

Piper Islands National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)

Management Statement

2013

The Department of Environment, Science and Innovation acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. We recognise their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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

This management statement does not intend to affect, diminish, or extinguish native title or associated rights.

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The Piper Islands National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2024 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the statement's original management intent and direction.

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Park size:	6.2ha
Bioregion:	Cape York Peninsula
QPWS region:	Ribbons and East Cape York
Local government estate/area:	Great Barrier Reef
State electorate:	Cook Shire Council

Legislative framework

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area</i>
✓	<i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>

Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
✓	China—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Japan—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Republic of Korea—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Indigenous Management Agreement – Kutini-Payamu, Piper Islands, Wuthara Island, Mitirinchi Island and Ma’alpiku Island National Parks (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) 2011
✓	Kuuku Ya’u People Protected Areas Indigenous Land Use Agreement (QI 2009/012)
✓	Kuuku Ya’u People Marine Park Indigenous Land Use Agreement (QI2009/011)

Thematic strategies

✓	Statement of Fire Management Intent 2003
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Vision

Piper Islands National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land (CYPAL)) will be jointly managed with Kuuku Ya'u Traditional Owners to ensure natural and cultural values and processes are protected and presented.

The park has a strong sense of remoteness and wilderness and the islands are alive with roosting and nesting seabirds. Farmer Island is known as one of Queensland's few occurrences of the unusual *Pisonia grandis* forest.

These biodiverse islands have scenic appeal. Small forests and mangrove pockets contrast with long beaches stretching into the reef. Visitors will enjoy the environmental and cultural values of the park.

Conservation purpose

Piper Islands National Park (CYPAL) is part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The bio-diverse group of islands is important to a wide range of breeding and roosting seabirds and provides valuable nesting habitat for vulnerable hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata*. The park contains regional ecosystems which are restricted to coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays.

Piper Islands National Park was originally declared in 1989. In 2011 it was transferred as Aboriginal freehold land to the Northern Kuuku Ya'u Kanthanampu Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate Land Trust and was then dedicated as national park (CYPAL).

The new plan (SP241425) for the national park (CYPAL) shows that the boundary of the park on each island as a tidal boundary. The tidal boundaries are then further described as the top of the sandy beach for Beasley and Farmer islands and Kay Islet, and the edge of a solid coral encrusted feature which rises above the high tide line and excludes significant areas of mangroves on Baird and Fisher islands.

Protecting and presenting the area's values

Landscape

The Piper Islands are a living cultural landscape rich in traditional and contemporary significance for Kuuku Ya'u Traditional Owners. There is strong connection with surrounding traditional land and sea estates.

The national park (CYPAL) consists of five coral cays that rise out of the pristine waters of the Great Barrier Reef on the eastern edge of Cape York Peninsula's Temple Bay, 30km south of Cape Grenville.

Baird Island is located in the west of the group and is 200m long and 50m wide, with cemented coral ramparts and low coral shingle banks. Beesley Island is the most north-westerly island in the group and is 350m long and 200m wide. Farmer Island is located in the top of the centre of the group and is 350m long and 200m wide. Fisher Islet is located on the south-eastern end of a reef that also links to Farmer Island. The islet is a series of cemented coral ramparts and coral shingle ridges that stretches 700m in length but is only 50m at its widest part.

Kay Islet is located in the north east of the group and is situated on the north-western end of a platform reef. It is approximately 90m long and 70m wide. A separate shingle bank is located on the south-eastern end of the reef and is not part of the national park.

Regional ecosystems

There are three regional ecosystem types recorded for the park in the Regional Ecosystem Description database, two are of concern (Table 1).

Baird Island is vegetated with closed mangrove forest of *Rhizophora stylosa* +/- *Bruguiera gymnorhiza*. While not recorded in the regional ecosystem mapping, QPWS records indicate that the island's coral shingle ridges are also vegetated with herbs and low shrubs.

Beesley Island has a small area of closed mangrove forest of *R. stylosa* +/- *B. gymnorhiza*. While not recorded in the regional ecosystem mapping, QPWS records indicate grass and herb communities of *Sesuvium portulacastrum* and of concern sea shore stalky grass *Lepturus repens* are also present.

Farmer Island is vegetated with of concern coastal premna *Premna serratifolia* closed scrub. While not recorded in the regional ecosystem mapping, QPWS records indicate the island also has a community of endangered *Pisonia grandis* forest and grasslands including the of concern sea shore stalky grass.

