



WATARRKA NATIONAL PARK

JOINT MANAGEMENT PLAN
July 2018



WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT CULTURE AND COUNTRY

“Both partners, both ways – making decisions and working together on country.”

The Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (PWCNT) present the Joint Management Plan for Watarrka National Park. As Joint Management Partners, we have developed this Plan with support and advice from the Central Land Council and other community members including tourism industry representatives. The Plan defines our shared vision, objectives and strategies to deliver effective joint management, care for culture and country and support exciting, memorable and safe visitor experiences.

The assistance of the Central Land Council in facilitating consultations with Traditional Owners is gratefully acknowledged.

This Plan has been prepared consistent with section 25AD of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation (TPWC) Act*. It supersedes the 1991 Plan of Management for Watarrka National Park and will remain in effect until it is amended or replaced by a new Plan.

Spoken by the Traditional Owners throughout this document





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Cover: Watarrka National Park

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – ABOUT THIS PLAN

“There’s more to the park than just the Canyon.”

Watarrka National Park is an ancient living landscape, home to Anangu who share their country and culture with people from around the world. Everything that can be found in the park from the people, the plants, the animals and the rock formations are united by the laws of Tjukurpa. For Anangu, Tjukurpa is a religion, law, a philosophy, the guide that inextricably connects them to the surrounding landscape. When Anangu look at the landscape of Watarrka, they don’t see “just the Canyon”. Ancient sandstone features remind them of the creation ancestors and stories teaching them of appropriate behaviour, relationships and how to care for country. The land provides sustainability, shelter and food, all of this is part of Tjukurpa. With acknowledgement and respect of Tjukurpa also comes obligation - as custodians of the land, the Traditional Owners are responsible for country and are obliged to maintain and protect it.

The Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Commission work together, sharing cultural and scientific knowledge to manage the Park and to “look after country properly – both partners, both ways”. We call this Joint Management.¹ As Joint Management Partners and with involvement from the wider community, we have developed the Draft Watarrka Joint Management Plan. The Plan defines our shared vision and will assist and direct us in making decisions to manage the natural and cultural values of the Park.

Our priorities are:

- 1. Making Joint Management work** - Meeting the needs of Traditional Owners to maintain their connection to country and to benefit from joint management arrangements.

Together, guided by this Plan we will make decisions that fulfil our priorities, while allowing for adaptability and flexibility as we continue to learn about and share both ways. The Joint Management Committee governs the delivery of our outcomes and will support and facilitate training, employment, and commercial enterprise development for Traditional Owners with the support of relevant agencies.

- 2. Looking after country and culture** - Protecting the outstanding natural and cultural values of the Park.

Following the laws of Tjukurpa and working together as Joint Management Partners, we look after the flora, fauna, landscapes and places of cultural and historical importance over an area spanning 1 057 km². Within the Park’s ancient geological features are more than 170 recorded rock art sites, historical sites, over 600 recorded plant species and significant mammal and reptile species. We use both traditional and scientific knowledge to care for Watarrka.

- 3. Visitor experiences** - Providing a range of exciting, authentic and engaging experiences for visitors and ensuring the Park continues as a key tourist attraction and driver of the region’s economy

Watarrka provides visitors with unique opportunities to explore breathtaking gorges on foot or by air, relax by secluded rock holes, experience the rich diversity of plant and animal species, and be inspired by incredible geological formations, all within an ancient cultural landscape. About 250,000 people from around the world visit the Park each year (2016), taking home unforgettable memories. A visit to Watarrka creates lifelong advocates, inspiring and encouraging others to come and experience the incredible cultural and natural values for themselves. Traditional Owners welcome you to connect and learn about their home, they want you to have an enjoyable but safe holiday, so that you can go home and share the story of Watarrka with your family and friends.

The Park’s visitor numbers create significant opportunities for high quality commercial enterprises, to further enhance the visitor experience and encourage longer stays in the Park. Traditional Owners are already providing tourism services and wish to continue developing new experiences both as independent businesses and in partnerships with experienced operators. The Parks and Wildlife Commission is committed to Visitor Experience Development Plans for the Territory’s most visited parks, including Watarrka. These Plans will ensure sustainable tourism opportunities providing benefits to the Traditional Owners, the Park and the tourism industry.



“Watarrka” is the Anangu name for the Umbrella Bush (*Acacia ligulata*).

¹ The *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation (TPWC) Act* defines the joint management partners as the traditional Aboriginal Owners of the Park (Traditional Owners) and the Territory. The Territory will carry out its joint management obligations through the Parks and Wildlife Commission. For the purposes of this Joint Management Plan, references to the Parks and Wildlife Commission as a joint management partner should read as reference to the Territory.

OUR VISION

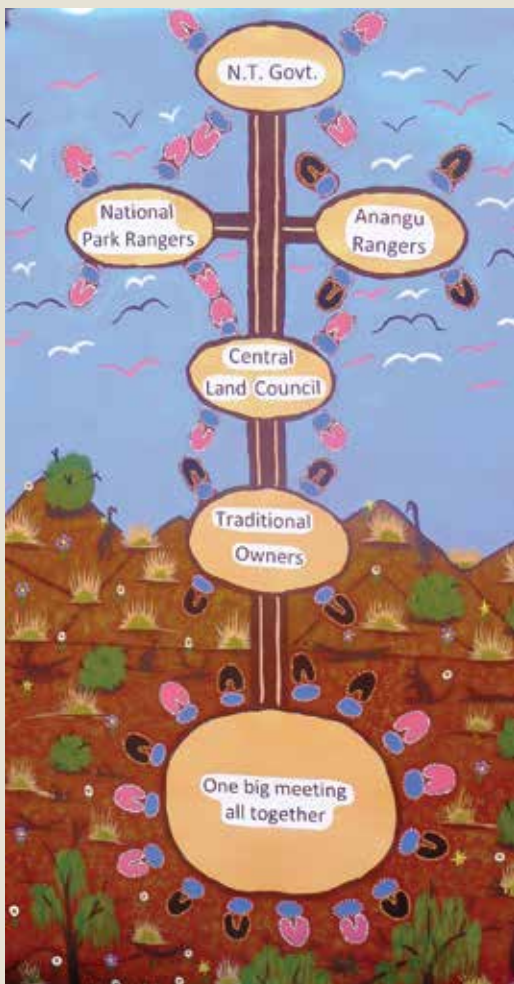
“Both partners, both ways – making decisions and working together on country.”

The Joint Management Partners of Watarrka National Park will work together and support each other in ways that demonstrate respect, and continue to develop a mutual understanding for and of each other, the land and future partnerships.

Traditional Owners view of joint management

“The Government send messages through. National Parks are working for NT Government. Anangu rangers work side by side park rangers – equal, working on behalf of Aboriginal people. Pink are European people, blue is a table, putting answers on the table, black is Aboriginal people, putting answers on the table. The one down the bottom is all of us together, putting our answers on the table. The picture is about the National Park, the trees, the grass, the animals, everything. It’s got Spinifex, turkey, kangaroo, emu, bilby, mala.”

