

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

THE DAMPIER ARCHIPELAGO

The Dampier Archipelago consists of 41 islands, islets and rocks lying within a 35km radius of the Port of Dampier on the NW coast of Western Australia. It lies at the eastern end of an extensive chain of islands between Exmouth and Dampier. Twenty-six of the islands in the archipelago are nature reserves managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

HISTORY

The Dampier Archipelago was known to early Dutch navigators as it appeared, along with Barrow Island and the Monte Bellos Islands, on a chart drawn in 1628. The archipelago was named in 1801 by the Frenchman, Baudin, after William Dampier who visited the islands in 1699. Rosemary Island was named during this visit by Dampier, after a plant on the island which reminded him of the English herb. Phillip King produced the first detailed charts of the area during his 1818 visit in the "Mermaid". Several islands such as Enderby, Lewis, Intercourse and Gidley, were named by King. Many plant specimens were collected by the botanist accompanying king, Alan Cunningham.

Until the late nineteenth century, Aboriginal people of the Yapurarra group lived on the Burrup Peninsula and islands of the archipelago. Evidence of their occupation in the form of rock engravings, middens and hunting hides is abundant.

Between 1870 - 1900 the islands were used as bases for pearling and whaling operation, and remains of these can be seen today. During this period also, the pastoral industry on the adjacent mainland became established, and Roebourne and Cossack built.

Between 1900 - 1960 islands in the archipelago were used for shelter and campsites by commercial fisherman from Point Samson and Onslow. Turtles were taken commercially from around the islands during this period. Two wartime wrecks can be found on Enderby Island, one a Catalina flying boat, the other a boat.

RECREATION

Prior to 1960 very little recreational activity occurred on the islands as the population of the area was small and the islands relatively inaccessible at this stage. However, with the development of the Pilbara iron ore industry and subsequent increase in population in the 1960's, the Dampier Archipelago became a focus for recreational activities. With the development of Karratha as a regional centre, this use has increased. Because of their high conservation values many of the islands were declared nature reserves in 1980, and a management plan is now being prepared for the islands by CALM. The nature reserves extend to LWM and all intertidal flora and fauna is also protected.

LANDFORM AND GEOLOGY

The Dampier Archipelago was formed 6000 - 8000 years ago when rising sea levels flooded coastal valleys, leaving hills and ridges exposed as islands. The islands range in size from rock inlets of less than 1ha. to Enderby Island, the largest of 3290ha. Dolphin is the highest island in the archipelago rising to 120m above sea level.

Topographically many of the islands resemble the adjacent mainland and Burrup Peninsula and are steep and rugged with coastal cliffs and large rock piles. These rock piles and cliffs are separated by valleys, beaches and coastal sandplains. The majority of the islands are composed of igneous basaltic rocks of Precambrian Age (about 2700 million years old). Some of the more northern islands are composed of Pleistocene dune limestone and are relics of a coastal dune system of an earlier period when the mainland shore was further north than at the present. More recently (since separation) beaches and sandplains have formed in the lower lying coastal areas of the island.

FLORA AND VEGETATION

At least 238 species of native terrestrial plants representing 53 families are known from the Dampier Archipelago. Another 7 species of introduced species are known, however these are only located in localized areas and not widespread as they are on the mainland. There are also many species of marine algae and seagrasses inhabiting the intertidal zones.

The vegetation associations are similar to those on the adjacent mainland, however unlike the mainland they have not been disturbed by the pastoral and mining industries. Six vegetation associations are recognised:

1. Littoral Association - mangrove and saltflat communities
2. Sandplain Association - Acacia shrubs, Trioda and Spinifex grasses
3. Run-on areas and Flats Association - heavier soils which become water logged during rain, and support shrubs and grasses
4. Drainage lines Association - between rocky slopes which may support Eucalyptus
5. Rocky Slope Association - most common is the archipelago and supports a few shrub and many grass species
6. Rock Pile and Outcrop Association - sparsely vegetated areas.

FAUNA

Eleven species of native mammal including 3 species of marsupial, 4 species of rodent, and 4 species of bat have been recorded. The introduced fox and feral cat occur on some islands adjacent to the Burrup Peninsula. Many species of marine mammal such as Humpback whale, Dolphin and Dugong occur in the waters around the island.

Ninety two species of bird and 37 species of reptile are also known from the island areas.

