

Resource Assessment for the Buccaneer Archipelago, a candidate marine protected area in the Kimberley region of Western Australia



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Executive Summary

Located in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, approximately 230km north east of Broome, is a cluster of over 800 islands known as the Buccaneer Archipelago. The Western Australian Marine Parks and Reserves Selection Working Group (1994) identified the Buccaneer Archipelago as one of seventy candidate marine protected areas. It has recommended that the waters of the Buccaneer Archipelago be considered for reservation as a multi-use marine park.

This unique archipelago system, with a tropical monsoonal climate, exhibits a complex geomorphology and experiences a macro tidal range in excess of 10 meters. This system supports a vast diversity of marine habitats. Some key habitats of the Buccaneer Archipelago include seagrass communities, extensive mangroves, intertidal reefs, coral reefs, sandy beaches, rocky bays and embayments.

With a large mix of habitats there are many significant marine fauna that visit, breed or nest in the area. Dugongs frequent the large bays and seagrass communities. Five species of marine turtle visit the region with the Green turtle (*Chelonian mydas*) nesting in the Buccaneer Archipelago. Areas of the Buccaneer Archipelago are also used as calving grounds by humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) between June and November. There are over 800 species of fish and 111 species of birds known from the area.

Significant cultural sites found in the area date back thousands of years. The Bardi and Jawi aboriginal groups occupy the region. Within the local government of Derby-West Kimberley the coastal tenure is a mix of aboriginal, nature and defence reserves. Mining for iron ore occurs on two of the islands of the Buccaneer Archipelago (Koolan and Cockatoo Islands). Aquaculture and pearling take place in the Buccaneer Archipelago and surroundings. Tourism in the Buccaneer Archipelago is growing especially in the area of charter boat cruises through the islands.

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