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## K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Advisory Committee – Communiqué 8 November 2023

The final K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee (KWHAC) meeting for 2023 was held on 8 November in Hervey Bay, on Butchulla Country. This was KWHAC's eighth meeting for the term.

### Visitation

Monitoring and managing total visitation to K'gari continued to be a priority for the committee.

KWHAC noted that the figure of ~400,000 annual visitors to K'gari provided to the committee by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in March 2023 does not include a growing number of Free and Independent Travellers (FITs).

FIT activities on K'gari are unregulated. FIT visitors also receive limited interaction and exposure to World Heritage information from rangers and experienced tourism providers whilst on the island. As a result, these visitors are more likely to impact on OUV and their behaviour may place them at higher risk of habituating, or attack by, wongari (dingoes) – an example of this being the attack on jogger, Sarah Peet in July 2023.

KWHAC acknowledges the tension of managing a National Park located wholly within a World Heritage property and the different value systems associated with these places. However, with only five World Heritage properties in Queensland and more than 300 National Parks, the protection and management of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for these exceptional and globally significant properties must take precedence.

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

Impacts on K'gari's OUV associated with visitation include:

- deterioration of aesthetics (criterion vii)
- localised geological impacts (criterion viii)
- localised ecological and evolutionary impacts (criterion ix). *(Queensland Government, 2020)*

The Queensland Government's 2020 State of Environment Report on K'gari<sup>1</sup> also states "Accurate monitoring of visitor numbers is integral to managing visitor impacts."

Matt Brun from Tourism and Events Queensland advised KWHAC members during the meeting that "Visitation is likely to further increase with the Brisbane 2032 Olympics," and "tourism operators are being encouraged to diversify and enhance their products."

In 2022, the Department of Environment and Science (DES) commissioned EarthCheck to undertake a Sustainable Visitor Management Strategy (SVMS) for high visitation sites on K'gari (Fraser Island National Park). Completed earlier this year, the SVMS is still pending release.

KWHAC recommends that the Queensland Government commence accurate monitoring of total visitor numbers to K'gari (including Free and Independent Travellers), releases the Sustainable Visitor Management Strategy for further discussion and urgently delivers strategies to reduce threats to the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage property's OUV associated with increasing visitation.

### Three Year Plan and Priority Projects

Excellent progress has been made on KWHAC's 3-year plan and priority projects. Members discussed the remaining actions and formed Biosecurity, Butchulla Cultural Protocols, and Climate Change Working Groups to support progress across these areas.

KWHAC acknowledged the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC for their leadership of a K'gari Biosecurity Strategy and commends their proposal to the Australian Government for their full support under the Australian Heritage Grants program.

KWHAC also supports progressing:

- The development of Butchulla Cultural Protocols for K'gari.
- Renaming the property K'gari World Heritage Area following the reclamation of the island's Butchulla name in June 2023 under the *Place Names Act 1991 (Qld)*.
- Recording, mapping, and assessment of cultural values on K'gari and within the proposed Great Sandy-Cooloola extension area, to enable these values to be acknowledged, incorporated into a World Heritage re-nomination, and protected for current and future generations.

### K'gari Climate Adaptation Plan

The K'gari Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP) is entering its final stages of preparation, with KWHAC members asked to provide and refine information to finalise the vulnerability assessment.

Notably, the CAP is being developed through a co-design and co-delivery process between the Butchulla people and the Department of Environment, Science, and Innovation (DESI), supported by the CSIRO.

KWHAC members look forward to reviewing the completed plan at our next meeting and supporting climate adaptation on K'gari through the CAP's implementation.

### Updates

Dr Graeme Potter, Chair of the Riversleigh Australian Fossil Mammal Site's Advisory Committee briefed KWHAC members on their 3-year plan and the Waanyi people's *Fossil Dreaming* project.

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

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.

### Reference:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Environment and Science, 2020. *State of the Environment Report: Tourism Pressure on Fraser Island (K'gari)*. URL: <https://www.stateoftheenvironment.des.qld.gov.au/heritage/world/tourism-pressure-on-fraser-island>.