

Warul Kawa Island

The Torres Strait, Queensland



The small tropical island of Warul Kawa lies off Cape York Peninsula in the Torres Strait. Also known as Deliverance Island, the uninhabited sand cay is of spiritual and cultural significance to the Indigenous Western Island communities.

Managed by the Torres Strait Island Coordinating Council, Warul Kawa Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) covers around 3,500 hectares (35 square kilometres) of vegetated dunes, rainforest and dense vine thickets. The IPA and the sea around it are important hunting and fishing grounds for the Traditional Owners, particularly the Boigu Island community.

One of the few Torres Strait islands to retain its natural vegetation, Warul Kawa's reef and shallow waters support large populations of several turtle species. The migrating green turtle, the flatback turtle and the hawksbill turtle are all common, and the island is even

named for them (Warul Kawa means 'turtle island' in Kalaw Lagaw Ya language).

The alternate name of Deliverance Island comes from the 1793 arrival of two British sailing ships. After a treacherous voyage through the Straits, they encountered the deeper water and safer passage at the island, and named it in honour of their 'deliverance' from catastrophe.

Warul Kawa and its surrounding reef system have retained their high natural values due largely to their remoteness. Although Warul Kawa has been periodically inhabited by Europeans in the past and may have been visited by Japanese pearl divers, there is now little evidence of this presence. Of the 56 recorded plant species, only two exotic species are found—stinking passionflower and coconut palm. It is thought that the coconut palms are remnants of a former copra plantation established in the early 1900s.



Despite forming part of Australia's Protected Zone, the island and surrounding seas are visited by illegal fishermen, and also serve as a temporary refuge for passing sailors caught in stormy weather. IPA management is reducing the environmental impact of these, and other, visitors by constructing a small campsite and permanent water supply to limit the effects of unplanned camping and foraging on the wider landscape.

Warul Kawa also supports a variety of bird habitats and plants species not usually found on Torres Strait islands, including nesting mounds of the orange-footed scrub fowl and the rainforest plants *Manilkara kauki*, *Diospyrus maritima* and *Aglaia eleagnoides*. IPA activities maintain the health of the island's ecosystems by removing shipping debris and other wastes washed up on the beaches, and by implementing sustainable hunting practices.

The declaration of Warul Kawa IPA in April 2001 was made under World Conservation Union (IUCN) *Category VI – Managed Resource Protected Area: Protected Area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems*.

Warul Kawa IPA is part of Australia's National Reserve System, a nation-wide network of reserves especially set up to protect examples of Australia's unique landscapes, flora and fauna for current and future generations.



For more information about Indigenous Protected Areas visit www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa or contact the Department of the Environment and Water Resources Community Information Unit. Email: ciu@environment.gov.au Freecall: 1800 803 772

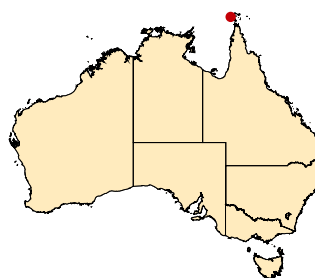


Photo Credits: Front – Placid seas near Warul Kawa, Steve Szabo. Back – (Left) Migrating Green Turtle, Robert Thorn. (Right) Thursday Island community, Steve Szabo. (Bottom) Mangroves along the sea, Steve Szabo. **Art Credit:** Taken from original artwork ©Eunice Nungarayi Woods.



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