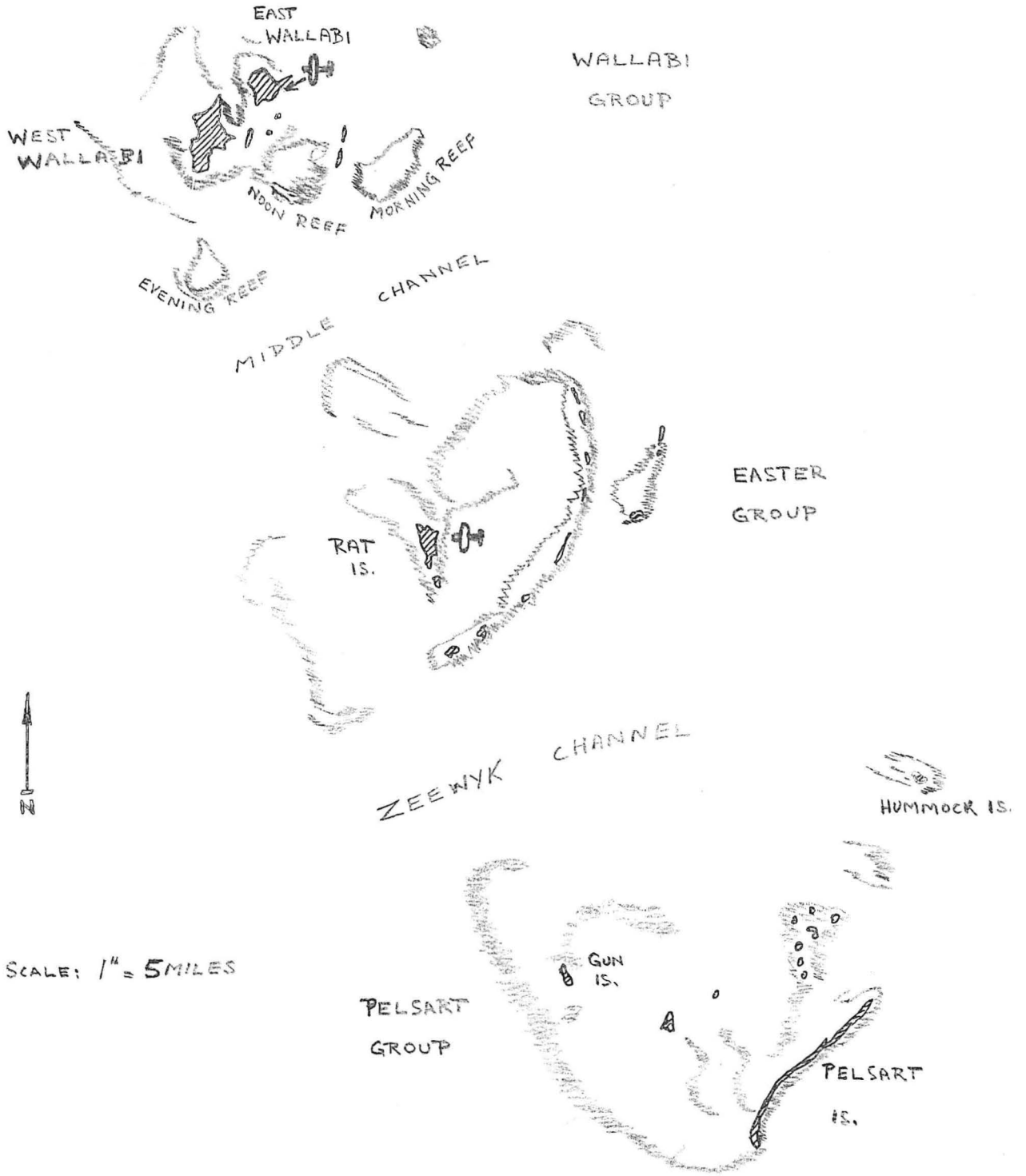




NORTH IS.

Map showing the Houtman Abrolhos and the location of the landing strips.



MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND FAUNA APPROVES
APPLICATION FOR ADDITIONAL LANDING STRIP
IN HOUTMAN ABROLHOS

An application by Geraldton Air Charter Pty. Ltd., to construct a landing strip on Rat Island in the Easter group has been approved by the Minister for Fisheries and Fauna. The Minister in reaching his decision considered that the natural resources of this island have been badly despoliated by various forms of use including guano mining and the provision of crayfishing facilities.

Rat Island contained what has been described as the biggest bird nesting colony in the southern hemisphere. Before the turn of the century, one ornithologist estimated that there were more than three million birds nesting there, more than twice as many as he found on Pelsart Island. Man's use of Rat Island has undoubtedly caused the loss of surface soil which made the island useless for the birds. Although some nesting lingered on until the 1930's, virtually none occurs there now.

In its application, the company also sought permission to establish additional landing strips on Pelsart and North Island, but was refused.

The purpose of Pelsart Island (an A class reserve) includes, "Fauna Conservation" and the construction of a strip on Pelsart could not be anything but contrary to this purpose. It has been estimated that well in excess of one million birds nest there, including the rare Red-tailed Tropic Bird. A considerable proportion of the vast flights are Mutton Birds which dig burrows in which to nest. They are persistent in their nesting habits, and it would be out of the question to build anything but sealed runways over their nesting grounds to provide a safe landing strip. The hundred of thousands of terns and other birds which nest over the length of the island, would also be a major hazard to any aircraft operating there. Furthermore, and primarily we don't want Pelsart to become another Rat Island.

In the case of North Island there are scientifically interesting invertebrates in the small salt lake which should be preserved if possible. A great deal of trouble might be caused by erosion and shifting sand dunes if even a strip of the vegetation cover at present consolidating the soil was to be destroyed. There are already shifting sand dunes on part of North Island and additional ones could cover and kill more vegetation and could conceivably overwhelm the fishermen's huts there. This island is richer in flora than other islands, and harbours some fauna well worth preserving.

Considering the rarity of emergencies in the past, the needs of the Northern and Southern Groups, could be reasonably well met from a landing strip on Rat Island and the previously approved application for a strip on East Wallaby Island.