Keppel Islands National Park and Adjoining State Waters





Prepared by: Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment, Science and Innovation © State of Queensland 2024

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The Keppel Islands National Park and Adjoining State Waters 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:	827 ha
Bioregion:	Brigalow Belt and Central Queensland Coast
QPWS region:	Great Barrier Reef Region
Local government estate/area:	Rockhampton Regional Council

Legislative framework

~	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003				
~	Environment Protection and Biodiversity				
	Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)				
~	Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)				
~	Nature Conservation Act 1992				
~	Queensland Heritage Act 1992				
~	Marine Parks Act 2004				
~	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Cwlth)				

Plans and agreements

~	Bonn Convention				
~	China—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement				
~	Japan—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement				
~	Recovery plan for marine turtles in Australia				
~	Republic of Korea—Australia Migratory Bird				
	Agreement				

Thematic strategies

- L		Level 1 Fire Management Strategy			
	~	Level 2 Pest Management Strategy			

Vision

As part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, Keppel Bay Islands National Park and the adjoining State marine park waters will preserve the habitat and species of state, national and international conservation significance.

Keppel Bay Islands National Park and adjoining Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park will be managed to conserve the diversity and integrity of its isolated island landscapes. These islands support unique and varied vegetation communities, while the adjoining Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park contains important marine habitats.

The visitor experiences and recreation opportunities are largely self-reliant, in keeping with the areas undeveloped natural environment.

The areas rich marine life and fringing reef flats are used by scientists to improve management decisions to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Partnerships with the Traditional Owners, local community, neighbours, research institutes and conservation groups are established and contribute to the area's ongoing management.

Conservation purpose

The objectives of management for the Keppel Bay Islands National Park and adjoining State marine park waters are to:

- conserve island landscapes and foreshore quality and integrity, having regard for the high nature conservation and cultural heritage values and address any threats
- protect regional and marine ecosystems and animal species of global conservation significance, such as flatback turtles *Natator depressus*, green turtles Chelonia mydas, loggerhead turtles *Caretta caretta*, hawksbill turtles Eretmochelys imbricata and international migratory bird species and address any threats
- work with neighbours to minimise the risk of wildfires to life, property and the management area's values
- incorporate the interests and rights of Traditional Owners and their affiliations to the area by cooperatively
 protecting and managing cultural heritage of significance
- provide safe, sustainable, nature-based terrestrial and marine recreation opportunities
- support diverse experiences for international and domestic visitors, ranging from remote island camping and day visits to a developed environmental education centre
- identify knowledge gaps and encourage scientific research that addresses these gaps and contributes to the understanding and management of the area and utilise this information to provide direction and actions to protect the natural, cultural and social values of the management area
- continue to build and enhance cooperative relationships with North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre, community, neighbours, stakeholders, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), universities, conservation groups, Traditional Owners, tourism organisations and visitors to the area.

Protecting and presenting the area's values

Landscape

Keppel Bay is the name given to the island and marine area extending from north of Curtis Island to Water Park Point near Corio Bay.

The waters and islands known as Keppel Bay are located 15km east from Yeppoon, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. The bay is studded with islands ranging from bare rock to large islands such as North Keppel Island (627ha) and Great Keppel Island (1,454ha). The Keppel islands boast beautiful coral reefs with spectacular underwater landscapes.

The continental islands of the national park represent the peaks of a submerged range complex that became inundated during the last ice age. Many islands in the park have stunning topography of steep rugged cliffs, rocky peaks and outcrops isolated in the marine environment. Sheltered bays and quiet sandy beaches provide a range of habitat and vegetation communities and add to the spectacular scenery.

The Keppel Bay islands are located in the Brigalow Belt and Central Queensland Coastal bioregions. Vegetation on the islands includes grasslands, heath and shrubland, open forests and woodlands. Marine plains, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests occur in the intertidal areas. Fringing reefs are found around most of the islands. The area supports a variety of land and sea birds, provides nesting habitat for turtles, and feeding grounds for marine mammals and turtles.

