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## **K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Advisory Committee – Communiqué 10 April 2024**

K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee's (KWHAC) first meeting for 2024 was held online on 10 April. This was KWHAC's ninth meeting for the term.

KWHAC members reflected on the Committee's achievements and challenges over the last 12 months. These included:

### **Climate Adaptation Plan**

Finalisation of the K'gari Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP), the first Indigenous-led plan of its kind in Australia.

Using an adapted methodology, based on the Australian Government's *Climate change toolkit for World Heritage property managers*, the Butchulla-led project was delivered by the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (BAC) in partnership with Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (BNTAC), the Department of Environment, Science, and Innovation (DESI) and the NESP Climate Systems Hub.

Overseen by a Butchulla Working Group, a Butchulla Climate Change Response Plan has been developed for K'gari that focusses on five action themes:

1. Protecting and using traditional Butchulla knowledge
2. Managing biosecurity risks
3. Protecting and building resilience of freshwater ecosystems
4. Right way fire management
5. Protecting vulnerable species.

KWHAC members also noted the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water's (DCCEEW) presentation on the World Heritage Committee's *Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage* (2023) discussing options to progress climate action at the property and national levels. These included sharing learnings from the K'gari CAP with other First Nations communities, and training for rangers to enable them to modify practices within their current work plans.

KWHAC recommends that additional support, including funding, is provided to both the BAC and BNTAC Land and Sea Rangers to support the delivery of the Butchulla Climate Change Response Plan.

### **K'gari Biosecurity Strategy**

KWHAC members were pleased to hear that the BAC had been successful in achieving an Australian Heritage Grant to support the development of a tenure-blind K'gari Biosecurity Strategy.

With multiple tenures on K'gari, there is currently no coordinated approach to the island's biosecurity. Invasive species have repeatedly been identified in the IUCN Outlook Reports 2014, 2017 and 2020 as a major threat to K'gari's Outstanding Universal Value and reduce the island's resilience to climate change.

Commencing in July 2024, this 18-month project will bring property managers, community partners and researchers together to undertake risk analysis, develop a business model, and develop a wholistic, tenure-blind strategy to address priority biosecurity threats including phytophthora, chytrid fungus, yellow crazy and red imported fire ants, and to develop strategies to prevent the establishment of these introduced pests, if detected.

### **Butchulla Cultural Protocols**

KWHAC members learned about the new Butchulla Cultural Protocols developed by BNTAC. The protocols are pivotal in preserving and honouring the Butchulla culture while also creating understanding and cooperation between Butchulla people, agencies, and the broader community. The protocols provide a framework for preserving, protecting, and promoting Butchulla culture, ensuring that Butchulla traditions remain vibrant and relevant in a changing world. They are a testament to the Butchulla people's deep connection with the land, sea, and sky, guiding them in their roles as custodians of Butchulla Country.

KWHAC recommends that Butchulla cultural protocols be adopted as the framework for all management activities undertaken on K'gari.

### **Sustainable Visitation**

Members of the committee expressed their concern about continued delays on the release of the Sustainable Visitor Capacity Management Study (completed by EarthCheck in 2023). Further the KWHAC members were concerned that no member of the Committee had been asked to provide advice on the draft report when the provision of advice of this sort is central to the mandate of the Committee.

KWHAC recommends that the Queensland Government urgently releases the Sustainable Visitor Management Study for further discussion and initiates support actions to reduce threats to the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage property's OUV associated with increasing visitation.

Increased tourism in the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area is a major driver for threats including erosion, pollution, and siltation of aquatic areas (particularly perched lakes and streams), and biosecurity (introductions of weeds, pests, and diseases).

KWHAC members expressed their concerns regarding visitor behaviour at high visitation sites on K'gari and the implications that this has for the island's genetically pure and culturally significant dingo (wongari) population. Tourists to Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) and Eli Creek appear to be unaware of the Department's advice not to eat or picnic at these sites, leading to a greater chance of dingo habituation and a negative interaction (attack).

KWHAC members acknowledged the Queensland Government's announcement in September 2023 "to enhance visitor safety and preserve wongari on K'gari" through 13 additional staff positions, comprising six Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers, four Butchulla rangers and three Department of Environment and Science technical support positions to support on-ground efforts.

Despite the success of safety messaging over the Easter School Holidays with the *Dingo dos and don'ts* campaign, sadly over a dozen negative dingo interactions have occurred in the year to date.

### **K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Area Renaming**

Following the formal renaming (reclaiming) of K'gari in June 2023 under the *Place Names Act 1994*, KWHAC members discussed the removal of the reference to Fraser Island in the World Heritage property's name.

Following advice from DCCEEW, KWHAC members unanimously supported the BAC and BNTAC with their request to expunge the reference to the Fraser family from the property's name.

### **Updates**

Relevant updates were also provided by DCCEEW, the World Heritage Unit (DESI), and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

KWHAC provides advice to State and Commonwealth Ministers and management agencies on matters relating to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural values of the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Area from Butchulla, scientific and community perspectives.