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K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Advisory Committee – Communiqué **10 March 2023**

The fifth K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee (KWHAC) meeting was held in Brisbane on Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera/Yuggerapul Country. KWHAC comprises an independent chair and fifteen members and 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 acknowledges and respects the strong connections that Butchulla people have with K'gari.

The Committee welcomed guests Ben Klaassen, Queensland Deputy Director-General (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships) and Julia Playford - Executive Director, Office of the Great Barrier Reef and World Heritage, to the meeting.

Queensland Audit Request

KWHAC discussed the Queensland Audit Office request proposed at its December meeting.

KWHAC continues to be concerned about the lack of available resources to address threats and impacts on the K'gari World Heritage property, including climate change, visitor management, invasive weeds, pests and diseases, fire, and marine debris. This issue has been raised consistently over the last decade through Communiqués sent to the Queensland and Australian Ministers for the Environment and KWHAC believes many attributes, which make up the site's Outstanding Universal Value, are deteriorating.

KWHAC highlights the relative inequity (and scale of this inequity) of funding for K'gari, Riversleigh (Australia Fossil Mammal Sites) and Gondwana Rainforests of Australia when compared with the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics World Heritage Areas.

KWHAC requests that the QAO “Evaluate the resources needed to maintain Queensland's World Heritage properties to a World Class standard - with reference to K'gari (Fraser Island)” and seeks the Queensland Government's support to prioritise completion of this audit.

KWHAC Three-Year Plan

KWHAC has developed a Three-Year Plan (2021 – 2024) (the Plan) to capture key matters and enable focused discussions and efforts to achieve stronger outcomes for K'gari. The Plan aligns with the current KWHAC term, which commenced on 11 November 2021. Unresolved matters that continue to be a priority will carry over to future committee terms.

The Plan is structured around KWHAC's purpose of providing expert advice to State and Australian Government Ministers and management agencies responsible for World Heritage to ensure that Australia continues to meet its obligations under the World Heritage Convention to protect, conserve

and present this World Heritage property. The Plan will guide future KWHAC discussions and focus on opportunities to address known gaps.

KWHAC Project Plans

Committee members discussed and agreed on the priorities for the World Heritage property for 2023-25. These include:

1. Advocating for additional funding to support the world class management of K’gari.
2. Increasing biosecurity – supporting inspection/surveillance to prevent future pest incursions to K’gari and improving ecosystem resilience.
3. Developing and implementing Butchulla Cultural Protocols for the island.
4. Progressing the K’gari-Great Sandy-Cooloola Extension nomination for natural and cultural criteria (including an assessment of K’gari for cultural values).
5. Developing a tenure-blind Strategic Plan for the World Heritage area, including:
 - a. High-level principles to support the protection, conservation, and transmission of Outstanding Universal Value; and
 - b. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (including visitation data) to meet property and partner needs and inform Periodic, Outlook and State of Environment Reporting.
6. Finalising and implementing the K’gari Climate Adaptation Plan.

KWHAC will finalise costed Project Plans for 2., 3., 4. and 5(b) above for Ministerial consideration.

QPWS&P Priorities for K’gari

The Committee welcomed a presentation by Ben Klaassen, Deputy Director-General, QPWS&P, with several items raised for consideration including:

- Increasing speed limit compliance (especially during peak periods).
- Making portaloos compulsory for all camping areas without toilet facilities (mirroring arrangements already in place for several mainland National Parks).
- The need to focus on the sustainable management of Country (K’gari) rather than visitors (tourism).

The Committee reiterated its support for the introduction of a Cultural Levy to increase resourcing for the Butchulla People to increase participation in the cooperative management of K’gari.

The Committee welcomed the co-development of a K’gari Management Plan with the Butchulla people and look forward to being consulted on the draft by the end of 2023, acknowledging the progress being made towards co-management of K’gari.

Updates

Updates were provided by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), the Department of Environment and Science (DES), Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (BAC) and Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (BNTAC).

The Committee was briefed on:

- Progress of the K’gari Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP); and
- Outcomes from the BAC’s Butchulla Cultural Heritage Project.

The Committee welcomed an overview of recent research published by committee member Professor Patrick Moss¹. Professor Moss also briefed the Committee on the *Global Peatland Assessment – The State of the World’s Peatlands*, a project launched as part of the COP 27 Conference (Egypt, 2022). The project aims to improve knowledge of peatlands for better peatland management. This assessment has implications for K’gari ecosystems, with peatland wetlands forming an important component of the island’s Outstanding Universal Value.

¹ Moss, P. (2023). Australian peatlands—Globally unique and undiscovered landscapes. *Geographical Research*, 61(1), 8–10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12588>