

Blue Mud Bay and associated coastal floodplains

Location and Description

Blue Mud Bay is a large embayment in the western Gulf of Carpentaria, and 580 km east-south-east of Darwin. The Site is a composite of the coastline of Blue Mud Bay, the adjoining floodplains, and a number of small off-shore islands off Cape Shield. The Site encompasses a diverse coastline of many small bays and inlets, beaches, headlands and cliffs, and large saline flats and mangroves that gradually merge into the extensive freshwater floodplains associated with the rivers and creeks that drain into the bay.

Tenure and Land Use

Blue Mud Bay and the adjoining coastal floodplains are Aboriginal freehold land and held by the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Land Trust. The northern portion of the Site, 65% of the terrestrial area, is within the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area and is used for Indigenous and conservation purposes. The remainder of the Site supports Indigenous use. Waters within the Bay support commercial (e.g. mud crab) and recreational fisheries.

Significance Rating

International Significance

Ecological Values

The coastal floodplains adjoining Blue Mud Bay support vast numbers of waterbirds, including seasonal gatherings of more than half a million Magpie Geese. Two other waterbird species (Wandering Whistling-Duck and Brolga) can occur in internationally-significant numbers. Many other waterbird species nest in colonies on the floodplain, while significant numbers of marine turtles and seabirds nest on small islands within the Bay. Large aggregations of migratory shorebirds use the extensive tidal flats around the bay for feeding over summer months. Five threatened species are reported from the Site, including two species of marine turtle, one bird, one mammal, and one plant.

Management Issues

The large numbers of water buffalo on the coastal floodplains around Blue Mud are having a significant impact on the wetlands. Pig are also present on the floodplains, but in smaller numbers. A lack of biological surveys in the area means that knowledge of the Site remains incomplete. The area is likely to be susceptible to further pressures from the impacts of sea-level rise and invasive plants in the future.



Condition

The condition of the Site is generally good, although feral animals have degraded some parts of the coastal floodplains and wetlands.

Current Conservation Initiatives

Land in the northern part of Blue Mud Bay is included within the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area and a draft management plan identifying priority actions has been developed for this area. A future extension of the IPA is planned to encompass the coastal waters and islands. Aboriginal land and sea management activities around Blue Mud Bay are currently co-ordinated from Yilpara and Numbulwar. Recent activities include coastline patrols, marine debris surveys, and management of feral animals, weeds, and fire.