© Sadie Williams 2008



Our Vision for the Park:

- Anangu are involved in decision making and benefit from joint management.
- Country is looked after properly, nature is protected and native plants and animals thrive.
- Strong culture is shared with visitors.
- Unforgettable, exciting and safe visitor experiences create lifelong park advocates.

PARK SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUES

“This place is special in many different ways.”

Watarrka National Park (1057 km²) is located about 330km south west of Alice Springs (Figure 1). The Park protects one of Australia’s most stunning natural and cultural environments, contributing significantly to biodiversity conservation and regional tourism with strong employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people.

Watarrka is a living cultural landscape with strong cultural, spiritual and historical significance that forms part of their contemporary identities. Traditional Owners maintain the integrity of their land by following and teaching cultural and ecological knowledge from the Dreaming to their descendants. Traditional Owners are looking forward to the new opportunities afforded by joint management. They are keen to be involved in all management programs on the Park and spend time on country to pass on important knowledge to young people, each other and Park staff.

Watarrka is an internationally significant conservation area. Time has carved great buttresses out of the colourful sandstone of the George Gill Range, providing refuge to a variety of unique native flora and fauna living among domed rock formations, range-top “perched dunes”, flood-out areas and sheltered spring-fed gullies. These habitats support the richest assemblage of plants of all the national parks in Central Australia, with over 600 species recorded, as well as providing refuge to a diversity of animals including 20 native mammal species, 126 birds, 71 reptiles, 7 frogs and 109 taxa of invertebrate species.

Watarrka is a world class tourist attraction. Attracting about 250,000 visitors (2016), Watarrka boasts dramatic landscapes, high quality nature based tourism activities and opportunities to experience authentic Aboriginal culture. Central to the

experience is the spectacular scenery, from the sand dunes and desert oaks to the sudden contrast between the landscape and the Gill George Range, highlighted by Kings Canyon itself. The six kilometre walk around the Canyon is celebrated as one of

Central Australia's best walks, immersing visitors in a range of habitats including waterholes, intriguing rock formations and Eden-like "gardens" of native vegetation while being inspired by stunning views.

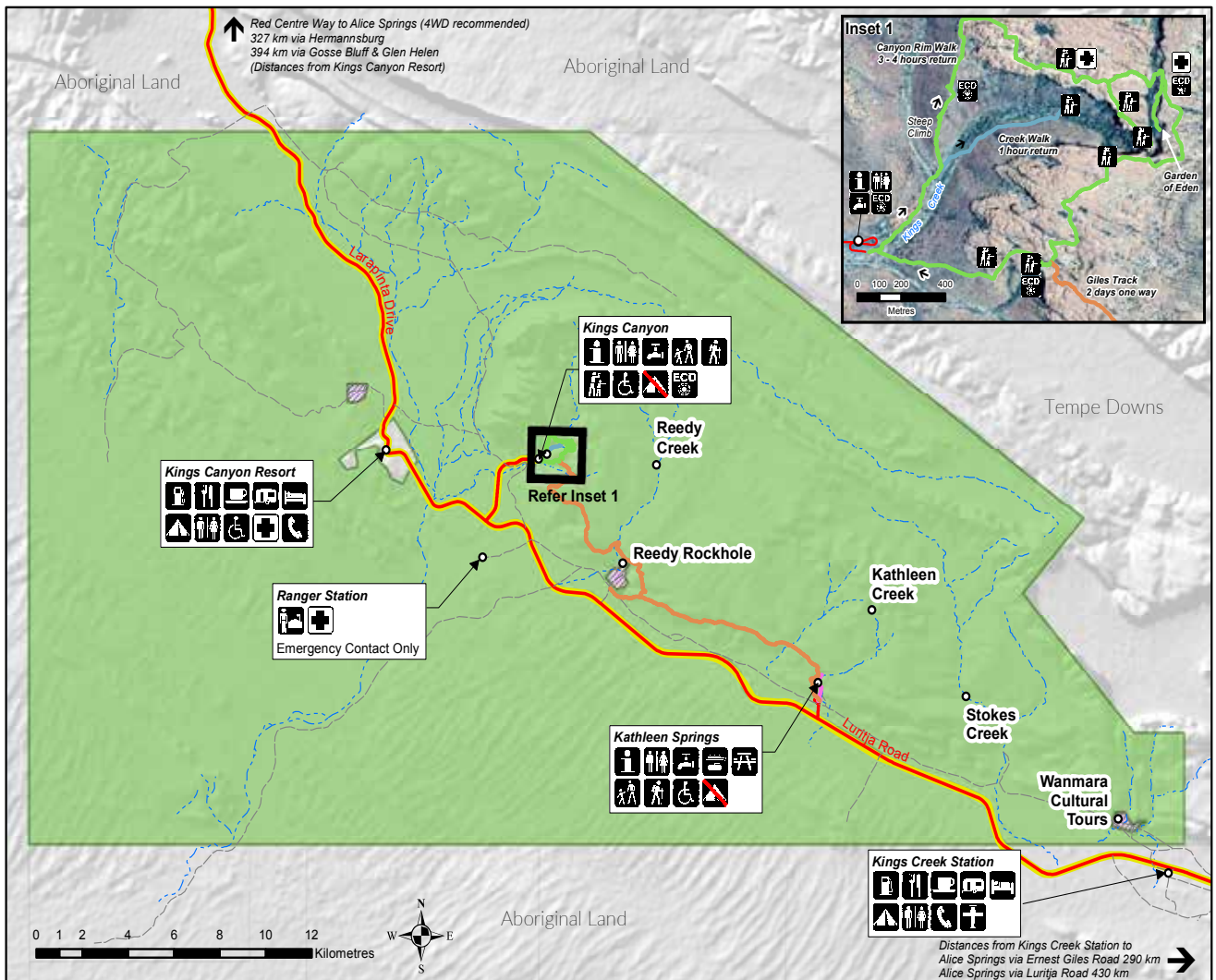
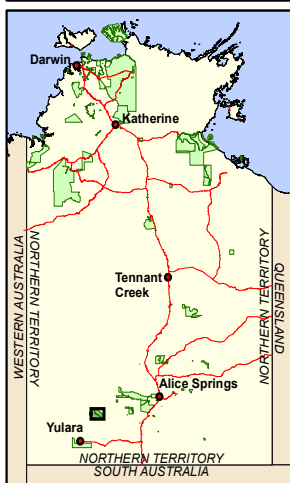


Figure 1



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DATA SOURCE:

Cadastral, Topographic, Road Centreline data sourced from Information Services Section, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics

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ALOS image product supplied by Geoscience Australia.

