

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

POLICY STATEMENT NO. 52

MANAGEMENT OF NORTH WEST ISLANDS FOR CONSERVATION

JUNE 1994

1. BACKGROUND

Well over 150 islands are located along the north west coast of Western Australia between Exmouth and Port Hedland. Ranging in size from small sand cays to the 23,000 hectares of Barrow Island, around half of them are Nature Reserves vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority (NPNCA). The Monte Bello Islands have been vested in the NPNCA as Conservation Park. Most of the other islands are vacant Crown land. Most are subject to EPA 'Red Book' recommendations

Most of the islands have not been disturbed by exotic plants and animals, and wildfires, and their flora and fauna assemblages remain intact. They consequently have very high wildlife conservation values, supporting populations of mammals now very restricted or extinct on the mainland, supporting relictual populations of plants, providing breeding sites for sea birds and marine turtles, and providing refuge for species of interesting biogeographic distribution.

Due to their isolation, speciation also occurs, particularly in the terrestrial reptile and mammal taxa on the islands.

The Dampier Archipelago islands and Depuch Island are of high and documented Aboriginal heritage value, and other island groups are proving to have similar values e.g. the Monte Bello and Barrow Islands.

Industrialisation in the Pilbara, starting in the early 1960's, increased human pressures to the islands. Some of the in-shore islands of the Dampier Archipelago are used as port facilities for loading salt and iron ore. Others in the Barrow, Lowendal and Thevenard groups are being used as bases for on-shore and off-shore oilfield developments.

Exploration for oil and gas continues in the northwest and, where these products are found, will lead to a demand for the use of more islands for support facilities. The precedence of Acts relating to the petroleum industry results in leases being provided for support facilities for the industry on islands reserved for conservation. However, the Department of Minerals and Energy encourages sharing of existing facilities for future petroleum operations.

Other uses include the siting of navigation and survey beacons, and communications towers.

Following industrial development and the attendant large population increases in the Pilbara, pressures have developed for the recreational use of islands. This is largely confined at present to day visits and overnight camping. However, shack licences have been granted on East and West Lewis, and Malus Islands and a permanent tourist facility has been constructed on Thevenard Island. Commercial tourism interests are proposing the use of more islands for permanent tourist facilities.

In summary, the north west islands exhibit an unusual range of conservation values which, in the absence of planning and management, could be affected by industrial, tourism and recreation pressures.

This policy statement, recognising the potential of the islands for a range of uses, provides for the protection of their wildlife conservation and heritage values. It has been prepared in consultation with the Departments of Environmental Protection, Minerals and Energy, Resource Development and Land Administration.

2. OBJECTIVE

To ensure that management of north-west islands will conserve indigenous plants and animals and the ecological communities they form, and heritage values.

3. POLICIES

The Department of Conservation and Land Management will

- 3.1. Establish a conservation reserve system which adequately represents the wildlife conservation and heritage values of the north west islands.
- 3.2. Manage the reserved islands for wildlife conservation, and for recreation where appropriate.
- 3.3. Ensure the protection of wildlife on islands which are not conservation reserves.

4. STRATEGIES

4.1. Establish a Reserve System

CALM will:

- 4.1.1. Review existing island reserves vested in the NPNCA for suitability of purpose.
- 4.1.2. Review and implement the EPA "Red Book" recommendations for the reservation of islands in System 8 and 9.
- 4.1.3. Propose reservation of islands of known high conservation value and which are not among the "Red Book" recommendations.
- 4.1.4. Survey all other islands for their wildlife conservation and heritage values, and make recommendations for reservation where appropriate.
- 4.1.5. Integrate existing and proposed island reserves with proposals for the establishment of marine conservation reserves.

4.2 Management of Island Reserves for Wildlife and Heritage

- 4.2.1. Control human access where desirable for wildlife and heritage protection purposes.
- 4.2.2. Eliminate, or effectively control exotic plant and animal species; and prevent introductions and re-introductions occurring.

- 4.2.3 Generally follow a 'no planned burn' strategy, except where there is a clear requirement for fuel modification to protect life and property or for ecological objectives
- 4.2.4 Identify and protect features of geological, archaeological and cultural significance.
- 4.2.5 Undertake and encourage research into natural processes as a basis for improved management.
- 4.2.6 Establish monitoring programs to determine ecological change and the effect of management operations.

4.3 Management of Island Reserves for Recreation and Tourism

- 4.3.1 Focus recreation and tourism activities on islands or parts of islands where these are declared purposes under vesting orders, a management plan or Departmental policy.
- 4.3.2 Locate recreation and tourism activities on lands that can sustain such activity without long-term damage, and on areas where wildlife values are not compromised.
- 4.3.3 Consider commercial tourism development proposals for islands where alternative suitable mainland sites are not available, and recommend that these be subject to formal environmental impact assessment.
- 4.3.4 Ensure that additional CALM management costs imposed by a development are recovered from a developer (e.g. through an appropriate lease/licence fee).
- 4.3.5 Encourage recreational day visits and boat-stay accommodation in preference to on-shore overnight stays where undue pressure on the island environment is being generated.
- 4.3.6 Permit camping on beaches where wildlife will not be disturbed, and the habitat not degraded.
- 4.3.7 Provide low-key recreation facilities for the benefit of visitors, and encourage activities compatible with management objectives.
- 4.3.8 Provide signs and interpretive materials to aid visitor appreciation of the island's environment, including advice about restrictions on access for pets.

4.4 Protection of Wildlife on Non-Reserve Islands

- 4.4.1 Provide input into environmental decision-making processes and assistance in establishing environmental conditions for development on the islands.
- 4.4.2 Provide advice to island-based industries and developers on measures to preserve wildlife conservation values.
- 4.4.3 Publicise the conservation value of islands and publish a code of conduct for casual users of islands.

4.5 Management of Industry Facilities

- 4.5.1 Seek to direct the use for industrial purposes (e.g. mining, petroleum and aquaculture) away from islands, or parts of islands, of high conservation value and encourage the sharing of facilities to minimise overall impact.
- 4.5.2 Liaise with industry, in the event of their access to island reserves being approved by Government, by providing environmental protection guidelines for incorporation in their environmental management programs.
- 4.5.3 Provide land for industry, where essential, by way of leases rather than excisions from reserves.
- 4.5.4 Ensure all personnel and contractors associated with industrial development receive adequate environmental training, and observe environmental conditions imposed on their presence in island conservation reserves.
- 4.5.5 Recover additional management costs imposed on CALM by industrial developments from the proponent/owners (e.g. through an appropriate lease or licence fee).

4.6 Island Reserve Management - General

- 4.6.1 Review leases and licences for permanent recreational structures owned by individuals in order to promote equitable access to the islands. Investigate general public use of these shacks, ideally on a commercial basis.
- 4.6.2 Be involved in contingency planning for containing oil-spills.
- 4.6.3 Liaise with Federal and other State government agencies regarding their use of islands.

Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Distribution
Lists A B D E & L