

5. Turtle Beaches/Coral Reefs of Tongaland

Geographical Coordinates 27°30'S 32°40'E

Area 39,500ha

Location About 30km east of the town of Bumbeni, in the north-east of Natal Province, eastern South Africa.

Date of Ramsar Designation 2 October 1986.

Other International Designations None.

National Designations Marine Reserve (St Lucia, 39,500ha).

Principal Features An extensive shallow marine zone, between low water mark and 5km offshore, along a 79km stretch of the Maputaland coast. True coral reef communities do not occur to a marked degree this far south, but the site does support coral encrusted sandstone reefs about 1-2km offshore. These are composed of a sandy calcarenite derived from the cores of former coastal sand dunes. They are colonised by corals and other benthic and pelagic biota typical of true coral reefs. The most extensive coral community within the site is on Leadman Shoals, north of Leven Point. The area is an important transition zone between true reef and non-limestone substrates with reef communities. The site is known to support 16 species of coral, 1,200 species of fish, 5 species of marine turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Caretta caretta* and *Dermochelys coriacea*), 41 species of marine mammal, 49 species of bird and the sea snake *Pelamis platurus*. The site includes important nesting areas for *Dermochelys coriacea* and *Caretta caretta*. The flora is predominantly algal, including Chlorophyta (11 species), Phaeophyta (9 species) and Rhodophyta (10 species). Many of these species reach the southern limit of their distribution in the area, as does the marine angiosperm *Thalassadendron ciliatum* (Potamogetonaceae). (1a,2a,2b,2c)

Conservation Issues State owned and managed by Natal Parks Board. The entire length of the shoreline adjacent to the site is protected within Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, Coastal Forest Reserve and St Lucia Wetland Park. There are strict controls on disturbance and harvesting of biota within the site. However, there are increasing pressures from diving, boating, fishing and other water sports.