Legend

- Kathleen Springs Walk
- Kings Canyon Rim Walk
- Kings Creek Walk
- The Giles Track
- Road
- - - - Management Track (No Public Access)
- Red Centre Way
- - - - Watercourse
- Watarrka National Park
- Community Living Area (No Public Access)
- Cadastre

- Information
- Toilets
- Ranger Station
- Parking Area
- Drinking Water
- Picnic Facilities
- Gas BBQ
- First Aid
- Short Walks
- Overnight Walks
- Lookouts
- Wheelchair Access
- Emergency Call Device
- No Camping
- Camping
- Fuel
- Meals
- Cafe
- Accommodation
- Caravan Camping
- Telephone
- Plane Landing

Watarrka National Park

Our Story - The Traditional Owners of Watarrka National Park

“We call ourselves Anangu.”

Watarrka National Park lies within the traditional lands of the Martutjarra people. Our land has a long history of human occupation and adaptation by our Traditional Owners. Country within and beyond Watarrka National Park is central to our identity.

We call ourselves Anangu, a word that refers to ‘people’ through the Western Desert.

Under Tjukurpa Aboriginal Law as Traditional Owners of Watarrka National Park, we belong to certain places and Dreamings of Anangu Land. Each of our landholding groups belongs to a country which is named after an important site. Each group belongs to a set of significant sites which are associated with one or more dreaming’s, this is our country or ngurra. We think of country in terms of our dreamings, where our stories and sacred places lie, there are no physical boundaries. We say “the whole country is special, inside and outside the Park”. On the Park, the countries Ulpanyali, Watarrka, Lilla and Wanmarra are identified with predominant dreaming tracks and particular families. These countries extend beyond the Park’s boundaries.

Anangu refers to people belonging to a certain country as *ngurraritja*. Ngurraritja means “belonging to country”, “owner/holder of land” as well as “spirit of the land.” Generally, the Traditional Owners belong to land through their *mama* (father), *tjamu* (father’s father, mother’s father), *ngunytju* (mother) and *kami* (mother’s father and mother’s mother), as well as through their birthplaces and death/burial sites of relatives. While people connected with a country through descent seem to have the strongest connections to a country, knowledge, in particular ritual knowledge and long-term residence, enhances the status of a ngurraritja significantly.

The ngurraritja of a country are complemented by people who are called *ngurra kutju ngurrara* meaning “people who are likely to share a camp” or “one’s countrymen.” These people usually belong to a neighbouring country, a shared dreaming track or both and are also ngurraritja. They are important in assisting decision-making concerning country, the maintenance and performance of ceremonies and the transmission of ritual knowledge.

Traditional Owners of the Park have strong connections to *Yankunytjatjara* and *Pitjantjatjara* people in the south and *Pertame Arernte* in the east. Religious and social ties allowed Anangu from surrounding regions to visit Watarrka for short ceremonial and recreational gatherings, or for extended periods during droughts.

To appreciate Traditional Owners’ persistence and involvement in management of the Park, it is necessary to understand both their deep connection to country and the dislocation they suffered through the occupation of the area by Europeans in the late nineteenth century through to the present day.

Diaries and journals kept by Ernest Giles as he passed through the area in 1872 and William Gosse in 1873 indicate their awareness of Aboriginal people through constant sightings of camp fire smoke but appear to have had little contact. These reports are confirmed by Traditional Owners who recall grandparents telling stories of “hiding from strange people who came on horses and camels.”

The establishment of pastoralism in the area in 1889 had a severe impact on Anangu and their culture. Pastoral activity severely reduced food, animal and foraging resources, effectively displacing Anangu from their country. There was often conflict and Anangu were forced into the relative safety of the George Gill Range, where they could access permanent rockholes under the cover of darkness. Areas such as Wanmarra (Bagot Springs), Lilla (Reedy Rockhole) and Watarrka (Kings Canyon) were especially affected. Some Anangu eventually obtained work on pastoral leases but many moved further away from their traditional lands. The people who survived these times found themselves living in a wide range of towns, missions and camps throughout the central region.

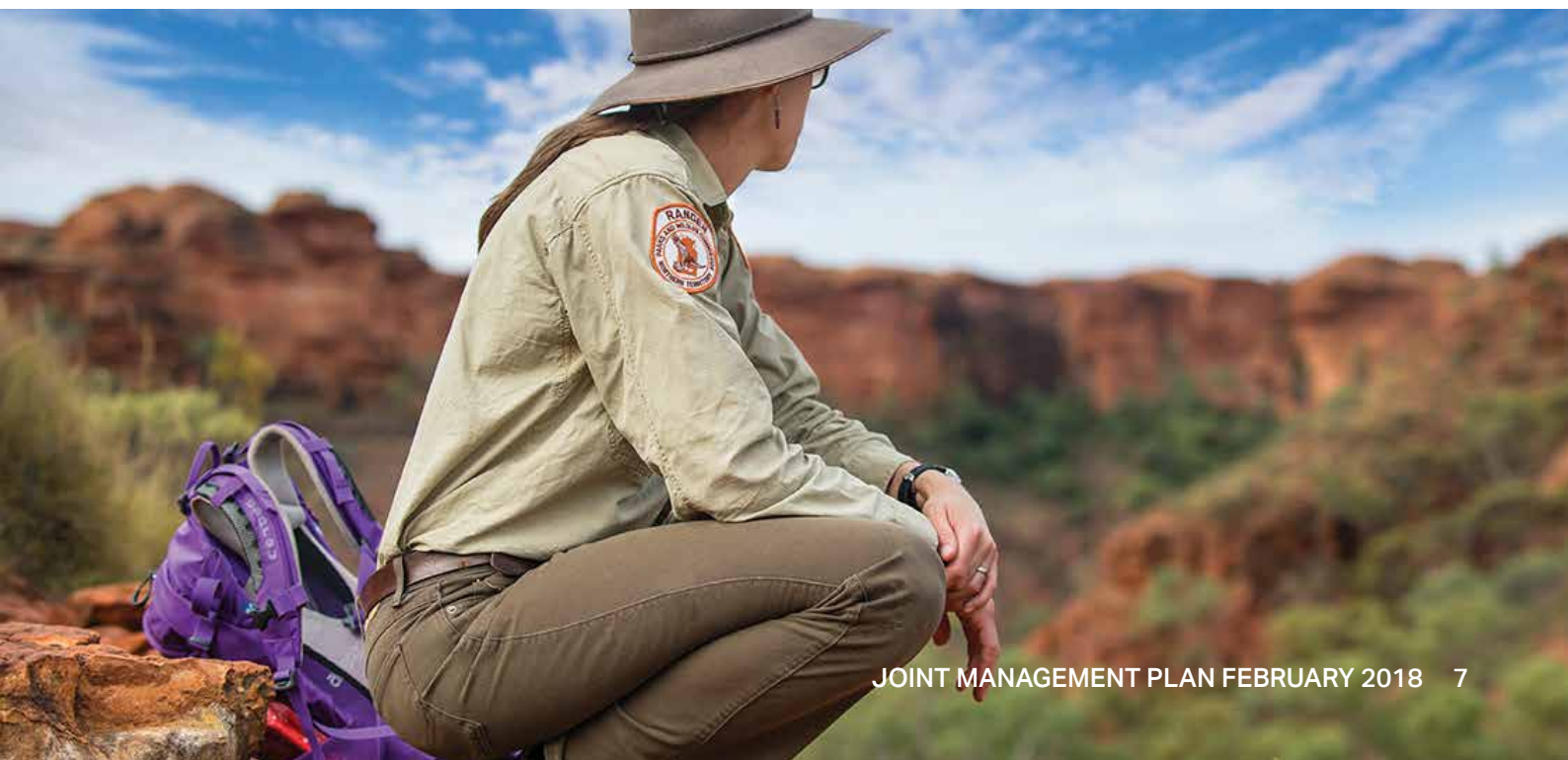
Today, many Traditional Owners have reconnected with their country, either living on the Park or visiting regularly with their families. Joint management enables Traditional Owners to continue practising traditions like hunting, gathering and ceremony, all crucial for keeping Tjukurpa strong and sharing it with younger generations.