CONSERVATION VALUES

The conservation values of the island include:

- supporting diverse floral and faunal assemblages
- supporting undisturbed vegetation and habitat types
- the low incidence of fires
- the absence of introduced predators on many of the islands
- breeding and refuge sites for seabirds and marine turtles
- supporting species of biogeographical interest.

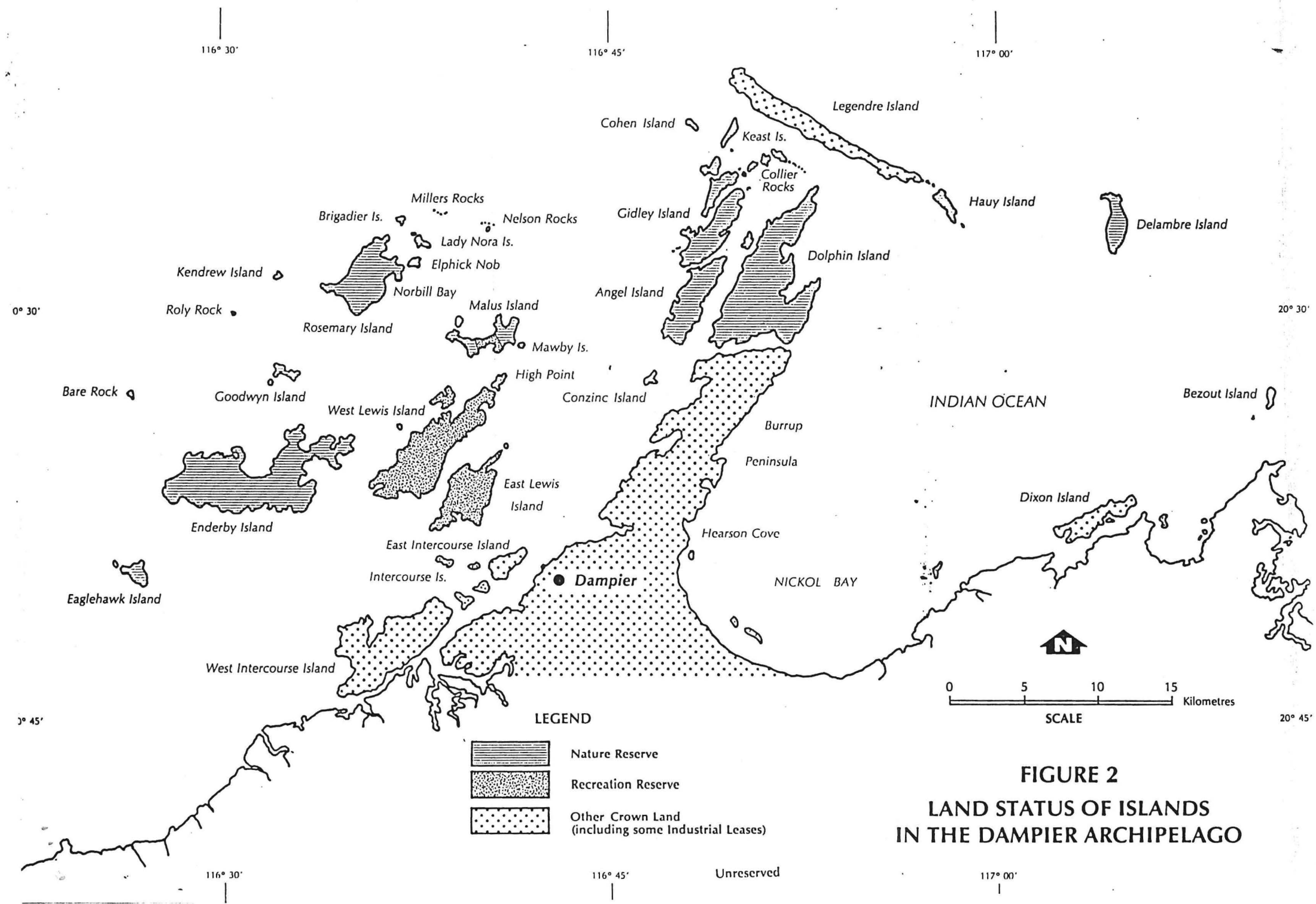


FIGURE 2
LAND STATUS OF ISLANDS
IN THE DAMPIER ARCHIPELAGO

Unreserved