among the colonies including royal spoonbill, little egret and pied heron. In particular, several surveyed colonies in the bioregion meet Ramsar Convention on Wetlands criteria as the colonies provide habitats for critical stages in waterbird life cycles, and some sites support at least 20,000 waterbirds and/or at least 1% of the total size of a waterbird population⁷. Such a high concentration of breeding colonies is presently unknown elsewhere in tropical Australia other than in the Top End of Northern Territory.

Nearby, the intertidal mudflats and saltmarshes of the South-East Gulf of Carpentaria provide a near-continuous shorebird habitat extending for about 350km along the Gulf Coast. This area is recognised as the third most important site for migratory shorebirds in Australia and of outstanding importance. It is internationally important for 16 shorebird species and supports well in excess of 20,000 individual shorebirds.

To date, 11 colonial-breeding species of waterbird have been recorded in the colonies with some colonies including all of these species, many colonies with most of the species and a few colonies with just one or two species. The most

⁶ Burrows (2004)

⁷ Jaensch (2013), p.7



© R. Jozanich and P. Kochanov, 2013

Location of bird colonies in Southeast Gulf of Carpentaria

abundant species was the intermediate egret *Ardea intermedia*, which in some cases was assessed as contributing more than 75% of the birds in a colony. The size of colonies ranged from several tens or hundreds of birds to several thousands, probably up to 10,000 at the largest colonies.

The 11 colonial-breeding species of waterbird are:

- Australasian darter;
- Australian white ibis;
- Great egret;
- Intermediate egret;
- Little black cormorant;
- Little egret;
- Little pied cormorant;
- Nankeen night-heron;
- Pied cormorant;
- Pied heron;
- Royal spoonbill.



© The State of Queensland (Dept. of Environment and Heritage Protection) 2013

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway: One of nine globally recognized major migratory routes

Rivers and estuaries

Water flowing across Kurtjar Country is part of two larger catchments that drain into the southern Gulf of Carpentaria – the Gilbert and Staaten drainage basins.

The ecology of the freshwater sections of rivers within Kurtjar country has not been well studied, in comparison to the saltwater estuary systems which have been better researched to support management of the commercial fisheries in those environments.



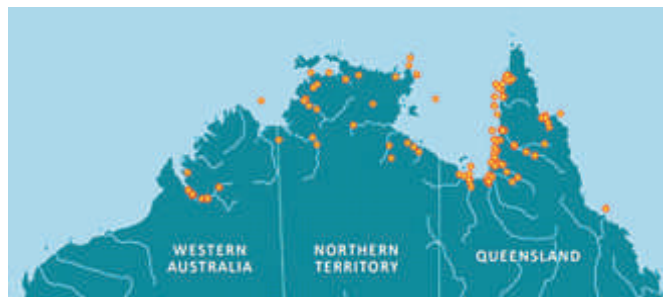
The Norman River

However, a survey of the freshwater fish fauna of the Norman River undertaken in 2006⁸ concluded that there is a total of 48 freshwater fish species living in the river, including seven species not previously recorded in the catchment and undescribed eel-tailed catfish, goby and river sprat. Of particular conservation significance are the freshwater sawfish and the freshwater whipray.

Freshwater sawfish

Conservation status: critically endangered

The freshwater sawfish was once widely distributed in the Indo-Pacific region but is now virtually extinct in most of its range due to over-fishing – especially for shark-fin soup and Chinese medicinal purposes. This species is now only found in rivers and estuaries across northern Australia, including the rivers in Kurtijar country (see map below).



Known distribution of freshwater sawfish in Australia

Freshwater whipray

Conservation status: data deficient

The freshwater whipray is a rare, recently described species of ray found in rivers and estuaries across northern Australia, including Kurtijar country, but its distribution and abundance are poorly known.

Recent research⁹ has demonstrated the ecological and economic linkages between all these terrestrial, freshwater and saltwater environments of Kurtijar country,



© Michael Heithau

including the importance of maintaining freshwater flows into the river estuaries for the health and sustainability of estuarine fish populations. Research undertaken by the Southern Gulf Catchment Group in 2005 found that bore drains (small artificial wetlands associated with water bores often installed many decades ago) may be providing habitat for an undescribed fish species, indicating that some man-made environments on Kurtijar country may have conservation significance.



© Department of Fisheries, Western Australia

Seagrass

Seagrass meadows on Kurtijar saltwater country near the port of Karumba are the most significant seagrass habitats in the southeast Gulf. They provide essential food sources for dugongs and several marine turtle species of high cultural and scientific significance. Seagrass communities also provide ecological functions in the coastal zone including provision of primary productivity in the marine environment and nursery habitat for key fisheries species. The extent and health of seagrass habitats also provide important indicators of the health of intertidal and marine environments more broadly.

Research undertaken in 2010¹⁰ indicates that the seagrass meadows near Karumba were in good condition, but will require regular monitoring to ensure port dredging and commercial shipping are not adversely impacting on this critical component of our saltwater country.

Dugongs and marine turtles

Surveys undertaken over the last decade indicate that the Gulf of Carpentaria is one of Australia's

⁸ Burrows and Pern, C. (2006)

⁹ Halliday and others (2012)

¹⁰ McKenna and Rasheed (2011)

and the world's most significant environments for dugongs, supporting a total population of about 12,500 individuals, of which about 4,000 are located in the eastern Gulf.

Six of Australia's seven marine turtle species are found in the Gulf of Carpentaria, including a particularly significant population of green turtles. Genetic studies¹¹ of green turtle populations have shown that green turtles found in the Gulf of Carpentaria only move between feeding grounds, mating areas and nesting beaches within the Gulf itself – they do not migrate long distances around the Australian coastline or internationally as other Australian green turtle populations do. This means

that all Traditional Owner groups around the Gulf have a special responsibility to collectively take care of the green turtle habitats on their saltwater country to ensure the survival of this most important species.

While Kurtijar people obtain most of their aquatic livelihood resources from our rivers and estuaries, dugongs and marine turtles are culturally significant animals to us, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the seagrasses and water quality in our saltwater country continue to remain healthy and clean to support dugongs and all marine turtle species.



Green Turtle



Turtle tracks along surveyed coastline of Delta Downs Station

¹¹ Kennett and others (2004)

Biodiversity Snapshot of Lotus Lagoon, Delta Downs Station



Northern sedge frog



Lotus Lagoon



Grassland melomys



Wallaby



Mud crab



Goanna



Bower bird nest



White-bellied sea eagle

7. Using and Managing Kurtijar Country

This section describes how Kurtijar country is used and managed today, including:

- Indigenous fishing;
- Recreational fishing;
- Commercial fishing;
- Pastoral industry;
- Mining;
- Tourism;
- Urban development and infrastructure;
- Protected areas;
- CLCAC Normanton Rangers:
 - Patrolling land and saltwater country;
 - Managing fire;
 - Controlling pest plants and animals;
 - Caring for cultural sites;
 - Monitoring turtle nests;
 - Removing marine debris.

Kurtijar country supports a diverse population, mainly in Karumba and Normanton, engaged in industries largely based on the natural resources of the region. Key industries include commercial fishing, mining, shipping, pastoralism and tourism (including recreational fishing), and charter fishing. Along with all these demands on the resources of our country, Kurtijar people continue to rely on our traditional foods, particularly fish and other aquatic species, to sustain our livelihoods, health and culture.

Indigenous Fishing

Our ancestors have fished the waterholes, rivers, estuaries and coastal waters of our country since these coastal ecosystems became established at least 5,000 years ago when the sea level settled at its current level after the 100 metre rise in sea level that began about 18,000 years ago. Most of our people now live in Normanton, where the nearby Norman River provides the daily food source for many Kurtijar families. For us, fishing is an essential livelihood activity, just as it was for our ancestors. Most of us do not fish recreationally or commercially – we fish to feed our families; we fish to live!

Under section 14 of the *Fisheries Act 1994* (Qld), a Traditional Owner acting under their local Aboriginal tradition is permitted to take, use or keep fisheries resources, or use fish habitats, for personal, domestic or non-commercial communal need.

If a larger supply of fish is needed for ceremony or cultural events, Traditional Owners can apply for a General Fisheries Permit to use fishing gear that is larger (for example - nets).

Taking or using fisheries resources is permitted as long as it is carried out with recreational or traditional fishing gear.

Permitted fishing gear includes:

- Cast net up to 3.7 metres, scoop net (maximum size 2m) and seine net up to 16m;
- A maximum of four crab pots, dillies or collapsible traps;
- Three fishing lines with no more than six hooks;
- A handheld fork for taking worms, a hand pump for yabbies and a shell dredge for molluscs;
- A spear or spear gun.

The Queensland Fisheries Act 1994 recognises Indigenous fishing as distinct and separate from commercial and recreational fishing. Section 26(1)(a) of the Act seeks to ensure the “fair division of access to fisheries resources for commercial, recreational and indigenous use”. Until recently these provisions in the Act were developed further in the Gulf of Carpentaria Fin Fish Management Plan which required that the fishery is managed to ensure “adequate access to fin fish under Aboriginal tradition”. The Management Plan also required the then Queensland Fisheries Management Authority to:

- undertake surveys of Aboriginal participation in fishing and an agreed consultation process with Aboriginal fishers by 2002; and
- to review the Fin Fish Management Plan if a survey of participation in traditional or customary fishing shows a significant decline in catches or participation.

Regrettably, the promised surveys of Aboriginal participation did not take place and the Gulf Inshore Fin Fish Management Plan is no longer in effect. Despite the vital importance of fishing in our daily lives, the Indigenous fishery remains poorly understood, undervalued and generally neglected by the current fisheries management arrangements in the Gulf. Options to address this unacceptable situation are proposed as one of our urgent priority actions in Section 9 of this Plan.

