



Action planning for island conservation and management in Australia

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Australia as a nation has placed considerable focus on understanding and stewarding many of its landscapes. This is evidenced by the plethora of environmental institutions, research hubs and management programs established targeting those landscapes, and their focus on meeting the objectives in the National Biodiversity Strategy ([Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council 2010](#)). However, despite Australia being custodian of one of the most diverse and important assemblages of offshore islands globally, there has never been a commensurate level of attention given to their strategic management or even their inventory.

Australia needs a new shared vision that the current trajectory of loss of natural heritage on its offshore islands is not acceptable and needs to change. Recent climate-related events highlighting the fragility of island marine ecosystems following cyclones in the Great Barrier Reef ([GBRMPA 2011](#); [Hughes et al. 2018](#)), and bushfires on Kangaroo Island that burnt almost 40% of the island, are yet another reminder of the urgency to address these declines ([DAWE 2020](#)). The importance of some islands around Australia for endemic species (e.g. Christmas Island), and nesting sites (summarised in [Morris et al. 2018](#)) signifies these land areas and associated coastal areas provide valuable habitat at a national level. However, we must re-examine long-held beliefs that Australia's islands are remote and 'okay' and replace this complacency with a better understanding of their contribution to this country's natural capital and value nationally and internationally, and the strategic role they can play in guarding its future.

Building on the 'Foundations' and 'Emerging Themes' described in 'Australian Island Arks' ([Moro et al. 2018](#)), we introduce and continue discussions among leading island practitioners for a holistic plan focusing on national island coordination. In this Special Issue authors identify the current tools, approaches and frameworks that currently exist – and draw together examples as case studies – to better manage islands nationally in a cost-effective way while recognising the opportunities they present for the conservation of their natural heritage. The effectiveness of community and not-for-profit groups is particularly influenced by their capacity to attract financial resources to support conservation initiatives on islands.

This Special Issue brings together seven papers from Traditional Owners, leaders and practitioners with experience working on offshore islands across the Australian and New Zealand region. The fundamentals for each paper are to ask whether solutions already exist or could be easily adopted, and if not, suggest potential solutions or scenarios to move forward with island policy and management. Case studies reflect key lessons and concepts discussed within the context of climate change, Traditional Owners, community participation, entrepreneurial investments for conservation, holistic island management activities and comparing some environmental organisational governance models for managing national-level environmental initiatives. Papers showcase examples of social practices that have enhanced island restoration and biodiversity conservation, and examine approaches in other sectors to recommend which, if any, islands might be useful in resolving the issue of lack of cross jurisdiction co-ordination in Australia for island management. Northern Australia and its offshore islands (including Sea Country) has a different custodianship to many other islands elsewhere in the south, hence a different set of cultural and socio-strategies play into how these regions can be managed going forward with Traditional Owners involved at the planning phases of initiatives. The opportunity here is to examine how can we build inspiring socio-economic conservation initiatives using Traditional Owner custodianship as leadership models. Collectively these perspectives develop a thesis

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for how Australia as a nation could progress sustainable island conservation, management and community initiatives including our Traditional Owner custodians.

Establishing an action plan and a cohesive national organisation provides a compelling case for Australia as a nation to support a far greater investment in island management from social, indigenous, economic and environmental perspectives. Business cases identify several key activities that will pave the way for enhanced island management. The process of developing a national island strategy to achieve these gains offers the exciting prospect of redesigning the way in which conservation management interventions are delivered on islands across Australia now and into the future, and sets a new trajectory for their protection.

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