



Northern  
Territory  
Government



# Mary River National Park

Draft Joint Management Plan July 2014



For Public Comment

PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

## Making a Submission on the Draft Plan

Every submission is important but those that give reasons for concern with supporting information and constructive suggestions are most useful. Please include your name, contact details and area of interest. Be clear what parts of the draft Joint Management Plan you disagree with, as well as what you especially support. Refer to sections and page numbers.

The draft Joint Management Plan is available for public comment for one month.

In keeping with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, the joint management partners must consider all public comments and may amend the draft as they consider appropriate. After public consultation has closed the Joint Management Plan will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly by the Minister for Parks and Wildlife and, unless disallowed by Parliament, comes in effect after seven sitting days of the Assembly.

Written submissions may be emailed to [Parkplanning@nt.gov.au](mailto:Parkplanning@nt.gov.au) or can be sent to:

Mary River National Park Draft Joint Management Plan  
Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory  
PO Box 496  
PALMERSTON NT 0831

Front Cover photos are courtesy of Tourism NT

This document is available at: [www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/manage/plans](http://www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/manage/plans)

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### Acknowledgements

The production of this Joint Management Plan was made possible through the efforts and interests of many individuals and organisations, including the Limilngan and Uwynmil Traditional Owners for the Park and the Northern Land Council. Consultation with interested groups within the wider community also occurred and valuable contributions were given by various key stakeholder groups including members from the tourism industry, neighbours to the Park and recreational groups.

## Executive Summary

Mary River National Park is located in the northern most part of the Northern Territory in tropical wetland, savanna and woodland country 100 km east from Darwin. The Park comprises fourteen separate land parcels of varying size and contains biodiversity values of national and international significance. The main purpose of the Park is to protect and conserve its outstanding natural, cultural and visitor values and to provide opportunities for the public to enjoy high quality experiences.

The Park lies within the traditional country of the Limilngan People in the north and west and Uynmil People to the south. It is jointly managed by the Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. Through joint management the Park will be managed for the benefit of both the Traditional Owners and the wider community.

The Park is visited by local, interstate and international visitors. The Park is renowned for excellent fishing, particularly during the runoff and when the saltwater section of the Mary River is opened for fishing each year. The Park offers spectacular wildlife viewing with large flocks of water birds gathering on the floodplain. Mary River National Park is one of the best places to see saltwater (estuarine) crocodiles in their natural environment in Australia. Visitors can also experience the remoteness of the Northern Territory by heading out on one of the Park's four wheel drive tracks.

This Joint Management Plan sets out how the values of this Park will be protected and enhanced. Construction of new all-weather accessible infrastructure, including viewing platforms, walkways and bird hides, will increase visitor enjoyment of the Park. The visitor experience will be further enriched through stories of the area's Aboriginal cultural heritage as told by its Traditional Owners. The Plan also encourages commercial enterprise, particularly where visitor opportunities are enhanced and employment of Traditional Owners and their families are provided.

The Plan outlines how the Park's ecosystems and species will be safeguarded against threats so that future generations can continue to enjoy the Park. The varied ecosystems of the Park support numerous rare and threatened plant and animal species. Of even greater significance than these are the sheer numbers of common species such as magpie geese. The floodplains are important breeding habitat for many species and support populations of waterbirds and crocodiles.

The Park's values are challenged by many ongoing threats. Weeds such as olive hymenachne can colonise whole floodplains, excluding native species and reducing wetland habitat diversity, while gamba and mission grasses fuel intense late Dry season wildfires within the Parks woodlands. Feral animals including pigs and buffalo erode fragile soils and spread weeds and exotic diseases. Reduced fine scale burning and increased widespread wildfires cause changes to vegetation structures. The Parks' multiple unconnected land portions add another layer of difficulty in managing these threats. However, by the partners working together, strategically in collaboration with the Park's neighbours and supported by other government agencies, these difficulties can be overcome.

The resource-rich Mary River floodplain has supported large numbers of people for millennia. The region is crisscrossed by the pathways of many ancestral beings, or Dreamings, whose exploits are given tangible form in a number of sacred sites located through the current Park and its environment (Mearnes 2009). The Plan sets out the ways in which Traditional Owners will play a major role in the management of the Park and benefit from employment and tourism enterprise.

Significant historical sites relating to expeditions of early explorer John McDouall Stuart are located within the Park. Other adventurers in the form of crocodile and buffalo hunters followed by pastoralists forged strong working relationships with the ancestors of today's Traditional Owners. These ancestors had extraordinary bush skills which formed an integral part of new economic enterprises. Some legends were made during this time, including crack shots in the saddle and highly skilled cattlemen. Whole families were involved and contributed in a range of ways, from supplementing diet with bush foods, cleaning and salting skins, cooking and so on. Stories from this time are found in many popular biographies and are remembered with fondness and pride around the campfire. It is recognised that Traditional Owners have much valuable knowledge of the land and it is an objective of this Plan to incorporate this knowledge into how the Park is managed.

Effective governance is a high priority for the joint management partners. Policies and guidelines will continue to be developed and refined by the partners in addition to those outlined in this Plan. The Plan outlines aims and management actions relating to the values of the Park. It also outlines monitoring and evaluation of actions, and processes to be followed so that management is adaptive and looks continually toward improvement. This will mean that the Park's natural and cultural values are maintained for generations to come, visitors continue to enjoy the Park, joint management enjoys widespread community support and Traditional Owners benefit from the partnership.



*Plate 1: All wetland areas of the Park are open to recreational fishing*  
Photo courtesy Tourism NT

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## Vision for Mary River National Park

Through a cooperative joint management partnership:

- The Park's wetland experiences, important habitat and significant breeding and feeding grounds are protected;
- Healthy country and culture are maintained for future generations;
- Visitors understand, respect and enjoy the Park's natural and cultural heritage; and
- Business and the wider community are engaged, with partnerships established benefitting all.



*Plate 2: Photography is a popular visitor activity within the Park*

### 1. Introduction

Located approximately 100 km east of Darwin, the 112,000 hectare Mary River National Park (the Park) includes sections of the lower and middle Mary River Catchment (see Map 1). The Park consists of fourteen parcels of land forming eight separate 'islands' within an extensive wetland complex that stretches from the Adelaide River in the west to the East Alligator River in the east and comprises some of the most extensive freshwater swamplands in Australia.

The land parcels that make up the Park listed from north to south are Point Stuart Coastal Reserve, Stuart's Tree Historical Reserve, Mary River Conservation Reserve, Point Stuart Road Corridor, Alligator Lagoon, Swim Creek, Shady Camp, Opium Creek, Boggy Springs, Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest, Wildman River, Annaburroo Delta Block, Mary River Crossing and McKinlay Sector (see Table 1 and Map 1). Declaration of Mary River National Park for 12 of the Park's 14 land parcels occurred in January 2012. Mary River Conservation Reserve was declared part of the Park in June 2012 while Stuart's Tree was declared an Historical Reserve in November 2002.

Whilst the Mary River is a major focus of the Park for visitors and sections of the banks of the Mary River are part of the Park, the river itself is a public waterway and is not part of the Park

*per se*. This means that activities on the Mary River may impact the Park but are largely outside the control of Park managers. A significant proportion of people accessing the Mary River and associated billabongs do so through the Park. Entry to the accessible sections of the Park is from the Arnhem Highway or from the Point Stuart Road off the Arnhem Highway.

**Table 1.** Reservation status for each land parcel within Mary River National Park.

Site Name	Size in hectares	Portion	Owner (tenure)
Point Stuart Coastal Reserve	5,154 ha	NTP 4435	CLC (Freehold)
Stuart's Tree Historical Reserve	4 ha	NTP 971	Crown Reserve 1166
Alligator Lagoon	277 ha	NTP 2718	CLC (Freehold)
Point Stuart Road Corridor	262 ha	NTP 4111	CLC (CLP 1205)
Swim Creek	128 ha	NTP 4433	CLC (Freehold)
Shady Camp	636 ha	NTP 4063	CLC (Freehold)
Opium Creek	210 ha	NTP 2723	CLC (CLP 941)
Boggy Springs	36 ha	NTP 2722	CLC (CLP 940)
Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest	194 ha	NTP 2721	CLC (CLP 939)
Wildman River	14,810 ha	NTP 2622	CLC (CLP 338)
Annaburroo Delta Block	7,690 ha	NTP 4121	CLC (CLP 1255)
Mary River Crossing Reserve	2,590 ha	NTP 1832	CLC (Freehold)
McKinlay Sector	51,340 ha	NTP 4425	CLC (CLP 1466)
Mary River Conservation Reserve	27,910 ha	NTP 2013	CLC (CLP 1548)*

NTP – Northern Territory Portion; CLC – Conservation Land Corporation; CLP – Crown Lease Perpetual

\*This portion is under a lease agreement for grazing with Marrakai Station until 2020.

## 1.1 Key Values

The key values of the Park are:

- **Natural** – The extensive wetland and floodplain systems are rich in biodiversity. Two international Sites of Conservation Significance cover approximately fifty per cent of the Park's area; two nationally-significant wetlands cover parts of the Park, including the entire Mary River floodplain; Mary River is noted as the most significant and reliable breeding habitat for magpie geese in the Northern Territory, and as important breeding and feeding grounds for water, shore and sea-birds. The Park provides important habitat for large numbers of freshwater and saltwater (estuarine) crocodiles.
- **Cultural** – The Mary River floodplain is a resource-rich environment and it has supported large numbers of people through the ages. The pathways of ancestral spiritual beings, or Dreamings, are located throughout the region. Dreamings are recorded in a number of sacred sites located through the Park (Mearnes 2009). There are more than 20 sacred sites registered within the Park and many more remain unrecorded. The Dreamings are the spiritual connection between Indigenous people and the land and are a highly significant part of their being. Men's ceremonies have been held in the Park within living memory and there are a number of sites associated with women's traditions (Mearnes 2009).
- **Recreational** – The Mary River floodplain is one of the most important recreational fishing sites in the Northern Territory. Other recreation activities offered in the Park include four

wheel driving, boating, camping, walking, wildlife viewing and nature photography.

- **Historical** – The Park contains a number of nationally and regionally significant historical sites including a rock cairn at Chambers Bay commemorating the explorer John McDouall Stuart who was the first European to cross Australia from south to north in 1862.



*Plate 3: The Park provides important wetland habitat for plants and animals*

## 1.2 Purpose of the Park

Mary River National Park will be managed to retain its character and maintain its heritage and natural resources. The Park will provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the landscape and wildlife and at the same time learn about its cultural and natural heritage. Limilngan and Uwynmil traditional knowledge and values will be protected and integrated into management of the Park.

## 1.3 Objectives of the Plan

This is the first Joint Management Plan (the Plan) to be prepared for Mary River National Park. A previous draft Plan was prepared and released for public comment in September 2011 and then disallowed by the Legislative Assembly in February 2013. This new Plan has been developed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (Parks and Wildlife Commission) and the Limilngan and Uwynmil Traditional Owners for the Park, with assistance from the Northern Land Council and other key stakeholder groups, including the tourism industry and recreational groups. It was prepared in accordance with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* (TPWC Act), and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) registered with the National Native Title Tribunal pursuant to the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). This Plan has been written for the joint management partners, to guide and support them in joint management. It is also a public document by which the public may learn about the Park, its values and management.

This Plan explains how the partners will work together to look after the Park. It provides actions for operational planning and day-to-day programs and sets objectives against which performance will be measured. It provides for the ongoing conservation of the Park's significant natural and cultural values, continued public use and enjoyment and ensures that future



development of the Park is appropriate. It shows how public interests in the Park will be best served while recognising that the Park is of deep cultural and spiritual significance to the Traditional Owners.

Management Actions stated within this Plan have been given a priority rating of Low, Medium or High. This rating is purely a guide and implementation of many of these actions is subject to the availability of resources.

This Joint Management Plan will remain in effect until amended or replaced by a new plan, preferably within ten years.

## 1.4 Joint Management

Joint management means the Park is being managed in partnership by the Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Traditional Owners of the Park. Joint management is about the partners exchanging their knowledge and expertise, solving problems and sharing decisions. It is about considering the interests of the wider community and liaising with stakeholders. And it is about achieving shared goals and aspirations, a richer visitor experience, protected natural and cultural values and opportunities for Traditional Owners

The joint management partners for Mary River National Park are the Northern Territory of Australia (Territory) and the traditional Aboriginal owners (Traditional Owners). The Territory is represented by the Parks and Wildlife Commission which carries out the Territory's joint management obligations. For the purposes of this Joint Management Plan, references to the Parks and Wildlife Commission as a joint management partner should be read as a reference to the Territory. When this Plan refers to the partners it refers to both groups of Traditional Owners, the Limilngan and Uwynmil People, and the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Mary River National Park was listed on Schedule 3 of the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act* in June 2005. This means the Traditional Owners do not hold title to the land. The terms of joint management for the Park are established under the TPWC Act and an ILUA signed in March 2005. Among other conditions, the ILUA establishes the joint management of the Park for 99 years.



Plate 4: Joint Managers - Members of the Mary River Joint Management Committee

**For the Traditional Owners joint management means:**

Working together with Rangers to manage country and to have a place to teach, learn and share knowledge and culture for generations to come as well as gain social and economic benefit from the Park.

**For the partnership joint management means:**

Making decisions together and sharing knowledge through open communication. The joint management partners believe in the long-term environmental and human outcomes gained by forging a strong, cooperative joint management arrangement for Mary River National Park.

**Traditional Owners**

The Limilngan and Uwynmil are the Traditional Owners of Mary River National Park and have a long and complex association with the area. Both groups were signatories to the ILUA for the Park. Limilngan People and Uwynmil People come from two distinct groups from two different areas within the Park. They do not necessarily share one voice. The two groups of Traditional Owners come from closely related family groups and are descendants of Traditional Owners who worked first in the crocodile industry and then later in the buffalo, cattle and pastoral industries.

The Traditional Owners of this area have continued to live and work on the land for many generations. In more recent times, opportunities for families to continue to work and live on their traditional lands became more limited. However, the traditional rights and responsibility to look after their land, culture, and families have always remained and have continued to be handed down through the generations via accepted traditions and cultural practice.

The Traditional Owners believe that joint management will allow them to once again work on country to balance their traditional values with modern responsibilities. As custodians of this land, Traditional Owners value the opportunity to share their rich knowledge with Parks and Wildlife Commission staff and visitors to the Park. They look forward to building a partnership with the community and with the Parks and Wildlife Commission to see that the Park is managed in accordance with traditional values.

**Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory**

The Parks and Wildlife Commission recognises that Mary River National Park, with its strong natural and cultural values and myriad of recreational activities close to Darwin, is a highly-significant Park amongst the Northern Territory's considerable conservation estate. The Parks and Wildlife Commission is dedicated to conserving these values while providing high-quality nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities for visitors. The Parks and Wildlife Commission is committed to engaging the public and working with the interests of the wider community. The Parks and Wildlife Commission is committed to seeing that the partnership grows and becomes truly equitable and that the Traditional Owners benefit culturally, socially and economically from joint management.

This Plan has been developed by the partners in a positive spirit. Like the Traditional Owners of the Park, the Parks and Wildlife Commission is optimistic about the future.

## **1.5 Zoning**

Mary River National Park is managed for multiple purposes, including nature conservation, the provision of a range of visitor experiences and the protection of cultural values. Different areas of the Park will be managed differently, usually with greater emphasis on one of these purposes.

A zoning scheme is a general summary of the purpose and focus of management for all areas of the Park based on the specific values of those areas and their level of visitor access and facility development.

The zoning scheme (see Table 2 and Map 1) indicates management intent at the time of this Plan's preparation. It is not intended to be the basis for regulation of access or development. With consultation, the zones may be changed during the term of this Plan to provide for improved protection of values and / or enhancement of visitor opportunities. Changes to the zoning scheme will require amendment of this Plan.

#### Aim

- Park values protected whilst encouraging public enjoyment, education and recreation.
- Joint management partners working together to make informed, consistent, transparent and accountable decisions that allow the Traditional Owners to meet their obligations to country.