We note that our rights to access our traditional fishery resources, and our bush tucker on land, are protected under the Convention of Biological Diversity and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Australia is a signatory nation.



Fred Pascoe Community Fishing Place, Norman River

Recreational Fishing (including Charter boat and fishing guide sectors)

Recreational and charter boat/fishing guide sectors target barramundi, king threadfin, blue threadfin and mud crabs along with other species that include mangrove jack, fingermark bream, grunter, black jewfish, jewel fish and triple tail cod. Based on information compiled from surveys carried out in the early 2000s, 1.2% of the State's 596,800 recreational saltwater fishers indicated that they mostly went fishing in the 12 months prior to the telephone survey in the north west region which includes the Gulf towns of Karumba, Normanton and Burketown. 46% of anglers fishing in the north west region indicated they fished for a particular species of saltwater fish, which is a higher percentage than for any other saltwater fishery region in Queensland. In the same survey, 31.8 % of anglers indicated they had fished for

barramundi, 13.1% indicated they had fished for mud crabs and 9.7% indicated they had fished for blue or king threadfins.



© The State of Queensland (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) 2010-2014

Barramundi

Recreational fishers primarily use hook and line to catch target fish species and cast and seine nets to catch baitfish species. Charter boat operators use the same fishing apparatus and methods as the recreational fishery. There are restrictions on the type of fishing apparatus allowed in the recreational fishery, which can be either shore based or vessel based. Methods for line fishing are diverse and largely dependent on the target species and the location fished. However, generally lines with bait or lures attached are cast at likely fish holding areas such as snags, submerged reefs, gutters, undercut banks and tidal drainage areas. Lures are retrieved to cause a fish to strike and become hooked.

Areas popular with recreational fishers in the Gulf of Carpentaria include mangrove-lined rivers and creeks (especially in estuaries adjacent to towns and ports in the region), rocky and coral reef structures and foreshore gutters. Boat based fishers either anchor and fish at a suitable site or allow the vessel to drift by likely fish holding locations to which lures are cast and retrieved.

There is a large annual migration of recreational fishers who expend weeks or months during the dry season based at Karumba concentrating their fishing effort on the Norman River and other nearby estuaries on the in coastal waters. While the ecological impact of these large numbers of recreational fishers may not be significant with regard to the state-wide populations of the target species, there is almost certainly an impact on local populations, which in turn is likely to impact on our traditional fishery.

Commercial Fishing

The rivers, estuaries and marine areas of Kurtjar country support a substantial commercial fishing industry, based largely at Karumba.

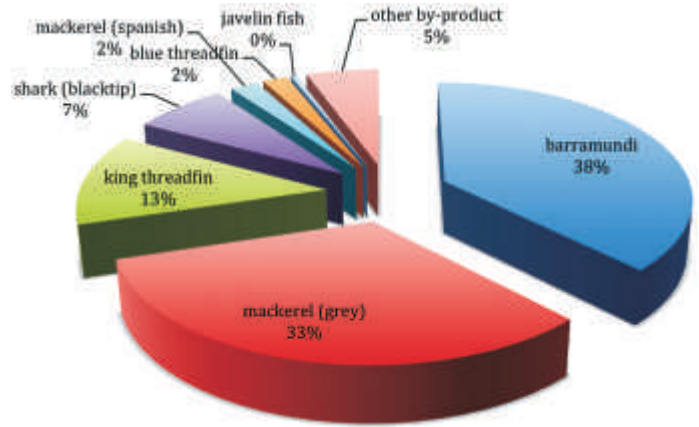
The most significant fishery is the net-based Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fin Fish Fishery (GOCIFFF) which takes place in intertidal and coastal waters out to the Queensland extent of the Australian Fishing Zone (25 nautical miles) along the Gulf coast from the tip of Cape York Peninsula to the Queensland and Northern Territory border (see map below). The main fish species targeted include barramundi, grey mackerel, king threadfin, mangrove jack, blue threadfin and tropical sharks.

Most of the harvest is taken from inshore waters, including from within rivers and creeks; however, some species, such as tropical sharks, rays and grey mackerel, are also taken in offshore waters. The total value of this fishery is about \$12 million per year; most of the catch is sold in Queensland, except for shark fin which is generally exported to Asian markets.

Commercial net fishing operations are restricted in a number of ways, including licensing, net length, mesh and drop, and open and closed seasons. There is an annual closed season to all Queensland managed commercial net fishing in the GOCIFFF in October, November, December and January. Fishing codes of practice also apply and the fishery has been accredited as an approved Wildlife Trade Operation under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.



Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fin Fish Fishery – Commercial inshore (N3) and offshore (N9) net fishery



2011 Commercial fishery catch in the GOCIFFF derived from daily log books (Source: Fisheries Queensland CFISH Database, 2012)

The Gulf Barramundi Restocking Association is a not for profit group originally established through the commercial fishing industry - to ensure future fish stocks and sustainability for industry and recreational fishing into the future. The restocking group has recently undergone significant changes and Carpentaria Shire Council now operate the hatchery and the Barramundi Discovery Centre. The restocking group will provide volunteer input and support for future hatchery and restocking activities to support fish stocks across the region.

A commercial crab fishery also operates in the estuaries and coastal waters of Kurtjar country. Mud crabs are widely distributed throughout coastal Queensland waters. Juveniles and adults generally occupy the same habitat within sheltered estuaries, tidal reaches of mangrove-lined rivers and streams, mangrove forests and mud flats.

A range of input and output controls are in place to manage the harvest of mud crabs by commercial and recreational fishers, including:

- a minimum legal size limit;
- a prohibition on taking female crabs;
- apparatus restrictions (50 pots per licence for the commercial fishery and four pots per person for the recreational fishery);
- limited entry to the commercial fishery (C1 endorsement required); and
- prescriptions on the size of the float that may be used.

The Gulf of Carpentaria commercial crab harvest averages about 130 tonnes, which represents about 15% of the total Queensland mud crab fishery. At an average return of about \$16/kg, the total gross value of the Gulf of Carpentaria mud crab fishery is about \$2 million per year.



Pastoral Industry

Our country's native pastures have been supporting the cattle industry for over 100 years. It is a very important part our region's economy. Many of us also work, or have worked, in the industry and value the connections to country that it provides.

Morr Morr Pastoral Company, owned and managed by Kurtijar Traditional Owners, has three adjoining properties along the southern coastal portion of Kurtijar country. These properties are Delta Downs, Maggieville Outstation and Karumba Holdings, which together cover approximately 390,000 hectares and run 40,000 – 45,000 cattle, depending on seasonal conditions and time of year. The business is run from the Delta Downs Station.

The Morr Morr properties breed steers and heifers for the live export trade and re-stocking operations in the Central Highlands of Queensland. Cows and bulls culled for age and quality are also sold directly to the meatworks in Townsville.



Indigenous Stockmen

We are committed to continuing to improve the management of Delta Downs through:

- Commercially sustainable cattle operation;
- Diversifying economic options;
- Sustainable tourism;
- Maintaining and supporting cultural values;
- Providing employment opportunities to Traditional Owners; and

- Supporting access to country and resources for Traditional Owners.

There is great potential for industry growth due to international demand, but this can be stopped by a lack of port services, competition from other regions, and damages to biodiversity and pasture due to unsustainable grazing practices. As Traditional Owners of country, we support sustainable grazing practices that will continue to look after landscape health and our communities. Since much of country is already used for grazing, some intensively, there is all the more need to look after areas that are less damaged and can be managed to conserve landscapes and biodiversity that support the industry.



Delta Downs Station

CLCAC Normanton Rangers have developed good relationships with some stations to help manage the threats of weeds and feral animals. This work not only leads to healthy country, but also supports sustainable pastoral management and local employment on country. Developing relationships with pastoralists also gives us the chance to show them why our country is important to us, how we look after it, and how important it is for us to visit certain sites.



Mining

MMG Limited's Century Mine operation is Australia's largest open-cut zinc mine. The mine's 304 kilometre underground slurry pipeline transports concentrates to their Karumba port facility. The material is then shipped through sea country to export ships anchored approximately 45 kilometres offshore.

In 1997, the historic Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA) was signed. It is an agreement about land use and benefit-sharing between four Native Title Groups (Waanyi, Mingginda, Gkuthaarn and Kukatj), the mining company developing Century Mine and the State of Queensland. While the mining operation and pipeline does directly impact on Kurtijar country we are concerned about the potential environmental impacts the associated shipping operations may have on our sea country.

We therefore wish to support the CLCAC Normanton Rangers to strengthen their role in sea country monitoring and management in collaboration with Gkuthaarn and Kukatj people, government agencies and the mining company.

Tourism

Tourism is a growing industry in the Gulf region. This is mostly because of the region's rich recreational fisheries and the many tourists that travel through country along the Savannah Way. We support the sustainable development of tourism in the region and on country, and would like to be involved in this to ensure our culture on country is acknowledged by all who come through.

Our country has a rich natural beauty that we are proud to share with locals and tourists. Our main concern is that tourism does not damage what we have for future generations. One of the biggest aims is to ensure that the future of fishing is sustainable for all fisheries – commercial, recreational and Indigenous. It is also important to us that visitors to our country respect the land as we respect it, and make sure that only footprints are left behind. There are also many cultural sites that are heavily impacted by tourism. Providing information about these sites and our culture is important for us because it lets us tell our story of country to visitors. We would like to continue working to see these areas protected for the benefit of all that come.

We are particularly keen to develop appropriate eco-tourism and cultural tourism on Delta Downs.