Plants and animals

Keppel Bay Islands National Park conserves eight regional ecosystems, two are listed as endangered and five of concern (Table 1).

There are several species of plants that are listed as endangered, vulnerable or near threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (NCA) which require consideration in management of the area.

Seasonal freshwater wetlands predominately forested with cabbage palm *Livistona decora* open forest are found on North Keppel Island. This species can be found throughout the Great Barrier Reef islands; however, stands of cabbage palm as the dominate forest species is unusual and only found on North Keppel and Magnetic islands.

There are a number of fauna species of conservation significance in the Keppel Bay Islands National Park; however, further research is required to establish the extent of their populations and distribution (Table 2).

The management area is rich in animal species, with at least 12 species of conservation significance. The little tern and loggerhead turtle are listed as endangered under the NCA and identified as high priority species under the Back on Track (BoT) species prioritisation framework. Four species are listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC) (Table 2).

Keppel Bay islands are known to provide habitat to birds of international significance (Table 3) such as eastern curlews *Numenius madagascariensis*, sooty oyster catchers *Haematopus fuliginosus*, and support nesting habitat for the bridled tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*. The area is important for migratory coastal birds. Migratory coastal birds make long annual flights between their international breeding grounds (China, Japan, Korea and northern Russia) and Australia where they spend their non-breeding season (September to April). Threats known to affect migratory coastal birds include coastal recreation activities and predation.

Resident coastal birds, such as the vulnerable beach stone-curlew *Esacus magnirostris* (BoT priority species) are present on some islands. Like all coastal birds, protecting nesting, roosting and feeding sites from human disturbance is vital. The major threats identified for the beach stone-curlew is human disturbance, coastal development and predation.

Keppel Bay is a significant site for marine turtle nesting and provides important inter-nesting habitat on Australia's east coast. This section of Queensland coastline is critical to the long-term survival of loggerhead turtles and flatback turtles *Natator depressus*, particularly for nesting and inter-nesting habitats (Environment Australia 2003). The area also supports a small number of vulnerable green turtles Chelonia mydas with approximately a dozen nesting events occurring across the area in any one year. The vulnerable hawksbill turtles Eretmochelys imbricata also inhabit these waters and are identified as a critical species in the BoT prioritisation framework. The main threats to these turtle species are coastal development, pollution recreation activities, predation of eggs by introduced species, entanglement from discarded fishing gear, boat strikes and light pollution.

The marine areas are important dugong *Dugong dugog* foraging areas. Other marine mammals such as Australian snubfin dolphins *Orcaella heinsohni* and Indo-pacific humpback dolphins Sousa chinensis, and migrating whales occur throughout the adjoining waters.

Impacts to native plants and animals include the spread of pest species and inappropriate fire regimes. Therefore, the major management themes that will assist in maintaining species diversity and numbers are the control of pest plant and animal species and appropriate fire regimes.

Aboriginal culture

The Woppaburra and Darumbal people have an interest in the management area. Native title claims have been lodged over the protected areas (QC97/021). Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and GBRMPA work closely with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other relevant groups to ensure that traditional use of marine resources are managed at sustainable levels. A Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) exists over some State waters in the management area.

The relationship of Traditional Owners with their traditional country is a special one, and the whole landscape has important value to them. The Kanomi–Woppaburra people lived on North Keppel Island for 4,000 years, and at least 700 years on nearby Great Keppel Island (Rowland 1992). The Traditional Owners were specialists at using the rich marine resources of the intertidal zones, fringing reefs and surrounding seas to support their community.

A formal archaeological survey of some of the islands has been conducted and recorded in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage database. Interpretive signs exist at North Keppel and Humpy islands to inform visitors of the area's cultural values, sites and artefacts including middens and fish traps. One significant site is on North Keppel Island at Mazie Bay, where a large midden is located. This midden has been described as 'one of the most significant in the Great Barrier Reef Province' (Rowland 1992).

