

Operational policy

Visitor Management

Camping on QPWS managed areas

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of Environment and Science (incorporating the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service). Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy

Policy issue

Camping on lands managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

Purpose

This policy outlines how QPWS decides where to allow camping on QPWS managed areas and what facilities will be provided at different locations. It also reviews booking systems, defines educational and group rates and clarifies issues such as arrival and departure times.

Background

Providing a range of camping experiences on QPWS managed areas allows QPWS to cater for a diverse mix of visitor needs and expectations, to ensure any facilities provided are suited to the settings and to maintain a diversity of visitor opportunities across the landscape.

QPWS uses a landscape classification system that provides a standard method to characterise the biophysical, social and management attributes of sites and areas within QPWS managed areas, from a visitor management perspective (see the *Operational Policy: Landscape classification system for visitor management*).

The nine settings established by the system range from 'wild' through to 'urban' and essentially provide a relative measure of the naturalness of a site, or level of human modification. Assigning settings to sites therefore provides managers and planners with one way to consider the implications of proposed activities and other changes that may alter the attributes of a site, for example increasing visitation.

QPWS also uses regional ecosystems as a means of classification and attributing ecosystem status. Regional ecosystems may be classified under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* as 'endangered', 'of concern' or 'not of concern'. Similarly, the conservation status of wildlife is reflected in the listing of species as 'endangered', 'vulnerable' and 'rare' under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

It is an offence to camp in most QPWS managed areas without a valid permit, authority, or other approval and penalties apply. The QPWS Sign manual defines sign standards for any signs required under this policy.

Definitions

QPWS managed areas means:

- protected areas (State land) managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
- State forests and forest reserves managed under the *Forestry Act 1959*
- recreation areas managed under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*.

To camp includes each of the following—

- a) to pitch, place or erect a tent, caravan or another structure that may be used for camping for the purpose of staying overnight by using the tent, caravan or structure;
- b) to place other equipment that may be used for camping or a vehicle in position for the purpose of staying overnight by using the equipment or vehicle;
- c) to keep a tent, caravan or another structure or other equipment that may be used for camping in position overnight, whether or not the tent, caravan, structure or equipment is unattended;
- d) to stay overnight

Determinations

General

QPWS aims to provide a diverse range of recreational camping opportunities within the areas it manages. However not all areas will offer the opportunity to camp. QPWS also aims to ensure that camping opportunities are safe, protect the environment and enable visitors to interact with and appreciate the natural and cultural values of the areas they visit.

Where provided, camping opportunities will be appropriate to the setting and range from low-volume, bush-style camping with few or no facilities, to facility-based camping for larger numbers of visitors in defined camping areas.

Where camping is allowed

When considering where to provide camping opportunities, QPWS takes into account factors including:

- physical suitability of an area for camping
- whether the area has been traditionally associated with camping
- existing and desired settings of an area
- compatibility of the desired setting with different camping styles (e.g. informal bush camping, vehicle-based camping in defined camping areas)
- directions of relevant approved management plans
- any limits on site capacity or group sizes that may be required to protect natural values, maintain the landscape setting and ensure sustainability
- the existence of alternative camping and accommodation opportunities in the surrounding area.

Where camping is not allowed

Generally, camping is prohibited or restricted:

- in landscape classification settings one to three

- in places of special cultural or historic significance
- in 'endangered' or 'of concern' regional ecosystems
- where camping would impact adversely on wildlife (for example, breeding areas)
- in areas that are national park (scientific)
- in sites that are too steep, contain fragile ground or vegetative cover, are sensitive to pollution, or have no capacity for onsite water supply or satisfactory waste disposal
- where natural hazards are present.

QPWS may use regulatory notices to identify 'no camping' areas in the following circumstances:

- to protect fragile sites or natural or cultural resources
- where all or part of a former or existing camping area is closed permanently or temporarily for rehabilitation
- where campers persist in camping outside a defined camping area.

Establishing formal camping areas

Establishing formal camping areas is only appropriate at sites within landscape setting classes four to nine.

In deciding where to locate campgrounds, consideration is given to:

- QPWS adopts a whole of landscape solution to identification and establishing formal camping recreational areas and will actively work with where relevant, traditional owners, user groups, stakeholder representatives, landholders and other land management agencies to appropriately locate the area on QPWS managed areas or other tenures
- QPWS will actively engage with traditional owners of the area if a proposed camping area is located near a site that has cultural and/or historical significance
- QPWS will consider the Cultural heritage duty of care when reviewing the proposed location of a proposed camping area. <https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/>
- QPWS will ensure the permit been assessed under the native title work procedures. <https://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/>
- the desired camping experience
- recreational and educational opportunities, such as proximity to water and scenic features, diversity of vegetation types and the presence of interesting plants and animals
- existing and planned associated infrastructure, such as walking tracks and access routes
- availability of funds for infrastructure construction, servicing and maintenance.

