

THUWATHU / BUJIMULLA SEA COUNTRY PLAN



Aboriginal Management of
the Wellesley Islands Region
of the Gulf of Carpentaria

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DEDICATION

On 24th November 1999, a Cessna 206 charter plane went down into the seas near the Wellesley Islands during bad weather and five of our countrymen were lost to us:

Lelkandu Nelson Gavenor of the Yangkaal people

Andrew Marmies of the Lardil people

Olive Loogatha of the Kaiadilt people

Brothers Graham Wilson and Gavin Wilson
of the Lardil people

They were all leaders of their community and members of the Carpentaria Land Council, committed to regaining control and customary rights to the islands and sea country.

We will always remember them and dedicate this Sea Country Plan to their memory.

Pilot Andrew Anthonisz of Karumba Air Services also lost his life that day.



Memorial at Mornington Island airport

Thuwathu / Bujimulla Sea Country Plan

Aboriginal management of the Wellesley Islands
region of the Gulf of Carpentaria

Prepared by
Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

for and on behalf of the
Lardil, Kaiadilt, Yangkaal and Gangalidda Native Title Holders of the
Wellesley Islands and adjacent mainland coast

2006

Warning: This document includes the names and photographs of deceased Aboriginal people

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Cover artwork: *Thuwathu (Rainbow Serpent)* by Daryl Williams

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Staff and consultants of the Carpentaria Land Council also contributed by organizing meetings, keeping track of issues that needed to be addressed in the *Sea Country Plan* and drafting the document.

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Staff from the National Oceans Office and Queensland Government agencies provided valuable assistance throughout the development of the *Sea Country Plan*.

Photographs

Thanks are extended to individuals and organisations for use of photographs in the *Sea Country Plan*; sources of photos are also acknowledged throughout the text.

Copies of this *Sea Country Plan* are available from:

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INTRODUCTION

We, the Aboriginal Traditional Owners of the Wellesley Islands region of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, have prepared this *Sea Country Plan* to explain our cultural relationships and obligations to our Sea Country, and to outline our ideas and commitments for its sustainable use and management. We urge anyone interested in the future of the southern Gulf to work with us in implementing this *Sea Country Plan*.

Thuwathu is the Lardil, Yangkaal and Kaiadilt language name for the Rainbow Serpent that lives in the sea and holds the law of the Sea Country. ***Bujimulla*** is the Ganggalidda language name for the Rainbow Serpent. The name ***Thuwathu / Bujimulla Sea Country Plan*** is used to convey the importance of the Rainbow Serpent in linking together our four saltwater language groups and in the management of our Sea Country.

We have prepared this Plan as a demonstration of our rights and responsibilities passed on to us by our ancestors for countless generations. In 2004 the Federal Court formally recognised our Native Title rights to our Sea Country. This Plan is an expression of our rights and responsibilities through culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable environmental management practices.

Our spiritual connection with our Sea Country, and our use and management of our Sea Country resources, have continued without interruption since time immemorial to the present day. Though we were denied recognition of our inherited rights to our Sea Country until recently, we never left our traditional Country, never stopped our cultural practices, never stopped relying on our Sea Country to feed our families and were never physically dispossessed, displaced or outnumbered by European settlers.

Our islands, coasts and Sea Country are still relatively clean, healthy and productive environments, largely free from the impact of towns, cities and industrial development that has occurred elsewhere in Australia.

Furthermore, there are no government environmental or natural resource management agencies based within our Sea Country¹. We believe that the combination of our unbroken cultural connection with our Sea Country, the health of our environments and the absence of government management agencies provides us with unique challenges, responsibilities and opportunities to take a leading role in caring for our Sea Country.

We are aware that government laws and policies apply over our Sea Country, that commercial fishers hold licenses to extract resources from our Sea Country, that recreational fishers and tourists travel from all over the world to enjoy our Sea Country and that mining companies and others depend on our Sea Country for transport and other purposes. We wish to develop cooperative working relationships with all these interest groups. In return, we expect all those with an interest in the southern Gulf to respect our long association with our Sea Country, our need to sustain our families and our culture from our Sea Country, and our inherited responsibility to care for our Sea Country. We also expect those who benefit economically from using our Sea Country to recognise our right to a fair share in the commercial use of our Sea Country resources, so that our communities can develop economically and socially.

We prepared the *Thuwathu / Bujimulla Sea Country Plan* with the assistance of the Australian Government's National Oceans Office (now part of the Marine Division of the Department of the Environment and Heritage), as part of their development of the Northern Regional Marine Plan under Australia's National Oceans Policy². The *Thuwathu / Bujimulla Sea Country Plan* is one of five pilot Sea Country Plans funded by the National Oceans Office. The others are:

- *The Kooyang Sea Country Plan* (south-west Victoria)

¹The nearest government agency representatives are two Queensland Fishery Service officers based in Karumba, located on the mainland outside our Sea Country.

²www.oceans.gov.au

- *The Ngarrindjeri Sea Country Plan* (south-eastern South Australia)
- *The Dhimurru Sea Country Plan* (north-east Arnhemland)
- *The Mabunji Sea Country Plan* (south-west Gulf of Carpentaria)

Our *Sea Country Plan* is the culmination of many years work by our Elders and others in our communities, assisted by our representative organisations, who have long sought to secure recognition of our customary authority over our Sea Country. While engaged in the process of developing this Plan, we have worked together with the Carpentaria Land Council, Mornington Shire Council and other agencies to build our capacity in Sea Country management.

Structure of the Sea Country Plan

Part 1: Saltwater People and Country describes our island, coastal and marine environments and resources that make up our Sea Country, and explains the relationship of our four language groups to those environments and resources. Also included is an overview of our experiences under colonial and later administrations, as well as a description of our communities today.

Part 2: Native Title Claim and Determination summarises the processes and outcomes of our successful Sea Country Native Title claim, and the relationship of the Native Title determination to our ongoing role in Sea Country use and management.

Part 3: Sea Country Planning describes the planning and consultative processes that led to the development of the *Thuwathu / Bujimulla Sea Country Plan*.

Part 4: Fisheries Management summarises Commonwealth Government and Queensland Government fisheries management arrangements currently operating in our Sea Country.

Part 5: Managing Sea Country summarises the key issues facing our Sea Country and sets out strategies and actions for our Sea Country management, taking into account our cultural rights and responsibilities, while also mindful of the interests of others.

Part 6: Implementing the Sea Country Plan sets out the steps we will be taking to implement our *Sea Country Plan* and identifies how government agencies, commercial fishers, tourism operators and other stakeholders can work with us in that process.