

Principles for working in partnership with First Nations people

Parks Australia acknowledges Traditional Owners as essential partners in the management of Sea Country within Australian Marine Parks, and recognise their historical exclusion from managing country

The following partnership principles were developed with guidance from the South-east Saltwater Council. They are based on engagement principles first published in 2018, following collaboration between the Director and representatives from land councils, Native Title representative bodies, and Indigenous ranger groups.

The principles published here are preliminary working principles intended to guide how Parks Australia and the South-east Traditional Owners work together. These principles are intended to be further refined through the co-design of a Sea Country Strategy for the South-east Network. The most up-to-date version of the principles will be made available online. This approach provides opportunities for review in collaboration with Traditional Owners, ensuring the principles evolve over time as we continue to learn and strengthen our working relationship.

Table 1.2 – First Nations partnership principles

Principle 1: It is recognised that First Nations people have been sustainably using and managing their Sea Country, including areas now included within Australian Marine Parks, for many thousands of years – in some cases since before rising sea levels created these marine environments and across ice-ages.

Principle 2: Management of Australian Marine Parks should be undertaken on the basis that Native Title exists in Sea Country within Commonwealth waters.

Principle 3: First Nations people will be positioned and supported as partners in planning and managing Australian Marine Parks on the basis of their nationally and internationally recognised rights and cultural interests.

Principle 4: Maximise opportunities for First Nations people to engage in self-determined cultural practices, and to enjoy the use of their Sea Country and actively participate in its management.

Principle 5: Maximise opportunities for the development of self-determined First Nations livelihoods, consistent with national Closing the Gap commitments, and First Nations rights and interests in building ethical, sustainable and community benefiting commercial enterprises and maximise local employment opportunities.

Principle 6: Governance and management activities within Australian Marine Parks respect and support local First Nations self-determination and governance frameworks. These activities aim to avoid duplicating existing governance mechanisms, uphold respect for local arrangements, and provide resources to enable meaningful participation in governance to inform decision-making.

Principle 7: First Nations engagement in managing Australian Marine Parks is undertaken through good faith negotiations, seeking to build on the common ground that exists between First Nations peoples and the Australian Government to protect and sustainably use Australia's Sea Country environments and resources.

Principle 8: Third-party investment in management activities in Australian Marine Parks – for example, through environmental offset investments – prioritise support for First Nations people's interests, capacity-building and development of livelihoods, consistent with all other principles outlined above; such third-party investments must not impact on Native Title negotiations or the rights to compensation.

Principle 9: Sustainable commercial activities on Sea Country provide economic and environmental benefits to Traditional Owners, the broader community, and Sea Country itself. Where appropriate, international best practice models for community asset benefit sharing will be applied.