



Australian Government
Director of National Parks

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Pulu Keeling National Park Management Plan 2015-2025

Pulu Keeling National Park

Pulu Keeling National Park protects the natural and cultural values of the 122 hectare North Keeling Island and its surrounding marine waters, within a roughly rectangular boundary framing 2,602 hectares of land and sea. The entire park is listed as a Ramsar wetland.

North Keeling Island is an uninhabited low-lying tropical oceanic coral atoll. It is one of the few remaining relatively pristine tropical islands in the Indian Ocean region, and the only largely undisturbed island in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands group that retains its original vegetation and fauna species. Because of its isolation, evolution and relatively minimal human impacts on its condition, the park is also significant to studies of the distribution of oceanic island species and atoll formation.

The park's natural values and/or features include:

- Relatively pristine ecosystems and habitat of high significance for Indian Ocean seabirds, playing a vital part in the stability of the Indian Ocean seabird biodiversity.
- One of the largest known nesting habitats for the red-footed booby in the world.
- Unusual closed canopy forests, species generally found as stunted shrubs in successional forests on the shoreline of tropical islands elsewhere in the region.
- Habitat for 10 species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) as under threat, including the endangered endemic buff-banded rail and the green turtle—that nest on the beaches of the park.
- Habitat for the robber crab, recognised for its conservation significance on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Pulu Keeling National Park was proclaimed on 12 December 1995. The park is a Commonwealth reserve under the EPBC Act and is managed by the Director of National Parks in accordance with the Act, the regulations made under it, and this management plan.

This plan sets out how the park and its natural and cultural values will be managed, protected and conserved for the next 10 years.

Much of the substance of the management plan is consistent with the intent and direction of the previous plan. Primary content changes from the last management plan include:

- A stronger biosecurity management focus, including detailed actions to develop and implement strict biosecurity measures to prevent introductions of invasive species.
- Greater emphasis on the Ramsar listing of Pulu Keeling National Park, particularly in relation to meeting obligations under the Ramsar Convention, to monitor and maintain the ecological character of the Ramsar site.
- Stronger focus on the park's regional conservation value and context including supporting/facilitating the establishment of ex-situ populations of the buff-banded rail and marine turtle management activities, in accordance with their EPBC Act recovery plans.
- Changes to visitor management policies allow permits to be issued to individuals to access the park for surfing and diving without the need to be associated with a commercial tour operator.
- Strengthening of collaborative and partnership approaches with the community and stakeholders, in relation to park conservation issues and other issues of mutual interest.
- More effective management plan implementation performance monitoring prescriptions, including the requirement to prepare a performance monitoring plan.
- More strategic and, where appropriate, enabling policies and actions have been adopted to allow greater adaptive management in the face of new evidence and unforeseen events/circumstances.

Overview of the Legislative Instrument

The Director of National Parks prepares management plans for Commonwealth reserves in accordance with Section 368 of the EPBC Act. The purpose of this management plan is to describe the philosophy and direction of management for Pulu Keeling National Park for the next ten years in accordance with the EPBC Act. The plan enables management to proceed in an orderly way, helps to reconcile competing interests, and identifies priorities for the allocation of available resources.

The EPBC Act and associated Regulations prohibit certain activities from occurring in Pulu Keeling National Park and other Commonwealth reserves. The management plan for the Park is an enabling document. It allows management activities to occur that would otherwise be restricted under EPBC legislation, and enables certain management, recreational and commercial activities to occur.

The third management plan for Pulu Keeling National Park replaces the second management plan for the park which ceased to have effect on the 27 April 2011. Since that time Pulu Keeling National Park has been managed under s.357 of the EPBC Act, effectively guiding the interim management of the park by the actions and principles of the previous management plan until the third plan comes into effect.

Consultation

On 25 November 2009, consistent with s. 368 (1) (a) of the EPBC Act, a notice was published in the Australian Government Gazette, The Australian newspaper, the local newspaper for the Cocos Keeling Islands (the Atoll) and placed on the Department of the Environment website, inviting comments on the proposal to prepare a draft management plan. A *Have Your Say* brochure was also circulated to stimulate awareness of the planning process and the opportunity to contribute to the plan. This initial comment period closed on 5 February 2010 and five submissions were received.

Following consideration of these submissions, the Director prepared a draft management plan in accordance with s.368 (1) (b) of the EPBC Act, which was released for public comment from 19 January 2015 until 27 February 2015.

Invitations to comment on the draft plan were again published in the Australian Government Gazette, The Australian newspaper, the local newspaper for the Cocos Keeling Islands (the Atoll) and placed on the Department of the Environment website. Personally addressed invitations to comment were sent by email and standard mail to key stakeholders. Copies of the draft plan were made available from the Department's website. A flyer about the opportunity to comment on the draft plan was provided to all houses on the Cocos Keeling Islands (Home and West Islands). Following this, meetings were also held, including with the Pulu Keeling National Park Community Management Committee and with Cocos Keeling Island community members.

There were six written submissions submitted during the comment period. In accordance with s.368 (1) (e) of the EPBC Act, the Director considered these submissions when finalising the plan and amended the plan where appropriate.

Period of operation

This management plan will come into operation, following approval by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Department of the Environment under s.370 of the EPBC Act, at the beginning of the day after it is registered under the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*. The plan will cease to have effect ten years after commencement, unless revoked or amended earlier by another management plan.

Regulatory Impact

This management plan has been written to preserve its largely intact terrestrial and marine ecosystems, while enabling a limited number of visitors with rare, unique, educational and safe natural and cultural experiences, without disturbing park values. It does not place any new restrictions upon individuals or businesses. The Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) advised that a Regulatory Impact Statement was not required for this management plan (OBPR reference: ID 2015/19315).

Sally Barnes
Director of National Parks

26 August 2015