

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ISLANDS

Progress update December 2021



Planning for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park

On 25 July 2019, the national park was established to include all uninhabited island areas to high-water mark with curtilages around the jetties at East Wallabi and Beacon islands.

The national park is vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission and managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park Management Plan

The Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park draft management plan 2021 (the draft plan) was released for a 10-week public comment period in May 2021.

There was considerable community and stakeholder interest in the draft plan and many, very detailed submissions were received. DBCA appreciates the time and effort made by submitters in providing considered

feedback to the draft plan and is currently preparing the final management plan based on the analysis of submissions. It is likely the final management plan will be released in mid-2022.

Construction of park management and visitor facilities

The roll out of the \$10 million capital works program on East Wallabi and Beacon Islands is continuing with most works to be completed by mid 2022. The construction of the two jetties by Dongara based company In-Situ Construction on Beacon and East Wallabi Islands is well advanced. All piling is complete and the construction of the deck structure for the East Wallabi jetty is taking shape. Completion of jetty works on both islands is due early in 2022. A major contract has been awarded to Geraldton company GBSC Yurra to construct the

park operations base and visitor infrastructure on East Wallabi Island. The works will include a six-bedroom operations base and workshop running off a remote power system. Tourism facilities in the contract include toilets, boardwalks and five shade shelters; three of which will service tourists visiting Turtle Bay. Works are due to commence early 2022 with completion likely by mid-2022.

Other works underway and nearing completion include improved airplane parking areas on East Wallabi Island that will alleviate safety issues and improve pedestrian access to both Turtle Bay and the island's jetty. The development of visitor facilities on Beacon Island will roll out in 2022 after the completion of the jetty. Works will provide improved pedestrian access, seating and interpretive facilities to tell the fascinating Batavia story to visitors.

Planning for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park (continued)

Managing biosecurity risks

Biosecurity risks include the introduction of weeds and animal pests (such as mice and rats) to the Abrolhos Islands. The devastating impact of introduced pests has already been experienced on Rat Island when rats and cats were introduced by guano miners in the 1800s, decimating the local breeding bird population.

In order to manage the potential for future introductions like this DBCA is in the process of preparing a biosecurity plan for the Abrolhos Islands. An expert team from Murdoch University's Harry Butler Institute have been engaged to prepare the plan and will consult widely to ensure all avenues for introduction are covered.

Managing biosecurity risks

The initial priority is to ensure that the upcoming works on East Wallabi and Beacon Island do not result in the introduction of weeds and pests. A series of protocols will be put in place for contractors, staff and then tour operators and their guests who visit the island to ensure no biosecurity breaches occur.

Further stages of planning will result in the preparation of a biosecurity plan that will cover all national park islands and determine the appropriate protocols to minimise the risk of introducing weeds and pest animal species.

Opportunities for commercial tour operators

Those wishing to operate land-based tours in the national park can apply for a commercial operations licence online at parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/for-business/commercial-operations-licensing.

For queries about marine tourism operations in the Fish Habitat Protection Area, please contact the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD).

Once management plans are completed for the national park, Fish Habitat Protection Area and the Abrolhos Reserve, a competitive process for any new semi-permanent or permanent tourism development proposals or restricted tourism activities will be advertised by DBCA and DPIRD.



Planning for the Abrolhos Reserve and Fish Habitat Protection Area

Over the past year, DPIRD has been assisting with progressing the national park planning process, as well as driving planning processes for the Abrolhos Reserve and Fish Habitat Protection Area (FHPA). The Abrolhos Reserve is the occupied island area (not included within the national park), which is vested in the Minister for Fisheries for the purpose of conservation, tourism, fishing and aquaculture. The Abrolhos FHPA includes the surrounding State waters.

Stakeholder Engagement Project

Earlier this year, DPIRD engaged an independent consultant to undertake a stakeholder engagement process. The purpose of the project was to capture the wide range of stakeholder views and aspirations for future management of the Abrolhos Reserve and FHPA, and to summarise those views for Government.

The engagement process is now complete. The findings have highlighted many issues that stakeholders agree on and have a similar attitude towards. The process has also identified specific areas of conflict or competing interests. DPIRD now has the challenging role of designing a new future for the Reserve and FHPA that aligns with State Government's vision for the Abrolhos and achieves an appropriate balance in meeting the needs of nature, visitors and workers.

The final consultation report will be released soon.

Mooring Review

During 2021, DPIRD engaged Wavelength Consulting to undertake an independent review and analysis of private and public moorings within the Abrolhos FHPA. The focus of the review was to identify current issues/ challenges and provide cost effective options for future management of existing and new moorings in the Abrolhos FHPA, noting other examples around the State and legislative requirements.

The consultant identified a range of management options relating to administration, licensing and mooring location, design, use and certification. The recommendations arising from the review were considered by DPIRD during the development of proposals for future planning and management for moorings.

The final mooring report will be released soon.

Development of draft management plans

DPIRD is currently in the process of drafting new management plans for the Abrolhos Reserve and FHPA. The draft plans will be informed by:

- The Houtman Abrolhos Islands Strategic Direction 2020–24
- The Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park Draft Management Plan 2021
- The Stakeholder Engagement Project; and
- The Mooring Review

The draft plans will set out management objectives and actions under six strategic priority areas:

1. Nature Conservation and Protection
2. Cultural Heritage Protection
3. Tourism
4. Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture
5. Abrolhos Community
6. Governance

Subject to the Minister for Fisheries approval, the draft management plans will be released for a public comment period in early 2022, and aim to be completed by mid 2022. Stakeholders will be notified when the draft management plans are released, and DPIRD looks forward to receiving your feedback on the draft proposals in due course.



Beacon Island. Credit: WA Museum, University of WA

Visitor Information and Interpretation

Visitor information promotes sustainable use of the Abrolhos and Leave No Trace principles. Interpretation enriches the visitors' experience and understanding of the values of the Abrolhos. The following information and interpretation products are in the planning phase:

- A DBCA/DPIRD brochure outlining the do's and don'ts for visitors and directing them to more detailed information
- An online/printable visitor guide with essential information for visitors
- A comprehensive, interpretive and searchable PDF with detail on values, use and management
- Interpretation for East Wallabi and Beacon Islands.

Stay up-to-date

To keep up-to-date on the Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park planning processes, visit the DBCA website: dbca.wa.gov.au/houtman-abrolhos-islands-national-park

Discover Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park

To learn more about visiting Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park, visit the Explore Parks WA website at: exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/houtman-abrolhos-islands

Contacts

If you would like to discuss any matters covered in this update, please contact the relevant staff:

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Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**

Department of **Primary Industries and Regional Development**

Department of **Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation**

Western Australian Museum

Mid West Development Commission