We believe the combination of Kurtijar culture, an Aboriginal owned and managed pastoral station, and the natural attractions of our land and saltwater country will provide an excellent tourism product if developed and marketed properly. One of the implementation actions of this Land and Sea Country Plan is to develop these tourism aspirations further to complement our successful cattle enterprise.

The CLCAC has two main economic development plans that identify some of our aspirations and provide recommendations for opportunities and pathways to further develop tourism on country:

- *Indigenous Economic and Business Development in the Gulf of Carpentaria;* and
- *Destination and Product Development Plan.*

Urban development and infrastructure

The development of roads and infrastructure has improved significantly over the last 30 years with the growth of the commercial fishing industry, tourism, and mining. The region has full bitumen links on all major roads, and has received airport upgrades, and water and sewage services, at both Normanton and Karumba.

One significant impact on the region's infrastructure is the lack of water during the dry season, and floods during the wet season. In 1974 and 2010 the region experienced two major floods. Every wet season the main roads are also cut off, often for long periods of time. During the dry, water becomes very scarce and it is hard to share the limited water supply amongst community and industries that support road infrastructure.

The strengthening of urban development, roads and infrastructure is vital in supporting our local communities and industry, but it is also important

to acknowledge the paths our older generations made and the sites that are important to our people. Under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2003* (Qld), there is a duty of care that requires a person carrying out an activity to take all reasonable and practical measures to ensure the activity does not harm our cultural heritage. The Carpentaria Shire Council has an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Policy that outlines the Act's Cultural Heritage Duty of Care Guidelines. This means that we are recognised as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Kurtjar cultural heritage; that our cultural heritage is recognised, protected and conserved during council works, and we are involved in this process; and that our knowledge and practices are respected and maintained to promote the understanding of our cultural heritage.

Protected areas – national parks, conservation reserves, fish habitat areas

Mutton Hole Wetlands Conservation Park

Mutton Hole Wetlands Conservation Park is an area that is important for both ourselves and Gkuthaarn and Kukatj people. During the time that people still lived on the Reserves, many locals would use the wetlands as a source of food and a place of cultural significance. The Conservation Park contains important cultural sites, and some Elders hold traditional knowledge about the area. Locals still also visit the wetlands and connecting creeks for fishing, crab-potting, collecting mussels and aquatic plants, hunting turtles and other culturally important practices.



In 2009, the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group developed a *Mutton Hole Wetlands Draft Management Plan* in consultation with local Indigenous groups and stakeholders. The initial community outcomes that were proposed for the use of the Mutton Hole Wetlands included

developing tourism to improve economic development, employment opportunities for local Indigenous residents, increased education and conservation awareness on the importance of the wetlands, and increased awareness of Aboriginal traditions and wetland management.

There was also strong interest from all Indigenous groups to preserve cultural sites and knowledge, and improve management by the Normanton Ranger group. In line with this plan, the CLCAC Normanton Rangers have completed a range of work on the park including an aerial weed survey (rubber vine and parkinsonia were identified as the main noxious weed issues in the park), weed control work, removal of old broken-down fences, cultural heritage surveys and consultation with Traditional Owners on future use and management of the park.

As a Conservation Park, Mutton Hole Wetlands is managed under the provisions of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. A Mutton Hole Wetlands Management Committee has been set up to assist in decision-making for cultural requirements and cultural site management. There have been discussions between the Queensland Government and Carpentaria Shire Council to negotiate trusteeship over the Conservation Park.

Staaten-Gilbert Fish Habitat Area

Originally declared in 1990, this 22,147 ha management A declared Fish Habitat Area (FHA) includes the tidal parts of the Gilbert and Staaten Rivers. The Staaten – Gilbert declared FHA has a diverse range of fish habitats. Characteristic habitats include mangrove-lined rivers and large adjoining areas of saltpan.

Commercial, recreational and Indigenous fishing occurs within the declared FHA with a large number of highly sought after species targeted. The Staaten – Gilbert declared FHA is an important barramundi and prawn nursery area.

In 2010, the seaward boundary of the Staaten–Gilbert declared FHA was amended from the low water mark to 4 km offshore to improve boundary definition.

There are currently no ongoing partnerships with state and local governments to facilitate management and planning of the area. An assessment of this FHA in 2012 recommended the development of partnerships with local

organisations and integration into regional planning process to enhance the monitoring and management of the area. This provides an opportunity for the CLCAC Normanton Rangers to negotiate a role in monitoring and managing the area.

Staaten River National Park

Staaten River National Park occupies 467,000 hectares of woodland savannah and is one of Australia's largest and most remote National Parks.

The park is dissected by ephemeral streams, with a small number of permanent or semi-permanent waterholes, and has few exotic weeds or introduced animals. The park has been identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International because it supports a large population of up to a thousand endangered golden-shouldered parrots. Also present are populations of Australian bustards, bush stone-curlews, black-throated and masked finches, varied lorikeets, and yellow-tinted, banded, yellow and bar-breasted honeyeaters.

We are keen to become involved with the management of the national park, in collaboration with our neighbouring Traditional Owner groups and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Fire Management

Fire management is essential for a healthy country. It helps to stop the impacts of invasive weeds, erosion, droughts and floods. It is also a strong part of our culture. We use both traditional knowledge and science to manage fire around country to protect landscapes, biodiversity, and our cultural and spiritual needs.

Using the correct fire regime is very important in maintaining biodiversity in particular habitats and



Fire management on Delta Downs Station

ecosystems. The CLCAC's Gulf Savannah Fire Management Guidelines were developed to help land managers plan hazard reduction burning, and planned burns for improved production conservation, across the 13 landscape types in the Gulf Savannah.



CLCAC and Traditional Owners with the Gulf Savannah Fire Management Guidelines

These fire landscapes include:

- Mangroves
- Saltmarsh and Saltwater Couch
- Foreshore beachscrub
- Salt pans with islands of vegetation
- Permanent lakes, billabongs and river lagoons
- Old dunes and grassland
- Tea tree woodlands
- Flood plains and wetlands
- Sandridge
- Forest country
- Fringing riverine woodlands
- Sandstone ridges and escarpments
- Downs country

We use fire to manage vegetation, but the benefits are spread out across ecosystems and landscapes. A plant community with many different species has more resilience to environmental disturbances, and will help to support animal populations and the wider ecosystems. There are many species that were once common which are beginning to disappear from some places where plant communities are changing. This could be due to many factors – cattle grazing impacts, feral plants and animals, habitat fragmentations, and climate

change. Our knowledge and observations on wildlife, ecology, ecosystems, managing cattle, climate variation, and vegetation patterns can improve our understanding of using the right fire regime to help reduce the impacts.

Over the past years, unmanaged fires have caused large areas to be burnt and have damaged grazing areas and natural biodiversity of country. The CLCAC Normanton Rangers have been working hard to carry out local fire management. They are fully equipped and trained in fire management, and have worked alongside pastoral stations and the Rural Fire Service to improve fire-fighting across the region.

CLCAC Normanton Rangers

We have a great sense of pride in the CLCAC Land and Sea Ranger group based in Normanton - for what they have achieved and continue to work hard at for our country.



The CLCAC Normanton Ranger group was formed in 2008 with Rangers representing the Kukatj people, the Gkuthaarn people and the Kurtijar people. They are Paul Richardson (Senior Head Ranger), Phillip George (Head Ranger), and Lance Rapson. In 2010, Alfred Pascoe, Derek George, and Marcus George joined the group. The



CLCAC Normanton Ranger Group
Front row (L-R): Lance Rapson, Mark Hognno (Ranger Coordinator), Derek George
Back row (L-R): Marcus George, Phillip George (Head Ranger), Alfred Pascoe, Paul Richardson (Senior Head Ranger)

group is led by coordinator, Mark Hognno, and is part of the CLCAC's Land and Sea Unit.

The Rangers work on the traditional country of the three groups between the Staaten and Leichhardt Rivers. Their role as Indigenous Rangers means that we have Traditional Owners working on country for cultural and environmental projects. Importantly, they use their traditional knowledge together with science to contribute to natural resource management on country.

It is also due to the work of the Rangers that we have strong partnerships with the regional community and local industries. The Rangers' community and visitor education work strengthens people's understanding of our cultural and natural values of country; and their hard work with pastoralists, Carpentaria Shire Council, government groups, researchers, and resource management groups shows our commitment to a healthy country for all.

Past and present activities of the Rangers include:

- Biodiversity monitoring to measure the success of management projects;
- Preserving key wetlands or ecosystems of high biodiversity or cultural significance through activities such as weed and feral animal control;
- Developing partnerships with neighbouring communities, landholders and research agencies to identify and preserve areas of high cultural and natural values and management practices;
- Community and visitor education about cultural and natural values;
- Developing and implementing landscape fire regimes for biodiversity improvement on country and within communities, incorporating both cultural and scientific practices;
- Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) biosecurity surveys;
- Protection of cultural sites;
- Ghost nets surveys and collection of old nets;
- Marine debris removal;
- Turtle and dugong surveys and monitoring;
- Marine and freshwater turtle, and crocodile, surveys;

- Migratory shorebird and local waterbird breeding colony surveys, and assessments of wetland condition;
- Weed control and eradication;
- Feral animal management;
- Fire management;
- Research partnerships with government, non-government organisations and universities (both in Australia and internationally) and other Indigenous Ranger groups;
- School visits and field trips as part of the Junior Ranger program;
- Assisting the CLCAC Native Title unit with community engagement activities.



Rangers working on identifying species for Lotus Lagoon biodiversity survey, Delta Downs Station

The group has built their capacities through completing training in turtle and dugong monitoring, fire management, weed management, biodiversity surveys, biosecurity surveys and a range of other technical and practical skills. In 2009, the Rangers were nominated for the Queensland Premiers Awards for Excellence (Green Category) and received a Highly Commended Award for their category.

