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K'gari (Fraser Island)

World Heritage Advisory Committee – Communiqué

16 September 2022

The third meeting of the K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee (KWHAC) was held online on Friday, 16 September 2022. KWHAC comprises an independent chair and fifteen members and provides advice to the State and Federal Governments on matters relating to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage of the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Area from a First Nations, Scientific and community perspective.

Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee

Members were briefed on the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) meeting held in August with the appointment of Sue Sargent as Co-Chair with Luke Donegan (Australian Convict Sites – Fremantle Prison). Jade Gould (a Butchulla representative on KWHAC) was endorsed as the property representative on AWHAC and will also nominate to AWHAC's Cultural Values Working Group.

Australian Government Update

Members noted that the Australian Government had committed \$24.8 million to fight yellow crazy ants in Cairns and Townsville – noting that yellow crazy ants are also located in Hervey Bay. KWHAC welcomed Minister Tanya Plibersek's commitment to implement measures to address issues identified in the State of the Environment Report 2021 and respond to the Samuel Independent Review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The Committee noted the increased focus on World Heritage but highlighted that nothing released so far addresses long-term issues of underfunding of the K'gari World Heritage Area (WHA).

Given the heavy usage of the WHA and the inadequacy of visitation monitoring, KWHAC recommended that additional funding be provided to ensure improved monitoring and management of impacts on the K'gari WHA.

Securing Additional Funding

Following the briefing from the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water (DCCEEW), members discussed suitable projects for the next round of Australian Heritage Grants, including progressing a nomination for cultural and natural values of the 'Cooloola extension' on the National Heritage List.

K'gari was successful with Australian Heritage Grant projects supporting the appointment of a Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation Biosecurity Officer in 2019-20, Fraser Coast Regional Council's K'gari Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy 2021-22 and in 2022-23, the K'gari Groundwater Quality Study to identify health risks and environmental impact. However, additional funds are also needed to support:



- Interpretation – to increase recognition of the island's World Heritage status and improve the visitor experience of K'gari.
- Increasing knowledge and recognition that K'gari, the Great Sandy Strait (Korrawinga) and Cooloola are cultural landscapes. Members acknowledged that a staged approach would be needed to enable free, prior, and informed consent for both Butchulla and Kabi Kabi Nations.
- Biosecurity – to increase surveillance, prevent future pest incursions (such as yellow crazy ants) and increase K'gari's ecosystem resilience.
- Monitoring and Research – including emerging challenges like marine debris and the implications of micro-plastics on K'gari's cultural and natural values

KWHAC recognises the urgent need for additional and ongoing funding to protect and maintain K'gari's OUV. KWHAC reiterated its support for an increased management charge (or cultural levy) on visitors to the island and acknowledged the need for increased Federal Government support through the next Project Agreement for World Heritage Management (2023-2028).

Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation

Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (BNTAC) briefed members on several initiatives underway for Korrawinga, including BNTAC's participation in the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar Management Advisory Group, Hervey Bay Whale Heritage Site Steering Committee and Turtles in Trouble.

Members congratulated BNTAC on the news that two Butchulla Marine Park Ranger Trainees will be placed in the Department of Science's Marine Parks team.

Buoyed by the Australian Government's election commitment to double the number of Indigenous Rangers by the end of the decade, members highlighted the need to increase the number of Butchulla Rangers for both K'gari and the Great Sandy Strait as globally significant places.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships (QPWS&P) highlighted the ongoing issue of marine debris, including grounded marine vessels, lengthy removal processes and implications for K'gari's beach ecosystems. Climate change scenarios for South East Queensland predict changing rainfall patterns and an increasing frequency of flood events and associated marine debris. Members noted that without changes to policy and management of yachts, pontoons and floatable materials, climate change would increase costs associated with salvage and marine debris cleanups.

KWHAC members learned that following the Fraser Coast Council's new Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy for K'gari's townships, QPWS&P is considering developing a collaborative waste management strategy for the National Park with ambitions for net zero waste production for the island. However, QPWS&P acknowledged that co-mingled waste (recycling) is bulkier and would require increased resources to manage.

Senior Ranger Mark Cody provided an overview of prescribed burns for the year, which had progressed despite the wet conditions. Acknowledging Butchulla aspirations for K'gari, QPWS&P is developing a new policy to incorporate cultural burns, undertaken by Butchulla Native Title Holders, in their management. The policy will include more planned landscape burns and the potential for burns outside the Department's traditional burn season. Cultural Burning involves Butchulla people using culturally informed knowledge and ecologically sensitive fire management techniques appropriate for K'gari's landscapes and ecosystems.

The Committee welcomed support for increased cultural burns recognising K'gari is a cultural landscape. Evidence suggests that these practices will mitigate the risk of extreme fires on the island.

QPWS&P were congratulated on the recent Hook Point Road upgrades. Upgrades to the road have been a priority by this Committee for over a decade to protect migratory shorebirds at Hook Point. The upgrades may also constitute K'gari's first climate adaptation management action providing a safer transit alternative to the beach road during king tides and projected sea level rise.

Climate Adaptation Plan

Tilly Davis from the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) presented progress on the K'gari Climate Change Adaptation Plan (CAP).

Co-designed with the Butchulla community, this project is a partnership between the BAC, the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) and the Department of Environment and Science (DES). The project seeks to use past knowledge to support modelling and identify adaptation approaches to a changing climate to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the K'gari World Heritage Area.

The project has funded a full-time BAC project officer to support the Butchulla people to engage, share knowledge and co-lead the process.

Members endorsed the activities under the CAP but asked for closer liaison between the project and Committee members to reduce the risk of duplication of previous and ongoing work on K'gari.



Putting Butchulla and community values on the map - capturing input for the K'gari Climate Adaptation Plan

Updates

Updates were also provided by the Department of Environment and Science (DES), the Department of Resources (DR), Fraser Coast Regional Council (FCRC) and the Queensland Museum (QM). KHWAC members were invited to comment on the following activities currently underway for the WHA:

The proposed K'gari name change (led by DR) under the *Place Names Act, 1994*, is progressing well, with nearly 6,000 submissions. A decision by Minister for Resources Scott Stewart MP is expected later this year.

The Committee reiterated their support for the name change of the island to K'gari.

K'gari Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy (led by FCRC) and funded through an Australian Heritage Grant. The strategy has now been endorsed by Council, with the project's first phase being to cap the Eurong Waste Transfer Station facility and appoint a waste management contractor. Members asked about the management of historic waste at the site and potential implications for K'gari's groundwater resources.

The Committee recommended monitoring be undertaken to ensure that groundwaters near the Eurong waste management facilities have not been significantly contaminated.

Great Sandy Marine Park Zoning Plan (led by DES). The World Heritage property extends 500m into the Marine Park, and the release of the revised zoning plan for the Marine Park is imminent. Rezoning has been underway since 2016. Given its significance, the Draft Zoning Plan will be evaluated out of session by committee members.

K'gari – Walking the Landscape (led by QM) in partnership with the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation and DES. A guidebook is being developed for visitors to provide a Butchulla understanding of their relationship to K'gari.

The Committee endorsed the development of the "Walking the Landscape" guidebook as a significant contribution to the interpretation of K'gari.