

# Barnard Islands National Park

**Management Plan**

1998

Prepared by: **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment and Science**

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*The department is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the Human Rights Act 2019.*

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The Barnard Islands National Park Management Plan 1998 has been extended in 2023 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the plan's original management intent and direction.

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## Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Barnard Islands National Park will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that are proposed to form the basis on which day-to-day management decisions are made.

This plan was prepared in May 1998, in accordance with s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Act). In 2023 the plan was extended, in keeping with s 120G of the Act. For further information on this plan or the planning process, please contact the Department of Environment and Science at [ParkManagementPlans@des.qld.gov.au](mailto:ParkManagementPlans@des.qld.gov.au).

This management plan was prepared by Department of Environment and Science staff. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

# 1. Management directions and purpose

## 1.1 Management directions

The Barnard Islands National Park is one of 13 island national parks in the Cairns Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP), which also contains 29 other non-national park islands or groups of islands. All of the islands in the Cairns Section will be managed in a co-ordinated, strategic manner to provide for a range of conservation and recreational settings.

The national park islands of the Barnard Islands Group are dedicated under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and must be managed in accordance with s 17 of the Act:

- to provide for the permanent preservation of their natural condition to the greatest possible extent.
- to protect and present their cultural and natural resource values; and
- to ensure that the only use of the islands is nature-based and ecologically sustainable.

One of the prime purposes of management is to preserve the highly significant natural and cultural values of the islands whilst also providing and managing a range of visitor settings.

Stephens and Sisters Islands are important seabird breeding sites. Stephens in particular supports a regionally significant breeding colony of bridled terns during the summer season. To avoid disturbance to breeding bird populations, access to these islands is restricted during the period September 1 to March 31 each year. Access to Sisters is totally prohibited during this time and access to Stephens is limited to the sand spit/camping area on the western side of the island.

The islands will generally be managed to maintain them in an undisturbed state where visitors can experience relatively isolated and self-reliant recreation with minimal contact with others or human influence on the landscape.

Visitor numbers will be kept to levels which have a low impact on the islands and the experience of fellow users. No permanent facilities, other than management related infrastructure, will be permitted. Use will be closely monitored for adverse impacts on the islands' values.

Only small-scale commercial operations (i.e., 15 persons or less) of a suitable nature will be considered. Conflict between commercial operators and private recreational users will be minimised by separating these user groups where possible. Efforts will be made to ensure that local recreational use is not displaced by commercial tourism.

The park has no permanent ranger presence but is visited regularly by marine park Rangers. No facilities are provided. Visitors will need to be self-sufficient. The islands are suited to those who wish to birdwatch, snorkel on the adjacent reefs and generally engage in minimal-impact, nature-based activities in a natural, undeveloped setting.

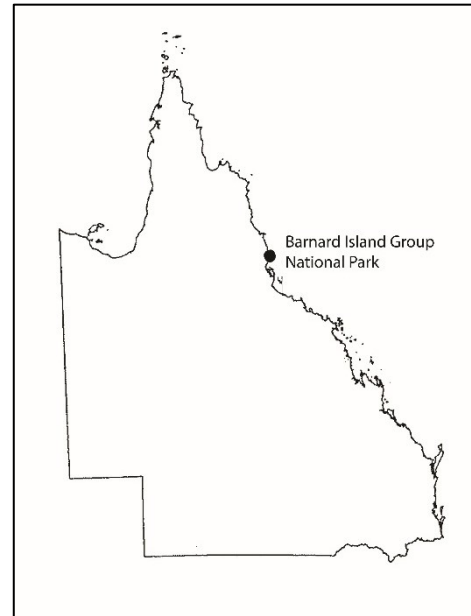
The Barnard Islands National Park and the Commonwealth owned Kent Island and their surrounds will be managed in a co-ordinated and complementary manner. Complementary management of waters adjacent to the national park islands is vital and continued co-operation between the Department of Environment and Science (DES) and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is essential if key natural values of the Barnard Islands Group are to be protected.

In managing the Barnard Islands National Park, opportunities will be provided to traditional owners, stakeholders and the general community to be involved in and consulted about planning and management. Involvement of traditional owners will be promoted. This plan is not intended to erode or extinguish any native title rights.

## 1.2 Purpose

The Barnard Islands will be managed for the following purposes:

- to protect and maintain breeding seabirds and their habitats and other island fauna
- to protect and maintain the diversity of vegetation types, particularly rainforest, woodland, beach strand and mangrove communities
- to respect the traditions and interests of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with traditional affiliations to the islands
- to control feral animals and noxious plants
- to maintain of the natural setting and provide recreational opportunities consistent with a peaceful, low intensity, minimally developed setting; and
- to provide for scientific research.



Map 1. Queensland locality map

## 2. Basis for management

### 2.1 Bioregional context

The Barnard Islands comprises seven continental islands with fringing reefs, located approximately 5-10 km offshore from Kurrimine Beach which is approximately 90 km south of Cairns. The five islands that make up the North Barnards (Bresnahan, Hutchinson, Jessie, Kent and Lindquist) are outcrops of weathered metamorphic rock, once part of the coastal mountain range, separated from the mainland by a rise in sea level. The two South Barnards (Stephens and Sisters) are volcanic tuffs. The islands have a high diversity of vegetation communities, and the fringing reefs are a mix of coral and rocky reef communities.

The South Barnards are of regional and possibly Great Barrier Reef scale significance for seabirds, supporting a number of breeding populations. Recorded numbers have indicated population levels in the region of 10 000 bridled terns, 2000 lesser crested terns and 2000 black-naped terns at times.

Five of the islands - Jessie, Hutchinson, Sisters, Stephens and Bresnahan - are national parks, declared under the provisions of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. Of the other islands in the Group, Kent Island is a Commonwealth lighthouse reserve and Lindquist Island is a Defence Reserve.

The island group is within the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) World Heritage Area and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). The intertidal area around the islands is part of the Cairns State Marine Park. The waters surrounding Sisters and Stephens Islands are zoned Marine National Park under the Cairns Section of the GBRMP, while the waters surrounding Jessie Island are a Conservation Park Zone, and those around Bresnahan and Hutchison Islands are Conservation Park Zone. Waters around Kent Island are Habitat Protection Zone.

The Barnard Islands are popular for recreational camping, sea kayaking, boating and snorkeling due to its proximity to Innisfail, Cairns and the Atherton Tableland. Being less than 10 km from the coast and Mourilyan Harbour, the islands are easily accessible by small vessel in most weather conditions. There is a high level of use by the local community.

## 2.2 Values

### 2.2.1 Geology and landform

The North Barnard islands are high continental islands with exposed rock faces of Barnard Metamorphic rocks - highly altered schists and gneisses with associated gneissic rocks of Pre Cambrium age, derived from sedimentary rocks.

The South Barnard islands (Sisters and Stephens) are volcanic tuffs, younger than the North Barnard islands, made of layers of ash implanted with volcanic bombs (fragments of Barnard Metamorphics). A distinctive olivine basalt dyke or ridge, much younger than the dominant volcanic rock, runs north-south across the western part of Stephens Island and is a prominent feature on the south-western shoreline.

The islands contain diverse and contrasting landforms including shallow reefs, rocky reefs, sand spits, beaches, exposed rock faces and dense rainforest clad slopes.

### 2.2.2 Plants and animals

The flora of the islands has not been extensively studied but is likely to contain species of conservation significance. The islands have a high diversity of vegetation communities, including lush tropical rainforest on the rugged high rocky areas, low woodlands on sand spits supporting beach she-oak *Casuarina equisetifolia*, beach almond *Terminalia arenicola*, Cardwell cabbage *Scaevola sericea*, octopus bush *Argusia argentea* and pandanus *Pandanus tectorius*. Beach dunal vegetation and foreshores communities are dominated by goatsfoot *Ipomoea pescaprae*, sea bean *Canavalia rosea*, nicker nut *Caesalpinia bonduc* and mangrove communities, predominantly *Avicennia marina*.

Twenty-six species of seabirds have been recorded on and around the islands, including the little tern, beach stone-curlew (vulnerable), sooty oystercatcher (Rare under the *Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 1994*), bridled tern, roseate tern, black-naped terns, crested tern, lesser crested tern, brown booby, pied oystercatcher, eastern reef egret, whimbrel, osprey, grey tailed tattler, lesser frigate bird and white-faced heron.

The South Barnards are regionally important seabird sites, supporting significant numbers of breeding populations, including over 10 000 bridled terns, (estimated Australian breeding population 20-60 000), 2000 lesser crested terns (estimated Australian breeding population 4-8000) and 2000 black-naped terns.

### 2.2.3 Cultural heritage

The islands are part of 'sea country' of the Mamu people. The waters and fringing reefs around the islands are still the focus of traditional use of natural resources. Although no specific cultural sites have been identified on the islands, they are a component of the local traditional cultural landscape and may have important cultural values in terms of their intrinsic natural landscape values and native plants and animals.

The South Barnards were settled in the late 1800s by Stephen Illidge, who built a house and established a beche-de-mer station from which up to six vessels operated. A cyclone in the 1890s destroyed the station and dwellings.

A lighthouse was established on Kent Island in 1897 and was converted to solar power in 1988. Several small grave sites are located in the vicinity of the lighthouse, most probably belonging to the Kent family - the lighthouse keeper. Sisters Islands was named for the daughters of this family, as was Jessie Island.

### 2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic

The islands have a high scenic value due to their relatively natural state. The slopes, covered in dense green vegetation rise in strong contrast against the backdrop of clear blue open waters, varying shades of blue-green hued reef flat shallows and coral sand beaches. There is no evidence of human activity or disturbance on the islands when viewed from the water. The lighthouse on Kent Island is not visible from the sea.

### 2.2.5 Scientific and educational

The geological, biological and historical and character of the Barnard Islands provides excellent material and educational opportunities for educational and research programs. However, due to space constraints, the islands are not considered to be suitable for school group excursions or camps.

### 2.2.6 Recreation and tourism

The major recreational value of the Barnard Islands lies in its natural condition and its easy accessibility to mainland population centres. There are extremely high levels of recreational use by the local community, particularly on weekends and during school holiday periods.

Camping is currently allowed by permit at Stephens Island between 1 April and 30 September and on Hutchinson Island. The Commonwealth-owned Kent Island has the best camping site in the group.

A number of commercial operators have commercial activity permits which allow access to the national parks of Hutchison, Jessie, Sisters and Stephens Islands on an infrequent, limited basis. Several marine park permits are issued for access to waters adjacent the islands. Present data indicates that use levels are low.

The islands, due to their small size and fragility, would be unsuitable for more than a limited number of visitors without suffering adversely from the impacts. They are suited to those who wish to birdwatch, snorkel on the adjacent reefs and generally engage in minimal-impact, nature-based recreational activities in a natural, undeveloped setting.

## 3. Management strategies

### 3.1 Native plants

#### Current situation

Plant communities include rainforest, beach, open woodland and mangroves systems. Damage has occurred to sand spit vegetation from past camping activities.

#### Desired outcomes

- Diversity of island vegetation communities is maintained.
- Visitor impact on vegetation is minimised by management controls.

#### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- A detailed flora survey of Stephens and Kent Islands will be undertaken, including assessment of conservation significance.
- The condition of camp sites and tracks will be surveyed, and a monitoring program implemented to assess existing and future impact on vegetation.
- Degraded areas not revegetating naturally will be planted with endemic species.
- Use levels will be monitored and permitted visitor numbers modified if necessary.

### 3.2 Native animals

#### Current situation

Significant populations of breeding seabirds are present from September to March including bridled tern, crested tern and black-naped tern. Migrant waders use the islands and intertidal reefs to feed and rest in transit. No systemic fauna surveys have been undertaken.

#### Desired outcomes

- Breeding seabirds remain undisturbed. Waders continue to use the area in transit.
- Vertebrate fauna is not unduly impacted upon by visitors.

**Proposed policies, guidelines and actions**

- A fauna assessment of Stephens and Kent Islands will be undertaken. Seabird counts will be undertaken during the breeding season.
- Access to Sisters Island will not be permitted during the breeding period between 1 September to 31 March.
- Access to Stephens Island during the period between 1 September to 31 March will be restricted to the sand spit and camping area at the western (landward) part of the island.
- A regulatory notice will be issued to formalise these restrictions.

**3.3 Introduced plants and animals****Current situation**

The black rat has been introduced to Hutchison Island. Introduced plants occur near the lighthouse and access route on Kent Island.

**Desired outcomes**

- The Islands will be free from introduced plants and animals.

**Proposed policies, guidelines and actions**

- Survey will be undertaken to locate and map weed infestations.
- Programs will be established to eradicate introduced species. Effectiveness of eradication measures will be monitored.
- Visitors will be advised to check their clothing and equipment for weeds and grasses before landing.

**3.4 Fire management****Current situation**

There is potential for island vegetation to be severely damaged by fire, especially during dry winter conditions.

**Desired outcomes**

- Incidence of wildfire is minimised.

**Proposed policies, guidelines and actions**

- Wood burning fires are prohibited.
- Visitors will need to provide their own fuel/gas stoves.

**3.5 Landscape, soil and catchment protection****Current situation**

The Islands have high natural and scenic values and landscape diversity. Areas in the vicinity of the campground and some sections of walking track are degraded. Mooring/anchoring and diving may damage the fringing reefs.

**Desired outcomes**

- The high scenic and natural values of the islands are maintained.
- Activities which degrade the landscape or physical integrity of the islands and reefs do not occur.

**Proposed policies, guidelines and actions**

- Walking tracks maintained and monitored for erosion from use, water channelling and wind.
- Tracks within vegetated areas discouraged.
- Visitor numbers, camping and other activities maintained at low levels.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.
- Baseline study of the fringing reefs at Stephens and Kent Islands will be undertaken and reviewed every 2-3 years.



## 3.6 Cultural heritage

### Current situation

The Islands and fringing reefs are part of the traditional 'sea country' of the Mamu people. The Barnard Islands has high Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and European cultural heritage values. No formal study has been undertaken.

### Desired outcomes

- The cultural and heritage values of the islands are recognised and presented where appropriate.
- Traditional use of the islands continues.

### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Document the cultural and heritage values of the islands.
- Traditional custodians involved in the management of the islands, including the active involvement of community Rangers.

## 3.7 Recreational and tourism

### Current situation

There are high levels of local recreational use. Fair weather anchorage is available. Very low level of commercial tourism use at present.

### Desired outcomes

- Access to the anchorage is maintained.
- Visitor impact on island biota is minimised.
- Impact of visitation levels on the experience of fellow users is minimised.
- Water-based recreation is non-intrusive, in line with desired visitor use settings.
- Local recreational use is not displaced by commercial tourism.

### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

#### Day use

- Only small-scale commercial operations (15 or less passengers) will be considered.
- Operations must be compatible with desired use setting and visitor experience.
- Access greater than two days in any seven-day period will not be permitted.
- Only one operator to access any island at any one time.
- Access will be managed by a booking system in conjunction with State marine park access, to a maximum of two days in any seven-day period for any one operator.

#### Camping

##### Stephens Island

- Maximum group size will be 10 persons.
- Maximum total number of 12 campers at any one time.
- Commercial camping allowed, restricted to weekdays and outside peak periods.
- Maximum length of stay at any campsite is 7 nights, reducing to four nights during peak periods.

##### Kent Island

- Small-scale commercial and private camping will be permitted.
- Maximum total number of 15 campers at any one time.
- Maximum group size will be 10 persons.
- Maximum length of stay at any campsite is 7 nights, reducing to four nights during peak periods.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.
- Access to Sisters Island will not be permitted during the breeding period between 1 September to 31 March.

- Access to Stephens Island during the period between 1 September to 31 March will be restricted to the sand spit and camping area at the western (landward) part of the island.
- Visitor experience and expectations will be monitored.
- Seaplane, helicopter or hovercraft access not permitted, except in emergency situations and for the maintenance of navigation aids.
- A voluntary Fly Neighbourly Agreement is to be implemented by Air Services Australia.

## 3.8 Education and interpretation

### Current situation

Island park guide and Marine Park Zone maps are available. Zoning information is available at boat ramps and on the North and South Barnards.

### Desired outcomes

- Visitor information is readily available, both pre-visit and on-site (signs).

### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Upgrade island park guide incorporating new information as required.
- Signs informing visitors of conditions which apply on the Barnard Islands will be erected at the boat ramps at Mourilyan Harbour; Cowley Beach, Kurrimine Beach and Clump Point.
- Copies of the management plan are available at [www.des.qld.gov.au](http://www.des.qld.gov.au).

## 3.9 Complementary management of adjoining areas

### Current situation

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park - the adjacent marine park is managed under provisions of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*. It is currently outside the Cairns Area Plan of Management.

Queensland Marine Park - DES intends to manage the national park island to low water in a consistent manner. This management plan sets the policy for the management of Queensland Marine Park in the surrounding intertidal areas.

### Desired outcomes

- The national park and adjacent marine park are managed under their respective legislation in a coordinated and complementary manner.
- The national park island will be managed to low water in a manner consistent with the management of the national park.

### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Encourage ongoing liaison within DES, and between DES and other agencies, to promote coordinated and complementary management, particularly with regard to:
  - development and revision of policies and zoning and management plans
  - visitor management and permit issue arrangements; and
  - public contact and information.
- In particular, encourage the development of interim management guidelines for the adjacent marine park to apply until a management plan is developed for that area.
- These guidelines should provide level of protection at least equivalent to that provided in the Cairns Area Plan of Management.