



View from Emu Park towards Pelican Island

## Keppel Bay

**T**he grassy hills, rocky headlands and sandy beaches of the islands and mainland coast of Keppel Bay make this region an interesting and worthwhile place to explore by sea kayak.

Keppel Bay is a wide and relatively shallow expanse of water east of Rockhampton. Because the bay straddles the Tropic of Capricorn, this area is also known as the Capricorn Coast. The bay has about 10 islands, many of which have a drier and more barren appearance than the islands described in other places of this book.

The Keppels supported a permanent population of about 80 to 90 Aboriginals of the Woppaburra people. The Woppaburra were marine specialists and made fine fish-hooks, harpoons and nets. White settlers began to take up land in the area in the 1860s and this was the beginning of turbulent times for the Woppaburra. Early attempts to use the islands for cattle and sheep grazing were unsuccessful. Tourist ventures started in 1958 when a small resort was built on Great Keppel Island. While a modern resort venture continues to operate on the island, the Capricorn Coast has thus far escaped the effects of mass tourism that is apparent in places such as the Whitsundays and Fraser Island. The main population centres of Emu Park and Yeppoon retain their friendly, low-key feel.

## SUGGESTED KAYAKING TOURS

### THE MAINLAND COAST AND INNER ISLANDS

The wide sweeping sandy beaches, rocky headlands, protected bays and a couple of small barren islands close to shore make the coastline between Emu Park and Yeppoon interesting for short paddles or a day trip.

#### What you need to know:

The mainland coast of Keppel Bay features many gently shelving sandy beaches, making for easy launchings and landings, though low tide usually means a long walk to the water. Roughly mid way between Emu Park and Yeppoon is Rosslyn Bay boat harbour, home of the local commercial fishing fleet and tourist ferries to Great Keppel Island.

There is a scattering of small islands off shore from townships of Emu Park and Keppel Sands. Of these, Pelican Island is the only one with camping permitted. The undulating island is covered in grassland and low shrubs. Pelican Island is about 4km east of Emu Park and the campsite is located on the shingle beach on its western side. There are no facilities or water and numbers are restricted to 6 persons only. Access is best around full tide.

## Sea Turtles

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the most important habitats for sea turtles in the world. Six of the world's seven species of sea turtle occur in the waters along the Queensland coast – the leatherback, green, loggerhead, flatback, hawksbill and olive ridley.

Marine turtles are long-lived, taking between 35 and 50 years to reach sexual maturity. Sea turtles breed and lay eggs on selected beaches along the coast. Nesting turtles usually weigh between 90 and 140kg. Large green turtles can weigh over 200kg.

All sea turtles are on the world's endangered species list. Turtles and their eggs are totally protected, but this does not stop turtles falling victim to boat-strikes, entanglement in crab pot lines and ingesting discarded plastics.