Current Partnerships

The CLCAC Normanton Rangers are actively involved with over 200 students at Normanton State School and the Gulf Christian School, involving children in Ranger activities out on country and making regular school visits and presentations.



Ranger Alfred Pascoe checking biodiversity survey traps



Exclusion fence work at Lotus Lagoon, Delta Downs Station, extending a total of 7km and protecting approximately 200ha of wetland



CLCAC Normanton Ranger Group with Junior Rangers

CLCAC is also contracted to implement the Carpentaria Shire's Pest Management Plan. This includes the eradication of pest plant and animals within the Shire area in compliance with Shire policies and procedures.



Turtle monitoring work

Over the past five years, the CLCAC and CLCAC Normanton Rangers have developed a strong working relationship with pastoralists in the region to work on feral pig management. All groups involved share the same concern for the impacts feral pigs have on pastures and how this will affect country in the long term. Culling efforts are

complimented by land management works such as exclusion fencing work to protect biodiversity, wetland systems, and marine turtle nests.

Forming partnerships with grazing leaseholders has been a major achievement of the CLCAC Normanton Ranger group. Not only have these partnerships resulted in more effective and valuable natural resource management outcomes, they have also increased access to traditional lands for Traditional Owners of the area.

The CLCAC Normanton Rangers have also been working on Delta Downs Station undertaking biodiversity studies, exclusion fencing, feral pig management, and marine turtle surveying and nest protection around Lotus Lagoon and along the property's coastline. Although it is a working

cattle property it has been managed so that country still supports a high level of biodiversity. The CLCAC Normanton Rangers are proud that they are managing this project themselves and that it is happening on Kurtijar country and on Indigenous owned Delta Downs Station.

Since 2009, the Rangers have been working with ornithologist, Dr Roger Jaensch, to survey colonial waterbird breeding in the region. During 2009-2013, the CLCAC Normanton Rangers surveyed colonies from the Leichhardt River to the Gilbert River and in 2014, more intensive studies of the ecological requirements for breeding have been conducted at several colonies. A key outcome of this work has been the first ever documentation of the scope and scale of colonial waterbird breeding in the Gulf Plains bioregion, with key findings



Weed eradication work



Normanton Ranger Junior Ranger Program



Fish Hole Ranger Base on Delta Downs Station

being published in a scientific journal and co-authored by one of the Rangers¹². Rangers continue to complete survey work and are also planning options to further protect significant areas. From 2014, attention has also been given to migratory shorebirds.

Future development

The CLCAC Normanton Ranger group aims to continue working for a healthy country and supporting Traditional Owners. Their strong capabilities and success in developing partnerships is a strong foundation for future plans to expand the group and their work.



Ranger Lance Rapson conducting bird surveys with ornithologist, Dr. Roger Jaensch

The CLCAC's 2014-2019 Strategic Plan also has the following goals for managing country –

- To be the best land and sea unit across Northern Australia;
- To combine the best available science with traditional knowledge and practices
- To improve how we manage country and grow the range of services with partnerships;
- To encourage our community and others to take positive actions for environmental sustainability.

These goals will help to guide the CLCAC Normanton Ranger group in achieving long-term, self-sufficient and sustainable land management practices and partnerships.



Egret colony identified during waterbird breeding colony surveys

¹² Jaensch, R & Richardson, P., 2013, “Waterbird breeding colonies in the Gulf Plains, 2009-2013”, *The Sunbird*, 43(2): 45-64.

8. Potential Threats to Country

This section describes activities and changes that may be damaging to the cultural and natural values of our country and its resources, including:

- Impact of commercial and recreational fishing;
- Pest animals and plants;
- Proposed dams and irrigated agriculture;
- Landscape and climate change;
- Impact of mining on Gulf waters;
- Barriers to Traditional Owners accessing country;
- Impacts of tourism on cultural sites;
- Increased population and water shortages.

Commercial and recreational fishing

We understand the need to share the fish resources of Kurtijar country, but it is important for our livelihoods, our culture and our country that these resources are shared equitably and sustainably.

Current threats from commercial and recreational fishing result from:

- Unmanaged, deserted commercial fishing camps along our coastline (see photos on page 33);

- Unauthorised occupation of coastal country by a licenced commercial fisher;
- Lack of information about the local impacts of these fisheries;
- Lack of information about the needs, practices and trends within the Indigenous fishing sector;
- Fisheries management arrangements that do not provide an adequate local voice for the Indigenous sector in resource allocation and monitoring decision-making – i.e. fisheries governance.

Although the Gulf Fin Fish Fishery and the Mud Crab Fishery are regarded as sustainable from the perspective of state-wide fish populations and economic return to commercial fishers, these fisheries cannot be regarded as culturally sustainable and equitable until the issues raised above are addressed.

We welcome the Queensland Government's current review into fisheries management arrangements and through the Carpentaria Land Council we will be contributing to the review in an attempt to have our concerns addressed – as explained further in Section 9 of this Plan.

Pest Animals

Kurtijar country is threatened by impacts from pest (non-native) animals including feral pigs, feral cats, cane toads and others.



Pigs are identified as the most significant threat to country. Feral pigs impact pastoral properties as they damage pastoral production by grazing and rooting, damage fences and watering facilities, and transport and creating conditions for weed growth and establishment. One of the main ecological impacts feral pigs have is through soil disturbance, which can disrupt nutrient and water cycles, change soil micro-organism and invertebrate populations, change plant succession and species composition patterns, cause erosion, and spread plant and animal species and plant diseases. Feral pigs also threaten our country's wetland ecosystems and their significant waterbird breeding colonies. Feral pigs are also capable of carrying infectious diseases and parasites that are both endemic and still exotic to Australia.

Although feral pigs are a resource, we have long been concerned at the impacts feral pigs are having on country – especially for wetlands, river systems and coastlines. The region is home to 11 endangered, vulnerable and threatened species that are directly impacted by feral pigs. Many traditional food species are also becoming scarce as a result of their impacts. There is strong concern that with more extreme drought and



Turtle nest protection trials, Delta Downs Station

flooding cycles expected under climate change models, and after a number of very wet years, we will see unsustainable growth of pig populations that could cause a lot of damage on important wetland areas when the weather goes into a very dry cycle.

Feral cats are also of concern as they prey on native species of mammals, birds and reptiles. Recent biodiversity surveys at Lotus Lagoon showed that the presence of feral cats may have contributed to the lack of small native mammal species.



Abandoned commercial fishing camps, buildings, vehicles, boats and rubbish on the Kurtjar coastline

Pest Plants

Weeds can threaten the biodiversity of native plants and animals. Within the Gulf Plains bioregion, these include:

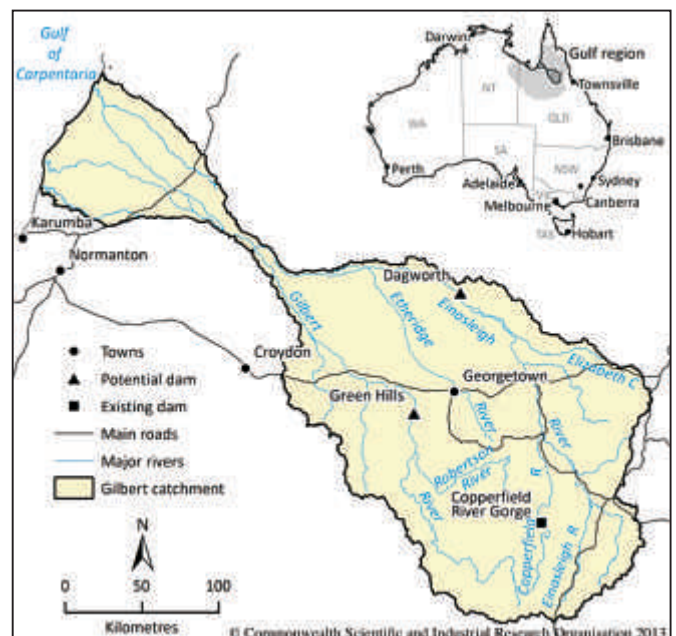
- African boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*)
- Athel pine (*Tamarix aphylla*)
- Barleria (*Barleria prionitis*)
- Bellyache bush (*Jatropha gossypifolia*)
- Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*)
- Burr grass or Mossman River grass (*Cenchrus echinatus*)
- Calotrope (*Calotropis procera*)
- Candle bush (*Senna alata*)
- Chinee apple (*Ziziphus mauritiana*)
- Giant rat's tail grass (*Sporobolus natalensis* and *S. pyramidalis*)
- Grader grass (*Themeda quadrivalvis*)
- Mint weed or Horehound (*Hyptis suaveolens*)
- Mesquite (*Prosopis spp.*)
- Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*)
- Parkinsonia (*Parkinsonia aculeate*)
- Parthenium weed (*Parthenium hysterophorus*)
- Prickly acacia (*Acacia nilotica*)
- Rubber vine (*Cryptostegia grandiflora*)
- Salvinia molesta (*Salvinia molesta*)
- Sicklepod (*Senna obtusifolia* and *S. tora*)
- Sida spp. (*Sida spp.*)
- Water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

The CLCAC Normanton Rangers' weed management focuses on stopping the spread of weeds of national significance, including rubbervine, prickly acacia, calotrope, and parkinsonia. They continue to maintain a control line at the Leichhardt River to stop the spread towards the Northern Territory. They also carry out the Carpentaria Shire Council's weed control program around Normanton and Karumba town commons, which includes rubber vine, parkinsonia, bellyache bush, candle bush, prickly acacia, chinee apple and barleria. Traditional Owners have also shown strong interest in further working to identify and manage the wide variety of weeds on country.