PROTECTING, MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING PARK VALUES

“Even when away from our country we still held the culture together, still taught our kids the Tjukurpa. When you go to your country the song comes to you – it doesn’t matter that you’ve been away.”

Together as Joint Management Partners we will:

- Build a strong relationship by respecting culture and differences and committing to understanding each other’s concepts of caring for country.
- Assist Traditional Owners and their families in maintaining close connections and park access for traditional land use and bringing children to camp and hunt.
- Keep culture strong and the spiritual, cultural and social beliefs, rights and aspirations of the younger generations alive.
- Enhance visitor experiences by providing excellent natural and well-serviced settings; a range of immersive activities and products which create benefits for the Park and Traditional Owners; and support opportunities for the growth of Aboriginal tourism enterprises in both independent and joint ventures.
- Deliver on Traditional Owner aspirations for economic development and employment through park management and tourism enterprises.
- Provide access and culturally appropriate information to help visitors gain an appreciation of culture while protecting the cultural economic and intellectual interests of Aboriginal people.
- Build a better understanding of the Park including baseline data, monitoring and improving the use of information to support informed decision-making.
- Protect our special places including sacred sites, heritage places, nationally significant waterholes, springs, plants and animals and spectacular rock formations of the George Gill Range.
- Identify and act upon risks and regularly communicate with our visitors and the tourism industry, to ensure safe experiences when visiting the Park.
- Involve the broader community in optimising the Park’s resourcing and improving the potential for funding, development and participation in other ongoing programs.
- Promote positive interactions with the Park’s stakeholders, ensuring appropriate dispute resolution and mitigation processes are in place.







THEME 1: MAKING JOINT MANAGEMENT WORK

“Working together and supporting each other.”

Principles for making Joint Management work:

- Respecting Traditional Owners rights to continue caring for country and keeping their culture strong.
- Engagement and employment of Traditional Owners in management operations is central to joint management success.
- Decision-making and accountability should be equally shared and Aboriginal decision-making processes must be respected.
- Time spent together on country is important for developing mutual trust, respect and understanding between the partners and of each partner’s roles.
- Resources are limited and must be efficiently used. Management priorities will be guided by the parks key values.
- Risks are identified and actions are put in place to minimise them.
- Joint management has to be checked to see that it is working well. It is important to keep improving.
- Public support for joint management is very important.

Encouraging a working relationship based on mutual understanding and respect is essential for joint management. Traditional Owners use the term *“ngapartji – ngapartji”* to describe this reciprocal, two-way co-operative approach to joint management. Also a shared understanding of *ngura* (country), *tjukurpa* (law and culture) and Aboriginal decision-making principles are fundamental to making good joint management decisions. Successful joint management will deliver benefits to Traditional Owners, visitors to the Park, the wider community and the conservation of the Park.

The Watarrka National Park land is freehold title, held by the Watarrka Land Trust on behalf of Traditional Owners, and leased to the Northern Territory for 99 years from 2012. The terms of joint management have authority in law under the TPWC Act, the Park Lease and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement registered under the *Native Title Act*. This Plan complies with these legal instruments.

The TPWC Act defines the joint management partners as the traditional Aboriginal Owners of the Park (Traditional Owners) and the Territory. The Act further defines the objective to jointly establish an equitable partnership to manage and maintain the Park as part of a comprehensive and representative system of parks and reserves in the Territory for the following purposes:

- (a) Benefiting both the Traditional Owners and the wider community;
- (b) Protecting biological diversity;
- (c) Serving visitor and community needs for education and enjoyment.

The TPWC Act also establishes the requirements of joint management plans and the role of the Central Land Council (CLC) in assisting joint management by representing and protecting the interests of the Traditional Owners.

Recognising, valuing and incorporating Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision making and combining the land management skills and expertise of both partners is essential for an equitable partnership and successful joint management. A strong partnership will ensure the values of the Park are protected, visitors continue to have a safe and enjoyable experiences, stakeholders are informed and involved in decision-making, proposals are considered efficiently and employment and economic benefits for Traditional Owners are provided.

“All Traditional Owners, can’t just talk to a couple of fellas, got to talk about it with everybody. Everybody’s got to be involved.”

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential for joint management to ensure ‘good governance’.