Camping areas will be designed to suit the local environment and decisions about infrastructure and facilities to be provided will follow guidelines set down in the QPWS Facilities manual.

For information on establishing a formal camping area please refer to the Landscape classification system for visitor management operational policy.

Procedures

Seasonal or temporary closures

QPWS may close whole or parts of camping areas either temporarily or seasonally via regulatory notice, for example to protect natural resources and processes (e.g. seabird nesting), protect visitors from natural hazards

(such as cyclones, wildfires and flooding), minimise environmental degradation associated with weather or visitor use patterns, or to allow staff to undertake necessary maintenance.

Emergency procedures

The Department of Environment and Science (DES) has emergency preparedness procedures in place that require emergency response plans to be developed in advance for medical emergencies and foreseeable emergencies that require closure of camping areas, for example in cases of extreme weather conditions (cyclones, wildfires and flooding) and incidents requiring evacuation. Such plans should be developed and implemented as appropriate to each area.

Camping permits

Camping is allowed on QPWS managed areas only under a camping permit. Permits are available online, at over-the-counter permit issuing agents, from self-service kiosks or over the phone via the Queensland Government Integrated Contact Centre, operated by Smart Service Queensland (SSQ).

Campers can book campsites and pay for permits:

- online via the Queensland Government websites www.qld.gov.au/camping or www.des.qld.gov.au
- over the counter at booking offices www.des.qld.gov.au/experiences/over-counter-permits.html
- by telephoning Smart Service Queensland on 13 74 68 (13 QGOV)
- by self-service kiosks https://recreation.npsr.qld.gov.au/booking-offices/?office_type=selfservice
- by self-registration onsite at camping areas in some remote parks.

Booking and pre-paying camping fees online is the preferred option, especially for busy campgrounds.

Camping permits available over the counter

For areas where there is a need to closely monitor or manage camping, QPWS staff or local businesses may directly issue permits. Over the counter services are provided to assist people to book who may not have access to internet or phone services or credit/debit card use.

Telephone bookings via Queensland Government Integrated Contact Centre

Where connectivity to the internet is not available, bookings and payment for permits is available through the Queensland Government Integrated Contact Centre operated by SSQ for camping areas that are not self-registration.

Campers booking via these methods are required to display their booking number at their campsite. Campers will be informed how to obtain camping tags. Customers who provide email addresses will be emailed confirmation of their booking and a printable camping tag.

Self-registration camping

Under the self-registration system, campers write out their own permits and pay their camping fees (cash, cheque or credit card number) in an envelope that is placed in a secure box at the self-registration station. Where self-registration is used, signs indicate how to obtain a permit and what fees apply. At least one self-registration sign will be installed in a central location at any camping area where self-registration still applies.

Advance bookings

Generally, bookings may be made up to 12 months in advance for individuals and commercial tours, though shorter periods may apply for some areas. Full payment must be made to secure a booking. Exceptions only

apply to some commercial activity permits. Advanced booking and pre-payment may apply to commercial activity agreements. Local demand and issues may determine the length of time for advanced booking.

Arrival and departure times

When camping areas are booked close to capacity, a campsite may be occupied from 2pm on the first day for which camping fees have been paid and must be vacated by 11am of the day after the last night's fees are paid. Arrival and departure times are flexible for islands where times are determined by tides.

Duration of permit

The maximum duration of a camping permit will vary depending on the area that is the subject of the permit. The maximum duration of a camping permit issued under the Nature Conservation (Administration) Regulation 2017 for protected areas is 30 days (s19). For a recreation area the maximum duration is 30 days. Despite these maximum periods, shorter permit durations may be set at high demand sites and sites vulnerable to user impacts. Where applicable, these periods are indicated in permit conditions or displayed on signs at the camping area.

Camping conditions

Specific conditions that apply to camping are included on the camping permit, camping tag or signs erected at camping areas. It is an offence not to comply with the conditions of a camping permit, camping tag or sign and penalties apply.

Camping fees

Nightly fees apply for camping in QPWS managed areas. These are defined in Schedule 3 (5) of the Nature Conservation (Administration) Regulation 2017, Schedule 6 of the Forestry Regulation 2015 and Schedule 2 of the Recreation Areas Management Regulation 2017. Camping fees are used to help offset the costs of maintaining camping facilities and services.

Fees are scheduled per:

- person;
- family or group; or
- person taking part in an approved education tour.

Scheduled fees also apply to camping under a commercial activity permit or commercial activity agreement.

Fees per person

Fees apply to each person aged five years or older who is camping.