Consultation with Traditional Owners about managing and protecting their heritage on park and adjoining State

marine park waters will continue, strengthening cultural connections and ensure appropriate measures are taken to protect known cultural sites. There is a strong likelihood additional cultural sites will be discovered, given the area's cultural richness and its underexplored history.

The Woppaburra people are developing a cultural heritage and resource use management plan for their country. It is envisaged that Traditional Owners will continue to work cooperatively with QPWS to develop strategies and guidelines to conserve and manage the area's Indigenous cultural heritage.

Shared-history culture

In 1770 Lieutenant James Cook named Keppel Bay after Rear Admiral Keppel. Surveyor Captain Matthew Flinders in the Investigator visited Keppel Bay in 1802. Shared-history culture associated with the area is demonstrated by some islands were settled and grazed between 1800 and 1960s, the commencement of commercial oystering in 1900s, that continues today at a smaller scale, the operation of resorts at Pumpkin Island and Great Keppel Island commencing in the 1900s, the establishment of holiday accommodation on North Keppel Island at the site that is now the North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre and the ongoing popularity of private sail and motor boat based recreation.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

The area is managed for nature-based visitor experiences where recreational opportunities include boating, fishing, camping and commercial guide tours. Visitor numbers to the islands are generally low as the islands are only accessible by open water going private or commercial vessels.

Visitors can expect a remote and natural experience when visiting the management area. Visitors will encounter undeveloped islands with basic facilities and some walking tracks to panoramic peaks with highly scenic views. The area's values are presented to visitors through a number of communication mediums including on-site information shelters, interpretation signs and park guides. Recreational opportunities include picnicking, bushwalking, bird watching and camping, along with water-based activities such as snorkelling, fishing, scenic boating and yachting. Camping is allowed on North Keppel, Humpy, Middle, Miall, Conical and Divided islands where there are basic supporting visitor facilities. Camping permits are required and are available from QPWS online, over the phone or from a QPWS office.

Visitor use and tourism is managed to minimise impacts to natural and cultural values. Commercial tourism use is managed through a permitting system. More generally, activities and uses across the marine park are guided by zoning provisions. Multiple use zoning provides for activities including fishing, snorkelling, shipping, and research. Zoning plans define the activities that can occur in specific locations to protect the marine environment and separate potentially conflicting activities. Zoning plans balance human use with conservation of the marine parks. Central Queensland's expected population growth may provide for new or emerging commercial tourism opportunities.

Tourism numbers for the Keppel Bay area have generally dropped in recent times. While Humpy Island has continued to be a popular campground, visitor camping nights at Considine Beach campground dropped from 10,000 a year in the late 1980s to less than 1,000 in 2011. Expected population growth along the Capricorn Coast region may influence this trend.

Education and science

The management area offers learning opportunities in geology, biology and marine studies. Public education increases community awareness of the area's values, conservation principles and practices. Education also encourages access to, and appropriate behaviour at, specific sites.

The management area provides abundant opportunities for scientific research and monitoring. Any research conducted in the management area must be conducted under the appropriate permits. Results from research and monitoring can benefit the area's future management and educate the community. It is important that knowledge is extended to the local community and included in the area's interpretive products.

An opportunity exists to work collaboratively with the Traditional Owners to increase QPWS staff's knowledge of the significance of the management area to Traditional Owners and to provide educational opportunities to the community.

Ongoing research by organisations and universities continues to guide management decisions. One of the aims of North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre is to provide a platform for natural resource research activities.

Partnerships

QPWS is directly responsible for planning, managing and regulating activities in the management area. Working with Traditional Owners, organisations and individuals with similar interests in managing the area is highly desirable to achieve the vision. Efficiencies in resource sharing, improved communications, decision making and enhanced on-ground outcomes is to be facilitated, where possible, through working partnerships.