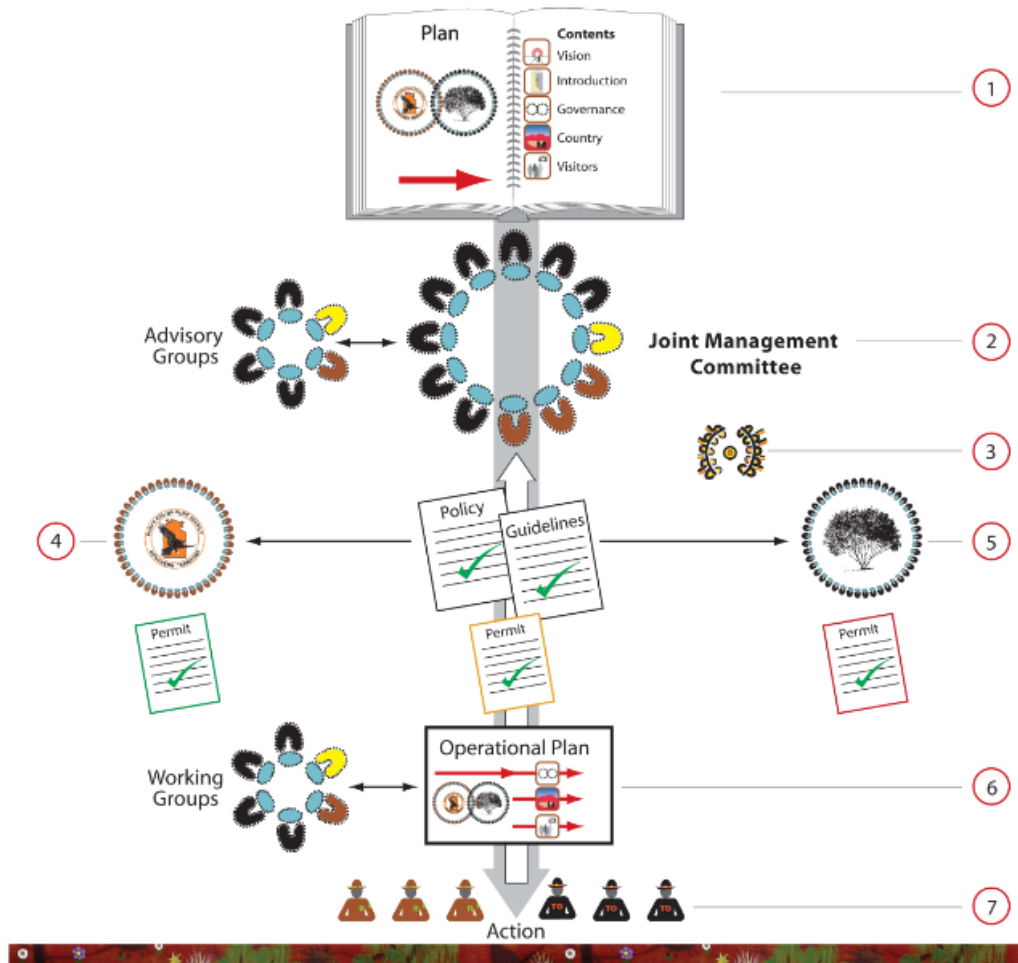
The **Parks and Wildlife Commission** resource and finance the Park’s ongoing day-to-day management. Parks and Wildlife Commission officers represent the Northern Territory in the joint management partnership.

Traditional Owners provide a vital role in the direction and management of the Park. Core members of landholding groups have responsibilities for decision-making and overseeing cultural protocol. Traditional Owners also have responsibilities for managing traditional knowledge and passing it on to the right people, looking after the land and its resources, maintaining sacred sites and keeping the country alive. Traditional Owners are responsible to the land, their law and culture.

The partners recognise that joint management is an ongoing learning process requiring an adaptive approach that respects the principles of making joint management work. A Joint Management Committee (JMC) has been formed, consisting of representative Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Commission staff.

Decisions made by the Partners follow the Decision-Making Structure (see Figure 2) which incorporates Traditional Owner decision-making principles. Traditional Owners want to be involved in all aspects of park management, including operational planning. They want to be involved in making decisions at the same level as senior park staff. The Decision-Making Framework (Table 1) provides clear roles and responsibilities of the Partners.

Decision Making Structure



Shared decision making and planning

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Joint Management Plan
An agreement between the Joint Management Partners about managing the Park together.</p> | <p>5 Traditional Owners
The full Traditional Owner group will be consulted for large, complex and culturally sensitive permits, or those that cannot be approved by the Joint management Committee.</p> |
| <p>2 Joint Management Committee
A representative decision making body that will meet twice a year to: approve local policies and guidelines to guide decision making; approve annual Operational Plans.</p> | <p>6 Operational Plans
Annual plans which set out activities agreed by the Joint management Partners, reviewed each year. Small Working Groups of interested Traditional Owners and Park staff will develop policies, guidelines and information as needed.</p> |
| <p>3 Central Land Council
Central Land Council is responsible for consulting with and protecting the interests of Traditional Owners.</p> | <p>7 Action
Rangers and Traditional Owners carry out agreed management under the Joint Management and Operational Plan.</p> |
| <p>4 Parks and Wildlife Commission
Senior Park staff will approve standard permits that require no special access and are consistent with Traditional Owner's wishes.</p> | |

Figure 2

Table 1: Decision-making Framework

Role of the Joint Management Committee	Role of Park Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exercise authority and accountability granted to it by the PWCNT and wider group of Traditional Owners.• Set strategic direction, develop and improve management strategies including cultural heritage, healthy country / conservation and visitor development.• Make decisions by consensus.• Set policy and procedure that applies to Watarrka consistent with broader PWCNT policy.• Assess and endorse commercial and development proposals.• Monitor and evaluate management performance.• Take advice from the wider Traditional Owner group.• Consult with community stakeholders and wider group of Traditional Owners as appropriate.• Delegate tasks to a decision-making authority such as advisory or working groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Day to day management of the Park.• Implement programs, policy and procedure as approved by the JMC or working group.• Maximise on-ground participation of Traditional Owners in managing the Park.• Implement programs and routine activities in line with approved plans.• Issue permits according to policy and procedure.• Prepare Operational Plans and works proposals for consideration and endorsement of the JMC.



Objective and Strategies

A strong and equitable partnership protects Watarrka's natural and cultural values, ensures visitors have safe and enjoyable experiences and social, economic and employment benefits are realised by Traditional Owners and the wider community.

- The JMC will oversee strategic direction of the Park. A more flexible and adaptive management style may be adopted, if and when the Partners feel this is needed.
- Meetings on country and dedicated country camps will be held to provide the opportunity for Traditional Owners to visit and discuss country issues.
- The Decision-Making structure will be used to support planning and operational Park management.
- A monitoring and evaluation program will inform actions to maintain effective governance.
- Governance training will be provided to the Partners to give them the tools and skills to work effectively in the partnership, with attention given to needs identified by the monitoring and evaluation program.
- Cross-cultural training for staff will be encouraged.
- Any proposal not addressed in this Plan will be openly considered by the Partners.



THEME 2: LOOKING AFTER COUNTRY AND CULTURE

"Ngura and Tjukurpa are number one – follow that one"

Principles for looking after country and culture:

- Management of natural and cultural values involves working together on country.
- Protection of the Park's ecological, cultural and heritage values will be achieved by minimising the impacts of wildfire, weeds, erosion and feral animals.
- Management of cultural knowledge and sites is guided by Traditional Owners.
- The Burra Charter (1999) provides sound guidance for cultural heritage conservation.

The Joint Management Partners will look after the flora, fauna, landscapes and places of cultural importance using both traditional and scientific knowledge.

"It's not just in ceremony. It's all the time we talk about it. Just driving from one place to another we talk about places we see, the dreamings. Older people are always talking Tjukurpa to younger ones."

Looking after culture. Under the laws of Tjukurpa, the Traditional Owners are responsible for country and are obliged to maintain and protect it. Tjukurpa requires Traditional Owners to respect the land and spirits that dwell within it by performing ceremonies on country and passing religious and ecological knowledge on to their descendants. Caring also entails visiting and monitoring the country and moving appropriately on it.

