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Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Community Advisory Committee Communiqué August 2018



The Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Community Advisory Committee (CAC) met in Hervey Bay on Monday 13 August 2018. The Committee had the opportunity to discuss a number of issues that have the potential to impact on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage property which are summarised below:

Myrtle Rust – A major threat to the integrity of K'gari (Fraser Island)

The CAC expressed their real concerns for the future integrity of K'gari and the implications of myrtle rust. This pathogen has the potential to detrimentally impact the OUV of the island. It is noteworthy that the island's international significance has again been recognised through the recently announced 'Queen's Commonwealth Canopy' status of the island's rainforests – a key ecosystem threatened by myrtle rust.

Since the first detection of myrtle rust in Australia (central coast NSW), the spread has been rapid. Myrtle rust has now been observed in over 350 species from 57 different genera. In 2013, surveys of K'gari identified rust on five species: *Austromyrtus dulcis*, *Backhousia myrtifolia*, *Homoranthus virgatus*, *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, and *Rhodamnia acuminata*. Since then, it is likely that the rust has infected more species.

The CAC expressed their support for the *Myrtle Rust in Australia – Draft Action Plan* and recommend the need for Commonwealth funding to support urgent research; field surveys and emergency conservation actions (including preservation of collection and preservation of germplasm/seed of key species); identification of potential cultural impacts on both flora and fauna species associated with rainforest and wetland Myrtaceae; and impact monitoring of affected species/sites on K'gari. If funded, these roles could be performed by the newly formed Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Team.

Adapting to Climate Change

The CAC welcomed the development of the *Queensland's Draft Biodiversity and Ecosystems Climate Adaptation Plan*. The CAC encourage both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to progress feedback from the Scientific and Community Advisory Committees and fund the development of property level adaptation planning for Queensland's terrestrial World Heritage Areas. With the exception of the Great Barrier Reef, Queensland's World Heritage Areas (WHAs) do not yet have integrated climate adaptation plans. The properties are likely to be important climate refugia in Queensland and climate change has been identified as a potential threat to the *Outstanding Universal Value* for which they are listed as World Heritage Areas. UNESCO has noted that the continued preservation of World Heritage Areas means understanding and addressing this threat.

Engagement with the State Party

The CAC was thrilled to have Commonwealth representation, including then Assistant Minister for the Environment, Hon. Melissa Price MP, at the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area earlier this year. However, over the last few years we have seen a decline in participation by Commonwealth representatives from the Department of Environment and Energy. While it is recognised that attending committee meetings is costly, the significance of these sites to the World, and the opportunity to gain greater understanding of the property, cannot be understated. We urge the Commonwealth to increase their current commitment to participate in meetings via teleconference (to provide a Departmental update) and to attend the annual Combined Community and Scientific Committee Meeting (held on K'gari), and, given that committee members themselves also travel great distances to attend, urge both Governments to consider using technology such as video-conferencing to reduce financial barriers to participation by both the Commonwealth and committee members.

Recent Research – Ancient Dunes

The CAC noted preliminary results from Professor Jamie Shulmeister on dune sequencing for K'gari and the Cooloola Sand Mass. The University of Queensland team have recently demonstrated that the dune sequence on the island is over 800,000 years old. The results also have implications for the Butchulla people, as with permanent fresh water on the island established far earlier than previously thought, K'gari has the potential to be one of the East Coast's earliest sites for Aboriginal occupation – potentially increasing occupation of the island from 6,000 to 60,000 years.

Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers

The Committee noted with excitement, the recent employment of four Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers for Butchulla country – including K'gari. The Butchulla rangers will make an invaluable contribution to the management of K'gari including increased cultural mapping and onsite conservation of cultural heritage.

Celebrating 25 Years of World Heritage

The 25th Anniversary celebrations continue, with over 350 superb entries to the 'Snap Up Some Paradise' photo competition. The Committee looks forward to the announcement of winners by the Minister for the Environment, Leeanne Enoch. Winners will be featured in the December issue of *Wildlife* magazine as well as a limited edition K'gari Calendar. The Queensland Museum is also committed to working in collaboration with the department, Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) and the Community and Scientific Advisory Committees in developing a commemorative Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area guidebook. A 'Science on the Couch' event is proposed for later this year which will also recognise the photo competition winners and showcase K'gari's incredible landscapes and ecosystems.

Communication Workshop

The CAC, QPWS and World Heritage team all participated in a workshop designed to identify key messages for the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area. In our attempts to better manage visitation the island, it is important to celebrate what it is that brings them to K'gari - namely its Outstanding Universal Value and status as a World Heritage property. The Committee reflected on what was unique about K'gari including its ancient dune systems (over 800,000 years old), pristine perched lakes, rainforests on sand and wilderness. Words including awe, primitive, privilege, spiritual and connection were put forward by committee members and will be crafted by the Queensland World Heritage team to be used for future communication products. The CAC encouraged the World Heritage team and the QPWS managers to work with the BAC to develop a comprehensive 'key messages' document to help guide future interpretation and messaging for the island.