Continuing the partnership with GBRMPA is essential in the management of the adjoining and overlapping Great Barrier Reef (Coast) Marine Park, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Commonwealth) and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The future management on North Keppel Island can also be strengthened through continuing the cooperative partnership and retaining strong communication links between QPWS and North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre's operator, Education Queensland.

A working relationship with the Traditional Owners including the Woppaburra people is essential so that their views and aspirations for the land can be included in planning and management. Traditional Owners have a role to protect cultural heritage in the management area and a role to educate QPWS and visitors on cultural heritage management.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

Pest management strategies have been developed for the area and prioritise regional pest plant and animal controls, guide operational work plans and evaluate program effectiveness on managed estates. QPWS Level 1 pest management strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Region guides pest management programs across the region. A QPWS Level 2 pest management strategy is in place for the Keppel Bay Islands National Park.

Keppel Bay Islands National Park faces the threat of pest plants spreading and the introduction of animal species to undisturbed areas of park. Pest plants may be spread through their translocation by wind, visitors, birds and by feral animals. The islands risk pest animal introduction either by accidental or deliberate introduction or by animals swimming between land masses. Ongoing monitoring is a recognised priority for pest management effectiveness.

Pest plants pose a threat to native vegetation communities and habitats. Pest plants could also impact on turtle nesting habitat and pose a significant threat of infestation to nearby islands.

Lantana *Lantana camara* occurs in the area which can form impenetrable thickets, altering understory structure and composition. Prickly pear Opuntia spp, is a highly invasive pest plant capable of infesting large areas and can dominate a variety of landforms and significantly impact threatened ecosystems. Spot infestations of rubbervine *Cryptostegia grandiflora* is found on Middle, Humpy and Divided islands. This vigorous woody climber can smother vegetation, form dense thickets and alter vegetation structure. Mossman River grass *Cenchrus echinatus* is a quick spreading plant that can exclude native fauna.

Keppel Bay Islands National Park generally has low populations of pest animal species.

Brushtail possums *Trichosurus vulpecula* are present on North Keppel Island, Middle Island and Corroboree Island. In 1997 it was identified through DNA comparative analysis that the island's possum populations were introduced. The island's introduced possums impact significantly on native plant species by defoliating, which occasionally results in the death of even mature trees. Additionally, possums impact upon bird and reptile nesting habitat and present health and safety issues for island visitors through faecal scattering contaminating drinking water, and attacking and, in some instances, biting visitors and students of the North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre.

Black rats *Rattus rattus* are found on North Keppel Island. Rat impacts include preying on bird eggs, spreading disease, damage to native vegetation and seed stock, impacting bird and reptile nesting and causing a nuisance to visitors.

Fire management

A fire management system has been adopted statewide by QPWS. QPWS are the primary agency for fire management on protected areas. Fire strategies provide the overall framework and direction for fire management and are the foundation from developing planned burn programs. A Level 2 fire management strategy exists for the area however it is currently due for review.

The main threat associated with fire management for the area is inappropriate fire regimes and wildfires. A coordinated approach is required with neighbouring properties to ensure fire is managed appropriately. Fire will be excluded from fire sensitive communities and from smaller islands where fire is thought unlikely to be a 'usual' part of natural processes, except perhaps over long timeframes.

Reef water quality protection

Maintaining healthy waters in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and catchment is important to maintain the diverse and functioning marine environment. Pollution from adjacent areas from flooding and primary production uses on the mainland can impact the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The *Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Act 2009* and Reef Water Quality Protection Plan highlight the need for land management activities in the Great Barrier Reef catchment.

The Fitzroy River naturally brings sediment into the Keppel Bay area; however, over recent years agriculture and industry have intensified throughout the Fitzroy catchment resulting in an increased sediment load. A series of floods over recent times have impacted on the area's water quality, reduced available sea grass beds for marine life to graze, and contributed to a decline in coral reef habitats.

