

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands

History of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are an Australian Territory located in the Indian Ocean some 2800 kilometres north-west of Perth. The territory consists of 27 coral islands in two atolls having a total land area of about 14 square kilometres.

The islands became an Australian Territory from 23 November 1955 with the proclamation of the *Cocos (Keeling) Island Act 1955*. Prior to this time they had been administered as a British possession by the Colony of Singapore and, from the middle of the nineteenth century, had been administered by British Governors in Ceylon or Singapore (the Straits Settlements).

The first permanent settlement on the islands was a party led by Alexander Hare, which arrived in 1826. Hare's party commenced commercial activity with the harvesting of coconuts and the production of coconut oil. A second settlement was begun in 1827 with the arrival of a party led by Captain Clunies-Ross. Clunies-Ross was also keen to exploit the islands' coconut supplies. In 1886 Queen Victoria granted all land on the islands to George Clunies-Ross (the third descendant of Captain Clunies-Ross) and his heirs in perpetuity.

The islands were strategically important to Australia in both world wars, as a communications and transport link across the Indian Ocean. In World War I the cable station on Direction Island was attacked by a party from the German cruiser *Emden*. Caught without warning by HMAS *Sydney*, the *Emden* was severely damaged and, on orders from the captain, driven ashore on North Keeling Island. Similar installations were attacked by the Japanese during World War II. The Allied forces occupied the islands for most of the war, constructing an airstrip in 1944. From 1944 to 1946 the islands came under military administration.

From 1955 Australian administration of the territory was the responsibility of an Official Representative of the Australian Government. This arrangement was altered in 1977 with the appointment of an Administrator reporting to the Minister for Territories. A Cocos-Malay Local Government Council was created in 1979 and in 1984 the Islanders voted for full integration with Australia. In 1978 the Australian Government purchased from Mr John Cecil Clunies-Ross the remainder of his property on the islands with the exception of his house on Home Island (it was purchased by the government in 1993).

Records of the administration of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands

The Archives' office in Perth holds a wide range of records documenting the administration of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands since they became an Australian Territory. Details of selected records of the Territory administration are listed below.

The office in Perth also hold records of other government agencies with roles in providing services to or on the Cocos Islands. These agencies include the Bureau of Meteorology (records include those of the Cocos meteorological recording station), the Civil Aviation Authority, Australian Construction Services (for details of the construction and maintenance of Commonwealth facilities on the islands), and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (for information on the Cocos Island Animal Quarantine Station). Searches on the Archives RecordSearch database using the series numbers for records of the agencies given below, with the keyword term 'cocos', will identify items of interest.

Selected records on Cocos (Keeling) Islands held in Perth

Cocos (Keeling) Islands Administration (CA 3802)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Copies of inward and outward correspondence</u>	1955–1959	K810
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1955–91	K811
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1955–91	K812
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1955–1991	K813
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1955–91	K816
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1955–91	K1249
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1955–91	K1250
<u>Plans and drawings relating to Cocos (Keeling) Islands</u>	1955–ongoing	K1237

Australian Construction Services

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Job files</u>	1942–62	PP280/1

Australian Quarantine Inspection Service

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1922–97	K279

Bureau of Meteorology

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1917–97	PP470/1

Civil Aviation Authority

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1962–ongoing	PP671/1

Records held by other offices

Other offices of the Archives also hold records relating to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Listed below are selected records held by the National Archives offices in Canberra and Melbourne.

Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Collection of records relating to the Clunies-Ross Administration	1857–1984	A9752
Maps and plans relating to Cocos Island	1952–56	CP1004/15
Cocos Island file No. 2	1940–41	A816, 14/303/14
Rehabilitation of Cocos Island Airstrip	1950–51	A1196, 15/501/326
Applications for Treaties to Cocos Island – general	1956–67	A1838, 1604/1
Important happenings Cocos Island – monthly reports	1959–60	A452, 1959/645

Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Report on Cocos-Keeling	1909	MP84/1, 2021/1/10
Cocos Island garrison	1940	MP729/6, 16/401/273
Charter of Australia Catalina: survey route Cocos, Chargos Seychelles	1942	MP238/1, 8/116/79
Use of Cocos Island by RAAF aircraft	1952–53	MP464/3, 99/1/666

For more information

You can obtain more information about the record series listed above (and the items within the series) from [RecordSearch](#), the Archives database. Using keywords such as 'cocos' and 'keeling' and 'clunies-ross' is likely to locate many additional items relating to the territory, including Australia's contact with it before 1955.

Some of these may be held in Perth, but many will be held by [other offices of the Archives](#).