



PULU KEELING NATIONAL PARK



VISITOR ACCESS STRATEGY

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1 Introduction

The Pulu Keeling National Park Plan of Management states that the objectives for the management of access are:

- (a) to protect and preserve the Park, its vegetation, animals, marine flora and fauna and marine habitats from the adverse impacts of visitor access: and
- (b) to ensure as far as possible, the safe access of park staff and visitors to North Keeling Island."

In order to achieve these management objectives, the Park is closed under the provisions of regulation 12.23 (3) of the regulations, with access only available to those persons issued with a permit under the provisions of regulation 17, or those accompanying a warden or ranger as provided for under Subregulation 31 (4) (b) of the Regulations.

The Plan of Management states that "*as a means of minimising the effects of access to the island a visitor access strategy will be developed*", and that the strategy "*will address all aspects of staff and visitor access to Pulu Keeling National Park*".

2 Access difficulties

Pulu Keeling National Park lies 24km north of the southern atoll (the main atoll). Between the months of April and November the predominant south-easterly Trade Winds make sea conditions very rough for small vessels. Rough seas can develop at any time during the year. The prevailing winds of 15-30 knots also produce a regular swell that has to be negotiated to get ashore at North Keeling Island. The swell, combined with the tides, makes it virtually impossible to be deposited on the beach by a small tender at both the beginning and the end of the same day. Consequently all visitors need to be good swimmers in surf conditions.

The only area suitable for anchoring is on the western side of the island, at the site known as the "landing area". Conditions can change very rapidly even at the landing area and no mooring sites are available. Vessels are restricted to anchoring in the sand sheet on the western side of North Keeling Island. Vessels at anchor must have a responsible crew member aboard at all times.

3 The requirement for guided access

Access is prohibited to Pulu Keeling National Park under Regulation 31(1) of the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975*. The requirements for making such a determination are that the Director, National Parks and Wildlife, has reasonable cause to believe that there is a need to protect and preserve the wildlife of Pulu Keeling National Park, which might be interfered with unless visitor access is controlled, and that public safety would or may be endangered by unsupervised access to the Park.

4 Permits to visit Pulu Keeling National Park

As stated above, unless a visitor is in the company of Park staff or a licensed tour operator, they require a permit to visit the Park. Even if one is only visiting the waters of the Park and do not intend to go ashore, a permit is required. Even when permitted themselves, tour operators are responsible for organising the group permits for their patrons. Research activities will only be permitted by scientists from bona fide

research organisations undertaking research relevant to the management of Pulu Keeling National Park.

5 Pre-visit education and briefing

Visitors going to the Park with Park staff will be given a pre-visit briefing to ensure visitors have been informed regarding what to take, appropriate behaviour etc. Prior to each visit to the Park, tour operators are to contact Park staff to check the weather conditions, to be informed of any seasonal closures, to confirm the names of the patrons and to discuss the day's route.

6 Tour Operations and size of groups

Tour operators must have a permit to conduct commercial operations in Pulu Keeling National Park.

Tour operations for land based, surfing and diving activities will be restricted to 2,1 and 2 operators respectively.

To ensure the enjoyment of visitors when exploring the wilderness of Pulu Keeling National Park, and to reduce the disturbance to wildlife, the maximum permitted size of land based tour groups is 14 persons only, including tour guides. It is preferable that the group remain together, but if they separate, each sub-group must have a guide. Tour Guides need to hold a St John's Senior First Aid certificate as a minimum requirement. Tour leaders must carry a suitable first aid kit, and are responsible for the safety and behaviour of their patrons. Tour operator training will be conducted by Parks Australia staff.

7 Frequency of visits.

Permits to go ashore at North Keeling Island (with a permitted tour operator) will be issued for a maximum number of three days per week, to minimise disturbance to wildlife.

8 Landing requirements and restrictions

Anchoring. No mooring site is provided. Anchor only in the sand on the western side of the island. Vessels at anchor must have a responsible crew member aboard at all times.

Emergency evacuations. Parks Australia has purchased a line thrower to be used to retrieve equipment or personnel.

9 Tour operator review

A review of the performance of tour operators is necessary to ensure that visitor impacts remain at a minimum and that accurate information is being presented. Tour operator performance will be assessed in a number of ways, including Parks Australia staff participation in tours and visitor questionnaires.

10 Communications

Tour leaders must have some form of communication with the vessel and their boat attendant in case of emergency or changing sea conditions.

11 Monitoring and recording of visitor impacts

Whilst in the Park, visitor activity must be environmentally sensitive. Visitor activity will be monitored, and Parks Australia will take appropriate action to mitigate or prevent adverse environmental impacts (eg erosion, weeds, rubbish etc).

12 Overnight visits

In addition to the requirements and restrictions associated with day visits, the following conditions apply when personnel are camping on North Keeling Island.

- a) Camping trips are for staff and accompanied scientists on official visits only.
- b) No camp fires are to be lit.
- c) Personnel are to give an up-date on conditions at the landing area in the morning before the pick-up vessel leaves the southern atoll. If conditions deteriorate during the day, the pick up time is to be advanced or abandoned, and the vessel notified as soon as possible.
- d) The pick up vessel is to have on board a line thrower, to be used for the removal of equipment if the sea conditions necessitate it.
- e) Extra food and water supplies are to be kept on-island for use in an emergency.
- f) Radio or telephone schedules with someone based on the southern atoll are to be pre-arranged for each visit. The person to be contacted on the southern atoll could be a family member, a friend or the AFP.
- g) If the conditions at the pick up time are any cause for concern, self inflating life jackets are to be worn.

13 Emden

Entry into the Protected Zone surrounding the *SMS Emden* is only allowed after a permit has been issued by the Minister for Communications and the Arts under Section 15 of the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

14 Scuba diving

SCUBA diving and snorkelling will only be allowed in the company of licensed tour operators, as per section 2.4.3 (e) of the Pulu Keeling National Park Plan of Management.