

# Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	1,300ha
Bioregion:	Cape York Peninsula
QPWS region:	Northern
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire
State electorate:	Cook



Sandstone escarpments. Photo: NPRSR.

## Legislative framework

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Aboriginal Land Act 1991</i>
✓	<i>Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>

## Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
✓	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

Within this document, the Melsonby (Gaarraay) Land Trust is referred to as the traditional partner.

## Vision

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park will be jointly managed in perpetuity by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and the Melsonby (Gaarraay) Land Trust.

The aspirations and cultural responsibilities of the Melsonby (Gaarraay) people will be recognised and reflected in park management.

## Conservation purpose

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park was gazetted to protect the spectacular hilly and rugged sandstone escarpments, gorges and plateaus; and the numerous watercourses, including Bridge, Duffers and Cater creeks within the park.

The area has immense significance to the Gaarraay Traditional Owners and the park conserves many cultural sites.

## Protecting and presenting the park's values

### Landscape

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park comprises a complex of steep stony hills and escarpments dissected with drainage lines. All drainage lines flow out of the park.

Located within the Normanby catchment, the park conserves many tributaries of the Normanby River. The many seasonal creeks within the park appear to be in good condition, with minimal bank erosion.

Sandstone escarpments exist in a natural condition, with minimal pest plant and pest animal impacts.

With the exception of the transport and utility corridor in the extreme south-western section, most of Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park remains in a natural, unfragmented state.

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park is bordered by Aboriginal lands, cattle properties, Jack River National Park and other government lands.

### Regional ecosystems

Nineteen regional ecosystems are mapped within Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park. Some of these are unique variants on the more widespread regional ecosystem types. One regional ecosystem (3.10.7b scarlet gum *Eucalyptus phoenicea* ± Melville Island bloodwood *Corymbia nesophila* woodland on wetter sandstone) is an of concern community (Table 1). The remaining 18 are not of concern at present.

In general, eucalypt woodlands occur on the scarps and plateaus with melaleuca woodlands growing in the lower areas and adjacent to the creeks. Heath occurs on the more exposed surfaces with shallow soils.

Sandstone escarpments dominated by a complex of eucalypt and bloodwood woodlands occur throughout most of the park. These communities are still recovering from the 2009 wildfire. It may take substantial time for ground animal populations in these communities to fully recover.

Creeks dominated by eucalypt and melaleuca closed woodlands appear to be in a healthy condition. These woodlands show limited impacts from wildfire and minimal evidence of pest plant invasion.

### Native plants and animals

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park is currently known to protect the near threatened *Homoranthus tropicus* (Table 2) and two species which are listed in international agreements (Table 3). Significant populations of scarlet gum *Eucalyptus phoenicea* are conserved within the park. Within Queensland, this species is endemic to Laura Basin. However, it is widely distributed in the Northern Territory and Kimberley region. Mapping indicates that scarlet gum occurs primarily in the southern half of the park, mainly south of Bridge Creek.

The diversity of the ecosystems and the complexity of the terrain within Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park means there may be many unique or regionally endemic species. Baseline data collected during a survey on the adjacent Bridge Creek holding in 2009 (which has the same geology and similar vegetation patterns as the park), can be reasonably extrapolated to the Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park.

### Aboriginal culture

The area is known to be of significance to the Melsonby (Gaarraay) people. They use the area for traditional hunting, gathering and other cultural social purposes. A cooperative management arrangement, based on an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA), has been established with the Traditional partners for management of Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park.

No other ILUAs or native title applications exist over the park.

Subject to successful negotiation with the Traditional Owners, the park is identified for future transfer to Aboriginal ownership under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*. A joint management regime will be established under the framework provided by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* for the Cape York Peninsula region.

Sites of material Aboriginal culture and places of cultural significance exist on the park. The location and significance of these sites and places is being progressively recorded and documented by the Melsonby (Gaarraay) people.

## Shared-history culture

Sections of old cattle fences exist in various locations along the park boundary.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park is a culturally significant park, and visitors enquiring about the park are encouraged to contact the Traditional partners prior to their visit.

With the exception of the dirt road in the extreme south-western section, most of Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park is largely inaccessible by vehicle. The park may be suited to dry season pedestrian access and aircraft-based viewing opportunities.

Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park is a very rugged landscape, with many natural hazards.