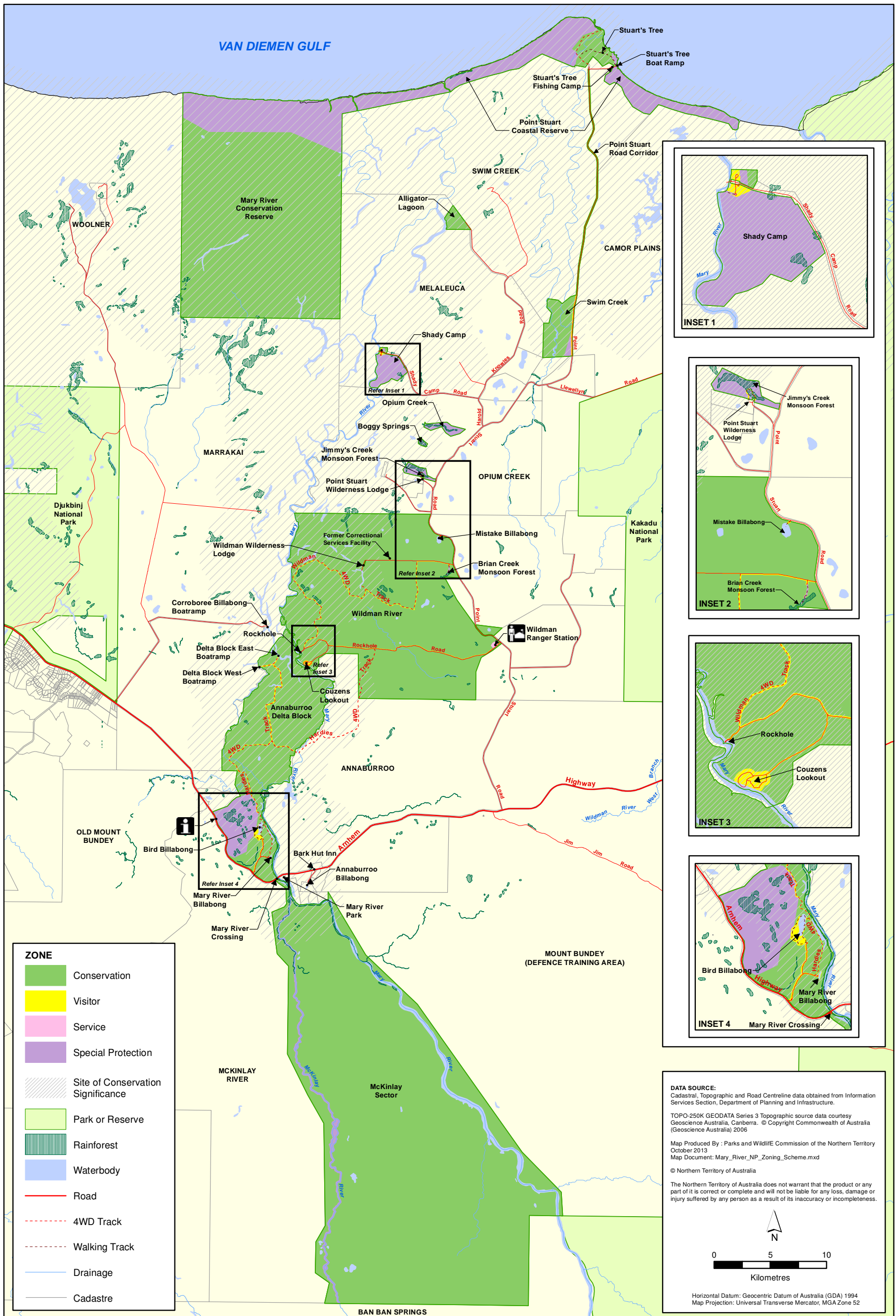
#### Management Actions

1. The Park will be managed in accordance with the zoning scheme. Regardless of the designated zone all management and development will have regard to maintaining the Park's natural character, its conservation values and visitor experiences. (*Ongoing*)
2. The value of some isolated land parcels within Mary River National Park will be assessed during the life of the Plan. (*High*)
3. Any new proposed development will be subject to consultation and permissions in accordance with legislated environmental, sacred site and heritage assessment processes. (*Ongoing*)
4. The partners will consult with other stakeholders and their concerns and ideas considered before major changes are made to the zoning scheme. (*Ongoing*)
5. To protect sites of exceptional cultural or conservation significance from threatening processes, special protection zones can be designated by the partners in consultation with stakeholders. (*Ongoing*)

**Table 2.** Zoning Scheme Summary for Mary River National Park.

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Visitor Activities</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Management Strategy</b>
<b>Visitor</b>	To provide for high levels of visitor use close to major attractions with infrastructure and facilities.	Formed gravel roads or unsealed tracks, mostly suitable for conventional vehicles. Some unsealed tracks are suitable for four wheel drive vehicles only. Access may be restricted for part of the year due to flooding and road conditions.	Developed visitor experience with a moderate level of regulation, including camping, fishing, walking, wildlife viewing and interpretation. Commercial activities and supporting infrastructure.	Boat ramps, short walking tracks, toilets and camping and picnic areas close to access routes. Orientation information and interpretation provided at main visitor nodes. High standard but basic visitor facilities (reflecting the level and type of use).	Visitor information, control and monitoring. Weed control, fire management.
<b>Service</b>	To provide for Park management and operation facilities.	Emergency contact and / or regulated experience supervised by Park managers.	Regulated access supervised by Park managers.	Management facilities only, offices, workshops, accommodation, utility maintenance facilities.	Maintenance of management facilities and services.
<b>Special Protection</b>	To protect significant natural and cultural values, includes the Mount Bunday Hills, the tidal mudflats of Chambers Bay and Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest.	Public access by permit only. Access for approved programs and for cultural activities for Traditional Owners, consistent with directions of the partners.	Management activities and highly regulated visitor experiences consistent with any restrictions directed by the partners.	Facilities appropriate to protect the site e.g. interpretive signs and barriers.	Management of natural and cultural values as required.
<b>Conservation and Dispersed Use</b>	To manage the vast majority of the Park for the protection of natural and cultural features. Access is limited due to seasonal flooding.	Four wheel drive access. More remote and self-guided visitor experiences. Mainly suitable for nature / cultural based tourism i.e. Specialist Tours (commercial / concessions) and self-reliant travellers. Permit approved commercial activities allowed.	Largely restricted for management purposes. Overnight walking and camping by permit only.	Basic visitor facilities may be provided including formed walking tracks and marked four wheel drive tracks. New development may occur subject to approval through legislated environmental, sacred site and heritage assessment processes.	Main focus on natural and cultural values and fire, weed and feral animal control programs. Maintain walking tracks, and four wheel drive tracks. Monitor visitor impacts on the natural values.

Map 1: Mary River National Park Zoning



## 2. Governance

For the purposes of joint management the term ‘governance’ means how the partners organise themselves to work towards their vision. It includes all aspects of communication, partnership, planning and decision-making. It is recognised by the partners that the joint management partnership will need to keep growing and improving through commitment and gaining new skills in governance.

To be successful, the partners must look after the Park in a way that meets the values and interests of the Parks and Wildlife Commission, the Limilngan People, the Uwynmil People, and the wider community. The partners agree that:

- Statutory responsibilities and obligations are primary considerations;
- Decision-making will be equitably shared;
- Planning and decision-making must identify and manage risks;
- Management priorities are guided by the requirement to protect the Park’s key values;
- Resources will be prioritised annually and used efficiently;
- Engagement and employment of Traditional Owners in management operations is central to joint management success; and
- Joint management will be monitored so the partnership can continue to improve.

### 2.1 Planning and Decision-Making

The partners have agreed to manage the Park for the benefit of Traditional Owners and the wider community and to be accountable to each other and to the wider community for planning and decision-making. The partners will need to plan and make decisions largely related to operational plans and strategies, permits, licences and leases, and infrastructure development (see Table 3, Figure 1). The partners may also be required to develop or comment on guidelines, standard operating procedures and policies that influence management of Mary River National Park where these differ significantly from overarching Parks and Wildlife Commission policy.

#### Building Effective Governance through Monitoring and Evaluation

This Plan sets out a framework for the Park’s governance. By monitoring joint management, the partners will be able to identify problems and make changes early, and in doing so, continue to improve and build strong governance over time. Key areas to be monitored include implementation of annually agreed priorities, accomplishment of the performance measures at the back of this Plan (see Appendix 1) and achievement toward the longer-term Aims relating to country, culture and visitors.

#### A Partnership Approach

The partners know and agree that:

- Success depends on a strong partnership built on mutual trust and respect and clear communication;
- A good understanding of the principles of effective governance and good decision-making is needed to properly meet legal obligations;
- Two-way learning and time spent together on country is critical for developing mutual trust,

respect and understanding between the partners. Both partners want to share and incorporate their knowledge into Park management;

- Having clear roles and responsibilities will also help the partners to properly exercise their legal obligations and be accountable for their management of the Park;
- Park managers are accountable to the wider community, and the partners will need to engage with and consider their interests when making decisions to maintain good working relationships with their neighbours and the wider community; and
- Traditional Aboriginal decision-making needs to be respected.

The partners have agreed to a small Joint Management Committee as a practical means to share responsibility and accountability for planning and decision-making for the Park. As joint management requires a practical relationship, a flexible approach to decision-making is required. The partners will promote an open, transparent approach to problem solving and making management decisions together. Figure 1 outlines the planning and decision-making process for this Park and shows how the partners contribute.

### Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Effective governance requires clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the people and groups involved (see Table 3 and Figure 1). The distinction between direction setting, planning, policy, routine decisions and day-to-day action is very important.

**Traditional Owners** provide an essential contribution to the direction and management of the Park. Particular Traditional Owners may be custodians for specific areas or traditions and have responsibilities for decision-making and overseeing cultural protocol relating to these areas. Traditional Owners also have responsibilities for managing traditional knowledge and passing it on to the right people, looking after the land and its resources, maintaining sacred sites and keeping the country healthy. Traditional Owners are responsible to the land, their law and culture. Traditional Owners expect Rangers to make routine decisions. Traditional Owners may be involved in both roles if they are employed as Rangers by the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

**Parks and Wildlife Commission** staff are responsible for day-to-day management of the Park. This includes funding and providing resources for the Park's ongoing management, including administrative functions, staffing, infrastructure and visitor services. The Parks and Wildlife Commission includes on-ground staff and those who provide them with support. All Parks and Wildlife Commission employees are responsible to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife and the head of the agency. The Parks and Wildlife Commission must consider this Park in the broader context of the Northern Territory's network of parks and reserves.

**Northern Territory Government** departments will work collaboratively with the partners to provide advice, support and services for particular issues within the Park. For example the Weed Management Branch from the Department of Land Resource Management or relevant government agency, provides expert advice on weed issues and control.

The **Northern Land Council** has an important role in supporting joint management. The TPWC Act defines the Northern Land Council's role as primarily to represent and protect the interests of Traditional Owners in Park management.

The **Mary River Joint Management Committee (MRJMC)** includes representatives of each of the joint management partners and at the time of this Plan's preparation membership consists of two senior Parks and Wildlife Commission staff and seven Traditional Owner representatives. Currently the quorum for MRJMC meetings is two Parks and Wildlife Commission staff and four of the seven Traditional Owner members. The MRJMC's role is to set the broad direction for management of the

Park through planning and policy development, but does not have a direct role in day-to-day operations. To allow for greater flexibility in decision-making, the MRJMC may choose to establish Working Groups to carry out projects associated with the implementation of this Plan.

Committee members are responsible for representing the shared knowledge, interests and concerns of their group. They also have a responsibility to pass information back to the wider Traditional Owner group, local community and key stakeholders. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will maintain regular formal and informal contact and engagement with Traditional Owners members of the MRJMC throughout the year. The Northern Land Council will provide support where required.

## Resolving Disputes

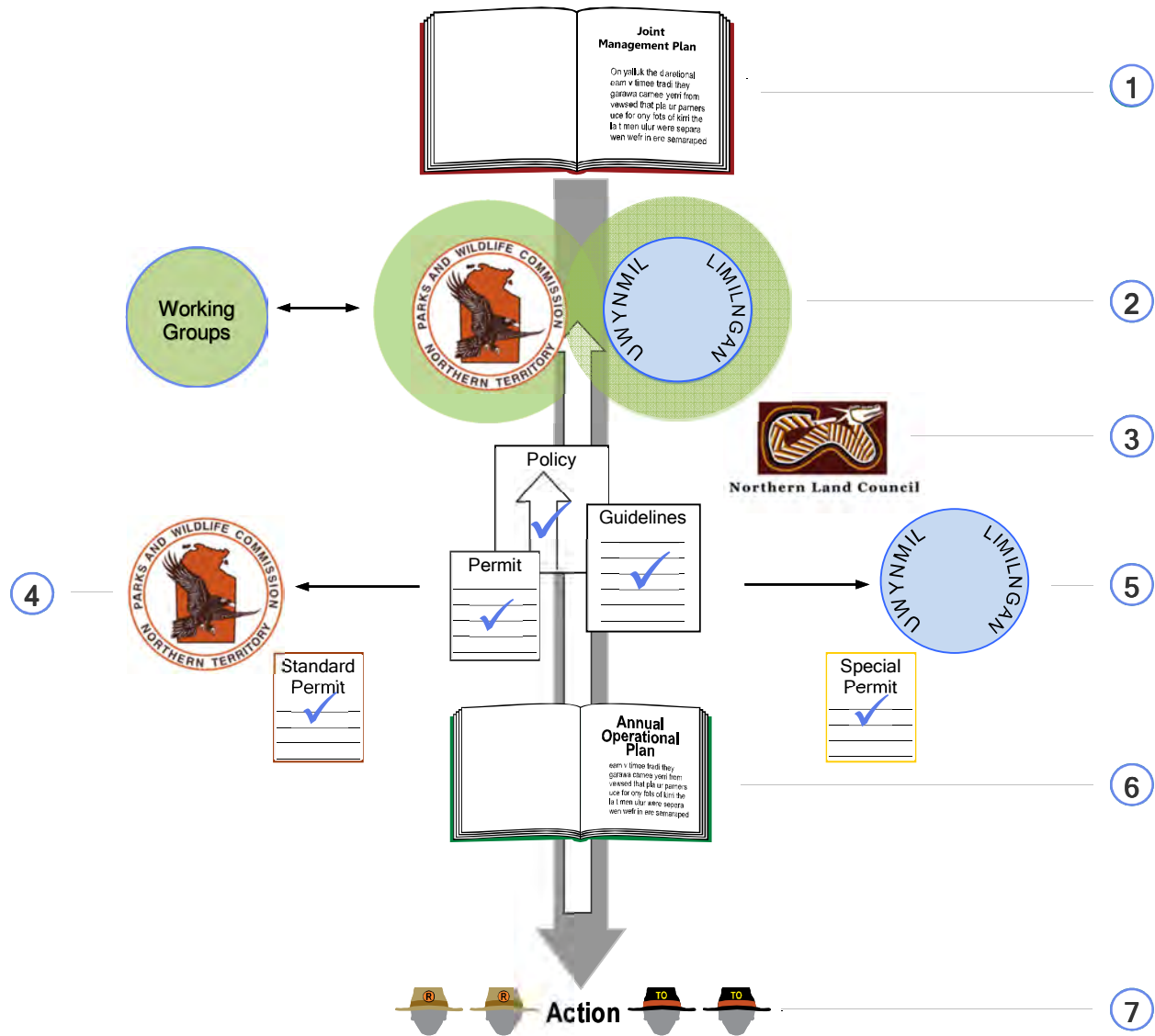
The Parks and Wildlife Commission, Limilngan People and Uwynmil People know that they all need to continue to communicate clearly and openly with one another and that communication within the wider group of Traditional Owners needs to stay strong. However, from time to time disputes may occur. The partners will aim to resolve disputes through open discussion and communication, involving the Northern Land Council as required or requested by the Traditional Owners. However, should a dispute arise between the partners that cannot be resolved, the parties agree to jointly appoint an independent mediator to facilitate a mutually acceptable decision. If the Limilngan People and the Uwynmil People disagree with one another then the Northern Land Council will facilitate the mediation process, independent of the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

**Table 3.** Decision-making framework for Mary River National Park

<b>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Mary River Joint Management Committee</b>	<b>Parks and Wildlife Commission Operational Staff</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise responsibility for the management of the Park</li> <li>• Provide strategic management direction and advice to Park operations</li> <li>• Endorse annual operational programs and allocated operational budget for the Park</li> <li>• Endorse policy and assist with development of procedural direction</li> <li>• Consider commercial and development proposals in line with agreed planning and approval processes and guidelines</li> <li>• Delegate tasks to Working Groups as appropriate</li> <li>• Monitor, evaluate and report on the progress and effectiveness of joint management</li> <li>• Engage with other stakeholders at the strategic level</li> <li>• Consider other proposals or issues not otherwise specified in this Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Day-to-day management of the Park</li> <li>• Implement operational plans, policy and procedures as endorsed by the MRJMC</li> <li>• Use best endeavours to employ Aboriginal people in the management of the Park</li> <li>• Monitor commercial operations and compliance with the TPWC Act, By-laws, permits and agreements</li> <li>• Liaise with stakeholders and neighbours</li> <li>• Be accountable to the Northern Territory Government</li> <li>• Report progress annually to the MRJMC</li> <li>• Issue permits according to policy and guidelines endorsed by the partners</li> <li>• Develop operational plans and allocate resources to deliver (in consultation with Traditional Owners for endorsement of the MRJMC)</li> <li>• Routine decisions necessary to implement approved operational plans.</li> </ul>



**Figure 1.** Planning and decision-making process for Mary River National Park



- 1 The **Joint Management Plan** says how the joint management partners intend to manage the Park together for the benefit of the wider community and Traditional Owners in accordance with the law.
- 2 The **Mary River Joint Management Committee (MRJMC)** is a representative decision-making body that will meet to consider permit applications and endorse agreed operational plans, policies and guidelines. Flexible approaches to decision-making, such as Working Groups and on country camps, will also be applied.
- 3 The **Northern Land Council** is responsible for consulting with and protecting the interests of Traditional Owners and supporting the Mary River Joint Management Committee.
- 4 Senior **Parks and Wildlife Commission** staff approve standard permits in accordance with policies and guidelines agreed by the partners (see Table 5).
- 5 The full **Traditional Owners** group including native title holders may need to be consulted regarding the approval for some permits, especially those permits related to licensing for use of the Park as outlined in the guidelines agreed to by the partners.
- 6 **Operational Plans** include five year strategies for key management programs and annual action plans that guide day-to-day management and implementation of key management programs.
- 7 **Action** involves Rangers and Traditional Owners working together to carry out agreed management programs.

### Aims

- Governing efficiently and effectively to facilitate decisions for the benefit of the Park, the partnership and the wider community.
- Open communication and mutual understanding between Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Commission, and the partners satisfied with joint management.