Many Traditional Owners live within the Park. They, and others living elsewhere regularly visit, camp and teach on the Park. Children practice their language, learn the names of places, where to go, how to behave on the country of their ancestors, continue to learn how to hunt and gather bush foods and are inducted gradually into the songs and rituals of Tjukurpa.





Traditional Owners gather seasonal plant foods, small game, medicines, ochre and wood and hunt kangaroos, emus and goannas on the Park. Hunting and gathering are important activities for maintaining connection to country and passing on knowledge. As one Traditional Owner says:

“Everything is special; trees, animals, hunting and waterholes. We know we’re connected to country when we are hunting and collecting bush medicine, passing knowledge on through hunting, gathering and making tools.”

To ensure that the country is properly cared for, Traditional Owners continue to hold ceremonies and attend meetings for spiritual and secular purposes relating to the area. Ceremonies are held regularly to ensure the transmission of geographical and spiritual knowledge to the next generation. Many significant and sacred sites within the Park remain relatively undisturbed and located in remote areas away from the public access areas. A large number of archaeological sites, over 170 recorded art sites and several historical sites bear testimony to thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation, adaptation and innovation.

“Managing country means working together on country and managing natural and cultural values together”
Senior Ranger

Looking after country. The Park’s unique geology and water catchments support natural and ecological values of international conservation significance. Over the ages, water has worn deeply incised creeks throughout the main range, forming sheltered environments contributing to the survival of fragile plant and animal communities. After rain, as the creeks dry up many of the rock holes on top of the George Gill Range remain, and in the valley below, permanent spring-fed waterholes can be found. These water catchments are of high conservation and cultural value, having sustained countless generations. The geology and water catchments have created an abundance of life in Watarrka, the cool and shady conditions also creating excellent microhabitats for relict plant species. These sites are considered some of the most species-rich in Central Australia and are highly protected with minimal impact from people or feral animals.

Of the estimated 2000 plant species recorded in Central Australia, 691 species have been confirmed within the Park, including threatened and endemic species, giving Watarrka the status of Site of National Botanical Significance. Several plant species of special conservation status have been recorded and are provided in Appendix 1.

Watarrka National Park is home to four significant plant communities. These include:

- the sparse Chenopod shrubland communities on the low hills and plains west and north of the George Gill Range
- the sand dune communities associated with shallow rock and range country
- the clay plains - wide clay drainages and clay pans with distinct shrub and grass species
- Witchetty Bush on Silty sandstone with Black Gidgee and Spinifex

To date 20 native mammal species, 126 birds, 71 reptiles, 7 frogs and 109 taxa of invertebrates have been recorded in the Park. It is likely that continuing fauna surveys will see the Park confirmed as one of the richest areas for reptiles in the Australian arid zone. Many mammals now extinct in the southern part of the Northern Territory once occurred in this region. Traditional Owners have strong connections to many of these species through Tjukurpa. It is important to work towards safe-guarding the Park's threatened fauna including;

- Australian Bustard, *Ardeotis australis* listed as Near Threatened under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* (TPWCA)
- Slater's Skink, *Liopholis slateri*, listed as Endangered under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC) (Cth) and vulnerable under the TPWCA
- Black-footed Rock Wallaby, *Petrogale lateralis* listed as Vulnerable under the EPBC and Near Threatened under the TPWCA
- Princess Parrot, *Polytelis alexandrae*, listed as Vulnerable (EPBC & TPWCA)
- Southern Marsupial Mole, *Nortoryctes typhlops*, Land Snail, *Pillomena aemula*, Grey Falcon, *Falco hypoleucos* all listed as Vulnerable under the TPWCA

Burrowing Bettong, *Bettongia lesuer* and Greater Bilby, *Macrotis lagotis* are no longer known to exist in the Park. In 2000 - 2001, a large predator-proof enclosure was constructed in the Park and stocked with Rufous Hare-Wallaby, *Lagorchestes hirsutus*,

and Mala, listed as Endangered (EPBC) or Extinct in the Wild (TPWCA). With the future of this species being secured in other places the Watarrka Mala program may be discontinued during the term of this Plan.

In 2016 the Australian Government announced that Watarrka National Park would be assessed for inclusion on the National Heritage List.

"We need to be working on and looking after the land – together."

Protecting against threats. There have been three major wildfire events in the past 30 years that may have been very damaging to the Park's biodiversity. Today, park staff work together with Traditional Owners, combining traditional and scientific fire management practices. Prescribed fire plays an important role and is used to keep eco-systems healthy, aid traditional hunting and protect the country from damaging hot wildfire, which may otherwise occur after big rainfall years.

Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) also poses a major threat to the Park's biodiversity, mainly through increased fire frequency and intensity from greater fuel loads. The extent of infestation and ecological impact varies throughout the Park. The highest concentrations occur along watercourses and areas frequented by visitors, feral animals and stock.

Introduced animals recorded in the Park include camels, horses, cattle, yabbies, cats, foxes and rabbits. Large grazing animals were largely excluded from the Park in the 1980s with strategic fencing and the active removal of horses.

A Healthy Country Plan / Integrated Conservation Strategy (ICS) has been developed to describe the most important conservation values and how they will be protected and maintained by managing key threats. Involving Traditional Owners and applying traditional ecological knowledge is important to this Strategy and it's implementation.

Systematic fauna survey and targeted monitoring is conducted in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. This monitoring aligns with the ICS and provides valuable data to inform more adaptive and effective management programs.

Consistent with the wishes of the Traditional Owners, exploration and mining within the park was officially prohibited in 2017.

Objective and Strategies

The Park's natural and cultural values are protected and Aboriginal knowledge and interests are incorporated into management programs.

- The Partners will learn about and share Aboriginal knowledge so together they can continue looking after country using both traditional knowledge and science in our conservation programs.
- Sensitivity and respect will be given to the directions and decisions from Traditional Owners on cultural matters. Cultural knowledge shared will always belong to the Traditional Owners and will only be used as directed by them, consistent with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Policy.
- The Healthy Country Plan / ICS will be reviewed every five years. Fire management will be given high priority with increased effort to follow high rainfall years when fuel loads increase.
- Systematic research, monitoring and reporting of the Park's biological resources is incorporated into the Healthy Country Plan / ICS.
- A Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) and program for the Park will be developed with advice and support from the CLC and Heritage branch. The Partners will work together to identify additional supporting resources, if required. The cultural heritage program will provide for "back to country" activities, cultural awareness programs and knowledge sharing opportunities for rangers and tourism operators and the management of archaeological and heritage places.
- A hunting and gathering policy will be developed by the partners, supporting traditional land use. The Policy will identify areas for hunting and firearm use, with the underlying goal of keeping country healthy and visitors safe.
- Sacred sites will be properly protected, supported by the CLC and Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) as required. The CLC will have primary responsibility for consulting Traditional Owners for proposed works.
- Protection of the Park's natural character and aesthetic values will be given high priority. Any development will be carefully sited and sustainably designed to be in harmony with the natural environment and significant sites, so as not to detract from the Park's outstanding landscape and scenic values.
- Soil and gravel extraction for soil conservation or other purposes will be subject to the approval of the Partners. Traditional Owner's right to extract ochre will continue to be upheld under the TPWCA
- The Partners will work with the local community and relevant stakeholders to ensure a coordinated approach to land management across tenures and neighbouring properties. Cooperative natural resource management will be encouraged with community ranger groups and adjoining landowners, including the Angas Downs Indigenous Protected Area and Katiti - Petermann Indigenous Protected Area.







THEME 3: VISITOR EXPERIENCES

"We want visitors to know about our history, how our ancestors lived... our plants and animals, Aboriginal names and bush tucker. We want Aboriginal names for places too so people know this place is owned by Traditional Owners. People will go home happy inside when they learn our culture."

Principles for Visitor Experiences:

- Delivery and development of rewarding and diverse visitor experiences will support our tourism industry.
- Visitor enjoyment of the park leads to further growth in visitor numbers and greater length of stay.
- The tourism industry must be involved in developing high quality experiences, that are responsive to changing visitor interests and expectations.
- Tourism can foster cultural awareness, sharing of traditional practices, establish joint ventures, generate income, create employment for the local community and support delivery of the Park's objectives.
- Facilities that well designed, sensitive to the natural and cultural environment and contribute towards an enjoyable, educational and safe visitor experience.
- Visitor safety is paramount. Traditional Owners welcome you to this special place and want to ensure you have safe and memorable experiences so that you can go home and share the story of Watarrka with your family and friends.
- Understanding visitors, their interests and activities helps good decision-making and can identify enterprise opportunities for Traditional Owners.

Watarrka is an exceptional landscape, rich with ancient rock shelters, fascinating geological structures and abundance of plant and animal life. As part of the Red Centre Way incorporating Uluru-Kata-Tjuta and the Western MacDonnell Ranges, self-drive visitors come to immerse themselves in the iconic outback and the incredible nature and culture of the region. Promotional campaigns have supported a steady increase in visitor numbers with about 250,000 people visiting in 2016, predominately from the domestic market (80%).

There are exciting opportunities through future visitor experience planning to work with the tourism industry to enhance existing experiences, improve access and infrastructure, create new activities and grow the Park's international profile to attract more overseas visitors.

Why do visitors come to Watarrka? Visitors are drawn to Watarrka for many reasons, but the beauty of Kings Canyon made famous in photographs and film, entices people to come and experience it for themselves. Experiences of Watarrka deliver on the Territory's tourism strengths of nature, fun, adventure and culture.

The six kilometre, four hour **Kings Canyon Rim Walk** is one of Central Australia's must-do experiences. This challenging walk rewards visitors with majestic views of the sandstone cliffs and great opportunities for photography and seeing wildlife. It includes the tranquil Garden of Eden Waterhole, a natural oasis for hikers to stop and rest. For cultural and safety reasons swimming here is prohibited.

The **Kings Creek Walk** is an easy two kilometre one hour walk along the ancient valley floor of the Canyon, which is a less strenuous, more intimate way to enjoy the Canyon. About one third of all visitors do this walk, which ends at an elevated platform that provides superb views up the sheer Canyon walls. It is recommended as a safe and comfortable alternative to the Rim Walk in hot weather, and for people with a lower level of physical fitness or mobility.

The **Kathleen Springs Walk** is one of the Park's spectacular gorges and rockholes with an easy 2.5 km walk leading from a quiet picnic area and with access to the eastern end of the Giles Track. The sealed path meanders through the gorge, ending in an elevated steel walkway overhanging clear spring-fed waters. Facilities here include sealed road access and parking, a shade shelter, picnic furniture, gas barbecues, drinking water and a pit toilet.

The 22 km **Giles Track** is an adventurous 1-2 day walk of moderate difficulty that follows the southern faces of the George Gill Range. For visitors wanting an immersive and remote experience, the walk crosses a plateau of sandstone before connecting to the Kings Canyon Rim Walk. This is the only overnight walking track in the Park and offers bush camping along most of its length.

Sharing Culture. The Traditional Owners welcome people to Watarrka and want to share their connection with, and knowledge of country with visitors. They want visitors to enjoy the Park, safely and with respect, to return home to their

families and share the Watarrka story. They want you to know that:

- This is Aboriginal land, it is our home and we are looking after this place together.
- You are welcome – we want you to enjoy this wonderful place.
- We all have a responsibility to respect each other and look after this country.
- This is a very important place for our culture, country and history.
- There's more to this place than just the Canyon – you can learn about our country and culture, and share your experience with your family and friends back home.
- There are plants and animals here that are not found anywhere else that are very special.
- We want you to feel comfortable learning about Aboriginal people and culture.
- We want you to be safe – this is your responsibility.

Many visitors seek authentic, engaging experiences with local Aboriginal people to learn about their lives, history and heritage, culture, lifestyle and art. Meeting and spending time with Traditional Owners fosters an appreciation of the living Aboriginal culture of Watarrka and encourages visitors to enjoy the Park with due respect.

Some Traditional Owners want to share their stories with visitors through tours, interpretative information on signs and cultural activities. This can be achieved through Joint Management and with direct involvement from the Traditional Owners living within the Park providing their own authentic cultural tourism experiences. The Joint Management Partners and the tourism industry need to work together in supporting Traditional Owners with developing sustainable enterprises. Joint ventures with existing tour companies are another positive way forward in strengthening relationships and progressing social returns for Traditional Owners.

Understanding our visitors. It is important that the Joint Management Partners stay abreast and are responsive to trends and opportunities in nature-based tourism and recreation. The global tourism market seeks a mix of active, adventurous fun and exciting, unique holidays. There is real demand for immersive, life-changing experiences including interactive, authentic cultural experiences with Traditional Owners on country.

Counting visitor numbers, monitoring visitor patterns and trends and measuring satisfaction is essential to inform sound planning of services, facilities and experiences.

Past visitor surveys have shown that most visitors are satisfied with facilities and experiences provided. They also indicate that visitors desire more contact with rangers and Aboriginal people.

Quality Experiences. Capital investment is also important to developing world-class tourism, complemented with high-quality services and infrastructure, interpretation and cultural experiences. Future visitor experience planning will identify needs and explore opportunities, while also ensuring benefits for the Traditional Owners and the Park. Future development potential includes:

- Walking, cycling, adventure. Improving and extending the Giles Track to include side-walks. A shared walking / cycling path will be constructed between Kings Canyon Resort and the Canyon. Other adventure, cycling and mountain biking experiences.
- A facility for sharing culture. Traditional Owners have been saying for many years, *'We need our culture at our own visitor centre. We want this to be a place where tourists can find out about our culture. We need that information for our young people too - something for them to look back on.'*
- Unique accommodation. Kings Canyon Resort, Kings Creek Station and Kings Canyon Wilderness Lodge currently provide overnight accommodation for visitors. New options include luxury boutique lodging, within or near the Park in which Traditional Owners provide services, including high-quality cultural experiences.