## Education and science

Given the cultural significance of the park, further collection and collation of cultural site information by the Traditional partners is strongly encouraged. There may also be value in undertaking further survey work and installing photo monitoring points to improve baseline knowledge and observe changes in the condition of the natural values of the park over time.

## Partnerships

QPWS staff work cooperatively with the Traditional partners and neighbouring properties to ensure protected area values are appropriately managed.

## Other key issues and responses

### Pest management

#### Pest plants

The park is largely free of pest plants at present. No known pest plants pose a significant risk to the natural and cultural integrity of the park.

Sicklepod *Senna obtusifolia* occurs in the greater Normanby River catchment. If sicklepod enters the park, it is only likely to grow along the creek margins.

#### Pest animals

Cattle *Bos* spp. and pigs *Sus scrofa* occur primarily in the lower lying country adjacent to water sources along Upper Bridge Creek. Some cattle are entering the park from neighbouring properties. Pig numbers vary with seasons and are likely to be following the Normanby River.

Cane toads *Rhinella marina* occur throughout the park. They are mainly observed during the wet season.

### Fire management

A wildfire burnt the whole park in October 2009 and, despite attempts to undertake prescribed burns, the park has not burnt due to limited fuel loads. Vegetation appears to be recovering well.

Once fuel loads build and fire can be re-introduced to the park, staff will try and establish a mosaic burn pattern.

### Other management issues

#### Transport and utility corridor

A gazetted road passes through the south-western corner of Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park. A 40–50m section of the road requires annual maintenance, as it gets washed into Bridge Creek each year during the wet season. The road provides access to a Telstra tower.

## Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p><b>Aboriginal culture</b></p> <p>Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park is jointly managed between the Melsonby (Gaarraay) people and QPWS and the partners have a strong collaborative working relationship.</p>	<p>A1. Establish and implement a formal joint management regime with the Melsonby (Gaarraay) people under the statutory framework provided by the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i> and the <i>Aboriginal Land Act 1991</i> for the Cape York Peninsula region.</p> <p>A2. Encourage and facilitate the ongoing collation and recording of cultural sites and places on the park by the Traditional partners.</p>
<p><b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b></p> <p>Recreational opportunities are culturally appropriate and complementary to the remote character of the park.</p>	<p>A3. The Traditional partners provide guidance on which sites of the park can be promoted for access by members of the public.</p> <p>A4. Visitors enquiring about the park will be encouraged to contact the Traditional partners prior to their visit.</p>
<p><b>Education and science</b></p> <p>Park staff have a good knowledge and understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the park.</p>	<p>A5. Support the ongoing monitoring and recording of baseline natural resource data by QPWS staff and the Melsonby (Gaarraay) people.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships</b></p> <p>Park staff maintain good working relationships with park neighbours and other community stakeholders.</p>	<p>A6. Maintain good working relations with neighbouring landholders and, where possible, cooperatively undertake fire and pest management programs.</p>
<p><b>Pest management</b></p> <p>Landscape values remain in a near-natural condition, largely free of pest plants.</p>	<p>A7. Park staff and the Traditional partners progressively familiarise themselves with the park and document pest occurrences and condition impacts.</p> <p>A8. Newly-identified pest threats are treated while it is still possible to eradicate or contain them.</p>
<p><b>Fire management</b></p> <p>The natural biological diversity and integrity of native plant and animal communities on the park is promoted.</p>	<p>A9. Minimise impacts from late season, large-scale and high intensity fires by implementing suitable fire regimes with relation to the frequency, intensity and timing of burns for natural communities and populations within the park.</p> <p>A10. Where possible, coordinate planned burns with neighbouring properties.</p>

## Tables – Conservation values management

**Table 1: Of concern regional ecosystems**

Regional ecosystem	Description	Biodiversity status
3.10.7b	<i>Eucalyptus phoenicea</i> ± <i>Corymbia nesophila</i> woodland on wetter sandstone	Of concern

**Table 2: Species of conservation significance**

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
<b>Plants</b>				
<i>Homoranthus tropicus</i>	-	Near threatened	-	Low

**Table 3: Species listed in international agreements**

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	JAMBA	CAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	-	✓	-	-
<i>Myiagra cyanoleuca</i>	satin flycatcher	✓	-	-	-

Bonn – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement