

# Hope 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 Hope 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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# Contents

<b>1. Management directions and purpose.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Management directions .....	2
1.2 Purpose .....	3
<b>2. Basis for management .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Bioregional context .....	3
2.2 Values of Hope Island National Park.....	3
2.2.1 Geology and landform .....	3
2.2.2 Plants and animals .....	4
2.2.3 Cultural heritage .....	4
2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic .....	4
2.2.5 Recreation and tourism .....	4
<b>3. Management strategies.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 Native plants .....	5
3.2 Native animals .....	5
3.3 Introduced plants and animals .....	5
3.4 Fire management .....	5
3.5 Landscape protection .....	6
3.6 Cultural heritage .....	6
3.7 Recreational and tourism.....	6
3.8 Education and interpretation .....	7
3.9 Plan implementation and monitoring .....	7
3.10 Complementary management of adjoining areas .....	7

## Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Hope Islands 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 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

Hope 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 coordinated, strategic manner to provide for a range of conservation and recreational settings.

Hope Islands 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 islands whilst also providing and managing a range of visitor settings.

West Hope Island supports a significant nesting population of pied imperial-pigeons. To prevent disturbance to breeding birds, access to this island will not be allowed during the breeding season – 1 September to 31 March.

The islands will be promoted for their natural values and visitors will be able to enjoy an island experience in a remote and natural setting. The islands will generally be managed to maintain them in an undisturbed state where visitors can experience relatively isolated, self-reliant recreation with minimal contact with others or human influence on the landscape.

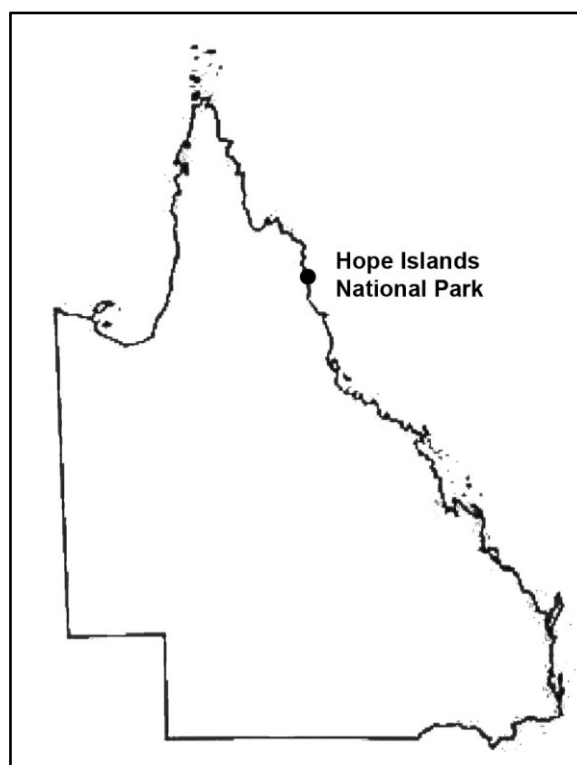
Visitor numbers will be kept to levels which have a low impact on the experience of fellow users. A limited number only of small-scale commercial tourism operations - of a style compatible with the desired remote and natural setting – will be allowed. Facilities or infrastructure that conflict with the natural setting will not be permitted.

Commercial camping will not be allowed.

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

The park has no permanent ranger presence but is visited regularly by marine park Rangers. Toilets are the only facility provided. Visitors need to be self- reliant. 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.

In managing the Hope 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 major purposes of management will be to ensure that:

- island fauna, in particular breeding seabirds, and their habitats are conserved and protected
- the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with traditional affiliations to the islands are recognised, protected and presented where appropriate
- the diversity of vegetation types is maintained
- rare and threatened species are identified and conserved through specific management strategies
- the natural setting is maintained to provide recreational opportunities consistent with a low intensity, undeveloped, semi-wilderness experience; and
- feral animals and noxious plants are controlled and eradicated if possible.

## 2. Basis for management

### 2.1 Bioregional context

The Hope Islands National Park consists of two vegetated sand cays - East and West Hope Islands. These are located 8-10km offshore, approximately 37km south-east of Cooktown and 22km north-east of the nearest settlements of Ayton and Wujal Wujal on the Bloomfield River. Much of the adjacent coast is included in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and has high wilderness values due to its remoteness, lack of human presence or influence and high biodiversity.

The Hope Islands National Park is within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The reef and intertidal area surrounding the islands are managed under the provisions of the Cairns Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Cairns State Marine Park respectively, and are zoned Conservation Park.

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. Hope Islands National Park is one of four island groups of this geomorphological type in the Cairns Section, i.e., a forested sandy cay with an associated low wooded mangrove island.

The Hope Islands National Park is of cultural significance to the local Aboriginal community at Wujal Wujal. The reefs surrounding the islands are important sites for traditional hunting and fishing.

The islands are within a day's sailing from Cairns and an important stop over and anchorage for boats heading to add from Lizard Island and beyond.

## 2.2 Values of Hope Island National Park

### 2.2.1 Geology and landform

East and West Hope Islands are situated on separate reef with a navigable channel between.

East Hope Island, a forested sand cay with a small shingle bank, is stabilised from the effects of wind and wave erosion by a layer of beach rock. West Hope Island is a low wooded island - a shingle bank - largely tidally inundated and colonised by mangroves.

### **2.2.2 Plants and animals**

East Hope Island supports a range of vegetation types including a casuarina dominated strand community, shrubland, open woodland, open forest and vineforest. West Hope Island is predominantly vegetated by mangroves, with an area of *Sesuvium* herbland on south-eastern side.

West Hope Island supports a large breeding colony in excess 15 000 of pied imperial-pigeons during the summer breeding season. These feed in the rainforests of the adjacent coastal hinterland.

Other birds breeding on the islands include the Australian pelican, eastern reef heron, lesser crested tern, beach stone curlew (vulnerable), osprey, white-breasted sea-eagle and brahminy kite. Migrant waders use the island beaches and reefs to rest and feed during migration.

East Hope Island is home to a colony of black flying fox.

### **2.2.3 Cultural heritage**

The islands and surrounding reefs are known to be a part of the 'sea country' interests of the Kuku Yalanji people based at Wujal Wujal. Traditional fishing, hunting and gathering activities are still practised, although no specific cultural sites are recorded from the islands. These islands are still a significant 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.

### **2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic**

The islands have a high scenic value due to their relatively natural state. The dense green vegetation stands out in strong contrast against the back drop of clear blue open waters, varying shades of blue-green hued reef flat shallows and near-white sand beaches.

Aesthetic values derive from the totally natural environs that the islands present, with no visible evidence of human activity or disturbance on the islands when viewed from the water.

### **2.2.5 Recreation and tourism**

The principal recreational value of the Hope Islands National Park relates to its natural condition and easy accessibility to the mainland population centres. East Hope Island is a popular destination for recreational camping, with a high level of use by the local community.

The northern side of East Hope Island and the channel offer a sheltered anchorage and support extremely high levels of use by cruising yachts and recreational and commercial fishing vessels.

At present there are three site-specific tourism, and a number of non site-specific, operations permitted to use the adjacent marine park. Ten of these have commercial activity permits which allow access to the national park islands. Presently, these limited access operations are allowed use of the island only twice in any seven day period.

The islands, due to their size and fragility, would be unsuitable for more than a small number of visitors without suffering adversely from the impacts. They are most 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.

## 3. Management strategies

### 3.1 Native plants

#### Current situation

East Hope Island supports a diverse plant community. West Hope Island is predominantly mangroves. There has been some damage to vine forest vegetation near the campground and adjacent tracks from visitor use.

#### Desired outcomes

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

#### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Undertake a detailed flora survey, including assessment of conservation significance.
- The condition of campsites 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

West Hope Island supports a significant breeding colony of pied imperial-pigeons from October to March. Beach stone-curlews (vulnerable) nest on the islands and are easily disturbed when nesting. Migrant waders use the islands and intertidal reefs to feed and rest. There is a black flying fox camp on the island. Other fauna is generally unknown.

#### Desired outcomes

- Breeding bird populations and habitat are not unduly disturbed.

#### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Routine monitoring of bird populations, especially during breeding season, will be undertaken.
- Access to West Hope Island will be prohibited during the period 1 September to 31 March.
- A regulatory notice will be issued to formalise these arrangements.

### 3.3 Introduced plants and animals

#### Current situation

There are small areas of lantana and guinea grass on East Hope Island. Coconuts palms occur on East Hope Island.

#### Desired outcomes

- The islands are free of exotic plants and animals.

#### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

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

### 3.4 Fire management

#### Current situation

Wildfire has the potential to devastate East Hope Island during the dry (winter) season.

### **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 stoves.

## **3.5 Landscape protection**

### **Current situation**

There is no evidence of human activity on the islands when viewed from the beach and sea. Mooring, anchoring and diving have the potential to damage fringing reefs. Condition of the reefs has not been assessed.

### **Desired outcomes**

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

### **Proposed policies, guidelines and actions**

- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.
- Tracks within vegetated areas discouraged.
- Baseline study of the fringing reef undertaken, including assessment of reef type, zonation etc for ecological comparisons. This study will be reviewed every 2 to 3 years.

## **3.6 Cultural heritage**

### **Current situation**

Hope Islands National Park and reef are part of the traditional 'sea country' of the Kuku Yalanji Aboriginal people who use the area for traditional hunting, fishing and gathering.

### **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 active involvement of community Rangers.

## **3.7 Recreational and tourism**

### **Current situation**

The islands are an important anchorage for recreational and commercial vessels. Private recreational camping is permitted on East Hope Island. Local recreational use of the islands is high.

Presently, there are three site-specific tourism, and a number of non site-specific, operations permitted to use the adjacent marine park. Ten have commercial activity permits for access to the national park. Non- site-specific operations are presently allowed access only twice in any seven day.

Data returns indicate only two commercial operations use the area on a regular basis.

### **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 operations.



## Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

### Day use

- Access will be managed by a booking system. The maximum number of persons visiting the island from a commercial vessel on any day will be 30; the maximum number at any one time 15 (except exempt operators). Access will be limited to 50 visits per vessel per year (except exempt operators).

### Camping

- Private camping will be permitted, on East Hope Island only.
- Maximum number of four persons per campsite.
- Maximum total number of 12 campers at any one time.
- Maximum of 7 consecutive night's camping allowed.
- Permanent infrastructure, other than management related facilities, not generally supported.
- Access to West Hope Island will be prohibited during the period 1 September to 31 March.
- Seaplane, helicopter or hovercraft access not generally permitted, except in emergency situations. A voluntary Fly Neighbourly Agreement is to be implemented by Air Services Australia.

## 3.8 Education and interpretation

### Current situation

Visitor information sheet is available. Marine Park Zone maps are available.

### Desired outcomes

- Minimal signs on the islands.
- Visitor information is readily available.

### Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- This management plan and visitor information sheet to be made available to the public fishing and boating clubs and relevant Department of Environment offices.

## 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*.

Cairns Area Plan of Management - East and West Hope Islands are sensitive locations, designated for low-use, i.e.

- maximum of 15 visitors per vessel (including crew)
- two vessels per day permitted to East Hope Island reef
- one vessel per day permitted to West Hope Island reef
- access by booking only (unless exempt).

Queensland Marine Park - Department of Environment and Science intends to manage the national park islands 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.