PULU KEELING NATIONAL PARK COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING (PKNPCMC)

Meeting Minutes Wednesday 31 March 2021

5-5.30pm Home Island Council Chambers; 5.50-6.15pm Home Island Parks Office;

6.45-7.45pm Island Brunch Cafe

Members	**Declaration of Interest**	**Contact**
Azima Bat (Mak Ayub)	Parks elected member	(08) 9162 7530
Ratma Anthoney (Nek Umar)	Shire elected member	(08) 9162 7512
Rik Soderlund	Parks elected member	(08) 9162 6777
Wesan Rasa (Pak Alfin) until 6.45pm	Shire elected Member	(08) 9162 7784
Kerrie Bennison	Park Manager, Pulu Keeling National Park	(08) 9164 8700
Larissa Powell	Parks elected member	(08) 91627530
Thomas Battcher	Shire elected member	
Observers		
Trish Flores (minutes)	A/g Chief Ranger, Pulu Keeling National Park	(08) 9162 6678
Siddiq Juljali (minutes)	Ranger, Pulu Keeling National Park	(08) 9162 6678
Apologies		
David McKinney	Parks elected member	(08) 9162 7587
Jamil Ibram (Pak Qoid)	Shire Councilor/elected member	(08) 9162 7536
Riadi Feyrel (Nek Nazif)	Shire elected member	(08) 9162 7519
Special guests		
Nek Su and Jan Young		

AGENDA

No.	AGENDA ITEM
1.0	Shire presentation • Update on Parks works since the previous presentation to Shire in June 2020 • Red foot booby research and harvest proposal • Australian Border Force compliance in PKNP

	5-5.30pm Home Island Council Chambers TF gave an update to the Shire (and the PKNP CMC members present at the workshop) on recent Parks works in PKNP and various collaboration activities with the Shire. The Powerpoint presentation is attached to these minutes. After the update, there was a question from Council regarding the improved communications for PKNP staff and the proposed semi-permanent vs permanent repeater in PKNP. TF advised that the AFP had indicated there was little need for a more permanent repeater in PKNP, due to the low visitation to the Park, on-going maintenance and that in good weather VHF 20 worked in waters around some of the island which could also be improved by having a long aerial installed on a boat. KB advised the Council that Parks had received the report from Monash University on the drone work completed in Dec 2019 and Feb 2020. The report shows that in December a total of 8,407 active red footed booby bird nests were recorded by the drone and ground counts. Other birds such as frigates and other booby species were also counted. This estimate is provided to the Council as assistance towards preparing a proposal for a legal harvest of red footed booby birds outside the boundaries of PKNP. There was a brief discussion with Council regarding the next steps for a proposed legal harvest. **Action: KB to find out what is required from ESD to progress a harvest proposal, what other assistance Parks could provide and pass this information to the Shire at the June Shire meeting.** KB advised that an arrangement had been put in place with Australian Border Force to assist with compliance in PKNP. The reason for this was to keep Siddiq and Trish distanced from compliance work, as they are expected to live and work in a small community. Commonwealth Marine Parks have agreements with ABF to do compliance in other Marine Reserves, so this is just an extension of work they already assist Parks with. Only the ABF vessels have been tasked and only for compliance in the Park e.g checking recreational permits within the Park. Separate to this arrangement, ABF will also intervene if a wildlife offence is being committed to a protected species <u>outside</u> the Park, as this is part of the broader Parks Australia agreement with ABF. The presentation to Council finished at 5.40pm.
2.0	**General business and debrief from the Shire workshop**
	5.50-6.15pm Home Island Parks office The meeting started at 5.50pm in the Parks Home Island office. The minutes of the previous meeting had been emailed around on 03.03.2021 and members had been asked to make any changes via email by 05.03.2021. No comments had been received. TF asked members could confirm the minutes at this meeting. Minutes were confirmed by NU and seconded by MA. TF advised that KB had approved minutes being circulated and confirmed by email rather than waiting for the next committee meeting, so they could be forwarded onto the Shire without delay. KB acknowledged TF and SJ and the hard work they continue to do. The committee were asked whether they had any feedback on what was discussed at the Council workshop. Thomas asked whether the committee could be involved in the red footed booby harvest proposal process,