Visitor safety is paramount. Visitor safety concerns include heat stress and dehydration, injury and cliff-related incidents, vehicle and aircraft related accidents, and incidents due to wildfire and flash flooding. The most significant safety issue concerns walker preparedness for the Kings Canyon Walk and Giles Track. Working with the tourism industry, measures have been put in place to ensure ongoing safety messages for visitors during their stay. This includes a hot weather management strategy and tour guide induction program. Ongoing communication between tour operators, the tourism industry and the Joint Management Partners is vital. In 2017 a welcome shelter was constructed at the base of the Canyon (see back cover through which all visitors must pass to access the walks). The Shelter provides vital safety messages and presents a walker safety video.

"You have a chance to learn about country and culture."

Objective and Strategies

Manage and develop safe, sustainable and outstanding world-class experiences that connect visitors to Watarrka and its people.

- Develop a Visitor Experience Development Plan (VEDP) reflecting the Park's role as an important regional tourist destination. The Plan will:
 - » Be developed with comprehensive consultation with the tourism industry.
 - » Explore opportunities to enhance existing experiences and develop new experiences, activities and facilities consistent with market trends and the expectations of contemporary visitors.
 - » Pay high regard to cultural and environmental sustainability.
 - » Encourage and support growth of Aboriginal tourism enterprise, including joint ventures supported by the tourism industry.
 - » Consider options for new accommodation and adventure activities such as new or extended walking tracks, night tours, cycling and mountain biking, rock-climbing, bush-camping and four-wheel driving.
 - » Outline innovative interpretation of the Park's values and immersive cultural experiences, including ideas for facilities.
 - » Engage the community and provide opportunities for ongoing feedback and adaptive management.
 - » Be reviewed every five years and as required to ensure currency with marketing trends and visitor satisfaction.
- Work with the tourism marketing arm of the NT Government and the tourism industry so that accurate and appropriate messaging is delivered that reflects the values of the Park and the wishes of Traditional Owners.
- Maintain the highest standards of visitor safety with ongoing monitoring, maintenance and risk assessment for park facilities and visitor management practices.
- Consider resourcing opportunities through existing tourism industry programs and initiatives to support the delivery of Park objectives.
- Develop a cultural awareness program for tour operators to encourage supportive relationships, Aboriginal knowledge sharing, and sharing of appropriate cultural stories with visitors.

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APPENDIX 1

Threatened flora

SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	CONSERVATION STATUS	
		"EPBC Act" Cwlth*1	"TPWAC" *2
<i>Macrozamia macdonnellii</i>	MacDonnell Ranger Cycad	VU	NT
<i>Santalum acuminatum</i>	Santalum, Quandong, Native Peach, Sweet Quandong		VU
<i>Amperea spicata</i>	George Gill Range Cliff-bush	-	VU
<i>Orianthera centralis</i>	Logania	-	NT
<i>Melaleuca faucicola</i>	Desert Bottlebrush	-	NT
<i>Ophioglossum lusitanicum</i>	Austral Adders Tongue	-	NT
<i>Poranthera triandra</i>	Three-petal Poranthera	-	NT
<i>Grevillea pterosperma</i>	Desert Grevillea, Desert Spider Flower	-	NT
<i>Hakea grammatophylla</i>	Hakea	-	NT
<i>Stenanthemum petraeum</i>	-	-	NT
<i>Xanthorrhoea thorntonii</i>	Xanthorrhoea, Desert Grass Tree, Yacka	-	NT
<i>Datura leichhardtii</i> subsp. <i>leichhardtii</i>	Native Thornapple	-	NT
<i>Austrostipa centralis</i>	Austrostipa	-	NT
<i>Eragrostis sterilis</i>	Eragrostis, Lovegrass	-	NT
<i>Eragrostis subtilis</i>	-	-	NT
<i>Persicaria decipiens</i>	Slender Knotweed	-	NT
<i>Sedopsis filsonii</i>	Pink Rock-wort	-	NT
<i>Swainsona colutoides</i>	Bladder Swainsona	-	NT
<i>Goodenia glandulosa</i>	Goodenia	-	NT
<i>Goodenia havilandii</i>	-	-	NT
<i>Glischrocaryon aureum</i> var. <i>angustifolium</i>	Yellow Popflower	-	NT
<i>Juncus continuus</i>	Juncus	-	NT
<i>Acacia grasbyi</i>	-	-	NT
<i>Doodia caudata</i>	Doodia, Small Rasp Fern	-	NT
<i>Cuphonotus andraeanus</i>	Downy Mother-of-Misery	-	NT
<i>Histiopteris incisa</i>	Bats Wing Fern, Oak Fern	-	NT

<i>Euphorbia sarcostemmoides</i>	False Caustic Bush, Climbing Caustic	-	NT
<i>Bulbostylis pyriformis</i>	-	-	NT
<i>Sclerolaena parallelicuspis</i>	Western Copper Burr	-	NT
<i>Hydrocotyle sp. Watarrka</i>	Wild Parsley	-	NT
<i>Chthonocephalus pseudevax</i>	Ground-heads	-	NT
<i>Cratystylis centralis</i>	Bluebush Daisy, Blue Daisy-bush	-	NT
<i>Mirbelia ramulosa</i>	Mirbelia	-	NT

As at July 2017 there are 680 Flora species listed in Watarrka National Park. For a complete list refer to NR Maps: visit nrmaps.nt.gov.au

APPENDIX 2

Threatened fauna

SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	CONSERVATION STATUS	
		"EPBC Act" Cwlth*1	"TPWCA" *2
<i>*Bettongia lesueur</i>	Burrowing Bettong	EX	EX
<i>Sinumelon bednalli</i>	Bednall's Land Snail	-	CR
<i>Liopholis slateri</i>	Slater's Skink	EN	VU
<i>Lagorchestes hirsutus</i>	Mala or Rufous Hare-Wallaby	EN	EW
<i>*Macrotis lagotis</i>	Greater Bilby	VU	VU
<i>Petrogale lateralis</i>	Black-footed Rock-wallaby	VU	NT
<i>Polytelis alexandrae</i>	Princess Parrot	VU	VU
<i>Pillomena aemula</i>	Snail	-	VU
<i>Falco hypoleucos</i>	Grey Falcon	-	VU
<i>Notoryctes typhlops</i>	Southern Marsupial Mole	-	VU

*Species not known on park anymore.

July 2017 there are 256 listed fauna species in Watarrka National Park. For the complete list refer to NR Maps: visit nrmaps.nt.gov.au

*1 *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (Commonwealth)

EN – Endangered

VU – Vulnerable

CR – Critically Endangered

*2 *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* (Northern Territory)

VU – Vulnerable

EX – Extinct

NT – Near Threatened





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