Group or family rate

Maximum fees are prescribed per night for a group or family. A group is defined under the Forestry Regulation 2015 as a party of at least four persons camping together where no more than two persons are aged over 15 years. For protected areas and recreation areas, a family is a party of one or two adults aged 18 years or over and accompanying children between five and 17 years.

Group or family members may be unrelated. The group or family rate applies to a maximum of eight people.

Educational rate

Discounted camping fees apply for people taking part in an approved educational tour or camp. Concessions apply to any educational excursion, tour or camp conducted by all Australian registered primary or secondary schools, Scouts and Guides or for Duke of Edinburgh Award Programs.

The educational rate applies to everyone in the group including teachers and parent supervisors.

Refer to *QPWS Operational Policy: Fee concessions for educational group excursions, tours and camps on QPWS managed areas*.

Fee exemptions

Fee exemptions for camping currently apply only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in land claim, management planning or co-management activities.

Retrospective payment of fees

When campers stay beyond their permit dates due to legitimate unforeseen circumstances, a permit should be issued and fees paid for the extended stay retrospectively. Legitimate circumstances include extreme weather events stranding campers on islands.

Overnight recreational use

Anyone who conducts a nocturnal recreational activity, such as fishing, is not required to have a camping permit, unless that activity is associated with sleeping equipment or camping equipment.

Ghost campsites

Where camping equipment is left in situ but the campsite is unoccupied overnight (or longer), the standard camping fee applies for one person only.

Camps that have no visible camping permit, booking reference or e-permit camping tag or receipt are in breach of permit conditions. If no permit or booking reference is displayed and it has been established that no permit has been issued, then QPWS may consider the camp an unauthorised structure (s114 Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2017) and take action to move the camp and/or issue an infringement for not displaying (or having) a camping permit.

Minimum age of applicants

Permits should preferably be issued to campers over 16 years of age, but no minimum age applies.

Camping equipment

Tents, camper trailers, caravans and motor-homes can be accommodated, but suitable sites may not be available at all camping areas. Campers must not rope off areas for exclusive use within any camping areas.

Where group/family fees are paid, the party should ideally be accommodated within the one tent, camper trailer or caravan structure. Exceptions are mess (cooking) tents, shelter over picnic tables (such as a tarpaulin) and small, separate tents for children under 18 years. Where a single permit is used, camping structures should be in close proximity, no more than 3m apart and ideally should fit on one defined campsite.

Other issues to consider

Camping authorised under another authority

On QPWS managed areas managed under the *Forestry Act 1959* and the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*, camping may be authorised under an authority other than a camping permit.

Camping may only be authorised via a condition in another authority for management-related activities that are non-recreational, for example when directly associated with authorised stock mustering. The conditions must specifically identify the number of people allowed to camp, the forest or other area where camping is authorised and require the authority holder to comply with general conditions (for example in relation to waste and campfires). No camping fees apply in these circumstances.

Camping associated with group activities

Recreational camping cannot be authorised except under a camping permit or commercial activity permit. For example, to conduct camping in association with a group activity, a camping permit will be required and the appropriate camping fees paid.

Camping in national park (scientific)

Camping is only allowed in a national park (scientific) when associated with management of the area or approved research and monitoring projects, and provided the applicant holds a camping permit, permit to enter the national park (scientific) and a scientific purposes permit.

Client information

To ensure sustainability, campers are expected to minimise their impact and abide by camping codes included in park information services.

Compliance

QPWS conducts ranger patrols of camping areas at regular intervals to ensure visitors are complying with regulations, have paid self-registration fees and also to monitor and encourage environmentally friendly camping.

Reference materials

Operational policy: Camping and vehicle service permit fee and pre-paid booking refunds

Operational policy: Fee concessions for educational excursions, tours and camps on QPWS managed areas

Operational policy: Noise-generating appliances in QPWS-managed areas

Operational policy: Landscape classification system for visitor management

Authorities

Nature Conservation Act 1992 and Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2017 and Nature Conservation (Administration) Regulation 2017

Forestry Act 1959 and Forestry Regulation 2015

Recreation Areas Management Act 2006 and Recreation Areas Management Regulation 2017

Further information

For campsite bookings and enquiries, book online at www.qld.gov.au/camping, visit one of our over-the-counter agents (https://recreation.npsr.qld.gov.au/booking-offices/?office_type=bookingagent) or alternatively contact the Queensland Government integrated contact centre on 13 74 68 (13 QGOV).

Disclaimer:

While this document has been prepared with care, it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Science should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved By

Ben Klaassen

Signature

14 February 2014

Date

Deputy Director-General
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
Department of Environment and Science

Enquiries:
QPWS Online Booking Services
Ph. 13 74 68 (QGOV)
Email: qpws@des.qld.gov.au