### Management Actions

6. **The Partners** (see Figure 1) – The partners will meet at MRJMC meetings, Working Groups and on country camps as well as individually as required, allowing for a flexible approach to decision-making. MRJMC meetings are held at least once per year with the date and location agreed to by the members well in advance of the meeting. Traditional Owners involved in the Committee and Working Groups will be paid for their service consistent with the Parks and Wildlife Commission Fee for Service policy. (*Ongoing*)
7. **Supporting and building the partnership** – The Northern Land Council will represent and support Traditional Owners’ interests by aiding consultations and (if needed) resolving conflict. The partners and Northern Land Council recognise that joint management will be a process of continuous learning and growth. Governance support and training will be provided to the partners by the Northern Land Council and the Parks and Wildlife Commission focusing on the needs identified by the monitoring and evaluation program (Management Action [MA] 9). Disputes will be resolved according to the process outlined in section 2.1. (*Ongoing*)
8. **Communication** – MRJMC members will be responsible for two-way communication with the wider Traditional Owner group, local community, key stakeholders (neighbours, commercial operators, recreational groups), operational staff and higher levels of government with support from the Northern Land Council as required. (*Ongoing*)
9. **Monitoring and evaluation program** – A monitoring and evaluation program will be developed by the MRJMC to inform action for improved governance. Performance will be measured using indicators relating to satisfaction of the MRJMC members, effectiveness of the partnership and progress towards the longer-term aims stated in this Plan. (*Moderate*)
10. **Dealing with proposals not in the Plan** – Any proposal not addressed in the Plan will be considered by the MRJMC. Any matter that may affect the interests of Traditional Owners will require the consent of the relevant Traditional Owners. Any environmental, sacred site or heritage matters will be assessed in accordance with relevant legislation. (*Ongoing*)

### Performance Measures

- Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Program instigated.
- The partners are satisfied with the implementation of annual priorities and decision-sharing processes.
- Achievements related to the longer-term aims stated in this Plan (culture, country and visitors).

### 3. Natural Values

Mary River National Park is one of the Northern Territory's most important Parks for biodiversity conservation. Many of the Park's natural values are internationally or nationally significant and are highly important to Traditional Owners. Park Rangers and the Limilngan and Uwynmil Traditional Owners share a deep respect for the land and want to look after it for future generations. They share concerns about the threats to the land including uncontrolled fire, weeds, feral animals and the threat posed by predicted climate change. The partners and the wider community will work together to maintain healthy country into the future.



Plate 5: Magpie geese numbers within the Park sometimes exceed 400,000 birds

As a Class 1 park for biodiversity (see section 6.1, MA 11), Mary River National Park has been identified as requiring a 5 to 10 year Integrated Conservation Strategy (ICS). The ICS will set well-defined objectives and measurable targets for the most important values and threats to the Park and will give a clear understanding as to the conservation successes of the Park. The ICS comprises an adaptive management approach which involves regular evaluation of results and subsequent adjustment of actions so that management of the Park is at an optimum. Results of the Park's ICS will feed into the Management Effectiveness Framework biennial performance review.

#### 3.1 Significant Conservation Areas

Sites of Conservation Significance are those areas containing special biodiversity values that require additional protection. They are classified according to their value for threatened species, aggregations of wildlife, wetlands, endemic species and botanical significance. The Northern Territory Government (NT Government) has identified 67 of the most important sites for biodiversity conservation in the Northern Territory. The recognition of these sites imposes no additional regulatory or legislative requirements over the land, over and above any particular existing requirements of the area. This Plan acknowledges the classifications of Harrison *et al* (2009) in their assessment of sites of conservation significance. Two sites in Mary River National Park have been classified as Sites of Conservation Significance for biodiversity (see Map 1).

##### Chambers Bay (International Significance)

Mary River National Park protects 19% of the Chambers Bay Site of Conservation Significance (Harrison *et al* 2009). This includes the saline and tidal mudflats in the Point Stuart Coastal Reserve and the Mary River Conservation Reserve (see Map 1). Chambers Bay is part of a wetland of national

importance for its extensive coastal samphire and saline tidal flats, which support large concentrations of migratory shorebirds (Environment Australia 2001).

### Mary River Coastal Floodplains (International Significance)

Mary River National Park forms part of the Mary River coastal floodplains Site of Conservation Significance (Harrison *et al.* 2009). The floodplain includes a complex mosaic of wet and dry habitats which support large and diverse populations of waterbirds. The floodplain is the most significant and reliable breeding site for magpie geese in the NT, and numbers sometimes exceed 400,000 birds. The floodplain environments provide a major breeding area for many fish species, including barramundi. Twelve threatened species can be found in the coastal floodplains and associated habitat in the Park.

The Mary River wetlands have been nominated as an internationally Important Bird Area for the abundance and significance of its waterbird and shorebird populations (BirdLife Australia 2005-2007).

## 3.2 Flora

A total of 763 plant species are recorded for the Park, of which four are listed as threatened. Two of the threatened plants, *Goodenia quadrifida* (nationally endangered, data deficient in the Territory), and *Schoutenia ovata* (vulnerable), are only reserved in this Park. Endangered species *Helicteres macrothrix* is conserved within Mary River National Park and a population of 100 plants were translocated to George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens in 2014 as a result of a quarry expansion (Extractive Mineral Lease 27133) within the Annaburroo Delta Block. The habitat of the fourth, *Cycas armstrongii* (vulnerable), is being cleared elsewhere and the Park may play an increasing role in its conservation.

The Park supports patches of monsoon rainforest that are a distinct and fragmented vegetation community once widespread across northern Australia. These communities support diverse and distinct flora and fauna assemblages.

There are also healthy examples of the tall open eucalypt forests that are restricted to the higher rainfall areas of the Top End. These forests are dominated by Darwin stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*) and Darwin woollybutt (*E. miniata*) with a sorghum grassland understorey and support a diverse range of fauna. An increasing amount of this habitat is being cleared across the Top End for horticulture and forestry. The open eucalypt forests in this Park will become increasingly important for biodiversity conservation.



Plate 6: *Melaleuca* swamps provide valuable nesting and roosting sites for many bird species

### 3.3 Fauna

A total of 333 vertebrate species including nine threatened species have been recorded in the Park.

Mary River National Park is one of only three Parks where the vulnerable yellow-snouted gecko (*Lucasium occultum*) and the endangered Alligator River subspecies of the yellow chat (*Epthianura crocea tunneyi*) are found and the Park is critically important for their conservation.

The impact of the cane toad (*Rhinella marina*) has been great as it appears that the critically endangered northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*) is no longer present in the Park and populations of two vulnerable goanna species (*Varanus mertensi* and *V. panoptes*) are thought to have significantly declined.

The partridge pigeon (*Geophaps smithii*) and Gouldian finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*) are threatened grassland and woodland birds that require larger areas for their conservation than that solely supplied by Mary River National Park. Protection and maintenance of habitat for these species will require cooperative management with neighbouring property managers.

Due to their sheer numbers within the Park, common species are considered to be of great significance. Common species include magpie geese and other waterfowl, along with saltwater (estuarine) crocodiles. Magpie geese (*Anseranus semipalmata*) occur in large numbers across the floodplain environments, migrating from one area to the next in an annual cycle. Around March the geese nest in areas of *Hymenachne acutigluma* and *Oryza rufipogon* found in the Wildman and Mary River Conservation Reserve sectors. The geese move to sedgeland dominated by *Eleocharis* spp. from April to July while they are rearing their young, then spread out to various sites before the nesting season comes around again (Pederson 2002).



Plate 7: Magpie geese feeding amongst the water lilies on the Mary River floodplains

During twenty years of ongoing monitoring of freshwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus johnstoni*) in the McKinlay River, the population has remained mostly unaffected by human activity. As a result this population is used as a scientific reference site for determining the status of crocodile populations elsewhere in the world (Pederson 2002). The Park also supports large numbers of mature saltwater (estuarine) crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*), and is often touted as the best place to see large (four metre plus) saltwater (estuarine) crocodiles.

## 3.4 Threats

The major threat to the biodiversity values of the Park is the loss of species richness and diversity of habitat through the invasion of weeds, uncontrolled fires, activities of feral animals and saltwater intrusion. Weeds are currently the most significant threat. The fragmented nature of the Park adds a layer of complexity to the management of landscape threats with the isolated portions of the Park, such as Alligator Lagoon, being particularly vulnerable. These isolated portions are mostly surrounded by pastoral properties used for cattle grazing, where improved pastures are planted that act as weeds inside the Park. In the longer term (five years plus) the impacts of climate change also pose a significant threat to biodiversity values.

### Weeds

Weeds represent a major threat to the biodiversity values of the Park and if left unmanaged will significantly alter the structure of the ecosystems. Consequently, management of key weeds is a very high priority action for the Park. Unfortunately eradication of some species over large areas is generally not feasible. Management is therefore focussed on eradication and control in select areas and of priority species.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission has a legislative responsibility under the Northern Territory *Weeds Management Act 2001* to control the spread of declared weeds and in some cases eradicate them from the Park estate. All attempts must be made to eradicate Category A Weeds; Category B Weeds must be contained and controlled; and Category C Weeds must not be brought into the Northern Territory. Currently 64 weed species have been recorded in the Mary River catchment, however the resources are not available to control every weed species. The current highest priority weeds for control in Mary River National Park and their categorisation under the Act are:

- Olive hymenachne (B: *Hymenachne amplexicaulis*) and mimosa (B: *Mimosa pigra*), in the wetlands – these species have the potential to colonise the whole floodplain, excluding native species and reducing wetland habitat diversity. They also displace native Hymenachne species that provide an important food source for magpie geese.
- Gamba grass (B: *Andropogon gayanus*) and mission grass (B: *Pennisetum polystachion*), in the woodlands – these invasive species have the potential to displace native species, including the endangered species *Helicteres macrothrix*, and reduce habitat diversity. They also fuel intense wildfires in the late Dry season that are difficult to control and can burn large areas.

Consultation and cooperative weed management will be undertaken with neighbouring property managers to reduce spread between properties.

### Feral Animals

Feral animals can have a major impact on the natural values of the Park. They can erode fragile soils, spread weeds and exotic diseases and compete with native animals for food and habitat. There have been 16 exotic animal species recorded within the Park. The complete eradication of all feral animals in the Park is not feasible and there are no long-term control methods for some species.

The key feral animals affecting the Park that can potentially be managed are:

- Pigs (*Sus scrofa*) – open up areas through physical disturbance and by inhibiting regeneration. Disturbed areas are vulnerable to weed invasions and erosion, particularly in drainage lines and forest. Pigs often cause major impacts in monsoon rainforest.
- Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) – trample sensitive vegetation, degrade freshwater habitats, spread weeds and cause erosion, and can significantly impact on nesting habitat of magpie geese and crocodiles. Large numbers of buffalo have contributed to the destruction of natural levees

separating the wetland from the sea resulting in the loss of wetland habitat due to salt water intrusion.

- Feral cattle (*Bos indicus*) – enter the Park from neighbouring properties through areas where fences are not maintained. Impacts are similar to buffalo but less severe in wetlands.

Integrating feral animal control with other threat abatement strategies is important. For example green pick regenerating after fire can attract grazing herbivores to an area where effective culling can occur. Options for control of these key feral species include exclusion from the Park via fencing, removal from the Park by mustering (stock and buffalo), population reduction via shooting (pigs and buffalo) and /or baiting (pigs).



*Plate 8: Feral animals such as pigs cause considerable damage to country*

Feral cats have well established populations in the Park and are a key threat to biodiversity. There is no formal control program for cats on Park, nor is any suitable broad scale control option available.

It is likely that cane toads reached the Park during 2001 and 2002 as they progressed from the south-east. There have been noticeable declines in native species such as goannas and quolls since that time. No practical broad scale control method is presently known for cane toads.

## Fire

The Australian landscape, its people and fire have a relationship that dates back tens of thousands of years. Fire was first used to shape the environment through the hands of Indigenous people, and more recently, park managers and landowners. The pattern of fire use and management has changed over the years, to the detriment of some habitats. Small-scale mosaic fires have shifted to more frequent and widespread wildfires.

Monsoon rainforests, riparian forests and swamplands are not well adapted to frequent hot fire and the naturally wet conditions provide some protection. Intense wildfires in the late Dry season that are fuelled by large stands of gamba grass (*A. gayanus*) and mission grass (*P. polystachion*) penetrate the margins of these communities, killing mature trees and removing groundcover. These areas are then susceptible to further disturbance from weed invasion and erosion, leading to unfavourable changes in structure, composition and the distribution and size of rainforest and riparian patches over time.

Woodlands require less frequent mosaic burning patterns to maintain a variety of burnt and unburnt areas and habitat diversity for wildlife. Less frequent, patchy, cool burns in the late Wet season and early Dry season can minimise the likelihood of large, intense fires.

The prevention and control of wildfire requires close collaboration with neighbouring landholders over many years. Informal and formal agreements, regional planning and on-ground work need to be developed between neighbouring pastoral, Aboriginal and reserved lands.

Long-term fire management goals will focus on protecting sacred sites, incorporating traditional burning practices, avoiding catastrophic wildfires, collaborating with neighbouring landholders and increasing community education. In addition to exploring traditional approaches to burning, fire management will require strategic fire breaks and fuel reduction burns.



*Plate 9: Undertaking early Dry season burning*

## Saltwater Intrusion

Much of the coastal floodplains north of Shady Camp are below sea level. They were originally separated from the sea by a series of parallel narrow sandy chenier ridges which are a legacy of the receding shoreline over the last 6,000 years. Since the 1940's these areas have undergone rapid changes with small tidal channels advancing inland, invading the freshwater swamps and billabongs and changing these environments from predominantly freshwater to saline. This saltwater intrusion is thought to have been caused by a number of inter-related activities including large numbers of water buffalos and deliberate destruction of natural levees.

Since 1987 a major saltwater control program by the NT Government has aimed to halt the expansion of saltwater channels into the freshwater floodplains of the Mary River. Construction of artificial levees has taken place, such as the off-Park barrage built across the river at Shady Camp. Over 2,000 hectares of freshwater grassland and Melaleuca swamps in the Coastal Reserve have since been restored. The program requires ongoing annual maintenance and repairs. There are no artificial levees or barrages located on Park land, however from a park management perspective controlling the number of buffalo and feral cattle on the floodplain helps reduce the degradation of natural levees.

Saltwater intrusion is likely to accelerate as climate change begins to take effect. One of the major effects of climate change is an anticipated rise in sea level with current estimates (Department of the Environment 2014) predicting sea levels could rise by nearly 1 meter by 2100 with a corresponding loss of coastal floodplain systems and wetland habitat. These calculations do not take into account other anticipated and compounding changes such as further saltwater intrusion or changes in hydrology and in weed and feral animal distributions and increased temperature. Future saltwater control and conservation activities in priority areas will be determined in consultation with the Traditional Owners.



## Aims

- Protecting and maintaining natural values of national and international significance including wetlands / floodplains, high species richness, wildlife aggregations, habitat diversity, and species of conservation significance.
- Incorporating Indigenous knowledge into Park operations wherever practicable and managing the Park to the satisfaction of the partners.

## Management Actions

11. **Integrated Conservation Strategy** – A planning team comprised of the park manager, a nominee of the MRJMC, scientists, stakeholders and a planner will prepare a five year Integrated Conservation Strategy for the Park, focusing on Park values and threats and monitoring health and outputs. As part of the strategy a long-term environmental monitoring program of the Park's most important wildlife values, including waterfowl, will be established. (*High*)
12. **Datasets** – Maintain data relating to inputs and outputs for threat abatement programs (weeds, feral animals, fire) to inform decision-making and using the best technology and methods available to the Parks and Wildlife Commission. (*High*)
13. **Operational plans** – The MRJMC will endorse the five year Integrated Conservation Strategy and annual work plans for conservation / threat abatement programs. Particular attention will be given to specific high value sites including floodplains, rainforest patches and grasslands. (*High*)
14. **Community liaison** – In conjunction with NT Government experts, liaise with the wider community, neighbouring landowners and adjoining Indigenous communities to complement management activities on Park, for assistance with managing the many separate portions of the Park, and to increase awareness of land management issues related to weeds, feral animals and fire. (*High*)
15. **Weed management** – Management of weeds will continue to take a strategic approach through implementation of the Integrated Conservation Strategy (MA 11) and the annually-reviewed operational plan. Weed control processes will be developed in conjunction with, and using the standards developed by NT Government experts, to ensure that Park operations comply with the *Weeds Management Act*, including all associated statutory management plans. (*High*)

Weed management will focus on practical control methods, practices to minimise the number of weeds being brought into the Park, effective survey and monitoring, and will incorporate the concerns of the Traditional Owners. Weed management will concentrate on the following:

- Control olive hymenachne, mimosa, gamba grass and mission grass in priority order as advised by the Weed Management Branch of the Department of Land Resource Management, or other relevant government agency;
  - Ongoing surveillance and mapping for high-risk weeds during Park patrols. Assess new weed incursions against legislative and statutory requirements, regional priorities and the current Park priority list before taking any action or altering existing priorities;
  - Mitigate weed spread by enforcing use of weed-free / clean equipment when undertaking development on-Park and implement other best practice quarantine procedures for Parks staff and equipment; and
  - Collect and map weed location data to monitor weed distribution and the effectiveness of weed control.
16. **Feral animal control** – Management of feral animals will be strategically managed through implementation of the Integrated Conservation Strategy (MA 11) and the annually-reviewed action plan. (*High*)  
Feral animal management will concentrate in priority order on the following:
    - Control pigs and buffalo particularly in rainforest patches and in sensitive riparian areas;
    - Maintain existing fences and install new fences in key locations including the south-eastern corner of the McKinlay sector; and

- Liaise with neighbours to maintain fences and to muster straying stock out of the Park at the end of the Wet season and as necessary at other times of the year.
17. **Fire management** – Fire will be strategically managed through implementation of the Integrated Conservation Strategy (MA 11) and the annually-reviewed action plan. (*High*)  
Fire management will concentrate in priority order on the following:
- Protect people, personal property, infrastructure and cultural sites from fire;
  - Protect the riverine corridor and riparian forests from hot fires through active management in the early Dry season;
  - Prevent fires from entering or exiting the Park and limit areas of the Park burnt through reducing fuel, maintaining firebreaks and protectively burning around high-value habitat;
  - Strategically mosaic burn in the early Dry season with patches preferably less than 2 ha. Ensure fires occur less than once every 5 years in savanna communities and less than once every 10 years in woodland habitats;
  - Reduce fuel loads by spraying, slashing, (pre and post Wet season) or burning invasive grasses (late Wet season);
  - Restrict open campfires within the Visitor Zone to designated fireplaces. In other zones, campfires may be permitted subject to conditions that minimise the impact and risk of uncontrolled fire; and
  - Involve the Park's neighbours and consider their interests.