	either as an individual or as a committee member. KB advised that Parks would stay separate from the process as much as possible so the community wouldn't think that Parks were the body who approved it. As the committee is "part of" Parks, it wouldn't be the role of the committee either. If a committee member knew of someone who could assist with writing the proposal, they could approach them. RS mentioned that it would be good to communicate to the community that it is not Parks responsibility to approve a harvest and that Parks is also not blocking a harvest. Regulating the harvest was the role of Parks in the past (ie Wendy and Greenie controlled the harvest) so would be good to clarify this. Other questions asked were: Would the harvest include frigates? Would the harvest be restricted to a season? How many families want to take birds, how many birds? This is not for Parks/committee to decide. It is the Shire's role to do the consultations to answer these questions. Parks could do an update in the Atoll informing that they had presented to the Shire, facilitated a report to provide an estimate for the Shire and it is now up to the Shire to progress a harvest proposal. **Action: Parks to do an update in the Atoll informing that they had presented to the Shire with the red footed booby estimate.** There was a discussion around flail vs shotgun. It was agreed that firearms would complicate the process and might make it harder for the Department to approve. There was a discussion around ABF doing the compliance patrols. TF advised that ABF had not reported seeing any boats in the Park since the tasking began last September. Pulu Keeling surveillance is part of their standard tasking and they are required to patrol PKNP when they are here. LP asked who would do the investigation and/or prosecution once ABF had the evidence. In the past, Parks Cocos staff had this role, but it was intended to defer the investigation to the Marine Parks Branch Compliance section. Parks Cocos staff would hopefully be kept out of this process as well.
3.0	**Fish catch non-returns**
	TF explained that despite the extended Doldrum season presenting numerous days of very calm weather, the fish catch data returns had been minimal. TF has also written several friendly reminder emails to return the fish catch data. People were still applying for permits and many permits had been issued. At the last committee meeting, the group was divided as to whether we should return to the 4 day permits, or leave it at 3 months. PA asked for clarification on the permit process. Permits need to be applied for and applications are available online and in the wooden box outside the Home Island Office. Permits are approved and issued by the Chief Ranger. People can also get a fish catch data return form from the wooden box. PA commented that people had not been going to the Park this season. PA has been approached by some members in the community asking when people are able to bottom fish in PKNP. TF gets asked this occasionally and often refers to the section in the POM that states this is not allowed for in the current Management Plan. The reason for this restriction is that it's the only place on the atoll where bottom is fishing is not allowed and where this reef habitat remains protected. NU commented that perhaps people were feeling policed. Perhaps they did not want to offer up this information as they were afraid that it would mean bag limits would be introduced if they were catching too much. It needed to be clear that the data is not for compliance but for monitoring the fish health, as

	the presence and composition of big fish can indicate that the food chain lower down is healthy enough to sustain the bigger fish. NU added that the same species could be caught in the southern atoll as PKNP, so recently people were fishing more in the southern lagoon, particularly as the calmer waters meant areas down south could be accessed, where normally it was too rough. TF has asked Pak Sofiya if Parks could attend a fishing reference group meeting to workshop the way forward to ensure the fish catch data is returned. It is hoped that Parks will receive and invitation to attend a meeting in the near future.
4.0	**Draft Committee members profile document**
	TF tabled the draft PKNPCMC members profile document. If everyone is happy with it, then Parks would like to publish it in the Atoll newsletter. **Action: TF to circulate the committee members profile document and if unanimous agreement, then it would go in the next Atoll.**
5.0	**Group discussion on observations from December trip, including lagoon closing. Nek Su has been invited to this session.**
	6.45-7.45pm Island Brunch Cafe Nek Su was asked to comment on the changes he observed on the trip to PKNP in December 2020 Translation was provided by Nek Umar, Mak Ayub and Jan Young. Nek Su noticed dramatic changes to the lagoon since it has closed. He was surprised at the extent of the mud at the edge of the lagoon and said the lagoon used to look like the sea, and now it doesn't. He said he also feels sad and worried that it looks the way it does now. NU asked whether we should open the lagoon or should we let it continue to dry? NS advised that if we don't open it up, the inside might dry up completely because it is not getting flushed anymore. At the point of the "mud crossing" down the southern end we see today, NS said he used to see the water coming in and out. There is not much water coming through now, and the mud seems to be drying up a little. TF asked the committee - What do other people think about opening up the lagoon? Is there a freshwater lens? TF seemed to think yes but will try to find any information on this. Nek Su says no as they did try in the past to dig for water and you can't get to the water, you just hit rocks. KB suggested we could trim the vegetation to allow the tide to come in and monitor for any change as a starting point. We are not talking about major earthworks. JY asked that with climate change and sea level rise, would the seawater come in naturally over time anyway? KB advised PKNP was listed as a RAMSAR site of international significance when the lagoon was opened, and this characteristic which helped it's listing, has now changed. There is an assessment process if we decided to pursue re-opening the lagoon. The process is called an Environmental Impact Assessment and

