

Nymph Island National Park

Management Plan

1998

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

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The Nymph Island 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 or direction.

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Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Nymph Island National Park will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that 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 s120G 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.

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

Nymph Island 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.

Nymph Island National Park is dedicated under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and must be managed in accordance with s17 of the Act:

- to provide for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition to the greatest possible extent
- to protect and present the area's 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 island whilst providing and managing a range of visitor settings.

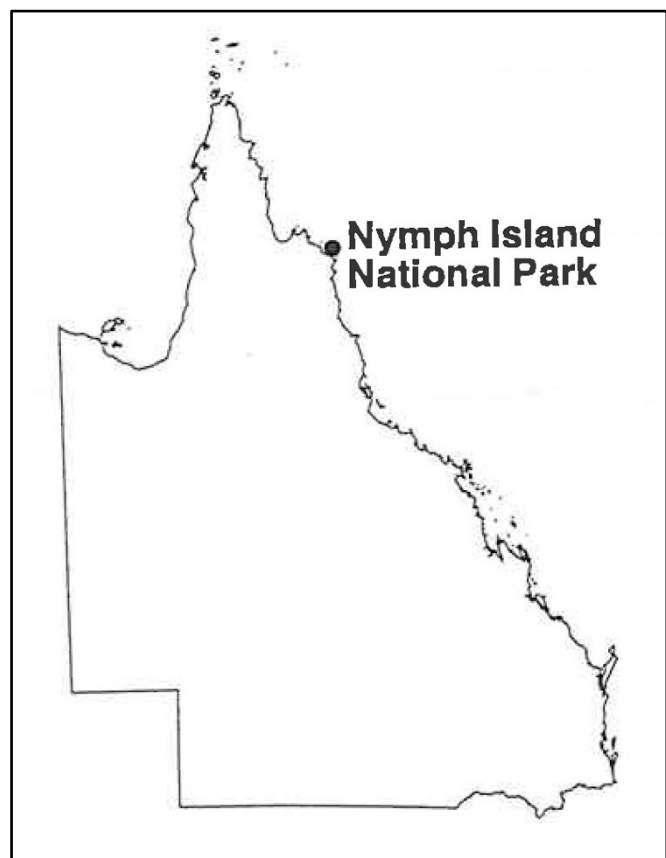
The island will be promoted for its natural values. Visitor numbers will be kept to levels which have a low impact on the experience of fellow users. Facilities that conflict with the natural experience of visitors will not be permitted.

Due to the relatively large size of the island, its habitat type and its visual and aesthetic attractiveness, Nymph Island is considered to have potential to attract and also support larger groups of visitors than most of the other islands in the northern part of the Cairns Section. Consequently, it is proposed to offer an opportunity for larger cruise ships to stop over and allow their passengers to engage in island based-activities. Only one large vessel would be permitted access at any one time.

The park has no permanent ranger presence but is visited regularly by marine parks Rangers. No facilities are provided. Visitors need to be self-reliant. The island is 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.

Complementary management of waters adjacent to the national park islands is vital and close co-operation between Department of Environment and Science and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is essential if key natural values of this national park island are to be protected.

In managing Nymph Island 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 major purposes of management will be to ensure that:

- island fauna, particularly breeding seabirds, and their habitats, are conserved and protected
- the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with traditional affiliations to the island are recognised, protected and presented where appropriate
- visitor use is monitored and controlled so that the diversity and integrity of flora and fauna communities is maintained
- disturbance to island fauna at critical times of the year is avoided
- introduced plants and animals are controlled or eradicated where possible; and
- the natural setting is maintained to provide recreational opportunities consistent with a peaceful, low intensity, undeveloped, semi-wilderness experience:

2. Basis for management

2.1 Bioregional context

Nymph Island National Park is located 30km offshore and is approximately 90km north of Cooktown and 22km east of Lizard Island. The nearest settlement - the small mining township at Cape Flattery - is 35km south. The adjacent section of coast is part of Starke River National Park.

Nymph Island National Park is located within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The surrounding reef and waters are managed under the provisions of the Cairns Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Cairns State Marine Park. The surrounding reef and intertidal areas are zoned Marine National Park and Buffer Zone.

There are 13 island national parks in the Cairns Section of the GBRMP and 29 other islands held under different tenures, both State and Commonwealth. The Cairns Section has good representation of the different island structural types characteristic of the Great Barrier Reef, i.e. continental islands, coral sand cays, mangrove islands and low wooded isles, resulting in a series of landscape settings of both geological and visual significance. Nymph Island is geomorphologically unique for this region, in that it is a relatively large island for this area and is the only island in the Cairns Section which totally encloses a tidal lagoon. This lagoon is drained by a narrow creek through which water rushes at great speed on ebb and flow tides.

Nymph Island is of cultural significance to the Guugu Yimidhirr people from Hopevale, and the reefs surrounding the islands are important sites for traditional hunting and fishing.

The adjacent waters provide a reasonable, fair weather anchorage for commercial and recreational fishing and tourist vessels.

2.2 Values of Nymph Island National Park

2.2.1 Geology and landform

Nymph Island is a densely vegetated, 65ha sand and coral rubble island with extensive mangroves. A well-developed cemented rock platform encircles the entire reef top and encloses a shallow internal lagoon - the only well-developed example of this type of formation in the Cairns Section. This lagoon area has many microatolls with fossil microatolls near the lagoon outlet having been aged at 3700 years BP.

2.2.2 Plants and animals

Nymph Island supports a range of vegetation types including dune woodland, closed vine forest, dense mangrove community and grassland.

Breeding birds include the beach stone-curlew (vulnerable), eastern reef heron, crested tern, osprey, white-breasted sea-eagle and pied imperial-pigeon. No single species appears to breed in any significant number. Migrant waders use the island beaches and reefs to rest and feed during migration.

2.2.3 Cultural heritage

The islands and surrounding reefs are known to be a part of the 'sea country' interests of the Guugu Yimidhurr people. Traditional fishing, hunting and gathering activities are still carried out in the area. There is evidence of traditional use of Nymph Island - blackened areas and rocks of mainland origin. This island is a component of the local traditional cultural landscape and may have important cultural values in terms of its intrinsic natural landscape values and native plants and animals.

There seems to be the remains of a grave site and an old well on the island, however a cultural heritage survey has not yet been undertaken.

2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic

Nymph Island has a high scenic value due to its relatively natural state and unusual physical structure. The dense green vegetation rises in strong contrast against the backdrop of clear blue open waters, varying shades of blue- green hued reef flat shallows and near-white sand beaches. The inner lagoon is an unusual visual and experiential setting as it is totally contained inside the island, surrounded by mangroves which do not provide a view through to the open ocean.

Aesthetic values derive from the totally natural environment that the island presents, with no evidence of human activity on the island when viewed from the sea.

2.2.5 Scientific and educational

Nymph Island has been the focus of attention for researchers from the Lizard Island Research Station. Flora and fauna studies have been undertaken and the island has been subject of a number of geological studies because of its unique inner lagoon.

2.2.6 Recreation and tourism

Nymph Island and reef are adjacent to the shipping channel and provide a fair weather anchorage for cruising yachts, tourist vessels and recreational and commercial fishing vessels.

Camping is permitted for a maximum of 30 persons for periods of up to 14 days. There are no facilities or fresh water on the island. Levels of use are extremely low.

Marine park operators have access to waters adjacent to Nymph Island on a limited basis, but are excluded from accessing the intertidal area (the beach) during the summer bird breeding season. There are also ten current commercial activity permits which allow access to the national park proper (the island beyond the beach). Present data indicates that use levels are low.

The recreational tourism potential of the island has not yet been fully realised. Due to the relatively large size of the island, its habitat type and its visual and aesthetic attractiveness, it is considered to have potential to attract and support larger groups of visitors than most of the other islands in the northern part of the Cairns Section. It would therefore be an ideal stop over for larger cruising vessels using the area.

3. Management strategies

3.1 Native plants

Current situation

Plant communities on Nymph Island are diverse and are free from weeds and human disturbance. Increased visitor use could impact on the island vegetation.

Desired outcomes

- Integrity of island vegetation communities is maintained.
- Visitor impact on vegetation is low.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Undertake routine monitoring of vegetation to identify any weed incursions and impacts of visitor use.
- Use levels will be monitored and permitted visitor numbers modified if necessary.

3.2 Native animals

Current situation

Nymph Island supports a variety of terrestrial and seabirds but none appear to breed in any significant number.

Desired outcomes

- Breeding bird populations and habitat are not unduly disturbed.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Undertake routine monitoring of bird populations, especially during breeding season.

3.3 Introduced plants and animals

Current situation

There are no introduced plants or animals recorded on Nymph Island.

Desired outcomes

- Island is free from introduced species.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Undertake routine monitoring of island to identify any non-endemic flora or fauna.
- Visitors will be advised to check their clothing and equipment for weeds and grasses before landing.

3.4 Fire management

Current situation

Wildfire has the potential to significantly alter island vegetation communities.

Desired outcomes

- Incidence of wildfire is minimised.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

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

3.5 Landscape, soil and catchment protection

Current situation

The island has high scenic and natural values. There is no evidence of human activity on the island when viewed from the beach and sea. Condition of fringing reef has not been assessed.

Desired outcomes

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

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Visitor numbers will be modified if necessary to preserve the high scenic and natural values of the island.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.
- Tracks within vegetated areas discouraged.

3.6 Cultural heritage

Current situation

Blackened sand and rocks of mainland origin are indicators of previous use. There appears to be the remains of a well.

Nymph Island and reef are part of the traditional 'sea country' of the Guugu Yimidhurr people.

No cultural heritage assessment has been undertaken to determine the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and European cultural heritage values of the island.

Desired outcomes

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

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

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

3.7 Recreational and tourism

Current situation

Waters adjacent to Nymph Island provide a fair weather anchorage used by cruising yachts, recreational and commercial fishing and tourist vessels. Current use levels are minimal, despite potential for access to the adjacent waters and intertidal area by most marine park permit holders, and the existence of ten current commercial activity permits for access to the national park. Permitted capacity for use of the national park does not appear to be fully utilised 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.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

Year-round access will be allowed

Day use

- A maximum 60 persons will be allowed on the island at any one time.

Camping

- Private and commercial camping will be allowed.
 - Maximum group size will be 10 persons
 - Maximum total number of 20 campers at any one time.
 - Maximum of 14 consecutive night's camping allowed - reducing to 7 nights during peak periods.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.
- Seaplane, helicopter or hovercraft access not permitted, except in emergency situations.

3.8 Education and interpretation**Current situation**

No visitor information sheet is available. Marine Park Zone maps are available.

Desired outcomes

- Visitor information is readily available.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Copies of management plan to be available through fishing clubs, marine outlets, local service stations and at the Cooktown harbour.

3.9 Plan implementation and monitoring**Desired outcomes**

- Management plan is successfully implemented, and desired outcomes achieved.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Performance indicators identified to allow monitoring of plan implementation and effectiveness of management strategies.

3.10 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*. Queensland Marine Park - Department of Environment and Science 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 co-ordinated 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 Department of Environment and Science, and between Department of Environment and Science and other agencies, to promote co-ordinated 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 Management Plan.
- Baseline surveys of the fringing reefs will be undertaken. Re-survey every 2-3 years will assess impacts.