#### Performance Measures

- Datasets maintained and information used to inform forward planning and adaptive management.
- Increasing communication and involvement with neighbouring landowners and communities.
- Annual operational action plans implemented with high priority actions and targets achieved.
- Coastal and floodplain systems in good condition.

## 4. Cultural Values



*Plate 10: Traditional Owners spending time together to discuss business*

### 4.1 Continuing Connection and Use

Continuing use of country and its resources is a core right and responsibility for Traditional Owners and one of the most important ways that Traditional Owners maintain and manage country. “Country has nourished the passing generations of Traditional Owner families over the thousands of years that people have occupied this land. To truly belong to country it is important to take food from it. Both the process of gathering food and the actual consumption are important. Both make people one with country and with their ancestors” (Mearnes 2009). Nothing in the TPWC Act limits the right of Aboriginal people who have traditionally used an area of land or water from continuing to use that area in accordance with Aboriginal tradition for hunting, food gathering and for ceremonial and religious purposes. The senior men and women of the Mary River area still recall the range of foods that were collected from country including goose eggs, fish, turtle, ducks, water python, lilies, freshwater mussels, red apples, green plums and yams. This is an important and productive landscape for the Traditional Owners.

Long absences from country mean that there has been very little traditional hunting for many years. The partners support Traditional Owners in changing this in the future through the establishment of camping areas for use by the Limilngan People and the Uwynmil People. These camping areas will be used to support the ‘back to country’ program, aimed at facilitating transfer of cultural knowledge to younger generations and Rangers. These areas will be used for traditional hunting and as an opportunity for Traditional Owners to teach their children and grandchildren about country and traditional law.

Aboriginal people who have traditional rights within the Park are permitted to hunt and gather on country for non-commercial purposes under section 122 of the TPWC Act. The partners agree that traditional hunting and gathering can be managed in a way that will not compromise visitor safety or wildlife conservation objectives of the Park.

#### Indigenous Knowledge

The Traditional Owners aspire to a strong culture by continuing to transfer knowledge to the younger generation. Traditional Owners are particularly keen to share knowledge so that visitors and the

wider community better understand and appreciate the cultural significance of the Limilngan and Uwynmil traditional lands that form the Park.



*Plate 11: Teaching the next generation about country helps keep culture strong*

Similarly, many visitors are very interested in Indigenous culture and the participation of Traditional Owners in the management of the Park provides opportunities to increase the level of cultural information presented in the Park. Traditional Owners will have the opportunity to actively participate in developing education and interpretation programs for the Park.

It is also important to the Traditional Owners that other Indigenous people follow proper cultural protocols when accessing country and exercising traditional rights. This means that they may need to remind family about their obligations through promoting cultural protocols and imparting knowledge about appropriate behaviour. This can be addressed through an education program and at on country camps.

Traditional Owners sometimes provide information to researchers and their contribution must be appropriately acknowledged particularly in published works. Traditional Owners may expect to share in any benefit if this knowledge is used for commercial purposes. Benefit sharing arrangements are negotiated for the partners and Traditional Owners with the assistance of the Northern Land Council during permit assessment processes.

Intellectual property rights and Aboriginal cultural knowledge need to be appropriately recognised and acknowledged, and the recording, presentation and the transfer of traditional knowledge managed in line with the wishes of Traditional Owners. The Traditional Owners are best placed to direct these processes because they require appropriate cultural authority to be managed properly. The Northern Land Council may assist the Traditional Owners to manage their traditional knowledge. Programs aimed at collecting cultural information for the benefit of park management and future generations of Traditional Owners may also be developed. The control, management and transfer of information collected during these programs remain the responsibility of Traditional Owners.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission acknowledge that cultural knowledge belongs to the Traditional Owners and will not use or permit to be used such knowledge without prior consent of the Traditional Owners. Wherever possible, the Parks and Wildlife Commission will assist the Traditional Owners assert their intellectual property rights consistent with Parks and Wildlife Commission policy and intellectual property law.

## 4.2 Sites of Significance for Indigenous People

The Mary River floodplain is intersected by the travels of ancestral spiritual beings and signs of their presence are the many sacred sites located throughout the Park. These pathways and sites are part of 'Dreamings' which belong to Limilngan and Uwynmil. The knowledge associated with these 'Dreamings' sites has many functions in Aboriginal culture including containing knowledge of traditional law which governs how people relate to country and the rules for caring for country.

Knowledge of sacred sites gives Limilngan and Uwynmil Traditional Owners authority under traditional law and is one of the most important ways they confirm and maintain their rights on country. For this reason they are concerned that these sites and the knowledge associated with them are properly managed.

Over 20 sacred sites have been documented and registered by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) in the Park and many more have been recorded. These sites and places have spiritual, mythological and ritual significance to Traditional Owners and encompass the knowledge and cultural practices exercised in managing them. Some of this knowledge is open and can be communicated widely but other knowledge is sacred and can only be passed on to those with appropriate authority. The management of Aboriginal sites will be guided by AAPA and the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act (NTASSA)* (see section 6.6).

The Traditional Owners observe complex sets of protocols and traditions to manage sacred sites and cultural information. Regulations relating to sites, stories and information of cultural significance may be established and communicated. Some sites may require additional physical protection such as fencing and interpretation, especially where they are close to visitor facilities or in parts of the Park regularly used. There are two sites that are of particular concern to Traditional Owners since they are located very close to access tracks and these tracks may need to be rerouted.

The many significant archaeological places belonging to Traditional Owners that have been identified in the Park include burial and ceremonial places as well as shell middens, stone scatters and stone arrangements. Aboriginal archaeological places and objects in the Northern Territory are protected by the *Heritage Act 2011* (see section 6.6). The Traditional Owners recall practicing a rich ceremonial life in the Mary River area and the abundance of archaeological material suggests that the area sustained a large population and vibrant culture. Ceremonial activity may sometimes require the temporary closure of small sections of the Park. Any temporary closure will not unduly affect visitor access to primary visitor areas.

## 4.3 European Historical Values

A number of sites associated with John McDouall Stuart's crossing of the Australian continent from south to north in 1862 can be found within Mary River National Park, including a memorial cairn at Stuart's Tree Historical Reserve. The expedition's purpose was to find a route for the Overland Telegraph Line which would connect Australia to the rest of the world. The Telegraph Line would ultimately open Central Australia to pastoralism and lead to a more permanent settlement in Northern Australia by non-Indigenous people. Significant Heritage places from the expeditions of John McDouall Stuart include:

- The Mary River Crossing - adjacent to the Arnhem Highway marks a significant transport route and crossing used by several historical figures including John McDouall Stuart whose party camped here.
- Shady Camp Billabong – a location where John McDouall Stuart camped on his journey.
- Stuart's Tree Historical Reserve and Point Stuart - marks the point where John McDouall Stuart finally reached the north coast of Australia. Originally, this site included a carved tree with

Stuart's name and date on it, however it has been burnt and a memorial has been constructed in its place.

These Heritage places may qualify for inclusion on the Northern Territory Heritage Register.

The more recent history associated with the early buffalo and crocodile industry is particularly important to Traditional Owners along with many non-Indigenous Australians.



*Plate 12: A number of historic sites associated with the explorer John McDouall Stuart are located within the Park*

#### Aims

- Maintaining the Park's cultural and historical values for future generations.
- People and park visitors respecting the Park's cultural and historical values.
- Traditional Owners satisfied with their involvement, fulfilling cultural responsibilities and protecting sacred sites.
- Incorporating Indigenous knowledge into Park operations wherever practicable and managing the Park to the satisfaction of the Traditional Owners.

#### Management Actions

18. **Cultural heritage management** – The Parks and Wildlife Commission will include Traditional Owner cultural interests and aspirations into existing management activities wherever practicable. The partners and the Northern Land Council will work together to identify external resources in support of these cultural components where additional funding is required. (*High*)

Cultural heritage management will provide for:

- On-country activities which allow the partners to spend time on country together, recording knowledge and facilitating transfer of knowledge and skills between Traditional Owners, to the younger generation and to Parks and Wildlife Commission Rangers. Where there is sufficient interest these activities will occur annually;
- Traditional Owners documenting Indigenous Knowledge and oral histories for the Park. The outcomes of the program will contribute to improving both Park operations programs and public interpretation; and
- Cross-cultural training – Park-specific cultural training and welcome to country will be arranged for all new Rangers through the MRJMC. These arrangements are to be made as soon as possible after a new Ranger has arrived at the Park.

19. **Cultural Heritage Management Plan** – Led by the Northern Land Council, the partners will seek assistance from the Heritage Division of the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, or other relevant government agency, to develop and implement a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the Park, providing for Traditional Owner contemporary cultural interests, and historic / archaeological site assessment and conservation. Consult with specialists such as AAPA on best practice information recording and management procedures. (*Moderate*)
20. **Aboriginal hunting and gathering** – The TPWC Act supports Traditional Owner use of the Park’s resources. The partners will promote sustainable use and develop policy and guidelines as necessary to ensure hunting and gathering is consistent with visitor safety and does not compromise Park values. (*Moderate*)
21. **Culturally sensitive areas** – The Parks and Wildlife Commission will uphold restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites or culturally sensitive areas of the Park as directed by Traditional Owners, and ensure adequate consultation and communication with affected stakeholders. With consultation and amendment of this Plan, the partners may approve culturally sensitive places as Special Protection Zones. (*Ongoing*)
22. **Aboriginal cultural business** – Traditional Owners’ advice on their customary obligations including ceremonial activity, their need to access country, and maintaining traditions will be respected and it is acknowledged that men’s and women’s sites may require different management. Adequate public notice will be given if public access will be affected by ceremonial activity. (*Ongoing*)
23. **Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property** – Traditional Owners will maintain ownership and control of their cultural and intellectual property consistent with intellectual property law as well as any policy and guidelines agreed by the Northern Land Council and the Parks and Wildlife Commission. (*Ongoing*)
24. **Archaeological and Heritage place assessment** – Places will be properly documented, assessed and conserved for their heritage value and their significance to relevant Traditional Owners where appropriate. The Burra Charter principles and processes will guide assessments and NT Heritage Officers will be consulted on any proposed works at Heritage places. (*Ongoing*)
25. **NT Heritage Register** – Where appropriate, places or objects can be nominated to the NT Heritage Register and declared under the *Heritage Act 2011*. During the life of this Plan, Mary River Crossing, Shady Camp Billabong, and Stuart’s Tree memorial will be assessed for registering on the NT Heritage Register using the expertise within the Heritage Division of the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, or other relevant government agency. (*Moderate*)
26. **Archaeological and Heritage place conservation** – Advice will be sought from NT Heritage Officers regarding the most appropriate protection and conservation works. Ideally, conservation works will only occur in accordance with the Cultural Heritage Management Plan. Training in Heritage place management, such as rock art conservation techniques, will be sought for Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Commission staff. (*Ongoing*)

#### Performance Measures

- Cultural Heritage Management Plan developed, regularly reviewed and the partners satisfied with its implementation.
- The partners are satisfied that Aboriginal skills and knowledge of country are being integrated into day-to-day park management wherever practicable.

## 5. Visitor Values

The spectacular wetland landscapes and abundant wildlife found in Mary River National Park offer extraordinary wildlife viewing and recreational fishing opportunities. The Park attracts locals and visitors from all around Australia and the world.



*Plate 13: Sightseeing on the Mary River*  
Photo courtesy Tourism NT

The recreation and tourism values of Mary River National Park are important to the economy of the Northern Territory. Experiences in the Park are mostly focussed on wildlife viewing, fishing and boating on the floodplains, billabongs and waterways. Visitor numbers are consistently highest at Shady Camp and in 2013 approximately 17,000 people visited this site. While interstate and international visitor numbers are significant, local visitation has increased in recent years with a large number of locals passing through the Park to fish the Mary River. The most popular activities in the Park include fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, four wheel driving, walking and boating. Around half of all visitors spend between two and four hours within the Park.

Current visitor sites within Mary River National Park are Bird Billabong, Mary River Billabong, the Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track, Mary River Crossing, Couzens Lookout, Rockhole, Wildman Four Wheel Drive Track, Brian Creek Monsoon Forest, Mistake Billabong, Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest, Shady Camp, Point Stuart Coastal Reserve and Stuart's Tree (see Map 3). Facilities and activities available at each site are shown in Table 4. Shady Camp, Rockhole and Bird Billabong are the most visited sites, attracting a mixture of visitors for different experiences. International visitors most often visit one of these three sites and arrive as part of tour bus groups. Private tourism operators also use the Park and provide nearby services and facilities for tourists.

### 5.1 Future Opportunities

The Parks and Wildlife Commission has prepared a Tourism and Recreation Masterplan in 2013-14 (see section 6.6). In addition to a Masterplan there is the need for a visitor strategy for Mary River National Park. In consultation with interested parties, a strategy will be prepared providing focus and purpose for any future development within the Park. The strategy will consider existing infrastructure and will outline opportunities and priorities for tourism related activities within the Park. Visitor experiences, products and services, future options for commercial access and infrastructure



requirements to deliver on experiences will also be considered within the strategy.

Some of the opportunities to be explored in detail within the visitor strategy include:

- Updating and expanding the interpretive information available and consulting with Traditional Owners to include further cultural content in new and updated information;
- Upgrading or relocating existing infrastructure;
- Construction of new four wheel drive tracks and camping sites;
- Safe river access and the creation of additional boat launching areas to the Mary River;
- Building new infrastructure, including all-weather accessible bird hides, elevated viewing platforms and elevated walkways beside floodplains and billabongs such as at Couzens Lookout and at Bird and Mary River Billabongs; and
- Night spotlighting tours (by foot or vehicle), fishing tours, walking tours and guided four wheel drive tours. Tours containing an integrated cultural component will be a key element to be considered.

**Table 4.** Summary of activities, services and facilities presently available at visitor sites within Mary River National Park

	Information Pull-in Bay	Bird Billabong	Mary River Billabong	Mary River Crossing	McKinlay Sector	Couzens Lookout	Rockhole	Hardies 4WD Track	Wildman 4WD Track	Brian Creek Monsoon Forest	Mistake Billabong	Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest	Shady Camp	Point Stuart Coastal Reserve
Camping sites						✓							✓	
Picnic facilities			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Wildlife viewing		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Walking tracks		✓						✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Boating				✓			✓	✓					✓	
Fishing				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
4WD driving								✓	✓					
Toilets						✓	✓				✓		✓	
BBQs			✓	✓		✓							✓	
Lookouts		✓				✓					✓		✓	
Boat Ramps				✓			✓	✓					✓	
Commercial Tours							✓	✓					✓	
Information on-site	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓

## 5.2 Recreational Fishing

All wetland areas of the Park are open for recreational fishing. This includes rivers which are bounded by the Park. The Mary River and Shady Camp Billabong are known nationally by recreational fishers for the chance to catch a large barramundi. The runoff and opening of the saltwater section of the Mary River attract large numbers of fishermen to the Park, while many locals use the area year round for fishing. There are a number of boat launching sites within and adjacent to the Park. Boat launching sites within the Park include Rockhole, Mary River Crossing, Shady Camp and along the Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track at Delta Block East and Delta Block West Boat Ramps, while at Point Stuart there is a privately leased boat ramp. The Corroboree Billabong and Hardies Lagoon Boat Ramps are outside the Park, as is the access road to the Shady Camp Boat Ramps. Rockhole, Mary River Crossing and Shady Camp can become overcrowded during busy periods and additional opportunities to easily access the Mary River are being considered to prevent these issues in future. A number of commercial tour operators use the Mary River for fishing tours, usually launching from Shady Camp and Corroboree Billabong Boat Ramps, and a fishing competition is held annually within the Mary River system.



