

# ABORIGINAL INTERESTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

## Introduction

The name of the new Section 'Gumoo Woojabuddee' is derived from the Darumbal clan language and means 'Bigfulla Water'. It refers to part of an extensive clan estate within the Darumbal language group which extends to include the greater Shoalwater Bay region and the Keppel Islands.



The Aboriginal people in this region depended on traditional plant foods and native animals. The marine environment provided food in the form of turtles and their eggs, dugong, fish, shellfish, crustaceans and other marine products.

Traditional use of the area ended earlier this century, after large numbers of the Darumbal people were killed in land-use conflicts with pastoralists, died through disease or hardship or were dispossessed and moved to Aboriginal settlements. The history of these people has been one of displacement and oppression by European settlers followed by misguided government policies with regard to Aboriginal welfare.

## Early contact period

There are a number of sites within the zoning area where contact between the original Aboriginal inhabitants and European explorers occurred. Port Clinton is especially notable in this regard. Several areas in the vicinity of Port Clinton also have significance for European exploration as they were visited by Flinders, King and Blackwood during the first half of the nineteenth century.

## Impact from settlement

The European settlement of central Queensland coastal districts began in 1855 following explorer Ludwig Leichhardt's good reports of the land surrounding the Fitzroy River. As in many other areas of eastern Australia, Aboriginal people were systematically removed from their traditional lands as settlement and particularly pastoralism expanded into new areas. Groups were sometimes tolerated as fringe communities on the edge of towns, however, most were dispersed by removal to Aboriginal settlements.

## Re-establishing cultural ties

The descendants of the people who belonged to the Darumbal language group are re-establishing physical and spiritual links to their traditional clan estate. They aim to progress this by permanent or temporary residence, hunting and gathering activities, recording and protecting archaeological sites, and participating in management decisions.

The Darumbal people state that ownership of, and access to, land and sea country is the basis of their cultural renewal and will result in improved knowledge and respect for their role as traditional custodians.

Archaeological sites are of great significance to Aboriginal people and it is important they are protected. However, their interests include a concern for the land as well individual sites. The location and protection of these sites is of fundamental importance to the Darumbal people as these sites provide a physical connection to the lifestyle of their forebears who lived in and used the area.

## Archaeological sites

Surveys of cultural heritage sites were carried out in the coastal area of the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area during 1997 with assistance from the Department of Defence. Further surveys of the offshore islands were conducted in early 1998 and are expected to yield further sites, providing evidence that Aboriginal people regularly moved between the mainland and the islands to access

food resources and raw materials or perhaps for ceremonial purposes. The eastern dunefields adjacent to the new marine park are estimated to contain between 400 and 1000 coastal archaeological sites. Sites range from relatively large middens to very small dinner camps. The proximity to raw materials and coastal resources and the hunter-gatherer economy practised by these people play a part in determining both the distribution and characteristics of these sites.

These coastal sites are significant in that they provide the mainland link to understanding the prehistoric use of the offshore zone. The sites include stone arrangements, middens and tree scars.

### **Aspirations of Aboriginal people**

The Darumbal have a continuing physical and spiritual relationship to all areas of traditional estate, and have an interest in the ongoing management of these areas. The Darumbal accept that Aboriginal use of the area should be on the basis that ecological and cultural values are maintained. To achieve this, they propose the following:

- increased opportunities to visit the area and re-establish a relationship to help re-gain spiritual and cultural links;
- development by management agencies of an appreciation of customary law and traditions, and and the incorporation of this appreciation into the use and management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park;
- full and proper recognition of the Darumbal as traditional owners of their estates and restoration of traditional estate ownership rights;
- cooperative management arrangements between the Darumbal and other indigenous maritime groups, in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Department of Environment;
- involvement of Darumbal representatives on boards of management or similar structures to provide direct input into management strategies for the area; and
- employment opportunities for Darumbal people in the management of land and marine areas within areas of traditional estate.

### **Sources**

This report is based on a number of reports that were prepared as part of the Commonwealth Inquiry into the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area. Other reports included one prepared on behalf of the Darumbal-Noolar Murree Corporation for Land and Culture and books on the history of the Shoalwater Bay area.

This report has been prepared as background material for preparation of a draft zoning plan for the Gumoo Woojabuddee Section of the Great Barrier Marine Park and adjacent areas including the waters of Port Clinton and the intertidal areas of Freshwater Bay and the Byfield coast. There are no management proposals contained in this report. If you have any other questions about the process contact:



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