The Reef Rescue Marine Monitoring Program monitors the condition of water quality and the health of key marine ecosystems such as coral reefs and seagrass. The Reef Water Quality Protection Plan (reef plan) is a joint commitment of the Australian and Queensland governments. The marine monitoring program is a key component in the assessment of long-term improvements in inshore water quality and marine ecosystem health that are expected to occur with the adoption of improved land management practices in the reef catchments under reef plan and reef rescue.

Authorities

Authorities may be issued under the NCA to allow certain types of infrastructure on national park estate.

North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre occupies approximately 17ha of North Keppel Island, part of Keppel Bay Islands National Park. The centre operates under a section 34 NCA authority.

References

Rowland M 1992, Conservation plan for cultural heritage sites on the Keppel island group, Central Queensland, Department of Environment and Heritage.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines		
Landscape The landscape is protected, particularly areas of high scenic quality or traditional or cultural significance, while allowing	 A1. Monitor the impacts from natural processes, pests, fire, and visitor activities. Use the information to guide management and amend current and future plans and strategies. A2. Ensure any activities are consistent with the high scenic landscape values. 		
natural processes to continue.	Activities that compromise these values, and cannot be mitigated or managed, will not be permitted.		
Fire management	A3. Review and implement the fire management strategy.		
Fire is managed for the protection of life and property on the park and neighbouring lands, protection of fire- sensitive vegetation communities, protection of cultural resources, and protection of threatened species.			
Native plants and animals Plant species and communities and animals of significance are protected and populations extended. The management area is a refuge for native plants and animals in a broader landscape undergoing significant change.	 A4. Implement research programs into species distribution and population dynamics and incorporate new information about threatened plants, animals or communities into plans or strategies and the department's WildNet database. A5. Continue to monitor vegetation to evaluate management actions, including the impact of fire (planned burns and wildfire) on plant and animal populations and diversity and review and update the fire management strategy as required. 		
Tourism and visitor opportunities The management area offers a diverse range of sustainable outdoor recreation	A6. Continue to manage the day-use areas in accordance QPWS facility standards and policies. Maintain adequate visitor facilities, stipulate conditions of use through permits and monitor the impacts of visitor use.		
and tourism opportunities and settings that meet and adapt to visitor needs with minimal impact on the area's natural and	A7. Continue to provide information about the management area's estates through appropriate channels, such as the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (NPRSR) website and visitor guides.		
cultural values. Visitor information regarding safety, facilities and park use will be provided to	A8. Continue to work with GBRMPA to identify future opportunities and manage fishing and commercial tourism use in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area through relevant zoning plans and other policy.		
facilitate safe and enjoyable experiences by park visitors. Promoting appropriate commercial	A9. In conjunction with GBRMPA, develop a site plan for activity and use management in the marine park surrounding the Great Keppel Island group (Middle, Great Keppel, Halfway and Humpy islands)		
tourism and outdoor recreation visitor opportunities in the management area.	A10. Liaise with Rockhampton Regional Council, tourism authorities, commercial tourism operators and local businesses to promote the area's values and recreation opportunities and ensure visitors have access to accurate information.		
Partnerships The effectiveness of future management is strengthened through cooperative partnerships having strong	A11. Encourage and support interest groups, residents and the broader community to assist in the management of natural and cultural resources through volunteering in management activities, such as regeneration, pest management, research and monitoring.		
communication links with a clear purpose.	A12. Continue involvement in local events and in talking to groups such as schools, recreational user groups and visitor groups to raise awareness of the management area and increase ranger presence in the community.		
	A13. Maintain cooperative and collaborative relationships with the North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre.		
Education and science Information on natural resources and	A14. Encourage participation and facilitate information sharing with research institutions.		
cultural information is enhanced over time.	A15. Encourage and support, where possible, research into natural and cultural values, ensure research outcomes are provided to facilitate appropriate park management response.		
Infrastructure management	A16. Ensure all private infrastructure is authorised under the NCA and/or Marine Parks Act 2004.		
Infrastructure and facilities on the management area are authorised under relevant legislation and do not significantly affect the area's natural and cultural values.	A17. Provide for the continued operation of the education facility on North Keppel Island.		

Tables – Conservation values management

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status		
8.1.2	Samphire open forbland to isolated clumps of forbs on saltpans and plains adjacent to mangroves.			
8.2.1	Casuarina equisetifolia open-forest to woodland with Ipomoea pes-caprae and Spinifex sericeus dominated ground layer, on foredunes.	Of concern		
8.2.6	Corymbia tessellaris +/- Acacia leptocarpa +/- Banksia integrifolia +/- Melaleuca dealbata + beach scrub species open-forest on coastal parallel dunes.			
8.3.6	<i>Eucalyptus tereticornis, Corymbia intermedia</i> and <i>Lophostemon suaveolens</i> (or <i>C. tessellaris</i> dominant) open-forest on alluvial levees and lower terraces.			
8.11.4	<i>Eucalyptus platyphylla</i> , <i>Corymbia clarksoniana</i> and <i>E. drepanophylla</i> woodland on low undulating areas on metamorphosed sediments.			
8.11.9	Grassland, or Xanthorrhoea latifolia subsp. latifolia shrubland/heathland with Themeda triandra and/or Heteropogon contortus on exposed rocky headlands on metamorphosed sediments, subject to strong sea-breezes and salt-laden winds.			
8.11.10	3.11.10 <i>Lophostemon confertus</i> and/or Acacia spp. and/or <i>Allocasuarina littoralis</i> +/- Corymbia spp. +/- Eucalyptus spp. +/- <i>Melaleuca viridiflora</i> open scrub to open-forest on exposed hillslopes of islands, on metamorphosed sediments.			

Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems

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
Plants				
Xylosma ovatum	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Animals				
Caretta caretta	loggerhead turtle	Endangered	Endangered	Critical
Chelonia mydas	green turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
Dugong dugon	dugong	Vulnerable	-	Critical
Eretmochelys imbricata	hawksbill Turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
Esacus magnirostris	beach stone-curlew	Vulnerable	-	High
Haematopus fuliginosus	sooty oystercatcher	Near threatened	-	Low
Natator depressus	flatback turtle	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Critical
Numenius madagascariensis	eastern curlew	Near threatened	-	Low
Orcaella heinsohni	Australian snubfin dolphin	Near threatened	-	Critical
Sousa chinensis	Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin	Near threatened	-	Critical
Sternula albifrons	little tern	Endangered	-	High

Scientific name	Common name	CMS	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
Calidris ruficollis	red-necked stint	✓	~	~	
Caretta caretta	loggerhead turtle				✓
Charadrius leschenaultii	greater sand plover	\checkmark	~	✓	
Chelonia mydas	green turtle				✓
Dugong dugon	dugong				✓
Eretmochelys imbricata	hawksbill turtle				✓
Heteroscelus brevipes	grey-tailed tattler	✓	~	~	
Numenius madagascariensis	eastern curlew	~	✓	~	
Numenius phaeopus	whimbrel	✓	~	~	
Onychoprion anaethetus	bridled tern	✓	~		
Orcaella heinsohni	Australian snubfin dolphin				✓
Pluvialis fulva	pacific golden plover	✓	~	~	
Sousa chinensis	Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin				~
Sterna albifrons	little tern	\checkmark	~	✓	✓
Sterna bergii	crested tern	\checkmark			✓
Sterna sumatrana	black-naped tern	\checkmark	~		
Sula dactylatra	masked booby		~	✓	
Sula leucogaster	brown booby	\checkmark	~	✓	

Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

BONN (CMS) – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement