

Croker Island group

Location and Description

Croker Island is a relatively large island (310 km²), located off the north coast of west Arnhem Land, about 260 km north-east of Darwin. The Croker Island groups included at least eight small islands that lie 30-50 km to the east of Croker Island, including Grant, Lawson, McClure, Oxley, and New Year islands. The small islands are mostly sand and coral, and each is less than about 20 km², and surrounded by clear blue seas. Croker Island is dominated by eucalypt woodland, but also support a mix of other habitats, including coastal dunes, seasonal floodplain, tidal flats and a significant area of monsoon vine thicket.

Tenure and Land Use

The islands of the Croker Group are Aboriginal freehold land, held by the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Land Trust. The land mainly supports Indigenous use, but waters surrounding the islands are also used by commercial fisheries. The islands are sparsely populated, and the largest community is Minjilang (population 200) on Croker Island. Smaller islands are mostly only inhabited temporarily.

Significance Rating

International Significance

Ecological Values

Many of the islands in the east of the Croker Island group support large breeding populations of three species of marine turtles (Olive Ridley, Green and Flatback Turtles). The small islands also support numerous colonies of breeding seabirds, some colonies supporting a number of Tern species. Many patches of monsoon rainforest are found on Croker Island, including one very large patch which is about 1400 ha in size. The islands offer important refuge from threatening processes that affect the mainland, and eight threatened species are reported from the Site.

Management Issues

Large feral pig, horse and cattle populations are affecting floodplain and rainforest environments on Croker Island and are a major management concern. Numerous weeds are present on Croker Island, and inundation of low-lying islands and habitats will be of increasing concern with predicted rising sea levels associated with climate change. The lack of comprehensive information on the biodiversity of Croker Island and associated islands may also restrict effective conservation planning and management.



Condition

The remote islands are in near-pristine condition, although introduced plants and animals are degrading floodplain and wetland habitats.

Current Conservation Initiatives

The Indigenous ranger group on Croker Island is not currently operating, but in past years it was active managing weeds and feral pig and horse populations, and removing marine debris from beaches. The Traditional Owners of Croker Island are currently considering the options for a land and sea reserve.