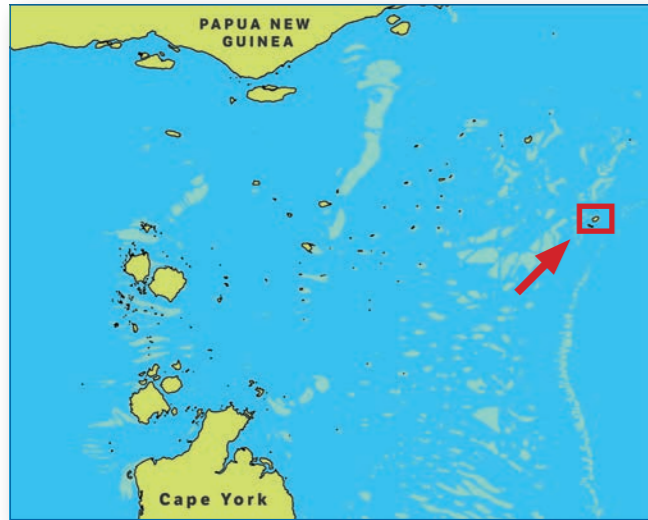


Mer Land and Sea Profile



OVERVIEW

Traditional island name	Mer
Western name	Murray
Eastern Islands Cluster	Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation
Local government	TSIRC & TSC
Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC)	Mer Gedkem Le (TSI) Corporation RNTBC
Land type	Volcanic Island
Air distance from Thursday Island (km)	216
Area (ha)	417
Indicative max length (km)	2.8
Indicative max breadth (km)	1.7
Max elevation (m)	210
Coastline length (km)	8
Population (2011 ABS Census)	364
Area of island zoned development (ha)	57
Area of disturbed / undisturbed vegetation (ha/%)	150 (36.0%) / 267 (64.0%)

RANGER GROUP



Rangers
2015



MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

LAND



- Coastal management
- Island plants and animals
- Community garden and nursery
- Fire • Weeds
- Feral Animals

SEA



- Dugong and Turtle

PEOPLE



- Traditional and cultural sites
- Research support
- Traditional ecological knowledge
- Community involvement and communication

KEY VALUES



Healthy sea ecosystems



Marine water quality



Coral reefs



Seagrass meadows



Dugong



Marine turtles



Subsistence fishing



Healthy land ecosystems



Sustainable human settlements



Coasts and beaches



Mangroves and wetlands



Coastal birds

CLIMATE CHANGE RISK

Vulnerability to sea level rise (+1.0m) **High**

Sea level rise response options **High**



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Mer is a very small (417ha) volcanic island in the Eastern Islands Cluster of the Torres Strait about 216km north east of Thursday Island. Mer (population 364) is a basaltic island, the largest of three islands in the Murray Group (Mer, Dauar and Waier). The community occupies the coastal fringe of the island.

The topography of Mer includes steep slopes rising to a plateau at about 80 metres and Gelam Paser, the western end of the extinct volcanic crater (highest point 210m). The fertile basalt derived soils support dense vegetation types, with some clearings for banana, cassava, taro and sweet potato gardens. About 64% of the island is covered in undisturbed vegetation, mostly on the steeper slopes.

Native title is recognised over Mer and is held in trust by the Mer Gedkem Le (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC.



This map is based on existing dugong and turtle management areas and shows the general areas of operation for community-based land and sea Rangers. Best available information (including traditional place names) has been used at the time of publication. This map is indicative only and not intended for native title purposes.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Recent land and sea management achievements include:

- Community-based dugong and turtle management plan in place
- Ranger group established and Rangers implementing activities under Working on Country plans
- Community participation in the Sustainable Horticulture Project, including a community fruit tree planting
- Revegetation project in erosion prone areas and minor erosion control measures undertaken
- Community participation in inter-tidal and sub-tidal seagrass monitoring and training activities
- Marine debris monitoring and management activities, including removal of ghost nets
- Feral animal management, weed mapping and management
- Erosion control for the Dauar Cemetery and village clean up and fire management project
- Dog control project to reduce predation on nesting green turtles by wild dogs

LAND AND SEA MANAGEMENT AREA

The Mer Gedkem Le land and sea management area (Keriba Luzabzab-Lera Dorge) includes a number of uninhabited islands, reefs and marine areas (see map) covering about 153,592 ha.

MAIN THREATENING PROCESSES

The main threatening processes affecting the Mer Gedkem Le land and sea management area relate to climate change (inundation from sea level rise and coastal erosion), the spread of pest plants and animals, and declining water quality (including marine debris and increasing sedimentation).

LAND AND SEA MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Eleven management priorities under the themes of Land, Sea, and People are identified in the draft Keriba Luzabzab-Lera Dorge Working on Country Ranger Plan. There are 3 Ranger positions (as at 2015). The Meriam Gesep A Gur Keparlem Le Rangers will continue to work closely with the community on priority projects including turtle and dugong management, protecting significant cultural sites, preserving Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and managing pests.

DUGONG AND TURTLE MANAGEMENT

The Mer Island community is actively implementing the Mer Island Dugong and Turtle Management Plan 2011-2016, that is built on the Mer Gedkem Le vision:

“To ensure deger a nam is here for our next generations into the future and that our traditional knowledge continues to be passed on through the generations.”

CLIMATE CHANGE PROFILE

Climate change in the Torres Strait will involve a warming of air and sea temperatures, rising sea levels, more severe weather events, ocean acidification and some changes to rainfall patterns, evaporation, wind and ocean currents. These changes are predicted to have long-term impacts on all of the region's key values across the Land, Sea and People themes. Mer has a 'medium' vulnerability rating to sea level rise and a 'very high' response options rating (there are good options to move to a safer site on the island). A rise of 40 cm will start to cause significant tidal inundation of the community. For more information on climate change, please see the Torres Strait Climate Change Strategy 2014-2018.

TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

The Mer community are working to protect Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for future generations. The TEK system enables communities to access information for their own cultural maintenance; support sustainable community based environmental management approaches; and allows Indigenous Rangers' planning and on-ground cultural and natural resource management activities to be informed by *Ailan Kastom* (Island Custom).

COMMUNITY HORTICULTURE

The Mer community has an active food producing community garden in place to preserve traditional gardening skills and support greater community self-sufficiency in food production. Meriam Gesep A Gur Keparlem Le Rangers have played a role in the establishment and maintenance of the community nursery.

FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

The Mer community is highly reliant on air transport, diesel powered electricity generation and barge transport of supplies and materials to and from the community. Renewable energy options will be explored to reduce carbon emissions and work towards energy independence.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Meriam Gesep A Gur Keparlem Le Rangers engage with the community through frequent community notices and ranger talks, community participation in ranger activities, and an annual community celebration and report back. This ensures land and sea management activities remain relevant to community priorities.

SOME OF MER'S IMPORTANT ANIMALS & PLANTS



Green Turtle
Photo: Tristan Simpson



Grassland Melomys
Photo: Ian Gynther



Red Bead Tree
Photo: Tauoulunga, Wikimedia Commons



Cycas scratchyleana
Photo: David Fell

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information, visit the TSRA website at <http://www.tsra.gov.au> and the Torres Strait eAtlas <http://ts.eatlas.org.au/ts>