*Plate 14: A prized catch of barramundi*  
Photo courtesy Tourism NT

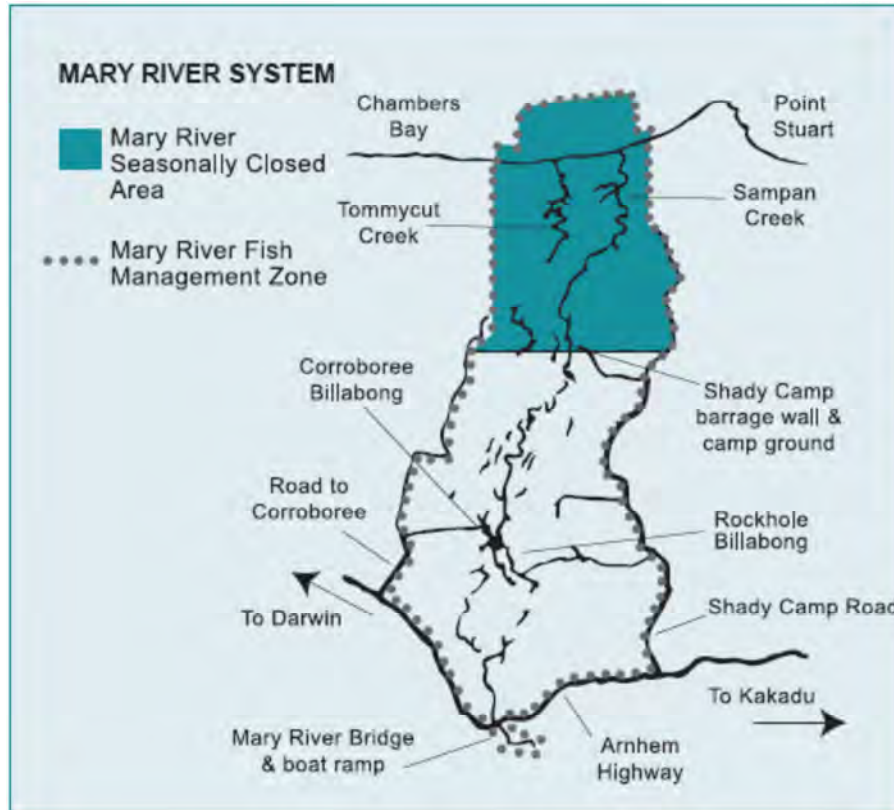
Recreational fishing is regulated under the provisions of the *Fisheries Act* and the TPWC Act (see also section 6.5). Size and possession limits exist for some aquatic species in the Northern Territory and this is enforced by Fisheries Officers. Fishing in waterways within the Park is regulated under the TPWC Act and By-laws and includes possession of nets, traps and spears being restricted to those with an approved permit (see section 6.6). Park Rangers enforce the TPWC Act and By-laws.

The Mary River has a specific 'Mary River Fish Management Zone' which incorporates the Mary River and its floodplains, extending from the coast to just south of the Arnhem Highway (see Map 2). When fishing within this zone, no more than three barramundi may be in anyone's personal possession at any time and the use or possession of cast or drag nets is prohibited. An area of seasonal closure for barramundi spawning is located within the northern half of this zone and extends from the coast to just south of the Shady Camp barrage wall and campground. Between 1 October and 31 January it is prohibited to have a fishing line to which a hook, lure or bait is attached or to fish for or have a barramundi in one's personal possession within the closure area.

The high water mark at the edge of the Mary River forms the Parks boundary for some of the most popular sections of the Park. Different landowners and tenures are located on the opposing bank along these sections of river. The Mary River runs directly through the Delta Block (NT Portion 4121)

of Mary River National Park. This section of the river is managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission, however the Mary River itself is a public waterway. The Parks and Wildlife Commission is responsible for boat ramps and other related infrastructure on Park land. Infrastructure located along road reserves, such as the road into the Shady Camp portion (NT Portion 4063) of the Park, is ultimately the responsibility of the Department of Transport, or other relevant government agency. At the time of writing, the Department of Infrastructure manage the contract for emptying the Shady Camp bins and any contracts to upgrade infrastructure such as roads and boat ramps.

**Map 2:** Mary River Fish Management Zone



Source: Department of Resources, 2010

### 5.3 Wildlife Viewing

The greatest range of wildlife can be seen from the water and depending on the time of year this is the best place to get a sense of the expansiveness of the Mary River floodplains. Purpose-built shelters for wildlife viewing are installed at Bird Billabong, Mistake Billabong and Shady Camp. Mistake Billabong and Bird Billabong are predominantly bird viewing areas and there is some scope to increase the amount of interpretive information about the natural values of these sites at the bird hides. The best site for viewing crocodiles in the Park is at Shady Camp, however the access track to the viewing platform needs upgrading so that visitors do not have to walk through water when a section of the track becomes inundated in the Wet season.

Commercial boat tours showcasing the wetland wildlife currently operate under a permit at Rockhole within the Park. A number of other commercial operators offer tours on the Mary River and associated billabongs. An increasing number of operators are launching tours from Corroboree Billabong and, although located off-Park, it could become a growing concern for the Park. Access to the river from Corroboree remains unregulated with launching as well as tours occurring in close proximity to the Park (see section 6.8 MA 43).

There are few elevated sites within the Park which allow visitors to experience the expansive nature of the Mary River floodplains without a boat. Opportunities to develop wildlife focused facilities and activities will be considered as part of the visitor strategy (see section 5.1). Possible facilities include an elevated viewing platform at Couzens Lookout, and elevated walkways and bird-hides beside floodplains. Wildlife activities such as localised night spotlighting tours, and wildlife focussed four wheel drive tours will also be considered. Wildman Wilderness Lodge conduct bush tucker and wildlife walking tours near the Lodge for Lodge guests, however there are opportunities for further walking tours to be conducted within other areas of the Park for other Park visitors.



*Plate 15: An elegant pair of Jabiru search for fish at Shady Camp*  
Photo courtesy Tourism NT

## 5.4 Four Wheel Driving

Mary River National Park is one of the few Parks in the Northern Territory with access to the coast, where people can park their vehicles and walk to the shore. Access is seasonal and only by four wheel drive.

The major scenic drives in the Park are along Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track and Wildman Four Wheel Drive Track, both half day trips. The two tracks are joined by a section of the Rockhole Road and camping is provided between the two tracks at Couzens Lookout and Camping Area. Two boat access sites are available along the Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track at Delta Block East and Delta Block West with picnic tables available at Delta Block East. Access to each of the four wheel drive tracks is only during the Dry season when conditions permit, as both tracks cross black soil plains of the wetlands and are under water for long periods of time during the Wet season. Both tracks have had prolonged periods of closure in recent years, causing frustration amongst members of the public keen to access these scenic drives.

Visitors using the Hardies and Wildman tracks can experience a range of habitats in the Park including floodplains, billabongs, woodlands and rainforests, and there are good opportunities to view wildlife. An information panel is available for visitors at the beginning of the Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track and two track specific fact sheets are also available for the public to download from the Parks and Wildlife Commission website. The Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track has been used by commercial tour operators in the past, however there are no operators at present. A cooperative management agreement with Annaburroo Station provides a four wheel drive corridor across the Station and between the Annaburroo Delta and Wildman River sections of the Park. These tracks need careful management since they quickly become boggy after short periods of rain.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission and Four Wheel Drive (4WD) NT signed a three year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2013. The MOU is a formal agreement between the two parties to increase access to Mary River and Litchfield National Parks for 4WD NT club members. Access requires a permit (see section 6.6) and 4WD NT's members help to re-open and maintain the tracks. The agreement affords greater access to four wheel driving and camping opportunities within areas which have existing closed or overgrown tracks.

The need for more four wheel drive opportunities within Mary River National Park will be investigated as part of the visitor strategy (see section 5.1). The potential to open tracks within the McKinlay Sector of the Park will be assessed for potential environmental and cultural site impacts before any development takes place.

## 5.5 Camping and Commercial Activities

Formalised camping areas with basic facilities exist at Couzens Lookout and Shady Camp. During the Dry season the campsite at Shady Camp is very popular and a camping fee is collected through an honesty system. There are a range of emerging issues at the campsite including overcrowding and visitors camping for extended periods. These issues will be addressed in the visitor strategy (see section 5.1). Informal bush camping along the Mary River in the McKinlay Sector of the Park is currently available only by applying for a specific By-Law 8 Camping Permit. There is an opportunity to more formally develop camping through the creation of designated campgrounds, and to provide new access options in to the McKinlay Sector of the Park.

Commercial accommodation available adjacent to the Park ranges from luxurious eco-style lodges to simple powered and unpowered campsites. These commercial operations currently include Wildman Wilderness Lodge, Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge, Bamurru Plains, Stuart's Tree Fishing Camp, Mary River Wilderness Retreat and Caravan Park, Bark Hut Inn and Annaburroo Billabong. These businesses play a significant role in providing tourism experiences within the Top End and encourage visitation to the Park. Due to existing offerings within the area, development of a Signature Lodge / Eco Accommodation within Mary River National Park is not seen as appropriate.

Owned by a private operator, the Wildman Wilderness Lodge is located on freehold tenure which is surrounded by the Wildman River portion of the Park. The Lodge offers luxury cabins and safari-style tent accommodation as well as boat cruises and four wheel driving, quad biking, fishing, sunset billabong and guided walking tours within the Park under a concession permit. Some of the supporting service facilities for the lodge are on Park land and operate under a commercial lease.

Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge is a privately owned and operated business located on private land along the road to Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest. The lodge offers accommodation including lodge style and budget rooms along with camping, a bistro and swimming. Barramundi fishing safaris along with boat, wildlife and birding tours are available within the Park and are conducted under a concession permit. Boats are also available for hire at Shady Camp. The Lodge commonly directs their visitors to other facilities and activities available within the Park, such as the four wheel driving and walking tracks.

Bamurru Plains is an exclusive safari-style buffalo property which is located east of the Point Stuart Road. All activities on offer are provided within the bounds of the property, however with its close proximity to the Park, self-driving visitors can visit the Park on their way to their accommodation provider.

Stuart's Tree Fishing Camp is a commercially run accommodation camp which is located on private freehold land via the four wheel drive Point Stuart Road Corridor. The Point Stuart Boat Ramp is leased and managed by the Fishing Camp owners and can be used by others if a launching fee is paid.

Mary River Wilderness Retreat and Caravan Park is located at Mary River Crossing along the Arnhem

Highway and is a privately owned eco-tourism property. A variety of accommodation options are available including deluxe and budget cabins along with powered and unpowered camping and caravan sites. Mary River Wilderness Retreat provides directions and information about the Mary River National Park to their guests.

The Bark Hut Inn is an iconic NT pub and roadhouse located halfway between Darwin and Kakadu National Park along the Arnhem Highway. A number of cabins, motel and budget rooms are available along with a bar, restaurant and fuel. The Inn commonly provides information and directions into Mary River National Park to those stopping at the Inn.

Annaburroo Billabong is located across the road from the Bark Hut Inn and provides accommodation and information to visitors interested in visiting the Park. Various sized lodges and cabins, along with sites for tents and caravans, are available for guests.

Tours provide a more direct educational experience of Mary River National Park. At present fishing, wildlife, four wheel driving, quad bike, walking and commercial boat tours operate in the Park. Opportunity exists to expand the number of tours available from different tour operators within the Park and the visitor strategy will look at identifying these (see section 5.1). Tours are an area of particular interest to Traditional Owners as there is much scope for developing tours showcasing the cultural values of the Park. Traditional Owners may work in partnership with existing tour operators or new commercial enterprises.

## 5.6 Visitor Information and Education

Information and interpretation plays an important role in visitor management by informing people about the values of the Park and how visitors can respect them. Public education informs visitors about facilities, activities, safety aspects and regulations, and explains or interprets the Park's cultural and natural features. Information is also used by local tour operators so they can access the Park with their tour groups and so they can give accurate information to visitors utilising their services and facilities.

Interpretive information is currently available for the fourteen established visitor sites within the Park (see Table 4) as either signs on-site or as downloadable information fact sheets from the Parks and Wildlife Commission website. Information can be classified as orientation information, which also includes information on safety and reducing visitor impacts; and educational information which can provide information on natural and cultural values in the Park. There is scope to update and expand the interpretive information available, particularly to incorporate further cultural information from the Traditional Owners. An upgrade of the information at Rockhole has been planned while an upgrade to the remainder of the Park's information will be considered within the visitor strategy (see section 5.1). The partners would like to see more information about the significance of the Park to Traditional Owners included in all interpretation. The Parks and Wildlife Commission produces interpretive materials for NT Parks and is keen to receive recommendations from joint management groups for information upgrades.

Local tour operators would like to be kept well informed about the Park, particularly when there are changes in access to visitor sites. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will keep an up-to-date list of local operator email addresses and emails will be sent when visitor sites are opened, closed and when there will be delayed site openings due to flooding, fires and other events. In addition, the Parks and Wildlife Commission's Mary River National Park access webpage and Facebook page will continue to be updated with the latest Park access information.

## 5.7 Visitor Access

Entry to visitor sites within the Park is from the Arnhem Highway and the Point Stuart Road off the

Arnhem Highway. The Point Stuart Road is sealed from the Arnhem Highway to the Wildman Wilderness Lodge turnoff and is accessible all-year. From this point the road becomes a formed 2WD gravel road which can become corrugated, particularly late in the visitor season. On the southern edge of the Swim Creek portion (NT Portion 4433) of the Park the Point Stuart Road becomes a four wheel drive track. The track is impassable during the Wet season and remains closed until conditions permit. The Point Stuart day use area, Stuart's Tree Fishing Camp and Finke Bay are accessed via this four wheel drive track and long closures have implications for local business and stations (see section 6.8 MA 42). See section 5.4 for information on access to the Hardies Four Wheel Drive Track and Wildman Four Wheel Drive Track.

Access to Shady Camp, Point Stuart Wilderness Lodge, Jimmy's Creek Monsoon Forest, Mistake Billabong, Brian Creek Monsoon Forest, Wildman Wilderness Lodge, Mary River Billabong and Bird Billabong are all by formed 2WD gravel roads. Access to Rockhole and Couzens Lookout is also via a formed 2WD gravel road, however access can be closed due to flooding.

Additional access into the Park for commercial tour operators will be considered as part of the visitor strategy (see section 5.1). Future access options in to the McKinlay Sector will also be explored by the joint management partners.

## 5.8 Visitor Safety

The Mary River floodplains with its numerous rivers, creeks and waterholes are a haven for estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles. The size of these water bodies varies considerably and there is a marked seasonal variation in flow, water levels and connections with other water bodies. Most of the water bodies are adjacent to, or connect directly or indirectly with the Mary River which contains the highest density of this species known anywhere in the world. There is a high likelihood that anyone undertaking activities on or near the water will interact with a crocodile.



*Plate 16: The Parks waterways contain large numbers of estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles*

Crocodile safety is extremely important in the Park and the 'Estuarine (Saltwater) Crocodile Management Plan for Visitor Safety – Mary River National Park' will be followed at all times. In particular, to reduce the risks to Park users:

- Swimming is not permitted in any water body within the Park;
- Standing a minimum distance of five metres from the water's edge is recommended when fishing;
- Fish should be cleaned away from the water's edge;

- Vigilance is recommended when launching or retrieving boats;
- It is strongly recommended not to lean over the edge of a boat or stand on logs overhanging water; and
- Individual crocodiles causing a problem to visitors will be removed.

Whilst it is not possible to eliminate all risk to visitors, risk can be reduced if visitors are prepared for hazards, have realistic expectations and behave appropriately. Having a clear and current set of emergency response procedures, appropriately trained Rangers and adequate resources will help effectively manage any emergency incidents that arise.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission has an overarching Visitor Incident system, including an Emergency Response Policy & Procedures, which provides a basis on which to respond to emergencies. The Parks and Wildlife Commission also undertakes annual risk management assessments and specific risk mitigation activities are captured within operational plans. All incidents are reported centrally and the Parks and Wildlife Commission has a range of Work Health and Safety Hazard Reduction guidelines to which the Park adheres.

During the Wet season access to the Park can be restricted due to flood waters. The Parks and Wildlife Commission advise the public of any road closures (and subsequent re-openings) via media releases, the Parks and Wildlife Commissions park access webpage and Facebook page, and by physically preventing access to affected areas by closing and locking gates across affected roads. Local tour operators will be kept better informed of access changes in to the future (see section 5.6).

## 5.9 Waste Management

The management of rubbish and waste in the Park is a concern. Rubbish bins are provided at a number of visitor sites within the Park with the Parks and Wildlife Commission managing all bins other than those located within the road reserve running through the Shady Camp portion of the Park. These bins are managed through a contract which at the time of writing is the responsibility of the Department of Infrastructure. Large amounts of rubbish are frequently dumped at the information bay beside the Arnhem Highway and Rangers need to stay vigilant for rubbish at all of the main visitor sites. Rubbish collected from Parks and Wildlife Commission managed bins is disposed of in a land fill dump within the Park. The volume of rubbish generated has increased over recent years.

The issue of waste disposal in parks and reserves in the Northern Territory will be addressed through the development of a Waste Management Policy which is identified for preparation by the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

### Aims

- Increasing numbers of visitors using the Park, enjoying high quality, safe and educational experiences.
- Realising new opportunities for visitor experiences leading to increasing visitor numbers and an increasing range of experiences available.

### Management Actions

27. **Visitor safety** – All staff will be familiar with the procedures and trained and prepared to implement them at all times. (*High*)
28. **Crocodile management** – Implement the ‘Estuarine (Saltwater) Crocodile Management Plan for Visitor Safety – Mary River National Park’ and review as required. (*High*)
29. **Visitor strategy** – A visitor strategy for Mary River National Park will be prepared by the partners in collaboration with Tourism NT and the Department of Business or other relevant government agencies, as well as other interested parties. The strategy will identify opportunities for all tourism related activities, facilities and information within the Park and will be guided by Territory-wide policies and the Tourism and



Recreation Masterplan. (*High*)

30. **Access** – Tracks and roads will be maintained for high quality visitor access and safety. Visitors will be encouraged to keep to vehicle and walking tracks to minimise damage to sensitive habitats and avoid risk of accidental entry into culturally sensitive areas. Access to the Park, or areas within the Park, may be restricted for environmental, cultural or safety reasons. (*High*)
31. **Pets** – Entry of pets into the Park will be consistent with the Pets in Parks policy.
32. **Increased four wheel drive access** – Work with 4WD NT, as per the MOU, to reopen and maintain existing and overgrown tracks within the Park. Consider additional opportunities for tracks within the Park, particularly within the McKinlay Sector. (*High*)
33. **Tour Operator Updates** – Send email updates to all local tour operators when there are changes in access to visitor sites. (*High*)
34. **Visitor facility planning and future developments** – Visitor access, activities and facilities within the Park will be managed and developed according to the zoning scheme (see Map 1) and the visitor strategy. The approval, design and construction of developments will be subject to appropriate site clearances, environmental assessments and agreed site development planning and be consistent with appropriate legislation. Investment in any proposed programs or works will be considered against Territory-wide priorities, the Tourism and Recreation Masterplan, budget availability and the visitor strategy. (*High*)
35. **Fisheries** - The partners will work cooperatively with the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, or other relevant government agency, to manage fisheries in and adjacent to the Park and to investigate opportunities to improve fishing access where sustainable. Northern Territory possession and size limits and the Mary River Fish Management Zone restrictions apply within the Park. (*Moderate*)
36. **Interpretation and community education** – A program will be developed for the Park which will consider: community engagement, use of innovative media, cultural interpretation, safety and regulation, staff training and tour operator and tour guide support. (*Moderate*)  
  
The interpretation and community education program will concentrate in priority order on the following:
  - Additional signs are to be erected at key locations to warn visitors of hazards and provide regulatory information (e.g. ‘no access’ and ‘no off-road driving’ signage);
  - The partners will work with Tourism NT and other relevant agencies to ensure the Park is marketed and promoted accurately and appropriately, consistent with the values and character of the Park;
  - The Traditional Owners will ensure that all Indigenous cultural information shared with visitors is accurate and appropriate; and
  - Opportunities to provide Park overview and /or orientation signage at key visitor nodes are to be explored in the visitor strategy. This includes assessing the suitability of providing for the development of an orientation visitor booth and rationalising existing signage at the junction of the Arnhem Highway and Point Stuart Road. Removal of the outdated visitor booth at its existing location 10 km east of the Mary River will be part of this process.
37. **Visitor monitoring** – Following the review of the Parks and Wildlife Commission Visitor Monitoring Strategy, implement the visitor monitoring program for the Park in accordance with the Parks and Wildlife Commission visitor monitoring standards. (*Moderate*)
38. **Waste management** – Implement the Waste Management Policy once it has been prepared. (*Moderate*)

#### Performance Measures

- Anecdotal evidence of visitor satisfaction with the Park and its facilities.
- Annual audit of infrastructure and Repairs and Maintenance program completed.
- Implementation of the Crocodile Management Plan, Emergency Response Policy and Procedures and no

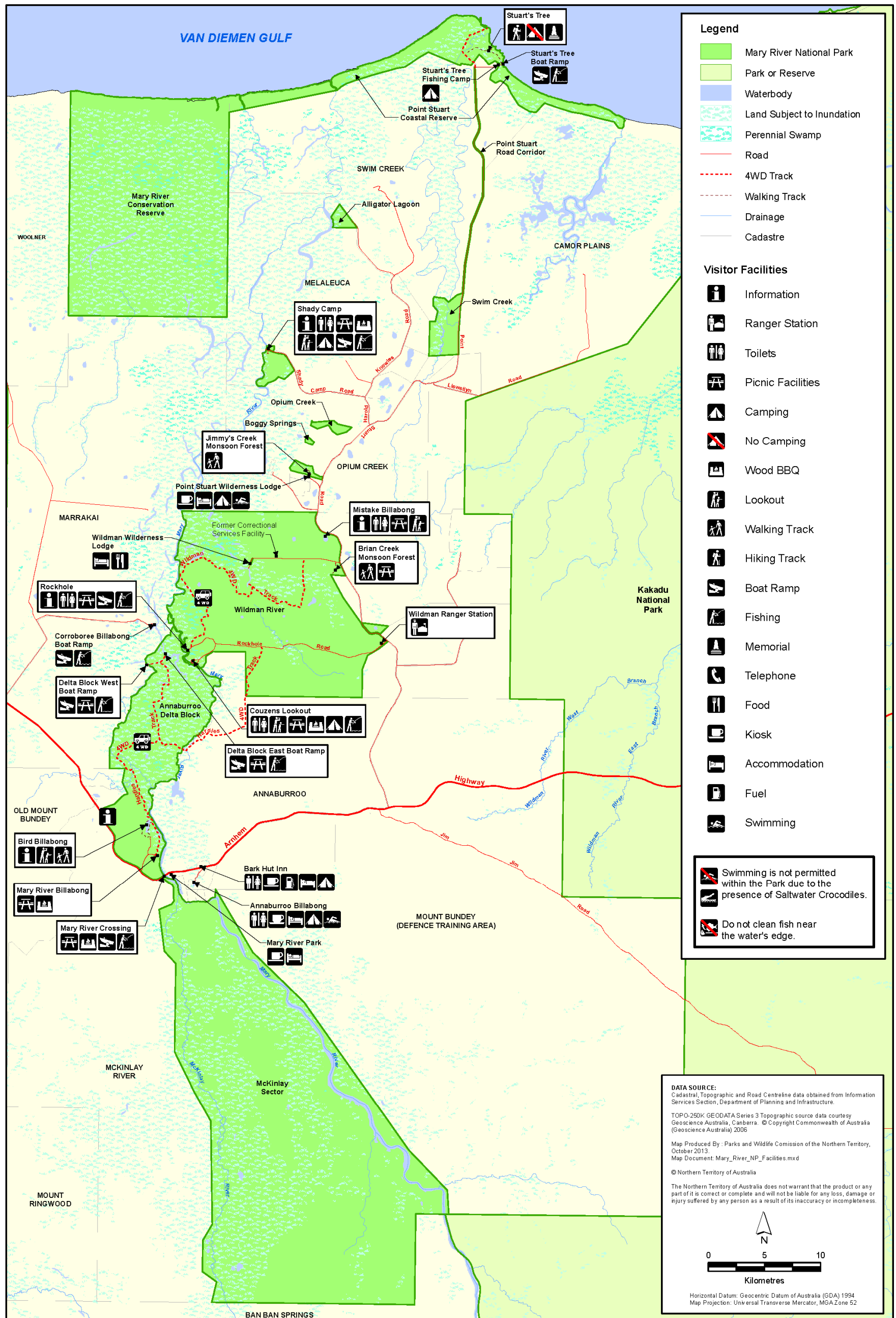
preventable visitor accidents as a result of visiting the Park.

- Increase in number of visitor opportunities and experiences available.
- Visitor numbers collected and reported to the partners.
- Appropriate cultural information is included in new educational information produced for the Park.



*Plate 17: Fishing the Mary River can be both thrilling and serene*  
Photo courtesy Tourism NT

Map 3. Mary River National Park Visitor Facilities



## 6. Business Operations

### 6.1 General Administration

The Parks and Wildlife Commission is responsible for the daily management of the Park and financing and resourcing the Park's recurrent management programs including administrative, staffing, infrastructure and services. The Park is managed by staff based largely at the Wildman River Ranger Station.

Overall management of the Park is guided by a legislative and policy framework. For proper management of the Park, and the safety of persons and property, it is essential that By-laws and regulations are in place and properly enforced.

Funding for managing and developing the Park is sourced through the NT Government. Capital works and funded works programs are subject to Territory-wide government priorities. Therefore the budget for managing the Park and the funding available for capital works and other programs must meet government priorities and is dependent on ongoing government and community support. Park and agency-wide priorities, performance indicators, monitoring, evaluation and reporting need to be integrated into the management cycle.

The MRJMC provides endorsement for the allocation of the annual Park operational budget. The partners will support each other in sourcing additional funds for special projects that cannot be funded under the annual Park budget.

#### Management Effectiveness Framework

The Management Effectiveness Framework informs priority, setting resource allocation across the NT Parks and Reserves system. Part of the framework establishes the relative importance of each park in the context of the park system by assessing each park's contribution to biodiversity conservation, and to recreation and tourism. It does not attempt to compare cultural values across the park system. The framework groups parks of similar importance and specifies general management standards to each group.

Mary River National Park is ranked as a Class 1 (most important) Biodiversity park and a Class 2 Visitor park. Class 1 Biodiversity parks require management of the Park to maintain and where possible improve landscape condition, and as a very high priority to manage threats at both the landscape scale and specific conservation values. All Class 1 parks for biodiversity have been identified as requiring 5 to 10 year Integrated Conservation Strategies (see section 3.). Class 2 Visitor parks should be promoted and managed as destinations of national / regional significance.

Mary River National Park will be subject to biennial performance reviews that look at each aspect of the business cycle. Results of the Integrated Conservation Strategy will feed into these performance reviews as will evaluation of the Performance Measures contained within this Plan. Every fifth year the condition of the Park's key values will be assessed through surveys and then reported on in a State of the Park report which will be made public.

### 6.2 Working with the Community

The Park's stakeholders have a keen interest in how the Park is managed and the future direction of the Park. Key stakeholders include neighbours, the tourism industry, users of the Park and community and recreational groups. Involvement of stakeholders in management of the Park provides benefits for both the wider community and the Park and it is important for the joint management partners to maintain support and

working relationships with key stakeholders of the Park.

Park neighbours are engaged in pastoralism, horticulture, mining, tourism, conservation and defence training. Neighbours face many of the same challenges in land management and have common interests in managing threats such as weeds and wildfire. Over the years the Parks and Wildlife Commission has built effective partnerships and relationships with neighbours and stakeholders of the Park. They have worked together to coordinate weed and fire management activities and to discuss management issues. Given the fragmented nature of the Park, maintaining relationships and collaborating with neighbours is an essential part of managing the Park to maintain its current values.

Many tourism operators work on land surrounding the Park and are interested in and make use of the tourism and recreation opportunities presented by the Park. Working with these operators as well as the wider tourism industry will help see operator interests incorporated in the Park's management, tourism and recreation managed sustainably and visitor experiences maintained to a high standard.

Mary River National Park is an important community asset. A number of community and recreational groups, such as the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT, NT Field and Game Association, Top End Orienteer and the Point Stuart Historic Society, use or are interested in using the Park. It is important that groups such as these are given opportunities to voice their interests and provide feedback about the Park.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission is committed to ensuring the whole community have a say in the development of the Park. This has been achieved through meetings with stakeholders to discuss management of the Park into the future. The wider community is encouraged to make submissions on the Joint Management Plan while the draft format is available for public comment. In addition, the joint management partners will continue to consult the wider community in planning and decision-making for the Park over the life of this Plan.

### 6.3 Indigenous Work and Business Opportunities

Joint management aims to help build sustainable livelihoods for Traditional Owners and their families through facilitating business and work opportunities for Traditional Owners in the Park and elsewhere. Working on country is an opportunity for Traditional Owners to exercise their cultural obligations and responsibilities to look after country according to traditional laws.

Employment and training is an essential part of joint management. Traditional Owners see education, training and employment as essential for the next generation. Traditional Owners want their children to be employed and trained on the job in addition to receiving formal training. They acknowledge that ongoing support will be required, and that they have a responsibility to support their young people.

The broader employment aspirations of Traditional Owners and their families cannot be met by joint management alone. Consequently, any employment and training programs developed by the partners will need to involve external groups and organisations. This may include other Government departments, Indigenous ranger groups, commercial business and other stakeholders.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission is working at increasing recruitment and retention of Indigenous people in the agency and are fostering the career progression of Indigenous employees. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will make every effort to increase the employment of Indigenous people at Mary River National Park, in accordance with employment laws and policies in force in the Northern Territory. Traditional Owners who are employed as Rangers, trainees and school-based apprentices will need different types of support and assistance in the workplace, which can be achieved through a collaborative approach between the Parks and Wildlife Commission, schools, industry, education and training providers.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission will continue to offer flexible or periodic casual employment, to provide

work experience and skills exchange and build positive working relationships between Rangers and Traditional Owners. This approach can also pave the way for employment of Indigenous people in permanent positions with the Parks and Wildlife Commission and lend skills for enterprise such as an Indigenous community-based ranger groups or tourism business. Cultural training of Park Rangers by Traditional Owners is an example of this working arrangement.

There are considerable opportunities for Cultural tourism in the Park or on adjacent land. Given its proximity to Kakadu National Park and the growing interest and focus on Indigenous tourism generally, it is likely that demand for cultural tourism product in the area will increase.

### Contract Services

Repairs and maintenance of Park facilities are usually outsourced to contractors. Contractors can be employed to clean campgrounds, repair and maintain visitor facilities, signs and fences as well as construct walking tracks. Traditional Owners and Indigenous businesses have an opportunity to tender for these contracts. To be contract-ready Indigenous operations need capacity – administrative and technical skills and equipment.

## 6.4 Areas for Community Living

Joint management agreements provide for Traditional Owners to live on and near parks so they might actively contribute to natural and cultural resource management. Many Traditional Owners for the Park live away from their country and would like an area on country where they can stay whilst conducting their obligations to country. Sites for semi-permanent camping areas in both the north and south of the Park for the respective Traditional Owners groups, Limilngan and Uwynmil, are being considered. Any areas proposed for community living, leases or expansion of the Park will be considered by the partners with consultation and full consideration of the issues. Final decisions will require agreement by the partners. Areas for community living and leases will be subject to the assessment of environmental impacts and any costs incurred for living area development will be financed through external funding.

## 6.5 Compliance and Legislation

The most common offences committed by visitors in Mary River National Park are illegal hunting, illegal access to closed areas, off-road driving, and bringing dogs into the Park without a permit. These are offences under the TPWC Act and By-laws and people committing offences can be prosecuted and fined under the Act by Park Rangers and the Police. To address these problems surveillance cameras have been installed and the partners are considering increasing patrols as well as other means to encourage compliance.

Fishing in Northern Territory water bodies, including within national parks, is regulated by the *Fisheries Act*. The Mary River is within a special management zone where only recreational fishing is allowed, possession and size limits apply for some aquatic species and seasonal closures apply in certain areas (see section 5.2 and Map 2). Other regulations relating to methods for fishing and humane killing of fish are also outlined in the Act. The regulations of the *Fisheries Act* are enforced by authorised Fisheries Officers. The TPWC By-laws have provisions for fishing to be regulated within a Park or Reserve. Park Rangers enforce these regulations.

### Hunting

Hunting in Northern Territory Parks and Reserves is regulated by the TPWC Act and By-laws. Although recreational hunting is not currently permitted within Mary River National Park options will be considered during the life of this Plan. The NT Field and Game Association have expressed an interest in working together with the partners to establish controlled hunting for Association members within a reserved portion

of the Park. The partners and the Association will meet to consider proposed options during the life of this Plan.

The TPWC Act enables Traditional Owners and Aboriginals who have traditionally used the area in accordance with Aboriginal tradition to hunt, hold traditional ceremony and use the traditional natural resources of the Park for traditional purposes. The Joint Management partners can, by agreement, place restrictions on traditional hunting for safety and conservation reasons. The *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) also supports traditional use of the Park. The partners will determine how Native Title rights will be exercised.

## 6.6 Special Activities and Development

Commercial enterprises, or any activities involving special access or use of any part of the Park, require a permit issued under the TPWC By-Laws. This includes activities related to research (see section 6.7), public gatherings and events, aircraft operation and commercial enterprises including commercial tours, filming and photography and commercial sustainable use of wildlife. Permit conditions are imposed which permit holders must abide by to ensure safety standards and to minimise negative impacts on the values of the Park and on other Park users. Some permits may require supervision by Traditional Owners or Park staff and a fee may be payable. Additionally, where a secure form of land tenure is needed for the occupation or specific use of an area, for example by a tourism enterprise, the TPWC Act provides for a licence or lease to be negotiated.

The MRJMC is responsible for developing practical guidelines for permit approvals and an initial set of agreed guidelines have been developed by the partners (see Table 5). These guidelines will continue to be refined by the MRJMC. Along with these guidelines the interests of the Park and partnership, stakeholders and the wider community, as well as existing Parks and Wildlife Commission policy and procedures are taken in to consideration when assessing permit applications.

**Table 5.** Mary River National Park Permit Guidelines

Permit Type	Decisions of the Joint Management Committee for Mary River National Park
Large Scale Commercial Film (By-Law 13)	MRJMC approval; Traditional Owner and PWCNT supervision required
Small Commercial Film / Commercial photography (By-Law 13)	Visitor zone (public areas): Low or high budget - MRJMC permit delegates to be consulted; Decision made within 2 weeks Off track: MRJMC approval; Traditional Owner supervision required
Promotional Film / Photography (By-Law 13)	Visitor zone (public areas): Park Ranger approval; Images not to be used for company logo Off track: MRJMC approval; Traditional Owner supervision required
Research (By-Law 17)	New: Permit checked by DLRM or other relevant government agency, ensure ethics committee approval and legitimate research; Detailed map of proposed area of research required; Permit sent to PWCNT, then MRJMC for approval; Traditional Owner supervision and acknowledgement required; Return of information and research results to MRJMC Renewal: MRJMC permit delegates to be consulted; Check applicant has abided by permit conditions in the past
Camping & Bushwalker (By-Law 8)	MRJMC permit delegates to be consulted; Applicant information required includes detailed map of proposed route and camping sites, number of people and vehicles; Decision made within 1 week; \$25 family booking fee per night for McKinlay Block
Minor Concession (By-Law 13)	MRJMC permit delegates to be consulted
Major Concession (By-Law 13)	MRJMC approval
General permit applications	Permits involving approved activities, requiring no special access, that are low impact and in keeping with Traditional Owner responsibilities can be approved by PWCNT staff

## Tour Operator Permits

Tour operators can have a strong influence on visitors' experiences of the Park. All commercial tourism operators visiting standard visitor areas within Northern Territory parks require a permit under the Parks and Wildlife Commission *Tour Operator Permit System*. The Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Commission want visitor information given by tour operators to be accurate and appropriate. The *Tour Operator Permit System* provides a means for the partners to better liaise with tour operators and monitor the activities of tour groups. It also fosters opportunities for the development of cultural tourism products and the employment of Traditional Owners.

## Development Proposals – Leases and Licences

During the life of this Plan the partners will likely be asked to consider commercial proposals to develop infrastructure within or adjacent to the Park as well as proposals to lease or license the use of part of the Park. Any commercial development or licence or lease entered into by the NT Government in respect of the Park must be consistent with the terms of the Indigenous Land Use Agreement and must have the informed consent of Traditional Owners. Such developments, licences and leases will present significant opportunities for business partnerships with the Traditional Owners and will result in benefits for visitors, local economies and expanded Park services. Such proposals will be supported and encouraged wherever possible.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission develops, implements and reviews processes and policy, in accordance with changes to State and Territory government policy, that facilitates commercial and infrastructure developments in Northern Territory parks and reserves. The 2013 Commercial Tourism Development Policy, prepared by the Parks and Wildlife Commission in conjunction with Tourism NT, provides principles for the facilitation of the development of privately developed and operated tourism infrastructure in Northern Territory parks and reserves. Until replaced by new processes or policy, the Commercial Tourism Development Policy provides guidance to the partners for any major proposals or new works within the Park. Assessment of development proposals will consider the potential impacts on Park values and will be consistent with this Plan as well as Northern Territory and Commonwealth legislation.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission has developed a Tourism and Recreation Masterplan for the Northern Territory park estate (see section 5.1). This document identifies opportunities for new or enhanced experiences primarily across the top 20 parks in the estate. Direction provided by the Masterplan will be considered in any future development of the Park and will help guide development of a visitor strategy for Mary River National Park (see section 5.1).

## Protecting Sacred Sites

Sites of cultural significance in the Park must be protected and managed by law and this is afforded under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act (NTASSA)*, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) (ALRA)* and the *Heritage Act 2011* (see section 4.2).

The NTASSA, administered by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA), protects sacred sites whether or not they are recorded or registered. Destruction, damage or disturbance to any site is an offence under this Act. An Authority Certificate will only be issued if the use or work on the land can proceed without there being a substantive risk of damage or interference with a sacred site or in the vicinity of the land or if an agreement is reached between the applicant and the custodians of the sacred site. Subject to the terms of the NTASSA, this protection enables the custodians of the sacred site to say who can enter the site and what can happen in or on the site. Successful joint management will ensure that sacred sites are protected in accordance with Traditional Owner responsibilities.



## Protecting Heritage Places

The *Heritage Act 2011* provides protection for and conservation of prescribed archaeological places and objects (see section 4.2). Archaeological places and objects are not necessarily sacred sites and can include art sites, artefact scatters, quarries and scarred trees. It is a requirement to consult with the Heritage Division of the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, or other relevant government agency, and to seek their permission to undertake any work on prescribed archaeological places and objects. The Act also provides protection for and conservation of declared heritage places and objects, including buildings, ruins, and old yards, as well as geological features, fossils and habitats. Importantly, sacred objects are not protected under NTASSA, but by the *Heritage Act 2011*.

## Long-term Agreements

Marrakai Station holds a licence to graze buffalo and cattle on the Mary River Conservation Reserve (NT Portion 2013) until 2020. The licensing agreement provides for management of flood plain habitats on Marrakai Station to protect magpie goose nesting habitat and obliges the licensee to control certain weeds. It also obliges the partners to consult the licensee regarding public use or access of this area. The partners will monitor the agreement and manage the relationship with the licensee through the Parks and Wildlife Commission. Future management of the Mary River Conservation Reserve will be considered by the partners prior to the expiry of the grazing licence. Options may include grazing, hunting and tourism.

A cooperative management agreement has been signed with Annaburroo Station providing an access corridor across the Station and between the Annaburroo Delta and the Wildman River sections of the Park.

## Mining

Several exploration licences have already been issued over large areas of the Park and extractive mineral permits have been granted for sand extraction along parts of the Mary River and rock extraction in the Mount Bunday section of the Annaburroo Delta Block. Mining of white sand currently occurs in the McKinlay Sector. Applications for exploration and mining will likely continue to be lodged over areas of the Park.

Three areas of the Park have been declared as Reserved Land under the *Mineral Titles Act*, which means they are not generally available for mining. These areas include Stuart's Tree (RL 1118), part of the Mary River Conservation Reserve (RL 1234) and part of the McKinlay Sector (RL 1252). The partners may apply for more areas of Reserved Land in the future.

Northern Territory legislation allows for mining in parks and reserves but requires the Minister for Mines to consider the views of the partners prior to granting any mining interest. If a mining interest is granted the Minister for Mines is obliged to include conditions for the protection of the environment recommended by the partners. These recommendations must be made within four months of the partners receiving notice that an application has been lodged.

## 6.7 Research and Monitoring

Most Park research and monitoring programs are carried out as internal projects by the Parks and Wildlife Commission or by other departments of the NT Government. External projects are encouraged, particularly targeted research which might improve management, and where any impact on the Park's values is minimal. Activities associated with research, such as interfering with wildlife and taking, interfering or keeping protected wildlife requires a permit issued under the TPWC Act (see section 6.6). Current permit guidelines for the Park (see Table 5) specify that the MRJMC will be involved in considering all new permit applications associated with research. For permit renewals, the Park and Wildlife Commission in consultation with a Traditional Owner delegate will approve permits if the applicant has abided by permit conditions. If a permit

is approved, participation of Traditional Owner in the research project will be actively encouraged and the partners request acknowledgement and the return of information and research results. These will be conditions of any such permit. Traditional Owners' wealth of knowledge about the Park may contribute to research projects, provided the researcher is aware that Traditional Owner cultural and intellectual property rights are protected. It is important for Traditional Owners to be consulted and invited to participate in research and monitoring projects and, where possible, employed in related activities.



*Plate 18: Park Rangers conducting fauna surveys*

Monitoring visitor numbers, demographics, behaviour and satisfaction helps to guide visitor management, including planning and design of facilities. This data can also be useful to inform Traditional Owners interested in developing tourism enterprises. Traffic counters collect information on vehicle numbers and the Parks and Wildlife Commission will continue to collect visitor data from traffic counters located within the Park. Visitor surveys ascertain visitor satisfaction, profile and use of the Park and may target particular sites or experiences. Visitors will be surveyed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission, Tourism NT or other interested parties on an as needs basis.

The success of both joint management and park management will be measured against the performance measures contained within this Plan (see section 6.1). Each year during MRJMC meetings, achievement against the Aims of this Plan will be considered. Progress with management directions, performance measures and overall direction will be assessed. This assessment will determine whether the Plan requires revision or should continue in operation. Implementation of the joint management participatory monitoring and evaluation program will ensure joint management at Mary River National Park continues to be assessed and improved into the future.

## **6.8 Landscape Connectivity**

It is highly desirable to connect the small isolated areas of the Park together, especially when it increases the security of highly valued sites such as sacred sites or waterfowl breeding areas. Opportunities to enhance the Park's conservation viability by expanding the Park or by entering into agreements covering landscape-scale conservation with neighbouring landholders in the region will continue to be explored, including options for corridors between Mary and Kakadu National Parks.

Alternatively the contribution of the smaller isolated parts of the Park should be re-assessed to ensure that their initial values are still valuable and viable and whether they should be retained. An example is the Point

Stuart Road corridor (NT Portion 4111) which is an unusual portion of land to be managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission (see also section 5.7). At present the road corridor contains a four wheel drive track, providing the only land access to Point Stuart Coastal Reserve, Stuart's Tree Historical Reserve (NT Portions 4435 and 971) and a number of private businesses and stations. Land access is unavailable during the Wet season. The Point Stuart Road corridor needs to be transformed into an all-year access road and negotiations are required between relevant government agencies such as the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, the Department of Transport, the Department of Infrastructure and the Parks and Wildlife Commission, as a matter of priority.



Plate 19: The Park is known for its extensive wetland and floodplain systems

#### Aims

- Traditional Owners meaningfully employed through Aboriginal employment and training programs.
- Effectively implementing this Joint Management Plan allowing for continuous improvements in park management.
- Supporting commercial operations and special activities subject to approval processes, policy and protection of the Park's values.

#### Management Actions

39. **Budget** – The Parks and Wildlife Commission will develop operational plans and allocate resources to deliver these plans in consultation with Traditional Owners and with the endorsement of the MRJMC. (*Ongoing*)
40. **Community involvement** – The partners will consult with neighbours, the tourism industry and community and recreational groups in planning and decision-making for the Park. Such groups will be invited to work strategically with the partners on conservation, recreation and tourism planning, to resolve common issues and develop opportunities, including those that are linked to the Park but lie outside the boundary. (*Ongoing*)
41. **Point Stuart Road corridor** – Negotiate with relevant government agencies such as the Department of Lands Planning and the Environment, the Department of Transport and the Department of Infrastructure, to transform the road into an all-year accessible road and to determine whether more appropriate tenure should apply to the Point Stuart Road Corridor (NT Portion 4111). (*High*)
42. **Linking Landscapes** – Opportunities to connect the disparate sections of the Park or enter into conservation agreements with neighbouring landholders will be explored and taken up when possible. (*Ongoing*)
43. **Development proposals** – Proposed activities and developments will be considered in line with relevant development processes and policy, the Tourism and Recreation Masterplan and the visitor strategy, and will be

assessed in line with the scale of potential impact, consistent with Northern Territory and Commonwealth legislation. (*Ongoing*)

44. **Approving permits, activities and proposals** – The Mary River National Park Permit Guidelines (see Table 5) are used by the Permits Office and the MRJMC when assessing permit applications. These guidelines will continue to be refined by the MRJMC (*Ongoing*)

In addition, the assessment of permits, activities and proposals will consider the following:

- Delegated Parks and Wildlife Commission staff can approve standard permit applications that involve an approved activity, require no special access, are low impact and in keeping with Traditional Owner responsibilities;
- Activities or proposals that are culturally sensitive, large or complex, or part of a major commercial project will require full consideration by the partners before the application is considered by the full Traditional Owner group;
- The partners will consider applications if an activity or permit application involves special access or activities including infrastructure development and new research related permits;
- Advice must be sought from the NT department responsible for heritage protection prior to any work involving significant land disturbance or infrastructure development; and
- The partners, with assistance from the Northern Land Council, will decide if activities or proposals affecting a particular area of the Park require additional input such as from a specific Traditional Owner.

45. **Permit conditions** – Compliance with permit, lease and license conditions will be monitored consistent with agreed policies and standard operating procedures. (*Ongoing*)

46. **Hunting** – During the life of the Plan the joint management partners will look at potential options for the future of the Park. (*Moderate*)

47. **Sacred site(s) management** – Traditional Owners are ultimately responsible for sacred sites, however a Cultural Heritage Management Plan will be developed for the Park to provide Parks and Wildlife staff with advice on restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites or culturally sensitive areas of the Park and any site protection works required under the direction of Traditional Owners. (*Moderate*)

48. **Sacred site clearances** – Sacred sites will be protected from damage from approved works on the Park and authority certificates will be sought through AAPA for any works that apply under the NTASSA. The Northern Land Council may provide advice to the partners regarding site protection and works clearances, and assist the partners with obtaining Authority Certificates. Management and protection of sacred sites will then be organised through the AAPA with the expressed wishes of the Traditional Owners. (*Ongoing*)

49. **Works on Archaeological and Heritage places** – Any works or disturbance to declared Heritage places and objects and prescribed Aboriginal Archaeological places and objects in the Park will require consultation and permissions in accordance with the *Heritage Act 2011*. Sacred site clearances through the AAPA will also be sought for works on any Archaeological sites on Park. (*Ongoing*)

50. **Indigenous employment and training** – Training and employment opportunities for Traditional Owners will be actively pursued by the partners. Opportunities for direct and flexible employment, contracts and training will be reviewed annually, together with Traditional Owners' interests and capacity. Agreed, achievable plans will be developed. Options to provide accredited training and business development support will be explored by the partners through collaboration with relevant Government agencies, industry, education and training providers. (*High*)

Priorities for employment and training include:

- Opportunities for paid participation of Traditional Owners in park management programs will be maximised. This may include on-the-job training as well as accredited activities carried out by training organisations;
- Traditional Owners will be paid for specialist cultural advice and supervision when required;
- The Parks and Wildlife Commission will continue to provide opportunities for direct employment and training for Indigenous people;
- Local Indigenous community-based Rangers, community volunteers, and sponsored training and employment organisations will be encouraged and, where possible, invited to assist with Park management; and,

- Indigenous Rangers from other areas will be introduced to the MRJMC or delegated Traditional Owners before working on the Park.
- 51. **Contract services** – Subject to the relevant laws in force in the Northern Territory, Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people, companies and organisations will be the preferred contract service providers where capacity to fulfil contract standards is demonstrated. Contractors who provide training and employment to Traditional Owners and other local Aboriginal people will also be regarded favourably. (*Ongoing*)
- 52. **Tourism enterprises** – Viable enterprises arising from Traditional Owners’ interests will continue to be encouraged. Appropriate support will be provided where possible and agencies such as the Northern Land Council will assist with developing ideas and identifying service providers to help with business plans, skills development and funding. (*Ongoing*)
- 53. **Partnerships and agreements** – Agencies and service providers who can assist with employment, training and enterprise development for Indigenous people will be invited by the joint management partners to provide support to local Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people. (*Ongoing*)
- 54. **Research and monitoring** – Park operational staff will complete a biennial performance review for the Park. Every fifth year a State of the Park Report will be produced reporting on the condition of key values and recommending adaptive changes to management if appropriate. (*Ongoing*)
- 55. **Community living areas** – Proposals for new living areas on the Park will be considered by the partners. The Northern Land Council will undertake Traditional Owner consultation and the precise location of living areas will be subject to assessment of the environmental impacts, NT Government policies, availability of external funding to finance development and joint management partner developed guidelines as required. (*Ongoing*)

#### Performance Measures

- Transparent processes including those for approving new developments and activities within the Park are developed and operating smoothly.

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## Appendix 1. Priority Management Actions and Performance Measures

The management actions and performance measures from this Joint Management Plan have been collated for easy reference. The priority ratings are purely a guide and implementation of many of these actions is subject to the availability of resources.

Management Actions	Page Number	Priority
<b>Zoning</b>		
1. The Park will be managed in accordance with the zoning scheme. Regardless of the designated zone all management and development will have regard to maintaining the Park's natural character, its conservation values and visitor experiences.	6	Ongoing
2. The value of some isolated land parcels within Mary River National Park will be assessed during the life of the Plan.	6	High
3. Any new proposed development will be subject to consultation and permissions in accordance with legislated environmental, sacred site and heritage assessment processes.	6	Ongoing
4. The partners will consult with other stakeholders and their concerns and ideas considered before major changes are made to the zoning scheme.	6	Ongoing
5. To protect sites of exceptional cultural or conservation significance from threatening processes, special protection zones can be designated by the partners in consultation with stakeholders.	6	Ongoing
<b>Governance</b>		
6. The partners will meet at MRJMC meetings, Working Groups and on country camps as well as individually as required, allowing for a flexible approach to decision-making. MRJMC meetings are held once per year with the date and location agreed to by the members well in advance of the meeting. Traditional Owners involved in the Committee and Working Groups will be paid for their service consistent with the Parks and Wildlife Commission Fee for Service policy.	13	Ongoing
7. The Northern Land Council will represent and support Traditional Owners' interests by aiding consultations and (if needed) resolving conflict. The partners and Northern Land Council recognise that joint management will be a process of continuous learning and growth. Governance support and training will be provided to the partners by the Northern Land Council and the Parks and Wildlife Commission focusing on the needs identified by the monitoring and evaluation program (Management Direction [MA] 9). Disputes will be resolved according to the process outlined in section 2.1.	13	Ongoing
8. MRJMC members will be responsible for two-way communication with the wider Traditional Owner group, local community, key stakeholders (neighbours, commercial operators, recreational groups), operational staff and higher levels of government with support from the Northern Land Council as required.	13	Ongoing
9. A monitoring and evaluation program will be developed by the MRJMC to inform action for improved governance. Performance will be measured using indicators relating to satisfaction of the MRJMC members, effectiveness of the partnership and progress towards the longer-term aims stated in this Plan.	13	Moderate
10. Any proposal not addressed in the Plan will be considered by the MRJMC. Any matter that may affect the interests of Traditional Owners will require the consent of affected Traditional Owners. Any environmental, sacred site or heritage matters will be assessed in accordance with relevant legislation.	13	Ongoing
<b>Performance Measures</b>		
➤ Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Program instigated.	13	
➤ The partners are satisfied with the implementation of annual priorities and	13	



decision-sharing processes.		
➤ Achievements related to the longer-term aims stated in this Plan (culture, country and visitors).	13	
<b>Natural Values</b>		
11. A planning team comprised of the park manager, a nominee of the MRJMC, scientists, stakeholders and a planner will prepare a five year Integrated Conservation Strategy for the Park, focusing on Park values and threats and monitoring health and outputs. As part of the strategy a long-term environmental monitoring program of the Park's most important wildlife values, including waterfowl, will be established.	20	High
12. Maintain data relating to inputs and outputs for threat abatement programs (weeds, feral animals, fire) to inform decision-making and using the best technology and methods available to the Parks and Wildlife Commission.	20	High
13. The MRJMC will endorse the five year Integrated Conservation Strategy and annual work plans for conservation / threat abatement programs. Particular attention will be given to specific high value sites including floodplains, rainforest patches and grasslands.	20	High
14. In conjunction with NT Government experts, liaise with the wider community, neighbouring landowners and adjoining Indigenous communities to complement management activities on Park, for assistance with managing the many separate portions of the Park, and to increase awareness of land management issues related to weeds, feral animals and fire.	20	High
<b>Weed Management</b>		
15. Management of weeds will continue to take a strategic approach through implementation of the Integrated Conservation Strategy (MA 11) and the annually-reviewed operational plan. Weed control processes will be developed in conjunction with, and using the standards developed by NT Government experts, to ensure that Park operations comply with the <i>Weeds Management Act</i> , including all associated statutory management plans.  Weed management will focus on practical control methods, practices to minimise the number of weeds being brought into the Park, effective survey and monitoring, and will incorporate the concerns of the Traditional Owners. Weed management will concentrate on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control olive hymenachne, mimosa, gamba grass and mission grass in priority order as advised by the Weed Management Branch of the Department of Land Resource Management, or other relevant government agency;</li> <li>• Ongoing surveillance and mapping for high-risk weeds during Park patrols. Assess new weed incursions against legislative and statutory requirements, regional priorities and the current Park priority list before taking any action or altering existing priorities;</li> <li>• Mitigate weed spread by enforcing use of weed-free / clean equipment when undertaking development on-Park and implement other best practice quarantine procedures for Parks staff and equipment; and</li> <li>• Collect and map weed location data to monitor weed distribution and the effectiveness of weed control.</li> </ul>	20	High
<b>Feral Animal Control</b>		
16. Management of feral animals will be strategically managed through implementation of the Integrated Conservation Strategy (MA 11) and the annually-reviewed action plan.  Feral animal management will concentrate in priority order on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control pigs and buffalo particularly in rainforest patches and in sensitive riparian areas;</li> <li>• Maintain existing fences and install new fences in key locations including the south-eastern corner of the McKinlay sector; and</li> <li>• Liaise with neighbours to maintain fences and to muster straying stock out of the Park at the end of the Wet season and as necessary at other times of the year.</li> </ul>	20	High
<b>Fire Management</b>		
17. Fire will be strategically managed through implementation of the Integrated	21	High

<p>Conservation Strategy and the annually-reviewed action plan.</p> <p>Fire management will concentrate in priority order on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect people, personal property, infrastructure and cultural sites from fire;</li> <li>• Protect the riverine corridor and riparian forests from hot fires through active management in the early Dry season;</li> <li>• Prevent fires from entering or exiting the Park and limit areas of the Park burnt through reducing fuel, maintaining firebreaks and protectively burning around high-value habitat;</li> <li>• Strategically mosaic burn in the early Dry season with patches preferably less than 2 ha. Ensure fires occur less than once every 5 years in savanna communities and less than once every 10 years in woodland habitats;</li> <li>• Reduce fuel loads by spraying, slashing, (pre and post Wet season) or burning invasive grasses (late Wet season);</li> <li>• Restrict open campfires within the Visitor Zone to designated fireplaces. In other zones, campfires may be permitted subject to conditions that minimise the impact and risk of uncontrolled fire; and</li> <li>• Involve the Park's neighbours and consider their interests.</li> </ul>		
<b>Performance Measures</b>		
➤ Datasets maintained and information used to inform forward planning and adaptive management.	21	
➤ Increasing communication and involvement with neighbouring landowners and communities.	21	
➤ Annual operational action plans implemented with high priority actions and targets achieved.	21	
➤ Coastal and floodplain systems in good condition.	21	
<b>Cultural Values</b>		
<p>18. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will include Traditional Owner cultural interests and aspirations into existing management activities wherever practicable. The partners and the Northern Land Council will work together to identify external resources in support of these cultural components where additional funding is required.</p> <p>Cultural heritage management will provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-country activities which allow the partners to spend time on country together, recording knowledge and facilitating transfer of knowledge and skills between Traditional Owners, to the younger generation and to Parks and Wildlife Commission Rangers. Where there is sufficient interest these activities will occur at least annually;</li> <li>• Traditional Owners documenting Indigenous Knowledge and oral histories for the Park. The outcomes of the program will contribute to improving both Park operations programs and public interpretation; and</li> <li>• Cross-cultural training – Park-specific cultural training and welcome to country will be arranged for all new Rangers through the Traditional Owners. These arrangements are to be made as soon as possible after a new Ranger has arrived at the Park.</li> </ul>	25	High
<p>19. Led by the Northern Land Council, the partners will seek assistance from the Heritage Division of the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, or other relevant government agency, to develop and implement a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the Park, providing for Traditional Owner contemporary cultural interests, and historic / archaeological site assessment and conservation. Consult with specialists such as AAPA on best practice information recording and management procedures.</p>	26	Moderate
<p>20. The TPWC Act supports Traditional Owner use of the Park's resources. The partners will promote sustainable use and will develop policy and guidelines as necessary to ensure hunting and gathering is consistent with visitor safety and does not compromise Park values.</p>	26	Moderate
<p>21. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will uphold restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites or culturally sensitive areas of the Park as directed by Traditional Owners, and ensure adequate consultation and communication with affected stakeholders.</p>	26	Ongoing

With consultation and amendment of this Plan, the partners may approve culturally sensitive places as Special Protection Zones.		
22. Traditional Owners' advice on their customary obligations including ceremonial activity, their need to access country, and maintaining traditions will be respected and it is acknowledged that men's and women's sites may require different management. Adequate public notice will be given if public access will be affected by ceremonial activity.	26	Ongoing
23. Traditional Owners will maintain ownership and control of their cultural and intellectual property consistent with intellectual property law as well as any policy and guidelines agreed by the Northern Land Council and the Parks and Wildlife Commission.	26	Ongoing
24. Places will be properly documented, assessed and conserved for their heritage value and their significance to relevant Traditional Owners where appropriate. The Burra Charter principles and processes will guide assessments and NT Heritage Officers will be consulted on any proposed works at Heritage places.	26	Ongoing
25. Where appropriate, places or objects can be nominated to the NT Heritage Register and declared under the <i>Heritage Act 2011</i> . During the life of this Plan, Mary River Crossing, Shady Camp Billabong, and Stuart's Tree memorial will be assessed for registering on the NT Heritage Register using the expertise within the Heritage Division of the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, or other relevant government agency.	26	Moderate
26. Advice will be sought from NT Heritage Officers regarding the most appropriate protection and conservation works. Ideally, conservation works will only occur in accordance with the Cultural Heritage Management Plan. Training in Heritage place management, such as rock art conservation techniques, will be sought for Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Commission staff.	26	Ongoing
<b>Performance Measures</b>		
➤ Cultural Heritage Management Plan developed, regularly reviewed and the partners satisfied with its implementation.	26	
➤ The partners are satisfied that Aboriginal skills and knowledge of country are being integrated into day-to-day park management wherever practicable.	26	
<b>Visitor Values</b>		
<i>Visitor Safety</i>		
27. All staff will be familiar with the procedures and trained and prepared to implement them at all times.	35	High
28. Implement the 'Estuarine (Saltwater) Crocodile Management Plan for Visitor Safety – Mary River National Park' and review as required.	35	High
<b>Development, Access, Activities, and Facilities</b>		
29. A visitor strategy for Mary River National Park will be prepared by the partners in collaboration with Tourism NT and the Department of Business or other relevant government agencies, as well as other interested parties. The strategy will identify opportunities for all tourism related activities, facilities and information within the Park and will be guided by Territory-wide policies and the Tourism and Recreation Masterplan.	35	High
30. Tracks and roads will be maintained for high quality visitor access and safety. Visitors will be encouraged to keep to vehicle and walking tracks to minimise damage to sensitive habitats and avoid risk of accidental entry into culturally sensitive areas. Access to the Park, or areas within the Park, may be restricted for environmental, cultural or safety reasons.	36	High
31. Entry of pets into the Park will be consistent with the Pets in Parks policy.	36	Ongoing
32. Work with 4WD NT, as per the MOU, to reopen and maintain existing and overgrown tracks within the Park. Consider additional opportunities for tracks within the Park, particularly within the McKinlay Sector.	36	High
33. Send email updates to all local tour operators when there are changes in access to visitor sites.	36	High

34. Visitor access, activities and facilities within the Park will be managed and developed according to the zoning scheme (see Map 1) and the visitor strategy. The approval, design and construction of developments will be subject to appropriate site clearances, environmental assessments and agreed site development planning and be consistent with appropriate legislation. Investment in any proposed programs or works will be considered against Territory-wide priorities, the Tourism and Recreation Masterplan, budget availability and the visitor strategy.	36	High
35. The partners will work cooperatively with the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, or other relevant government agency, to manage fisheries in and adjacent to the Park and to investigate opportunities to improve fishing access where sustainable. Northern Territory possession and size limits and the Mary River Fish Management Zone restrictions apply within the Park.	36	Moderate
<b>Information and Interpretation</b>		
36. A program will be developed for the Park which will consider: community engagement, use of innovative media, cultural interpretation, safety and regulation, staff training and tour operator and tour guide support. The interpretation and community education program will concentrate in priority order on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional signs are to be erected at key locations to warn visitors of hazards and provide regulatory information (e.g. 'no access' and 'no off-road driving' signage);</li> <li>• The partners will work with Tourism NT and other relevant agencies to ensure the Park is marketed and promoted accurately and appropriately, consistent with the values and character of the Park;</li> <li>• The Traditional Owners will ensure that all Indigenous cultural information shared with visitors is accurate and appropriate; and</li> <li>• Opportunities to provide Park overview and /or orientation signage at key visitor nodes are to be explored in the visitor strategy. This includes assessing the suitability of providing for the development of an orientation visitor booth and rationalising existing signage at the junction of the Arnhem Highway and Point Stuart Road. Removal of the outdated visitor booth at its existing location 10 km east of the Mary River will be part of this process.</li> </ul>	36	Moderate
<b>Visitor Monitoring</b>		
37. Following the review of the Parks and Wildlife Commission Visitor Monitoring Strategy, implement the visitor monitoring program for the Park in accordance with the Parks and Wildlife Commission visitor monitoring standards.	36	Moderate
<b>Waste Management</b>		
38. Implement the Waste Management Policy once it has been prepared.	36	Moderate
<b>Performance Measures</b>		
➤ Anecdotal evidence of visitor satisfaction with the Park and its facilities.	36	
➤ Annual audit of infrastructure and Repairs and Maintenance program completed.	36	
➤ Implementation of the Crocodile Management Plan, Emergency Response Policy and Procedures and no preventable visitor accidents as a result of visiting the Park.	36	
➤ Increase in number of visitor opportunities and experiences available.	37	
➤ Visitor numbers collected and reported to the partners.	37	
➤ Appropriate cultural information is included in new educational information produced for the Park.	37	
<b>Business Operations</b>		
39. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will develop operational plans and allocate resources to deliver these plans in consultation with Traditional Owners and with the endorsement of the MRJMC.	46	Ongoing
40. The partners will consult with neighbours, the tourism industry and community and recreational groups in planning and decision-making for the Park. Such groups will be invited to work strategically with the partners on conservation, recreation and tourism planning, to resolve common issues and develop opportunities, including	46	Ongoing

those that are linked to the Park but lie outside the boundary.		
41. Negotiate with relevant government agencies such as the Department of Lands Planning and the Environment, the Department of Transport and the Department of Infrastructure to transform the road into an all-year accessible road and to determine whether more appropriate tenure should apply to the Point Stuart Road Corridor (NT Portion 4111).	46	High
42. Opportunities to connect the disparate sections of the Park or enter into conservation agreements with neighbouring landholders will be explored and taken up when possible.	46	Ongoing
43. Proposed activities and developments will be considered in line with relevant development processes and policy, the Tourism and Recreation Masterplan and the visitor strategy, and will be assessed in line with the scale of potential impact, consistent with Northern Territory and Commonwealth legislation.	46	Ongoing
<i>Permits</i>		
44. The Mary River National Park Permit Guidelines (see Table 5) are used by the Permit Office and the MRJMC when assessing permit applications. In addition, the assessment of permits, activities and proposals will consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegated Parks and Wildlife Commission staff can approve standard permit applications that involve an approved activity, require no special access, are low impact and in keeping with Traditional Owner responsibilities;</li> <li>Activities or proposals that are culturally sensitive, large or complex, or part of a major commercial project will require full consideration by the partners before the application is considered by the full Traditional Owner group;</li> <li>The partners will consider applications if an activity or permit application involves special access or activities including infrastructure development and wildlife permits;</li> <li>Advice must be sought from the NT department responsible for heritage protection prior to any work involving significant land disturbance or infrastructure development; and</li> <li>The partners, with assistance from the Northern Land Council, will decide if activities or proposals affecting a particular area of the Park require additional input such as from a specific Traditional Owner.</li> </ul>	47	Ongoing
45. Compliance with permit, lease and license conditions will be monitored consistent with agreed policies and standard operating procedures.	47	Ongoing
<i>Hunting</i>		
46. During the life of the Plan the joint management partners will look at potential options for the future of the Park.	47	Moderate
<i>Sacred Sites</i>		
47. Traditional Owners are ultimately responsible for sacred sites however a Cultural Heritage Management Plan will be developed for the Park to provide Parks and Wildlife staff with advice on restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites or culturally sensitive areas of the Park and any site protection works required under the direction of Traditional Owners.	47	Moderate
48. Sacred sites will be protected from damage from approved works on the Park and authority certificates will be sought through AAPA for any works that apply under the NTASSA. The Northern Land Council may provide advice to the partners regarding site protection and works clearances, and assist the partners with obtaining Authority Certificates. Management and protection of sacred sites will then be organised through the AAPA with the expressed wishes of the Traditional Owners.	47	Ongoing
49. Any works or disturbance to declared Heritage places and objects and prescribed Aboriginal Archaeological places and objects in the Park will require consultation and permissions in accordance with the <i>Heritage Act 2011</i> . Sacred site clearances through the AAPA will also be sought for works on any Archaeological sites on Park.	47	Ongoing
<i>Indigenous Employment and Business Opportunities</i>		
50. Training and employment opportunities for Traditional Owners will be actively pursued by the partners. Opportunities for direct and flexible employment, contracts	47	High

<p>and training will be reviewed annually, together with Traditional Owners' interests and capacity. Agreed, achievable plans will be developed. Options to provide accredited training and business development support will be explored by the partners through collaboration with relevant Government agencies, industry, education and training providers.</p> <p>Priorities for employment and training include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for paid participation of Traditional Owners in park management programs will be maximised. This may include on-the-job training as well as accredited activities carried out by training organisations;</li> <li>• Traditional Owners will be paid for specialist cultural advice and supervision when required;</li> <li>• The Parks and Wildlife Commission will continue to provide opportunities for direct employment and training for Indigenous people;</li> <li>• Local Indigenous community-based Rangers, community volunteers, and sponsored training and employment organisations will be encouraged and, where possible, invited to assist with Park management; and</li> <li>• Indigenous Rangers from other areas will be introduced to the MRJMC or delegated Traditional Owners before working on the Park.</li> </ul>		
51. Subject to the relevant laws in force in the Northern Territory, Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people, companies and organisations will be the preferred contract service providers where capacity to fulfil contract standards is demonstrated. Contractors who provide training and employment to Traditional Owners and other local Aboriginal people will also be regarded favourably.	48	Ongoing
52. Viable enterprises arising from Traditional Owners' interests will continue to be encouraged. Appropriate support will be provided where possible and agencies such as the Northern Land Council will assist with developing ideas and identifying service providers to help with business plans, skills development and funding.	48	Ongoing
53. Agencies and service providers who can assist with employment, training and enterprise development for Indigenous people will be invited by the joint management partners to provide support to local Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people.	48	Ongoing
<i>Research and Monitoring</i>		
54. Park operational staff will complete a biennial performance review for the Park. Every fifth year a State of the Park Report will be produced reporting on the condition of key values and recommending adaptive changes to management if appropriate	48	Ongoing
<i>Community Living Areas</i>		
55. Proposals for new living areas on the Park will be considered by the partners. The Northern Land Council will undertake Traditional Owner consultation and the precise location of living areas will be subject to assessment of the environmental impacts, NT Government policies, availability of external funding to finance development and joint management partner developed guidelines as required.	48	Ongoing
<i>Performance Measures</i>		
➤ Transparent processes including those for approving new developments and activities within the Park are developed and operating smoothly.	48	