	would eventually go before ESD (the same people who would approve a seabird harvest). KB advised Parks would do the initial self - assessment first, then bring before committee to determine whether opening the lagoon up would be deemed a "significant impact" or not. If yes, it would go before ESD to assess. As part of our self-assessment, we would have comment on the perceived effects of the lagoon closing and then re-opening, both negative and positive effects across all species across the entire island. We would describe our concerns on how some species have changed over the years e.g rail population dropping in recent years, mud crabs disappearing on lagoon edge. Also, what would be the effects on the masked booby colony that now nest where there used to be sand and tidal inundation? Is there freshwater on the island? Further discussion will be deferred to the next meeting. **ACTION: Siddiq and Trish to find out what is required in the self- assessment of the EIA and this item to be further workshopped at the next meeting.** Pulu Bill and Pulu Latim now have many more trees. NS was surprised at this. Nek Su used to fish from both of these spits of land. Access to Pulu Bill and Pulu Latim was tidal and the fish used to swim in and out of the channel and the seabirds would feed inside the lagoon. NS mentioned there used to be mud crabs and crab holes around the edge of the lagoon. As part of the New Years celebration, they would travel to the Park on the Big Barge, Biar Selamat. The focus of the trip was to harvest seabirds as it was a large part of their diet, so they wouldn't spend time looking for crabs, but he knows they were there. They also knew they could get mud crabs from the southern lagoon so they were not taken from PKNP as much. TF and SJ don't see mud crabs when they visit now although there are some large holes in the mud in some areas on the lagoon edge. In the lagoon, NS would observe large sized cod. They were usually more concerned about the size of the cod rather than the sharks they used to see. Buff banded rails were not seen so much on the edge of lagoon, more seen throughout the forest. Sometimes they were seen on the beach edge taking a bath. These days TF and SJ see them more on the edge of the lagoon foraging, more commonly at night. On DI they swim on the beach edge. There used to be lots of robber crabs seen throughout the day and night. They used to come in and feed on all the food scraps, there would be plenty of them around the camp. (Now it is hermit crabs that are scavengers around the camp). TF and SJ don't see many robber crabs, they are more common at night and seen north of the camp in the open *Pisonia* forest. Back when they used to travel up in the jukongs and harvest sea birds from PKNP, they would take them from the western beach side, outside of the lagoon. Birds would be found everywhere in the trees outside, around the whole island. He noticed there were a lot more birds on the inside of the lagoon when he visited in December. He also said the roosting and nesting areas of the birds was very discrete, frigates only nesting in *Pemphis* in the southern end and on Pokok sireh, whereas now red footed boobies and frigates all seem to be together, some mixed species even nesting in the same tree. NS also mentioned there were not as many masked boobies seen on their visits, but they would see them down near the Emden site. (SJ and TF only see one or two breeding pairs there now).

6.0	**Office move to Home Island and Shire ranger co-location plans**
	TF updated the committee on the planned office to move to Home Island. It is hoped that the move would be done by 30 June and the Home Island office be fully operational. Although Parks would not have an office on Home Island, Parks would still be visible on West Island as there is still infrastructure to maintain. Meetings on West could still be held in the offices of the other stakeholders. Parks has also asked Razali to co-locate in the Home Island office to offer mentoring opportunities for Razali and to be able to better plan and coordinate some of the collaborative activities (eg rat bating, cat cameras). He would still maintain regular contact with the Shire office.
7.0	**PKNP CMC Q&A**
	There was little time left for this. TF apologised and reminded members that they could also approach Siddiq and Trish with any questions or email anything they wished to raise.
8.0	**Next meeting**
	The next meeting will coincide with Kerrie's next visit to Cocos at the end of June
	ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING
1	**KB to find out what is required from ESD for a harvest proposal, what other assistance Parks could provide and pass this information to the Shire at the June Shire meeting.**
2	**Parks to do an update in the Atoll informing that we had presented to the Shire with the red footed booby estimate.**
3	**TF to circulate the PKNPCMC members profile document and if unanimous agreement, then it would go in the next Atoll.**
4	**Siddiq and Trish to find out what is required in the self- assessment of the EIA and this item to be further workshopped at the next meeting.**