Fisher Islet's northern extent is vegetated with closed mangrove forests of *R. stylosa* +/- *B. gymnorhiza*, while its southern extent is largely unvegetated ocean rock. While not recorded in the regional ecosystem mapping, QPWS records indicate the coral shingle ridges are also vegetated with the herb *Sesuvium* and low shrub *Pemphis acidula*.

Kay Islet is vegetated with *Melaleuca viridiflora* woodland in sinkholes.

Plants and animals

The islands retain a high level of natural integrity and provide important habitat for roosting and nesting seabirds and also some terrestrial birds and marine turtles. QPWS records indicate more than 30 species of plants have been identified but none are listed as being of conservation significance under the Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006.

Over 70 animal species have been recorded from the park, most of which are birds. Five animals have conservation significance (Table 2) and 22 bird species are protected under international conventions for migratory birds (Table 3).

The park is home to one of the largest breeding and roosting populations of black noddy *Anous minutus* in Queensland. Farmer Island boasts bird records of 51 bird species at a time. Kay Islet is used by terns, herons and gulls for breeding with up to 800 breeding pairs of crested terns *Sterna bergli* recorded during one breeding season.

It may be necessary to implement future management measures to protect roosting and nesting birds on some of the islands. QPWS has previously identified Farmer Island as a potential restricted access area to protect the large colony of black noddys that breed on the island.

While the park is important for birds, the islands are not a key site in the GBRMPA Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy (2002).

The park also provides nesting habitat for the vulnerable hawksbill turtle.

Aboriginal culture

The *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* provides the primary legislative framework across all tenures for the management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage through mechanisms such as cultural heritage management plans and culturally appropriate registration of cultural places and items.

The Kuuku Ya'u people are the Traditional Owners of the park which is jointly managed by the Kuuku Ya'u Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate (previously the Northern Kuuku Ya'u Kanthanampu Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate) and QPWS in accordance with an Indigenous Management Agreement.

The Kuuku Ya'u People's Marine Park Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) between the Kuuku Ya'u people, Queensland Government and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority covers an area of approximately 1970km² and was registered in in 2009. It prescribes the native title rights and interests of the Kuuku Ya'u people and also provides for the protection of turtles and dugongs by restricting the number of animals that may be hunted annually.

The Kuuku Ya'u People's Protected Areas ILUA between the Kuuku Ya'u people and the Queensland Government covers Piper Islands National Park (CYPAL), Wuthara Island National Park (CYPAL) (previously Forbes Islands National Park) and Mitirinchi Island National Park (CYPAL) (previously Quoin Island National Park). The ILUA was registered in 2009 and provides for good management of the area and includes recommendations regarding camping, fires, rubbish, hunting and use of firearms.

An Indigenous Management Agreement between the State of Queensland and Northern Kuuku Ya'u Kanthanampu Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate (land trust) for Kutini-Payamu, Piper Islands, Wuthara Island, Mitirinchi Island and Ma'alpiku Island national parks (CYPAL) was made on 28 July 2011. This agreement provides the framework for ongoing relationships between the department and land trust for the management of the national park (CYPAL).

Shared-history culture

Early contact history of the Temple Bay area dates back to the late 1700s when survey and trading vessels visited the area. Numerous shipwrecks are found in the area including some that are protected under the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* (Commonwealth). An unnamed grave is located on Farmer Island. No places or items in Piper Islands National Park (CYPAL) are registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Piper Islands have scenic appeal, a sense of remoteness and provide a totally natural, self-reliant visitor experience. No formal visitor sites or access tracks are in place. Camping is not permitted.

Commercial activities are permitted year round. Due to the limited space on the islands and to minimise disturbance to nesting and roosting birds commercial access is carefully managed. Permits allow access to all islands except Farmer Island, with a requirement to make a booking and limits on the number of people taken ashore by individual operators.

The islands have boundary signs displaying the national park name with pictograms to regulate activities where relevant.

The Piper Islands are located in and to the west of the designated shipping channel. There are no designated anchorages or public moorings in waters surrounding the islands. Farmer Island offers good vessel anchorage and is the most visited island in the group. The adjoining State marine park surrounding the islands is habitat protection (dark blue) zone.

Education and science

Information about the park is available on the department's website.

