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## **K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Advisory Committee – Communiqué 6 June 2023**

The sixth K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee (KWHAC) meeting was held on K'gari, Butchulla Country. 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.

KWHAC members expressed their delight and excitement that the island (and site of the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Area) has finally regained her original name of K'gari. The committee was pleased to note that more than two thirds of respondents to consultation undertaken by the Queensland Department of Resources were also in favour of reinstating the traditional name of the island.

### **Recognising the principles of co-management**

KWHAC is pleased to see that the cultural framework/underpinning of decision-making is now part of all forms of management on the island. The Committee supports and encourages the Queensland Government with their ongoing journey towards formal co-management of K'gari.

### **Funding**

KWHAC acknowledged the \$725,000 funding commitment from the Australian Government for the next five years from 2023-24 to 2027-28. This equates to \$145,000 annually to support the K'gari Executive Officer and operation of KWHAC.

KWHAC notes that this budget **has not increased for almost two decades**. Based on CPI wage increases for an Executive Officer, the component of funding that is available for Advisory Committee business has halved from **\$50,921 in 2013-14, to \$26,206 in 2022-23**.

This is a disappointing outcome, and the Committee requests an urgent review of funding to return available resources to parity with 2013-2014 allocations.

### **Three Year Plan and Priority Projects**

KWHAC members finalised and endorsed the Committee's Three-Year Plan. Providing focus for the Committee's activities for the remaining 18 months of its term, the Plan will be an enduring and living document to be passed on to the next Committee. KWHAC members also developed four project plans to support priorities for essential funding for K'gari. These are:

- 1) A phased approach for an Indigenous-led World Heritage nomination of K'gari, the Great Sandy (Korrawinga) and Cooloola areas for both Natural and Cultural Values.
- 2) The development of Butchulla Cultural Protocols for the K'gari World Heritage Area.
- 3) A phased approach to develop and implement a Biosecurity Strategy for K'gari.
- 4) A phased approach to review and establish Monitoring and Baseline Studies of K'gari's natural and cultural resources.

**KWHAC seeks funding from the Australian and Queensland Governments to support these vital initiatives.**

### **Nomination K’gari-Great Sandy (Korrawinga)-Cooloola**

Amy Stevens and Prof. Ian McNiven shared their learnings on the Murujuga and Budj Bim journeys towards World Heritage respectively, highlighting the importance of a community-led and facilitated process. KWHAC acknowledges that central to the process is Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) under the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

### **Monitoring and Baseline Studies**

KWHAC noted the presentation from Mike Ronan, Queensland Wetlands Program, regarding K’gari’s Post-Fire Monitoring project, which relied on relocating long term vegetation monitoring sites. Some sites had not been surveyed for over 25 years, an unacceptable standard for a World Heritage property, and highlighting the urgent need to re-establish some baseline monitoring on K’gari.

### **Outdated and Inaccurate Visitation Figures**

Visitation has grown significantly since COVID-19, with estimates of up to 1 million people a year provided to the Committee by island operators. This is **more than double** levels reported to KWHAC by the Department of Environment and Science (~400,000) in March 2023, increasing threats to the World Heritage property and visitor safety that demand greater funding to improve management.

**KWHAC recommends that total visitation to K’gari must be verified from barge and flight data on an ongoing basis to support adaptive management of the World Heritage property.**

### **Queensland Audit Request**

Following a submission from KWHAC in March 2023, the Queensland Audit Office (QAO) has advised it is unlikely to be included in the QAO’s forward work plan for 2023-26. However, the QAO has suggested it will consider the topic to “Evaluate the resources needed to maintain Queensland’s World Heritage properties to a World Class standard - with reference to K’gari (Fraser Island)” in developing its next plan.

**KWHAC requests the Queensland Minister for the Environment’s support for the proposed QAO audit as soon as possible.**

### **Updates**

Relevant updates were provided by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), Department of Environment and Science (DES), Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (BAC) and Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (BNTAC).

In addition, the Committee was briefed on:

- K’gari Climate Adaptation Plan, with members expressing their excitement at reported progress.
- The resources document that underpins the **Values Based Management Framework** for K’gari. A K’gari Management Plan is currently under development with BAC (BNTAC to follow) acknowledging *two ways of walking* with culturally appropriate structures for management-based planning.
- K’gari: Walking the Landscape – a Butchulla guide to K’gari, noting progress.
- Great Sandy Marine Park Zoning Plan Review.
- Fraser Coast Council’s K’gari Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy – with concerns raised about the strategy reverting to previous management arrangements for Orchid Beach and Happy Valley (which have long been recognised as unacceptable).

**KWHAC reiterated the need to demonstrate world class waste management solutions and promote positive outcomes for K’gari.**

KWHAC has requested a briefing on recommendations from the Sustainable Visitor Capacity Management assessment undertaken by EarthCheck Pty. Ltd. (currently under consideration by DES).