Impact of proposed dams & irrigated agriculture

Water is part of our livelihood and supports all communities as well as the fishing, cattle and tourism industries in the region. Water that flows on Kurtjar country is part of two larger catchments that drain into the southern Gulf of Carpentaria – the Staaten River and Gilbert River drainage basins. Our country is at the end of these catchments and stretches out to the waters of the Gulf. Any developments upstream will have flow-on effects down river and into the Gulf.

Traditional Owners have serious concern that water developments in the region will significantly impact both important cultural and environmental systems. Water shortages and climate-based threats to agricultural production in other parts of Australia have meant that there is now more interest in the possible development of catchments in north Queensland. It is still unknown if our unique landscapes can support this without damaging natural ecosystems, dependent industries, and important cultural sites. Irrigated agriculture will require large amounts of water and any proposed dams would need to alter natural water systems dramatically. The extreme wet and dry seasons also means that water availability will be unreliable for crop productivity throughout the year.



Map of Gilbert River Catchment

Our country's water systems are all interconnected and any changes to natural flows could have unpredictable damages. The first flood flush at the end of the dry season is critical for cleansing out stagnant waters and replenishing oxygen levels in

the water. In our floodplains, 'flood pulses' are important in transporting species and nutrients between channels and coastal wetlands. If water volume and velocity is reduced due to irrigation and damming then whole ecosystems and productivity are affected. Soil erosion from irrigation will also increase sediment and nutrient in the water, which will block wetland's fragile filtration systems. Damming can also affect important vegetation communities and species richness in certain areas, and can block stream flows that are needed to replenish waterways and waterholes.

Furthermore, it is assumed that sufficient environmental flows will meet Traditional Owners' social and cultural needs, but this is dependent on existing extraction values rather than actual Indigenous rights and interests. There are currently no national guidelines to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous rights or interests in water reform¹³. There is also not enough information available to Traditional Owners for us to make informed decisions about the impacts water extraction will have on environmental and cultural values. One of the biggest threats for us is that water is not sustainably managed as part of country and that our values, rights and interests are not included in decision-making processes.

Landscape and climate change

During our lifetime we have witnessed significant changes in our landscape – particularly increasing saltwater intrusion into freshwater wetlands near the coast. These are the wetlands that enabled our people to live on the coast and estuaries for thousands of years, and they are also the freshwater sources on which our cattle depend while grazing on the prime coastal grasslands.



Coastline along Delta Downs Station

¹³NWC (2007)

We are currently working with ecologist Dr Hugh Pringle who has developed a participatory applied planning process called Ecosystem Management Understanding (EMU) that builds on existing local land managers' knowledge of the land and its management. Together we are developing an ecosystem management plan for Delta Downs Station that will help us to better understand the landscape changes that we know are occurring and how best to respond to them.

We are also aware that we need to prepare for likely changes to climate, including rainfall, as well as sea level rise as a result of climate change.

Barriers to Traditional Owners accessing country

Being on country gives us a physical and spiritual connection to our culture. Even though we now live in Normanton, visiting country is still a part of who we are and our culture. It is especially important for us to visit sites that are important for certain ceremonies, or waterholes and rivers for hunting and fishing. It is critical that our Elders have ongoing opportunities to be on country while they are able to pass on their knowledge to the younger generations.



Lotus Lagoon, Delta Downs Station

As history has played out, others in the wider community now share our country – small businesses, non-Indigenous landowners, government bodies, pastoralists, mining companies, and commercial and recreational fishers and tourists. We respect the tenures that have been placed over country, but cannot forget our connections because this would be to forget who we are. For us, the barrier to accessing country is not the people who are now using it, but that we have not had many chances to build strong relationships with them. If there is a better understanding between us, then we can learn how to work together for a healthy country for all.

Impact on cultural sites

For us, country is a living thing and has many places that keep our culture alive. We work hard to take care of country and its sacred areas. As long as we continue to take care of them, our generations to come will have a connection to their culture and know who they are.

We are proud to share the beauty of our country with locals and tourists. However, we also have a responsibility to help manage visitors to prevent damage to country and our cultural sites.

Currently, there is only one sign up to protect cultural sites that are visited by locals and tourists. Our concern is that if people continue to visit

cultural areas that they do not know about then they will not understand the importance of protecting them. There are also many sacred sites non-Traditional Owners cannot visit by themselves or without permission.

Increased population and water shortages

Because of the growing population of the Gulf region, and with the potential for more growth associated with proposals for irrigated agricultural developments, we all need to take into account the region's highly variable water resources to avoid increasing threats to the natural and cultural values of our country – including threats to the region's industries such as fishing and pastoralism.



9. Priority Actions

This section outlines our priority actions we propose to take to manage our land and saltwater country in collaboration with our government, community and industry partners:

1. Continued support of land and saltwater management

- Biodiversity, fire, feral animal and weed management

2. Fishery Management:

- Build partnership with Fisheries Queensland
- Cultural awareness for commercial fishers
- Reduce impacts of commercial fishing
- Collect information on Indigenous fishing
- Take part in fishery management decisions

3. Water Planning

- Take part in catchment wide water planning processes

4. CLCAC Normanton Rangers

- Develop a CLCAC Normanton Ranger strategic plan
- Strengthen Rangers' role in fisheries management
- Increase number of Rangers
- Research partnerships
- Develop land management partnerships

5. Economic Development

- Develop tourism strategy for Delta Downs Station
- Maintain cattle business in harmony with country

6. Access to Country

- Negotiate access to pastoral leases on country

7. Research on Country

- Biodiversity research
- Cultural site surveys
- Traditional knowledge
- Seagrass monitoring
- Landscape management

8. Protected Areas

- Monitor Fish Habitat Areas
- Consider:
 - East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership
 - Mutton Hole Wetlands Conservation Park
 - Indigenous Protected Area

Continued Land and Saltwater Management

The Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation's Land and Sea Program currently undertakes biodiversity monitoring, fire, feral animal and weed management to support Traditional Owners and a healthy country. This program is considered one of the best Indigenous Land and Sea Programs of its kind in Australia, and the CLCAC Normanton Rangers are central to its success.

Biodiversity, fire, and feral animal and weed management are key features of the work undertaken by the Rangers. As well as improving the health of country, this work has developed the skills of Rangers to perform as professional land and sea managers and support Traditional Owner knowledge and living culture.

It is important to continue to support the CLCAC's Land and Sea Program, while also strengthening cultural and natural resource management capacity through the following priority actions. These priority actions focus on supporting Traditional Owners' strategic aspirations for country and culture, including sustainable livelihoods from country.

Fishery Management

Through the implementation of this Land and Saltwater Country Plan we are committed to achieving Indigenous, recreational and commercial fisheries that are equitable to all sectors as well as ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable. To achieve this objective we will seek to:

- Build partnerships with Fisheries Queensland, recreational fishers and commercial fishers in the research, monitoring and management of fish resources on Kurtjar country;
- Develop and deliver cultural awareness training and accreditation for commercial fishers operating on Kurtjar country;
- Reduce impacts of recreational and commercial fishing where necessary to achieve equitable outcomes for the Indigenous fishing sector as required by the Queensland *Fisheries Act 1994*;

- Collect information on Indigenous fishing to support recognition of the Indigenous fishery in fisheries management and resource sharing;
- Collaborate with the CLCAC in their submissions to and participation in the current review into fisheries management being undertaken by the Queensland Government.

Progress towards these objectives will be made in the first instance through the following strategies:

1. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Fisheries Queensland and the CLCAC Normanton Rangers regarding collaboration between the Qld Boating and Fisheries Patrol (QBFP) in the monitoring and management of fisheries and aquatic environments in the Norman River, and areas of Kurtijar country, where possible and appropriate. The MoU could address a range of issues including:
 - a. Joint patrols on QBFP and/or CLCAC Normanton Ranger vessels;
 - b. Joint training, education and exercises;
 - c. Shared resources where possible and mutually beneficial.
2. A research project to document the extent, cultural significance and economic importance of Indigenous fishing in Kurtijar country, with particular focus on the Normanton region and the Norman River in particular. The research project will gather information that can be used in negotiating greater recognition for the Indigenous fishery and more equitable fisheries management. The scope of the information, how the information will be collected, stored and used will be discussed and negotiated among Kurtijar, the CLCAC Normanton Rangers and the consultant fisheries researcher contracted to undertake the project.

Funding for the project will be sought from the Commonwealth Government's Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. A possible tool for undertaking this research is the Indigenous Subsistence Fishing Survey Kit developed by the then Qld Departments of Environment and Heritage and Primary Industries, and Balkanu Aboriginal Development Corporation in the late 1990s.

3. A coastal rehabilitation project in collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Carpentaria Shire Council and CLCAC Normanton Rangers to remove abandoned buildings, vehicles, boats and rubbish associated with several abandoned commercial fishers' camps along our coastline.
4. Resolve tenure and management issues for the unallocated State land (USL) along the coast of Delta Downs Station.

Water Planning

Our concern for sustainable water management is at the wider catchment scale, and we have strong interest in managing water resources so that they are sustainable to support the natural environment, Traditional Owners, the local community and industry.

- Continue to work with researchers to strengthen our understanding of sustainable water management; and
- Ensure that Kurtijar interests are recognised in the State government's review of the *Water Resource (Gulf) Plan 2007*.

CLCAC Normanton Rangers

Managing land and saltwater for Kurtijar country is not possible without the efforts of the CLCAC Normanton Ranger group. They have achieved a great deal for country, their families and themselves. Their expertise, and success in developing partnerships, shows that there is great potential to support future plans for country. With increasing opportunities in land and saltwater management, the group needs a strategic approach that will support their growth and Traditional Owner aspirations.

Develop a Strategic Ranger Plan – By developing their own strategic plan, the CLCAC Normanton Rangers will be able to identify their long-term goals and consider the best ways to develop to achieve these.

Strengthen Rangers' role in fisheries management – Build partnerships with Fisheries Queensland to strengthen the role of Rangers in fisheries management and compliance.

Increase the number of Rangers – The more Rangers there are, the more opportunities Traditional Owners have to be working for a healthy country and healthy community.

Develop research partnerships – There is a growing number of research opportunities available to the CLCAC Normanton Rangers that could help develop their skills as well as develop studies about country. Having the Rangers directly working with researchers also means that Traditional Owners will be managing research on country.

Develop land management partnerships – Collaborate with MMG Ltd on mutually beneficial opportunities for joint land and sea management and monitoring of Century mine activities.

Economic Development

We aim to identify, promote and negotiate opportunities for investment, resource development and other commercial projects to benefit our people and country. For Kurtijar people, the current economic development priorities are to:

- Continue to develop our tourism strategy for Delta Downs Station; and
- Maintain our cattle business in harmony with country.

Access to Country

Access to country is a priority for achieving a healthy country and healthy community. Being on country will allow us to sustainably manage what is culturally important for us as well as the natural systems that support all land users. Our priority actions will be to:

- Bring our Elders to certain places so that they can pass their knowledge onto us and we can continue to practice our culture;
- Access country for cultural heritage surveying and mapping, so that we have a record of country and the state it is in for future cultural and natural resource management;
- Visit parts of country that are important for us for fishing, ceremonies, hunting, and taking care of country.

There is a range of approaches that can be used to develop relationships and achieve access to country without compromising the needs of others. Each tenure on country will be different, and so must be dealt with one by one so that everyone involved is satisfied. Furthermore, with our native title claim being prepared our aim is to establish good relationships with all land users through land and saltwater country management so that solid

foundations have been laid for all parties when our claim is determined.

Access to pastoral leases on country is one of our main focuses. The CLCAC Normanton Rangers have achieved a lot for us in developing relationships with pastoral stations. Their work has proven that Traditional Owner activities can be co-beneficial and sustainably support the natural resources that we all depend on. Still, there are many more opportunities to build relationships and negotiate access to country.

Finally, while preparing our native title claim we would like the opportunity to educate pastoralists and the broader public on the exercise of our potential native title rights. This could include strengthened cultural awareness, partnerships for environmental management, and a strong mutual respect for each other's needs and values.

Research on Country

Biodiversity research

We are committed to continue our existing research partnerships, including the long term study on migratory bird colonies with Dr Roger Jaensch, while also developing new partnerships with research institutions to help us better understand the biodiversity values of our country and how to monitor, manage and protect those values.

Cultural site surveys and Traditional Knowledge

We want to build on the previous cultural heritage surveys that have taken place on Delta Downs with support from Northern Gulf Resource Management Group (NGRMG), and managed through the Kurtijar Aboriginal Corporation, by:

- Expanding these surveys to other parts of Kurtijar country;
- Collecting available traditional knowledge during the survey work;
- Establishing a cultural heritage and traditional knowledge database to support the work of our Rangers in looking after country;
- Compile a reference collection of all available published and unpublished research reports and other material relating to our cultural heritage and traditional knowledge.

Seagrass monitoring

We are keen to support the CLCAC Normanton Rangers to regularly monitor the extent and health

of seagrass habitats along our coastline, in collaboration with Seagrass-Watch and James Cook University's Tropical Water and Aquatic Ecosystem Research group (TropWATER).

Landscape management

There is an urgent need to better understand the climate and landscape impacts on land and saltwater country. We have chosen to focus on looking at these impacts occurring on Delta Downs Station as it is a part of country that we have strong connections to, both in terms of land management and identity. Through Delta Downs Station, the Morr Morr Pastoral Company seeks to develop a culturally and environmentally sustainable business as a best practice model for the region's cattle industry.

With assistance from the CLCAC Normanton Ranger Group and consultant, Dr. Hugh Pringle, we will be developing a land management plan for Delta Downs Station using the Ecosystem Management Understanding (EMU) process. The EMU process aims to integrate pastoral management into the wider management of ecological landscapes.

Protected Areas

Staaten-Gilbert Fish Habitat Area

In developing partnerships with local groups to enhance a more regionalised approach, there is an opportunity for the Queensland Government to work with Traditional Owners and the CLCAC Normanton Rangers and negotiate a role to monitor and manage the Staaten-Gilbert Fish Habitat Area. We will seek to establish such a role for the CLCAC Normanton Rangers through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing.

East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership

In 2014, the CLCAC Normanton Rangers have helped local land managers to consider becoming involved in the Flyway Site Network of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), as a step to raise the international profile of key shorebird habitat in the region. The EAAFP is a cooperative international arrangement of governments and other types of partners within the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (one of nine globally recognised major migratory routes). It is an informal, voluntary, and non-binding mechanism that aims to recognise areas of international importance for migratory waterbirds

and to protect migratory waterbirds, waterbird habitats and the livelihoods of local communities.

Nominating a site to the Flyway Site Network of the EAAFP can provide opportunities for international cooperation for migratory waterbird conservation. Once a site is established as part of the Flyway Site Network, it may benefit from:

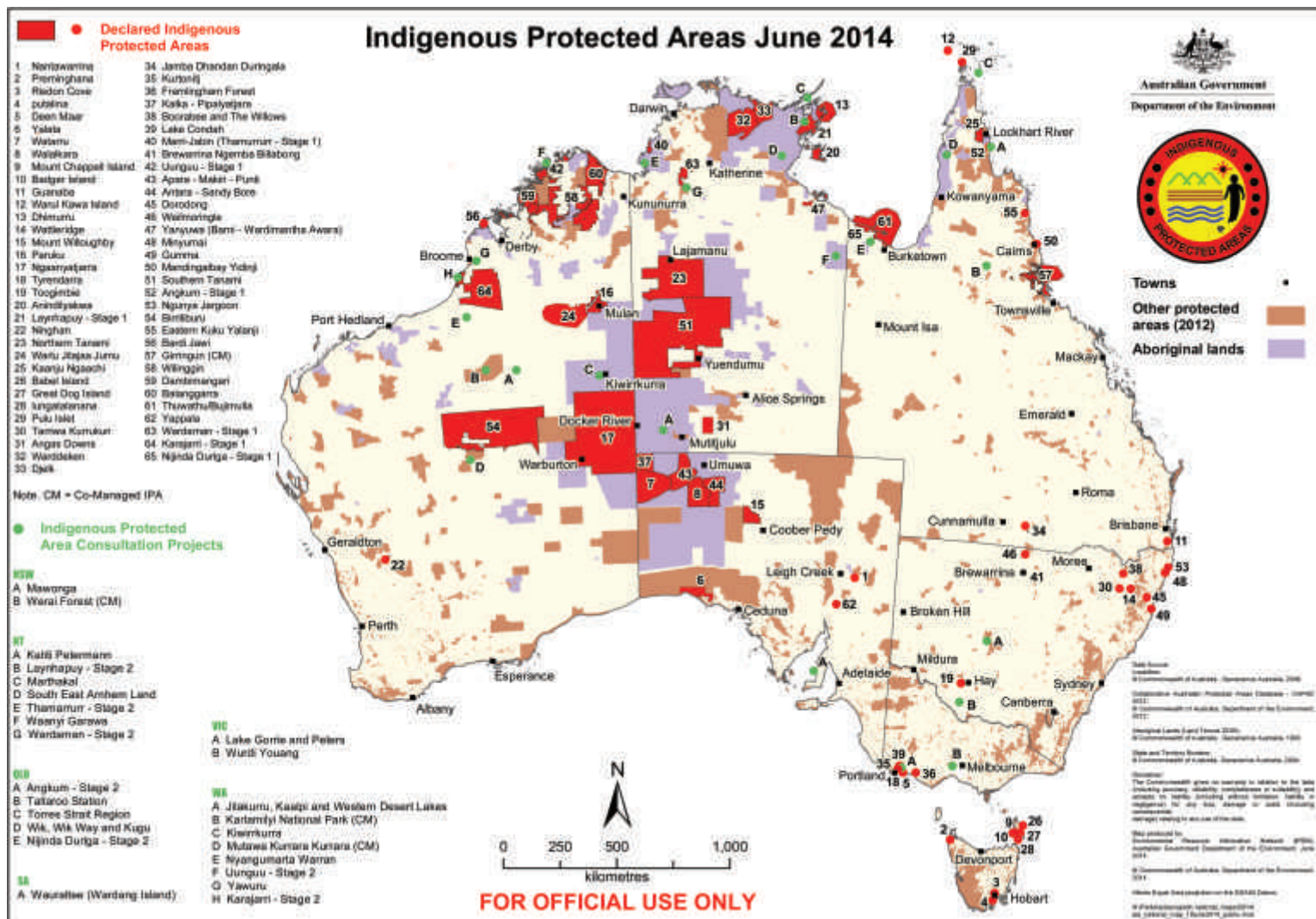
- a higher profile through engagement in this highly regarded international initiative;
- opportunities to connect with managers of other sites in the flyway to share information and expertise;
- added features for promotion of ecotourism in the region; and
- potentially also greater prospects to secure resources for habitat management.

In particular, the Rangers identified an important site along 43km of coast within the greater shorebird area of the south-east Gulf of Carpentaria. The 'South-East Gulf of Carpentaria: Karumba-Smithburne (Delta Downs) section' is a significant section of the greater shorebird area, along the Delta Downs Station coastline, with high densities of migratory shorebirds and extensive intertidal mud and sand flats backed by mangroves, bare salt flats and some shelly beaches.

Over 20,000 Asian-breeding, migratory shorebirds of at least 25 species feed and roost in the site, and some travel on to south-eastern Australia and probably also New Zealand. The site supports internationally important numbers of Great Knot, Red Knot, Black-tailed Godwit and Greater Sand Plover; it also supports substantial numbers of two globally threatened species: the far-eastern curlew (Vulnerable) and great knot (Vulnerable). The site meets three (and possibly another two) of the criteria for the Flyway Site Network. As a result, it is possible for the Morr Morr Pastoral Company, supported by the Kurtijar Aboriginal Corporation, to nominate the site to the Flyway Network of the EAAFP. The nomination process is continuing and it is hoped that both the State and Federal Governments will support the nomination and complete the lodgement process before the end of 2014.

Mutton Hole Wetlands Conservation Park

The proper management of Mutton Hole Wetlands Conservation Park is urgently needed to protect cultural sites from further damage:



Map showing dedicated IPAs (red) and developing IPAs (green) throughout Australia

- Negotiate with the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing and Carpentaria Shire Council on future park management and a finalised management plan;
- Properly manage vehicle access and develop signage to protect cultural sites.

Indigenous Protected Area

During the implementation of this Plan we wish to explore whether it would be feasible and beneficial to dedicate some of Kurtijar country as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).

An IPA is an area dedicated by its Traditional Owners as a protected area for the protection and sustainable use of its environmental and cultural values, in collaboration with appropriate government agencies, tenure holders and others with rights and interests in the area. IPAs are recognised by the Queensland and Commonwealth governments, and by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as part of

Australia's National Reserve System (NRS) of Protected Areas.

There are currently over 60 IPAs throughout Australia (see map above), totalling an area of 48 million hectares and amounting to almost 40% of the NRS. Since their inception in 1998, the planning and management of IPAs have been supported by funding from the Commonwealth Government's IPA Program, other government agencies, conservation organisations, research institutions and other partners.

IPAs are similar to national parks or conservation reserves, except they are made (dedicated) by Traditional Owners, rather than by governments, and are managed through a diversity of legal and other effective mechanisms, rather than by separate legislation. Traditional activities, such as sustainable hunting and fishing and other enterprises that are compatible with the values of an IPA can continue once country is dedicated as an IPA.

Most IPAs are situated on Aboriginal-owned land, but in more recent years IPAs have been established on multiple tenures, including sea country, in collaboration with agencies, organisations and groups with authority, resource rights (e.g. commercial fishermen) or tenure holders (e.g. pastoralists).

IPAs are therefore a mechanism for Traditional Owners to “put country back together” after it has been divided up into different tenures over time, often with different management authorities responsible for different tenures. Because IPAs are not established under legislation they do not restrict the legal authority or rights of existing

tenure-holders or rights-holders, but they are proving very effective in promoting collaborative, whole of landscape and seascape management that achieves the protection of environmental and cultural values of importance to Traditional Owners and with the consent of other interested parties.

Through the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation we will seek funding from the IPA Program, and/or other sources, to enable Traditional Owners to consider the IPA option and, if authorised by them, to proceed to develop an IPA Management Plan for selected parts of our country in collaboration with appropriate partners.



Lotus Lagoon on Delta Downs Station, managed and owned by Kurtijar Traditional Owners

10. Partnerships and Implementation

This section describes how our Land and Saltwater Country Plan will be implemented in collaboration with our government, community and industry partners, including through:

- Publication and distribution of the Plan and a poster summarising key aspects of the Plan;
- Identification of partners and their potential roles in implementation;
- An Implementation Workshop bringing together representatives of Traditional Owners, CLCAC Normanton Rangers and partners to develop agreed pathways to implement this Plan;
- A process for monitoring and evaluating and reviewing the implementation of this Plan.

Distribution of the Plan

Copies of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan will be made available to all Kurtijar People and distributed to all our partner agencies and organisations. A wall poster that summarises the main features of the Plan will also be circulated and made available to community organisations in the region, such as primary schools, secondary schools and local government offices.

The Plan and poster will also be available for download from the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation website.

Our Collaboration Partners

We recognise that many of the priority actions identified in this Plan can only be achieved in collaboration with government agencies, community groups, industry bodies, landholders, research institutions and other partners with rights, interests, resources and expertise that can assist us to look after our country.

The following organisations have been identified as existing or potential collaboration partners, with suggestions on how they can assist us to implement our Plan.

Indigenous organisations

Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) is the native title representative body coordinating the Kurtijar People's native title claim:

- Coordinate production and distribution of the Plan and poster;
- Administer the CLCAC Normanton Rangers, supported by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection;
- Facilitate collaboration with partner agencies and organisations in implementing the Plan;
- Facilitate monitoring and evaluation of the plan, including a formal plan review after five years.
- Coordinate the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.
- Assist in ensuring Kurtijar interests are recognised in the State government's review of the Water Resource (Gulf) Plan 2007.
- Assist in ensuring Kurtijar interests are recognised in the State government's Fisheries Management review.



Local Government

Carpentaria Shire Council

Carpentaria Shire Council is the local government authority responsible for the Gulf region in which Kurtijar country is located:

- Manage contracts for pest animal and plant activities undertaken by CLCAC Normanton Rangers on Council land;
- Negotiate with Qld Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing and CLCAC Normanton Rangers regarding future management arrangements for Mutton Hole Conservation Reserve;



- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers on mutually beneficial opportunities for joint training and resource sharing, where appropriate;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

**Queensland Government
Fisheries Queensland
(Department of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries)**

Fisheries Queensland is responsible for fisheries management, monitoring and research throughout Queensland:



- Negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding regarding collaboration between Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol and CLCAC Normanton Rangers for fisheries monitoring, management and compliance on Kurtijar country;
- Support CLCAC and CLCAC Normanton Rangers in their funding application for, and implementation of, an Indigenous fishery research project on Kurtijar country;
- Collaborate with other government agencies and the CLCAC Normanton Rangers to remove building and equipment from several abandoned commercial fishing camps along our coastline;
- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers on mutually beneficial opportunities for joint training and resource sharing, where appropriate;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

**Department of National Parks, Recreation,
Sport, and Racing**

Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport, Recreation and Racing (NPRSR) is responsible for planning and managing protected areas throughout Queensland, including national parks, conservation reserves and fish habitat areas:

- Negotiate a MoU with Kurtijar people and CLCAC Normanton Rangers regarding the monitoring and management of Staaten-Gilbert Fish Habitat Area;

- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers on mutually beneficial opportunities for joint training and resource sharing, where appropriate;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

**Department of Environment and Heritage
Protection**

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) is the agency responsible for protecting and managing species, environments and cultural heritage throughout Queensland:

- Continue collaboration with CLCAC Normanton Rangers on developing a joint program for crocodile monitoring and management on Kurtijar country;
- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers on mutually beneficial opportunities for joint training and resource sharing, where appropriate;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting the implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

**Australian Government
Department of the Prime
Minister and Cabinet**

The Environmental Programs Branch of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is responsible for implementing the Indigenous Protected Area Program and the Working on Country Program:



- Support Kurtijar People, through the CLCAC, to explore the option of dedicating appropriate portions of Kurtijar country as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA);
- Provide additional resources to the CLCAC Normanton Rangers (through the Working on Country Program, or its equivalent) to facilitate the expansion and development of the CLCAC Normanton Ranger program;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Department of the Environment

Department of the Environment (DoE) is responsible for administering the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, including overseeing the National Reserve System of Protected Areas and undertaking ecological sustainability assessments of export fisheries:

- If requested by Traditional Owners, support the process of planning, dedicating and managing a possible Kurtijar IPA, through information sharing, technical support and recognition of the IPA as part of the National Reserve System of Protected Areas.
- Take into account Kurtijar peoples' rights and interests with respect to our traditional fishery when undertaking an ecological assessment of export fisheries sourced from our country under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) is responsible for delivering biosecurity programs across northern Australia through the North Australia Quarantine Strategy (formerly delivered by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS)):

- Continue to collaborate with and support the CLCAC Normanton Rangers in their quarantine monitoring activities in coastal, including autopsies of culled pigs and monitoring for invasive organisms in marine debris;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) is Australia's national science agency, undertaking research to support agribusiness, energy and transport, environment and natural resources, health, information technology, telecommunications, manufacturing and mineral resources:

- Continue to collaborate with Traditional Owners and CLCAC Normanton Rangers to research potential impacts of the irrigated agriculture proposals in the Flinders River catchment, including potential impacts on the sustainability of our Indigenous fishery resources.

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation



Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) is responsible for funding research relating to Indigenous recreational and commercial fisheries throughout Australia, advised by their Indigenous Reference Group and advisory bodies in each state and territory:

- Through the FRDC's Indigenous Reference Group, support the development of a funding application to undertake an Indigenous fisheries research project on Kurtijar country;
- Develop an ongoing relationship with Kurtijar people, CLCAC and the CLCAC Normanton Rangers to support ongoing research and monitoring requirements for sustainable fishing for all fishing sectors on our country;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Non-government and community organisations

Northern Gulf Resource Management Group

The Northern Gulf Resource Management Group Ltd (NGRMG) is a not-for-profit community based company supporting partnerships to care for natural and cultural resources in the Gulf savannah region, including Kurtijar country:



- Continue collaboration with CLCAC Normanton Rangers, including investment in identified land management project, to achieve outcomes on Kurtijar country that are consistent with both our Land and Sea Country Plan and the Northern Gulf Natural Resource Management Plan;
- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers on mutually beneficial opportunities

for joint training and resource sharing, where appropriate;

- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association

Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association (GoCCFA) represents the interests of licenced commercial fishers in the Gulf of Carpentaria and promotes sustainable fisheries practices in the region:

- Collaborate with Kurtijar people, CLCAC and CLCAC Normanton Rangers to develop and implement a cultural awareness accreditation process for Gulf commercial fishermen;
- Support the development and implementation of an Indigenous fisheries research project;
- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers and Fisheries Queensland in the efforts to jointly monitor and manage fisheries resources and environments on Kurtijar country;
- Participate in the proposed Implementation Workshop to explore additional opportunities for supporting implementation of our Land and Saltwater Country Plan.

Pastoral Industry

Many owners and managers of pastoral stations on country are currently developing relationships with Traditional Owners that are co-beneficial, and support sustainable pastoral management:

- Further develop relationships with Traditional Owners to create mutually beneficial land and sea management on country;
- Support access to country for Traditional Owners for sustainable management of cultural heritage.

James Cook University
James Cook University's
(JCU) Tropical Water



and Aquatic Ecosystem Research group (TropWATER) provides support for the World Seagrass Association and manages the Seagrass-Watch monitoring project. JCU also conducts research on dolphins around northern Australia:

- Collaborate with Traditional Owners and CLCAC Normanton Rangers in monitoring of seagrass health and habitats along our coastline; and
- Collaborate with CLCAC Normanton Rangers in any potential dolphin monitoring, survey or research programs.

Implementation Workshop

The Carpentaria Land Council will convene an Implementation Workshop within three months of completing this Plan to bring together Kurtijar Traditional Owners, CLCAC Normanton Rangers and our collaboration partners (listed above) to confirm existing commitments and to map out a pathway to implement our agreed Priority Actions.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Implementation Workshop will develop an agreed timeline for achieving the Priority Actions identified in this Plan. The timeline and agreed steps to achieve milestones for each Priority Action will form the basis for monitoring the implementation of this Plan.

Progress on the implementation of the Plan will be documented in the Annual Report of CLCAC and the Plan will be reviewed after a period of five years.

References and Further Reading

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Appendix 1

Lotus Lagoon Species List

The information presented in the list below is from biodiversity surveys conducted by the CLCAC Normanton Rangers at Lotus Lagoon (Delta Downs Station) during 2012 and 2013. From the surveys, a total of 119 native species were detected in 2012, and a total of 113 in 2013.

The language names of listed species are important for Traditional Owners and their management of country. Many language names are known, and the CLCAC Normanton Ranger group will work with Kurtjar Traditional Owners to record these as part of their planned Traditional Knowledge database.

NATIVE SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NATIVE SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Mammals			
Agile wallaby	<i>Macropus agilis</i>	Comb-crested jacana	<i>Irediparra gallinacea</i>
Grassland melomys	<i>Melomys burtoni</i>	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocoracidae sp.</i>
Micro bats (Un.ID)	<i>Microchiroptera sp.</i>	Crested pidgeon	<i>Ocyphaps lophotes</i>
Northern nailtail wallaby	<i>Onychogalea unguifera</i>	Diamond dove	<i>Geopelia cuneata</i>
Long-tailed planigale	<i>Planigale ingrami</i>	Double-barred finch	<i>Taeniopygia bichenovii</i>
Little red flying fox	<i>Pteropus scapulatus</i>	Emu	<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>
Long-haired rat	<i>Rattus villosissimus</i>	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Brushtail possum	<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	Fairy martin	<i>Petrochelidon ariel</i>
Birds			
Apostlebird	<i>Struthidea cinerea</i>	Forest kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus macleayi</i>
Australasian darter	<i>Anhinga novaehollandiae</i>	Galah	<i>Eolophus roseicapilla</i>
Australasian grebe novaehollandiae	<i>Tachybaptus</i>	Glossy ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Australasian pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	Great bowerbird	<i>Chlamydera nuchalis</i>
Australia bustard	<i>Ardeotis australis</i>	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Australian brush turkey	<i>Alectura lathami</i>	Green pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus pulchellus</i>
Australian crow	<i>Corvus coronoides</i>	Grey fantail	<i>Rhipidura albiscapa</i>
Australian pratincole	<i>Stiltia isabella</i>	Grey teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>
Australian white ibis	<i>Threskiornis moluccus</i>	Gull-billed tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Azure kingfisher	<i>Alcedo azurea</i>	Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>
Bar-breasted honeyeater	<i>Ramsayornis fasciatus</i>	Hybrid grey teal / Pacific black duck	
Bar-shouldered dove	<i>Geopella humeralis</i>	Intermediate egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
Black fronted dotterel	<i>Elseyornis melanops</i>	Jabiru	<i>Jabiru mycteria</i>
Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Jacana	<i>Jacanidae (family)</i>
Black necked stork **	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	Laughing kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>
Black swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	Leaden flycatcher	<i>Myiagra rubecula</i>
Black winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Little black cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>
Black-faced cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	Little corella	<i>Cacatua sanguinea</i>
Blue winged kookaburra	<i>Dacelo leachii</i>	Little friarbird	<i>Philemon citreogularis</i>
Blue-faced honeyeater	<i>Entomyzon cyanotis</i>	Little pied cormorant	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>
Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	Little tern **	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
Brolga	<i>Grus rubicunda</i>	Little wood swallow	<i>Artamus minor</i>
Brown falcon	<i>Falco berigora</i>	Magpie	<i>Cracticus tibicen</i>
honeyeater	<i>Lichmera indistincta</i>	Magpie goose	<i>Anseranas semipalmata</i>
Butcher bird	<i>Cracticus spp.</i>	Magpie lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>
		Masked owl	<i>Tyto novaehollandiae</i>
		Mistletoebird	<i>Dicaeum hirundaceum</i>
		Nankeen kestrel	<i>Falco cenchroides</i>

NATIVE SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Nankeen night heron	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>
Nightjar owlet	<i>Aegotheles cristatus</i>
Olive backed sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
Pacific barn owl	<i>Tyto javanica</i>
Pacific black duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>
Peaceful dove	<i>Geopella placida</i>
Pelican	<i>Pelecanus sp.</i>
Pelican	<i>Pelecanus spp.</i>
Pheasant coucal	<i>Centropus phasianinus</i>
Pictorella mannikin finch **	<i>Heteromunia pectoralis</i>
Pied butcherbird	<i>Cracticus nigrogularis</i>
Pied heron	<i>Ardea picata</i>
Plover/Masked lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles</i>
Radjah shelduck **	<i>Tadorna radjah</i>
Rainbow lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>
Red-backed kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus pyrrhopygius</i>
Red-tailed black cockatoo	<i>Calyptorhynchus banksii</i>
Red-winged parrot	<i>Aprosmictus erythropterus</i>
Royal spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i>
Rufous-throated honeyeater	<i>Conopophila rufogularis</i>
Sandpiper/Red-caped plover	<i>Charadrius ruficapillus</i>
Sarus crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>
Satin flycatcher	<i>Myiagra cyanoleuca</i>
Small egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Southern boobook	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>
Spangled drongo	<i>Dicrurus bracteatus</i>
Spoonbill	<i>Platalea sp.</i>
Spotted nightjar	<i>Eurostopodus argus</i>
Squatter pigeon	<i>Geophaps scripta</i>
Straw-necked ibis	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>
Sulphur crested cockatoo	<i>Cacatua galerita</i>
Tawny frogmouth	<i>Podargus strigoides</i>
Tree martin	<i>Petrochelidon nigricans</i>
Unknown grasswren	<i>Amytornis spp.</i>
Varied lorikeet	<i>Psitteuteles versicolor</i>
Wedge-tailed eagle	<i>Aquila audax</i>
Welcome swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>
Whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna sp.</i>
Whistling kite	<i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>
White-bellied cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina papuensis</i>
White-bellied sea eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
White-browed wood swallow	<i>Artamus superciliosus</i>
White-necked heron	<i>Ardea pacifica</i>
Willie wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>
Wood duck	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>
Yellow honeyeater	<i>Lichenostomus flavus</i>
Yellow-billed spoonbill	<i>Platalea flavipes</i>
Yellow-throated miner	<i>Manorina flavigula</i>

NATIVE SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Reptiles	
Shaded litter rainbow skink	<i>Carlia munda</i>
Long-tailed rainbow skink	<i>Carlia Storri</i>
Cann's long-necked turtle	<i>Chelodina canni</i>
Northern long-necked turtle	<i>Chelodina rugosa</i>
Carnaby's snake-eyed skink	<i>Cryptoblepharus carnabyi</i>
Peron's snake-eyed skink	<i>Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus</i>
Port Essington skink	<i>Ctenotus essingtonii</i>
Common green tree snake	<i>Dendrelaphis punctulata</i>
Eastern Dtella	<i>Gehyra dubia</i>
Water python	<i>Liasis fuscus</i>
Northern sedge frog	<i>Litoria bicolor</i>
Green tree frog	<i>Litoria caerulea</i>
Buzzing tree frog	<i>Litoria electrica</i>
Bumpy rocket frog	<i>Litoria inermis</i>
Striped rocket frog	<i>Litoria nasuta</i>
Pale frog	<i>Litoria pallida</i>
Roth's tree frog	<i>Litoria rothii</i>
Ornate burrowing frog	<i>Platyplectrum ornatum</i>
Northern soil-crevice skink	<i>Proablepharus Tenius</i>
Western brown snake	<i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i>
Mertens water monitor	<i>Varanus mertensi</i>
Yellow spotted monitor	<i>Varanus panoptes</i>
Snake (Un.ID)	
Snake (Un.ID - different species)	
Skink (Un.ID)	
Black snake	
Crustaceans	
Freshwater crab (Un.ID)	
Arachnids	
Scorpion	<i>Scorpiones (Order)</i>

** Conservation status - Near Threatened (*Nature Conservation Act 1992 Qld*)