Given the remote location the park it not often visited by researchers. Any research undertaken must be conducted under a relevant authority.

Partnerships

Piper Islands National Park (CYPAL) is jointly managed by the Kuuku Ya'u Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate and QPWS to protect cultural values, species of conservation significance and regional ecosystems.

Future partnerships may also be developed with interested parties such as tourism operators and researchers.

There is a cooperative focus between QPWS and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for complementary management of the World Heritage area, including national park islands and surrounding marine parks (State and Commonwealth).

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

The islands are thought to retain a high level of natural integrity, with minimal to no pest plants or animals on record. Regular assessments and inspections of national park islands are undertaken.

Fire management

Planned burning is not undertaken and campfires are not allowed as seabird nesting would be adversely impacted and the sand cays would be susceptible to erosion after burning. The endangered *Pisonia grandis* low closed forest and of concern coastal premna closed scrub are both intolerant of fire.

References

GBRMPA 2002, *Coastal Bird Monitoring Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area*. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville, QLD.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Landscape Scenic amenity values of the park are protected consistent with the overall character of the park and landscape settings.</p>	<p>A1. Infrastructure is minimal and consistent with the character of the park and landscape setting.</p>
<p>Native plants and animals Conserve the diversity and distribution of natural plant and animal communities, particularly species of conservation significance and regional ecosystems representative of the Ribbons and East Cape York bioregions.</p>	<p>A2. Review monitoring objectives for species of conservation significance and support monitoring programs that achieve these objectives. Particular focus will be on monitoring objectives for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pisonia grandis</i> forest • little tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i> • beach stone-curlew <i>Esacus magnirostris</i> • eastern curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i> • sooty oyster catcher <i>Haematopidae</i> • hawksbill turtle <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>. <p>A3. Investigate whether restricted access areas are needed to protect roosting and breeding birds on the islands, particularly on Farmer Island.</p>
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities Provide a low-key self-reliant visitor experience without damaging natural and cultural values. Tourism activities enhance visitor opportunities and are sustainable.</p>	<p>A4. Allow commercial access to the park, except Farmer Island. Manage visitor use to minimise impacts to natural and cultural values. A5. Inform tourism and visitor opportunities where practicable through culturally appropriate cross-cultural information from the Traditional Owners.</p>
<p>Pest and fire management Natural and cultural values are maintained through strategic cross-cultural fire and pest management regimes.</p>	<p>A6. Utilise QPWS pest and fire management systems for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring and control (identification/eradication) of pests • fire management, including prevention, where no fire is required. <p>A7. Continue to restrict use of fire in the park, except for authorised management or Traditional Owner purposes.</p>
<p>Joint management Piper Islands National Park (CYPAL) is jointly managed by Kuuku Ya'u Traditional Owners and QPWS by building strong collaborative working relationships. The importance of the park to Traditional Owners will be recognised.</p>	<p>A8. Work closely with the Kuuku Ya'u Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate and consult regularly over management direction and issues. A9. Use best endeavours to facilitate site visits to discuss management of islands. A10. Fulfil actions identified in the Indigenous Land Use Agreements and Indigenous Management Agreement.</p>

Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
3.2.31	<i>Premna serratifolia</i> closed scrub. Restricted to coral atolls, shingle cays and sand cays.	Of concern
3.2.32	Sea shore stalky grass <i>Lepturus repens</i> closed herbland. Restricted to sand cays.	Of concern

Table 2: Species of conservation significance

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	High
<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>	beach stone-curlew	Vulnerable	-	High
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	hawksbill turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	sooty oystercatcher	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	Near threatened	-	Low

Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	CMS	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	ruddy turnstone	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Caidris ruficollis</i>	red-necked stint	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	large sand-plover	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	Mongolian plover	✓	✓	-	✓
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	hawksbill turtle	✓	-	-	-
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	lesser frigate bird	✓	-	✓	✓
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian tern	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	bar-tailed godwit	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	whimbrel	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	bridled tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Pluvialis cominica</i>	lesser golden plover	✓	✓	-	-
<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	grey plover	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	black-naped tern	✓	✓	✓	-
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sula dactylatra</i>	masked booby	✓	-	✓	✓
<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	brown booby	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	crested tern	✓	-	✓	-
<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	grey-tailed tattler	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	Terek sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓

BONN (CMS) – Bonn Convention; CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement; JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement; ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement