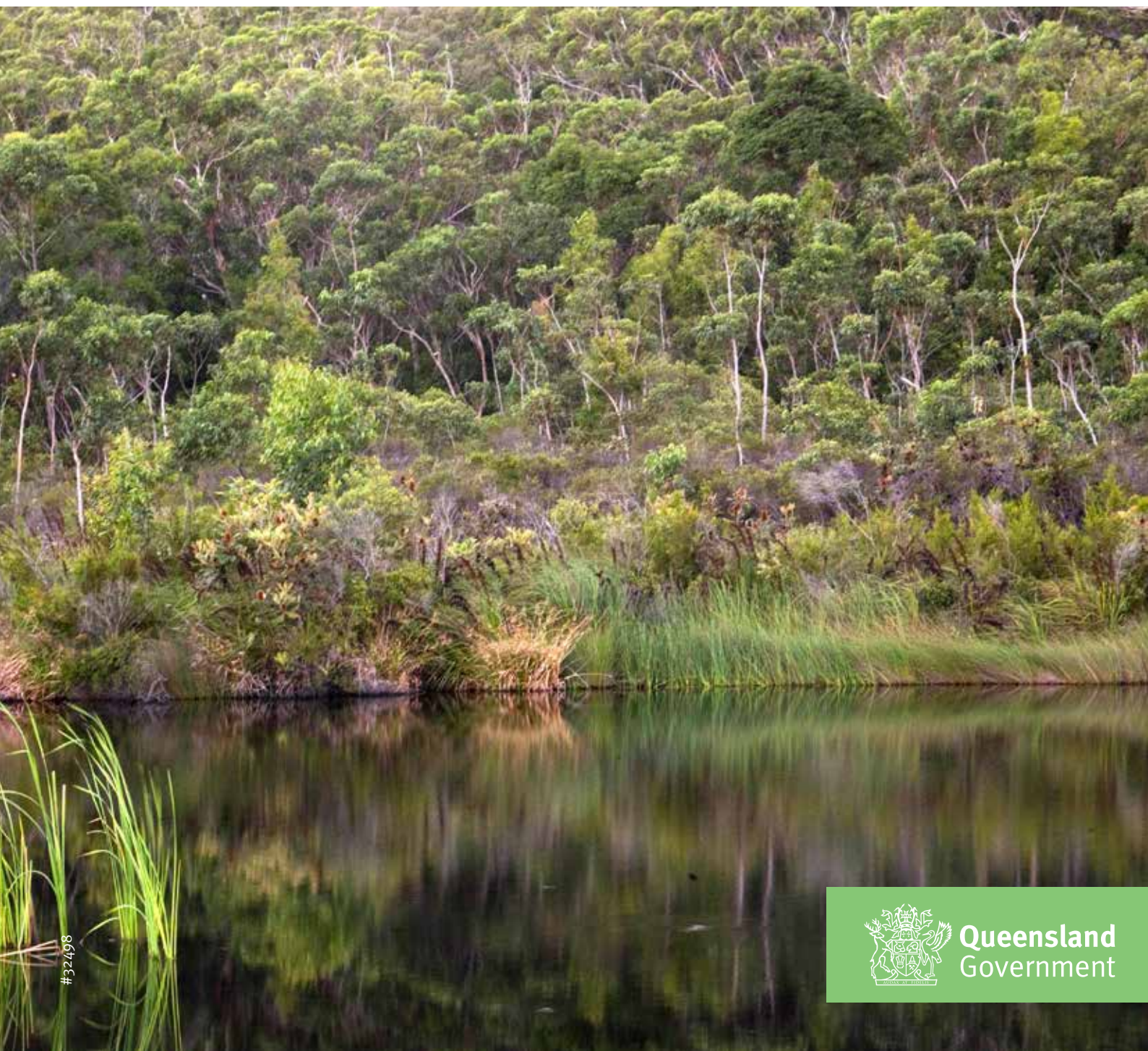


Queensland's

National Park Investment Prioritisation Framework

Protecting our world-class natural and cultural values



**Prepared by: Protected Area Strategy and Investment,
Department of Environment and Science**

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The Department of Environment and Science acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. We recognise their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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Front and back cover image: K'gari (Fraser Island), Great Sandy Marine Park

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1. Introduction

Queensland's rich biodiversity and unique and diverse Indigenous cultural heritage is of local, national and international significance.

Queensland is home to twice as many native wildlife species as any other Australian state or territory—and half of the species living in Queensland are unique to the state. Queensland is also home to 72% of Australia's native bird species, 85% of its native mammals and just over 50% of the country's native reptiles and frogs.

First Nations peoples, the world's oldest continuous cultures, have been caring for land and sea Country as living cultural landscapes across thousands of generations—a tremendous legacy of global significance and immeasurable worth.

Queensland's protected area system plays a vital role in preserving and protecting this legacy and the state's extraordinary biodiversity. Covering more than 14.2 million hectares, Queensland's protected area system is twice the size of Tasmania and covers approximately 8.2% of our state. It is comprised of two key types of protected areas:

- **Public protected areas:** making up 69% of the protected area system and referred to as Queensland national park estate, consisting of Indigenous-owned national parks, national parks, conservation parks and resources reserves.
- **Private protected areas:** making up the remaining 31% of the protected area system, comprised of nature refuges and special wildlife reserves.

Expansion of both public and private protected areas through coordinated and strategic growth is a critical strategy to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.¹

The Queensland protected area system provides a myriad of environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits, including:

- improved biodiversity outcomes, reduced habitat loss, improved protection of natural, cultural and heritage values, and recovery of threatened species
- increased resilience to climate change through a connected landscape that provides refugia for native wildlife and ongoing clean air, water and carbon sequestration
- connection to Country for First Nations Peoples, through formal joint management/co-stewardship arrangements, prioritising the renaming of protected areas and including the integration of traditional knowledge with modern land management practices
- economic benefits via jobs growth in ecotourism and unique cultural tourism experiences, as well as expenditure in regional centres
- direct and indirect social, cultural and health benefits resulting from increased community engagement in nature-based recreation and exposure to the natural world.

1 The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of a protected area: 'a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values'.



In recognition of the need for continued growth to deliver the benefits outlined above, and to protect our unique natural and cultural heritage for future generations, the Queensland Government has reaffirmed its commitment to make significant and sustainable expansions to the protected area system.

This commitment is outlined as part of Strategic Priority 1, ‘Grow’, of *Queensland’s Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030* (the Strategy)—a ten-year framework to govern the expansion and management of Queensland’s protected areas.

This priority seeks as its outcome:

An expanded Queensland protected area system that safeguards biodiversity and cultural values, protects threatened species, and builds climate change resilience while creating economic benefits.

To deliver this outcome, Action 1 of the Strategy is to *sustainably grow national parks*, with the term ‘national parks’ here including national parks, conservation parks and resources reserves that make up public protected areas.

While public and private protected areas play a complementary role in conserving Queensland’s natural and cultural heritage, there are additional public interest considerations associated with the Queensland national park estate. For example, the State funds land acquisition and management; supports First Nations peoples’ ownership as well as involvement in management and planning; and must consider public access. These considerations mean a separate strategic framework for expanding the national park estate is required.

Action 1.2 of the Strategy is to *Develop and implement a National Park Investment Prioritisation Framework to apply best available science, cultural and management factors in prioritising national park acquisitions.*

This framework will ensure national park expansion occurs in a considered, transparent and effective manner that represents value for money to Queenslanders. It outlines:

- objectives and principles to guide decision-making with regards to acquisition selection and implementation
- the legislative and policy context of decision-making
- key considerations in the strategic selection, assessment and prioritisation of land for acquisition
- governance monitoring and reporting requirements.



2. About this *framework*

Growing the Queensland national park estate will require significant, ongoing effort and investment, and will be achieved through well-founded decisions about acquiring, transferring and reserving new land.

This framework will guide and shape these decisions by providing a consistent, transparent and evidence-based methodology for identifying, assessing, selecting and prioritising potential acquisitions or transfers of new areas.

The **objectives** of this framework are to ensure that the Queensland national park estate:

- is comprehensive, adequate and representative of the state's biodiversity
- helps to conserve critical habitat for threatened and at-risk species
- protects and conserves Queensland's First Nation Peoples' culturally important landscapes and places and connection to Country
- protects non-Indigenous cultural heritage and historic places
- contributes to economic, social and health benefits to our community
- provides for high-quality, nature-based recreation and eco-tourism opportunities that connect people with nature
- contributes to carbon sequestration, climate resilience and protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

The strategic guidance provided by this framework will help the Department of Environment and Science to demonstrate and be accountable as to how and why a land acquisition, transfer or reservation decision has been made. It will ensure that public investment protects environmental, social and cultural values as well as providing economic and health benefits achieved through conservation, eco-tourism and community access to nature.



3. Guiding principles

The Strategy includes a set of overarching principles which recognise the critical importance and value of protected areas to our environment and all Queenslanders.

This framework operationalises Principle 4 of the Strategy: the selection of new protected areas will be based on scientific evidence and principles, and First Nations' knowledge and systems, to optimise public value and long-term conservation outcomes.

To guide decisions and acquisitions under this framework, the following seven guiding principles are applied:

1. Decisions about expanding the protected area estate are founded on contemporary evidence-based criteria and leading-edge science.
2. First Nations' knowledge and cultural objectives are accounted for in determining the cultural significance of the land being considered.
3. Local, regional and operational estate considerations are taken into account.
4. Potential economic, social and health benefits, including community priorities, inform investment considerations.
5. Investment into new acquisitions represents and optimises value for money.
6. Decisions are transparent, accountable and consistent in accordance with this framework.
7. Queensland's obligations under legislative and international commitments are being fulfilled.

Mbabaram Traditional Custodians, Gerry Turpin, Cheryl Turpin and Sandra Rosas looking at the Bushman's Clothes Peg tree on Country at Watsonville (Mbabaram Country)







4. Legislative, strategic and *policy context*

A core driver of this framework is to maximise the benefits of expanding the Queensland national park estate through applying contemporary, evidence-based approaches to the decision-making process.

The following section briefly outlines:

- the broader legislative and policy context surrounding the acquisition and growth of protected areas in Queensland
- the CAR principles (comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness) which underpin the National Reserve System throughout Australia.

Contemporary conservation legislation, strategies and policies are underpinned by recognition of the importance and value of protected areas in supporting sustainable management of natural land and sea environments.

In the face of climate change and rapid, global biodiversity loss, the need for conservation and the significant social, cultural, economic and health benefits associated with public protected areas has only further increased.

Accordingly, this framework is founded in a clear international, national and state policy context which promotes and guides efforts to improve and expand the Queensland protected area system.

4.1 International context

The Australian Government is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN Convention), a legally binding global treaty to promote the development of strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Parties to the UN Convention agree to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services. In 2010, it was agreed by the Parties to the UN Convention, that biodiversity targets would be set and translated into national strategies and action plans.

4.2 National context

In support of and consistent with the UN Convention, the Australian Government, along with all state and territory governments, made a collaborative commitment to deliver the National Reserve System (NRS)—a network of public, Indigenous and private protected areas that conserve examples of Australia's diverse ecosystems and native plants and animals. Queensland's protected area system contributes to this broader National Reserve System. All Australian governments have agreed to minimum standards that protected areas must meet to be included in and managed under the NRS. These include:

The land must be designated a 'protected area' to be conserved forever, with effective legal means guaranteeing its perpetual conservation.

The land must contribute to the comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness (CAR) of the National Reserve System—i.e. it must meet certain scientific criteria and strategically enhance the protected area network.



The land must be managed to protect and maintain biological diversity according to one of [six international classes](#) developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).¹

4.3 State context

In Queensland, the national park estate is established under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (the NCA), and includes national parks, national parks (scientific); national parks (Aboriginal land); national parks (Torres Strait Islander land); national parks (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land); conservation parks; and resources reserves.

The underlying objective for their management is the conservation of nature, while allowing for the involvement of First Nations Peoples in the management of protected areas in which they have an interest under Aboriginal Tradition or Island Custom.

The NCA identifies the Cardinal Principle for the management of national parks, which is to provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values (Part 4, Division 1, Section 17).

The Queensland national park estate is also managed to allow for:

- use and enjoyment by the community
- social, cultural and commercial use in a way consistent with the natural, cultural and other values of the areas.

The Department of Environment and Science (DES) is committed to working in genuine partnership with Queensland's First Nations peoples to achieve stronger outcomes for community and for all people. The department's Gurra Gurra Framework 2020–2026 will help DES to reframe relationships with First Nations peoples by holding Country and people at the centre of all policies, programs and service delivery, including the acquisition, transfer and reservation of new public protected areas.

4.4 The CAR reserve system principles— comprehensive, adequate and representative

The NRS is underpinned by a scientific framework to ensure Australia progressively extends protection to examples of all the nation's ecosystems. The objective of this scientific framework is to develop a 'comprehensive, adequate and representative' (CAR) system of protected areas.²

¹ <http://www.environment.gov.au/land/nrs/about-nrs/requirements>

² <http://www.environment.gov.au/land/nrs/science/scientific-framework>



The Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program

The program returns ownership and management of identified lands on Cape York Peninsula to local Aboriginal Traditional Owners, while ensuring the protection of Cape York Peninsula's iconic natural areas and significant natural and cultural values.

Through this program, the state is changing the tenure of identified Cape York properties to Aboriginal freehold land, allowing Traditional Owners to return to live on country and pursue employment and business opportunities in land management, grazing and private tourism ventures. Those areas of the land which have outstanding environmental values are being dedicated as jointly managed national parks. With support from Traditional Owners, the state is also converting existing national parks to jointly managed national parks (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)—CYPAL with Aboriginal freehold as the underlying tenure.

As at 30 September 2022, tenure resolution has been completed for 22 State land dealings and 24 existing parks, resulting in:

- the transfer of land to 29 Aboriginal land holding entities (holding more than 4.22 million hectares of land)
- the transfer of more than 1.57 million hectares of Aboriginal freehold land (without a national park (CYPAL))
- the conversion of 24 existing national parks to jointly managed national park (CYPAL)—more than 1.8 million hectares
- the creation of 10 new national parks (CYPAL)—more than 799,000 hectares
- the creation of 20 nature refuges on Aboriginal freehold—more than 303,500 hectares.

The CAR reserve system principles

COMPREHENSIVE:

conserve samples of each element of biodiversity (represented by species and ecosystems) in the protected area system

ADEQUATE:

how much of each ecosystem or habitat should be sampled to provide ecological viability and integrity of populations, species and communities

REPRESENTATIVE:

gives more depth to the measure of comprehensiveness—a representative protected area system will sample the full range of biological variation within each ecosystem by sampling the range of environmental variation typical of the ecosystem's geographic range.

The goal of the **CAR system of reserves for Australia** was endorsed by Queensland and all other state and territory governments as signatories to the National Strategy for Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity (2010) and the National Forest Policy Statement (1992).

More broadly, the NRS also provides general guidance about establishing national parks, including that:

- the boundaries of parks should be set with strong ecological integrity (such as capturing the headwaters of catchments)
- large parks are preferable to small ones, although a range of sizes may be appropriate to adequately sample conservation values
- boundary to area ratios should be minimised and linear parks avoided (except for riverine systems and corridors as may be appropriate)
- parks should be developed across major environmental gradients if feasible and appropriate
- each park should contribute to satisfying as many conservation criteria as possible
- impacts of threatening processes should be minimised (particularly from adjoining areas)
- parks should be integrated with landscape conservation efforts.



5. Setting *priorities*



Through the Strategy, the Queensland Government has reaffirmed its commitment to ‘an expanded Queensland protected area system that safeguards biodiversity and cultural values, protects threatened species, and builds climate change resilience while creating economic benefits’.

Both the national and Queensland policy and legislative contexts are clear that this expansion must prioritise outcomes for biodiversity. As such, the selection of land for addition to the national park estate must be carefully considered and based on scientific evidence that the land will extend protection to examples of all the state’s ecosystems. Queensland is working towards the expansion and effective management of the Queensland national park estate to align with the ‘CAR’ principles.

The additional public interest considerations associated with the Queensland national park estate, such as accountability and transparency in the allocation of public funding, supporting Traditional Owner ownership of protected areas and involvement in management and planning, and public access, mean there are other considerations, in addition to the ‘CAR’ principles that also inform decisions about acquiring, transferring and reserving land for national parks and other public protected areas.

The following section outlines six key assessment considerations that inform the decision-making process and establish priorities for national park acquisitions:

1. Biodiversity conservation
2. Indigenous cultural values and economic opportunities
3. Strategic commitments, partnerships and opportunities
4. Regional and operational considerations
5. Social and economic values
6. Due diligence and financial considerations.

While each potential acquisition is assessed against each of the above six assessment criteria, the department often reports and describes potential acquisitions as either being ‘strategic’ or ‘operational’ in nature. These two categories of acquisitions generally describe two over-arching drivers behind acquisitions and are considered important for differing reasons.

It can generally be said that the bulk of acquisition funding is allocated towards ‘strategic’ acquisitions which can be described as ranking highly against the top three assessment criteria, i.e. ranked high in terms of the property’s biodiversity conservation and/or indigenous cultural values, usually supports the current program/election commitments of the day, and may involve partnerships of some kind (philanthropic, First Nations peoples, environmental conservancies).

‘Operational’ acquisitions are generally those that acquit highly against key assessment criteria 4 and/or 5. While less funding is usually allocated towards operational acquisitions, these types of acquisitions play a vital role in the efficient functioning of a protected area, often boost public safety, and look to meet and enhance community experiences.

Acquisitions can also be both ‘strategic’ and ‘operational’ in nature with a prime example of this being the addition of a significant tract of an under-protected regional ecosystems that results in connection of two well established protected areas or Indigenous Protected Areas.

5.1 Biodiversity conservation

The principal benefits derived from protected areas are those that relate to the conservation of our biodiversity—ecosystems, habitats and species.

Accordingly, under this framework a **Base Biodiversity Criteria** is applied for the identification, prioritisation and decision-making process for national park acquisitions and transfers. The department applies an internally developed and managed Strategic Conservation Analysis tool, which refines a bioregional representativeness approach by focussing on achieving adequate representation of regional ecosystems.

Base biodiversity criteria

The assessment process will prioritise acquisitions and transfers that:

- contribute most to the **CAR reserve system principles** of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness
 - prioritise **Ecosystem Contribution**—ecosystems or species habitats that are not represented or not adequately represented
 - prioritise **Ecosystem Irreplaceability**—the conservation of that ecosystem or species could not be achieved elsewhere or is less likely to be achieved elsewhere in the landscape
 - prioritise **Ecosystem Urgency**—ecosystems, habitats or species under threat of loss or degradation through competing land uses.
- **enhance climate change resilience** and ecosystem adaptation capabilities of the protected area estate
- **improve landscape or habitat connectivity** or enhance the ecosystem health of protected areas
- **consolidate high biodiversity value areas**, for example, intact high value bushland in a highly fragmented landscape near or adjacent to existing national parks or other protected areas, a large tract of an at-risk regional ecosystem associated with a threatened species, or an area identified as an appropriate environment offsets site.





Wattle Gully Nature Refuge

The Department of Environment and Science is developing a Threatened Species Prioritisation Framework which will further support the consideration of threatened species protection in future acquisitions.

5.2 Indigenous cultural values

The department recognises, respects and values First Nations peoples and cultures. It recognises that First Nations peoples have rights and interests in the Country on which we live and work. The department is committed to progressing self-determination by working with First Nations peoples to incorporate their priorities and perspectives in decision-making and operations. Public protected areas have important cultural, social and economic value for First Nations peoples and communities, whose connection to Country is a core component of their spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

It is therefore critical to include the consideration of opportunities and benefits under this umbrella, to ensure the expansion of the Queensland national park estate facilitates partnerships with First Nations peoples in the ownership of national parks and to conserve landscapes and places of Indigenous cultural significance.

The assessment process will prioritise acquisitions that:

- represent areas of likely **Indigenous cultural significance**
- provide or enrich **social, cultural and economic benefits and connection to the First Nations owners and custodians**
- **advance Native Title outcomes** such as consent determinations or support Indigenous Land Use Agreements
- support increased **opportunities for co-stewardship arrangements** with the First Nations custodians.

5.3 Strategic commitments, partnerships and opportunities

As an overarching consideration, there is a need to ensure that planned acquisition or transfer of land aligns with relevant obligations and strategic objectives at the state, national and international levels. For example, land with known habitat for threatened species may be targeted in accordance with state directives and national programs.

Similarly, should the Queensland Government set aside specific funding allocation or growth targets for a particular bioregion, an additional weighting may be added where properties fit the specific conditions of the funding program.

Notwithstanding these considerations, protected area analysis systems currently in place already prioritise areas under-represented in the protected area system or at most risk of loss or degradation.



The Department of Environment and Science is actively exploring a range of partnership opportunities to grow the protected area system

Philanthropic co-investment partnership

Where opportunities arise, the Department of Environment and Science (DES) will seek to partner with philanthropic individuals and organisations to leverage both state's and partners' funding to achieve protected area outcomes.

Establishing these long-term philanthropic co-investment partnerships, where the altruistic intent and protected area outcome is at the core of the partnership, is a key DES strategy in making tangible progress in sustainably expanding the Queensland protected area system.

Cultural co-investment conservation partnerships

DES will look to partner with First Nations Peoples, government and non-government partners to advance connection to Country while also achieving cultural and biodiversity conservation outcomes. DES will work with First Nations Peoples to incorporate their priorities and perspectives in decision-making both in regard to the protected area outcome, ownership, and underlying tenure as well as the long-term sustainable management of the area.

Strategic directions, commitments and considerations

The assessment process will prioritise acquisitions that fulfils **government commitments, interstate or national agreements**, such as:

- international conventions and treaties
- joint Commonwealth/State strategies or contractual agreements
- Queensland Government priorities.

The Queensland Government also recognises the many conservation and philanthropic or non-government organisations that have common goals in conserving Queensland's biodiversity. Harnessing opportunities for partnerships with these organisations can maximise conservation gains for the Queensland national park estate.

Partnerships considerations

The assessment process will prioritise acquisitions that:

- facilitate co-investment conservation partnerships between government and non-government, conservation and philanthropic organisations, or other investors with an interest in conservation.
- facilitate co-investment cultural conservation partnerships with First Nations Peoples between government and non-government, where protected area and cultural connection outcomes can be achieved.

5.4 Regional and operational considerations

In addition to considering universal objectives and strategic priorities at the international, national and state level, there is also a need to ensure that unique regional issues are canvassed and included as part of the decision-making process.

Regional considerations play a significant role when prioritising acquisitions for the consolidation of national park boundaries and historic in-holdings for the Queensland national park estate. An area's acquisition priority may be elevated in circumstances where a small-to medium-sized acquisition results in a significant outcome. It might secure a critical value or mitigate risks against that value; provide a major management or operational efficiency; or significantly enhance a national park's public use or community benefit.

Further to this, the department may need to compare the operational set-up costs and contrast the environmental condition of multiple acquisition options. In this regard regional issues can significantly influence the priority ranking of acquisitions.



The department also needs to consider the long-term cost of setting up and managing an area—both in terms of operational infrastructure and potential environmental rehabilitation or restoration costs. Regional analysis takes into account the property’s values as well as potential savings or costs incurred or revenue through acquisition and management of the area in accordance with the Values Based Management Framework.⁴

The assessment process will prioritise acquisitions that:

- are feasible according to the cost analysis of the operational setup and ongoing management, taking into consideration:
 - the current environment condition of the land including projected environmental management costs of weed and pest animal control strategies or the cost to restore any cleared or degraded areas
 - the presence and condition of management infrastructure (such as operational bases, accommodation, fire management infrastructure and fencing)
 - the potential for co-design of the national park and ongoing cooperative management with First Nations Peoples
 - the current or potential visitor and ecotourism infrastructure and management requirements
 - whether reservation as part of the Queensland national park estate is necessary or if other options might be more suitable (for example, a private protected area such as a nature refuge).
- consolidate boundary configurations, secure an inholding or provide a buffer against threats from adjoining land uses
- secure landscapes and places of special regional significance to aid in the resolution of specific social and community issues such as securing an area of high aesthetic and/or community recreational value.

5.5 Social and economic values

The expansion of the Queensland national park estate provides opportunities to support regional jobs, environmental research and education, and sustainable nature-based tourism and recreation industries. The assessment process considers the potential to harness these opportunities, to maximise the ability of Queenslanders to reap the socio-economic benefits of nature conservation.

In addition, it is important to recognise Queensland’s unique and diverse cultural heritage and conserve areas of both state and local historical significance. The protection of sites of historical significance plays an important role in creating community identity and conserving the heritage places that define Queensland’s story.

4. QPWS introduced an adaptive management model for Queensland’s protected areas known as the Values-Based Management Framework (VBMF). The Framework, founded on International best practice, targets management towards the most important values on our parks, and enables flexible and proactive management and improvement of effectiveness over time.





Jindalpa Boardwalk, Daintree National Park © iStockphoto



The assessment process will prioritise acquisitions that:

- provide direct or indirect **benefits to the Queensland economy**, such as through job creation or ecotourism
- present opportunities for **environmental research, citizen science and education**
- offer potential for **nature-based recreation and ecotourism** activities
- provide potential **economic opportunity for First Nations peoples** to manage businesses autonomously and connect to Country
- protect **non-Indigenous cultural heritage** or places of historical significance.

In specific cases, as part of an acquisition, the department may consider a protected area outcome or future tenure strategies that may allow for commercial or educational co-benefit outcomes.

5.6 Due diligence and financial considerations

The acquisition and management of national parks requires significant upfront and ongoing financial investment which presents a challenge to governments globally.

While the Queensland Government is committed to the expansion of the Queensland national park estate, the reality of current and ongoing fiscal constraints must be carefully assessed as part of the decision-making process to ensure value for money is achieved.

Queensland's unique biodiversity ensures the state is well placed to participate in and benefit from global growth in the natural capital market. Emerging opportunities for private sector investment through this rapidly evolving market provides the State with the opportunity to partially or potentially wholly offset the costs of acquiring and/or managing new protected areas. Partnerships that engage with the natural capital market also have the potential to create employment outcomes for regional Queensland.

The potential for partnerships with not-for-profit organisations in managing new protected areas are another financial consideration. These partnerships may also provide opportunities to create employment outcomes for regional Queensland, including for First Nations peoples, while ensuring land newly acquired for the national park estate is managed for biodiversity.

In Queensland, national parks are only acquired through voluntary processes—this means there are no compulsory acquisitions. Therefore, the rights and interests of the landholder/s must be accounted for in the department's decision-making process and this may play a role in determining priority for acquiring lands with specific cultural or ecological values.

Further, the State will only pay fair market value for a property, based on independent expert assessment.



Financial agreement considerations

The assessment process will only consider acquisitions that:

- have a confirmed willing and legal vendor
- can be purchased in accordance with the overall acquisitions budget, taking into account legal and transfer costs and other practical settlement considerations.

As indicated, all State protected area acquisition is voluntary in nature (i.e. no compulsory acquisitions), with the department's Strategic Acquisitions Unit often having to negotiate within the constraints of the open market. Subsequently the process for identifying, assessing and prioritising potential acquisitions to grow the estate must be able to respond to the reactive and opportunistic nature of the property market.

In addition, the State must balance competing interests and land uses to ensure multiple policy objectives can be achieved to support a diverse economy and a healthy environment.

The assessment process involves early consultation with relevant stakeholders to identify and resolve competing state interests to achieve a balance between conservation potential and the values derived from minerals and energy resources, agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

The State also recognises the rights and interests of parties to pre-existing agreements and authorities over land, including easements and other encumbrances which may be registered on the land title. Easements may be related to existing access arrangements or allow for the provision of essential services through the authorisation of power/telecommunications and utilities infrastructure.

It is imperative that the selection process considers these complexities that may be associated with an acquisition, including the costs, legal or other practical considerations involved in resolving impediments to dedication.





State interests and impediments considerations

The assessment process will consider whether the acquisition will satisfy due diligence checks regarding other state interests and impediments, including:

- competing state interests in the land, such as mining, energy, forestry and fisheries, and the likelihood of negotiations with stakeholders reaching an agreed resolution in a reasonable timeframe
- the rights and interests of parties to pre-existing agreements and authorities over land, including easements, and the actions required to facilitate the continuation or resolution of these interests
- whether a subdivision and development application will be required to support a material change of use of the land, in accordance with local government planning instruments
- the actions, costs and timeframes involved in the resolution of impediments, balanced against the potential conservation gain afforded by the acquisition.

Natural capital market considerations

The assessment process will give due consideration to acquisitions that:

- provide opportunities for management costs to be offset by revenue generated through natural capital markets
- provide opportunities to realise cultural, social and economic co-benefits from participating in the natural capital market.



Citizen science activities being undertaken at Mount Mellum Nature Refuge
Image courtesy of Queensland Trust for Nature

6. Overall assessment summary or *value proposition*

As outlined, the process for undertaking a complete assessment of the value of potential land to add to Queensland's protected estate is based on these six areas of consideration.

While biodiversity conservation and Indigenous cultural values are fundamental to the property assessment and its priority ranking, the remaining assessment categories may add to or magnify the significance (or priority) of the proposed acquisition. Conversely, impediments, tenure constraints or management issues may lower a proposal's priority rating or even rule a property out of consideration.

A combined or overall assessment summary will capture an array of quantitative and qualitative considerations into a final Value Proposition for the Acquisition. As part of the summary each property will be assigned a broad Priority Ranking (Low–Medium–High) to assist in shortlisting against other properties from across the state.

The overall assessment categories and criteria are summarised in Table 1.



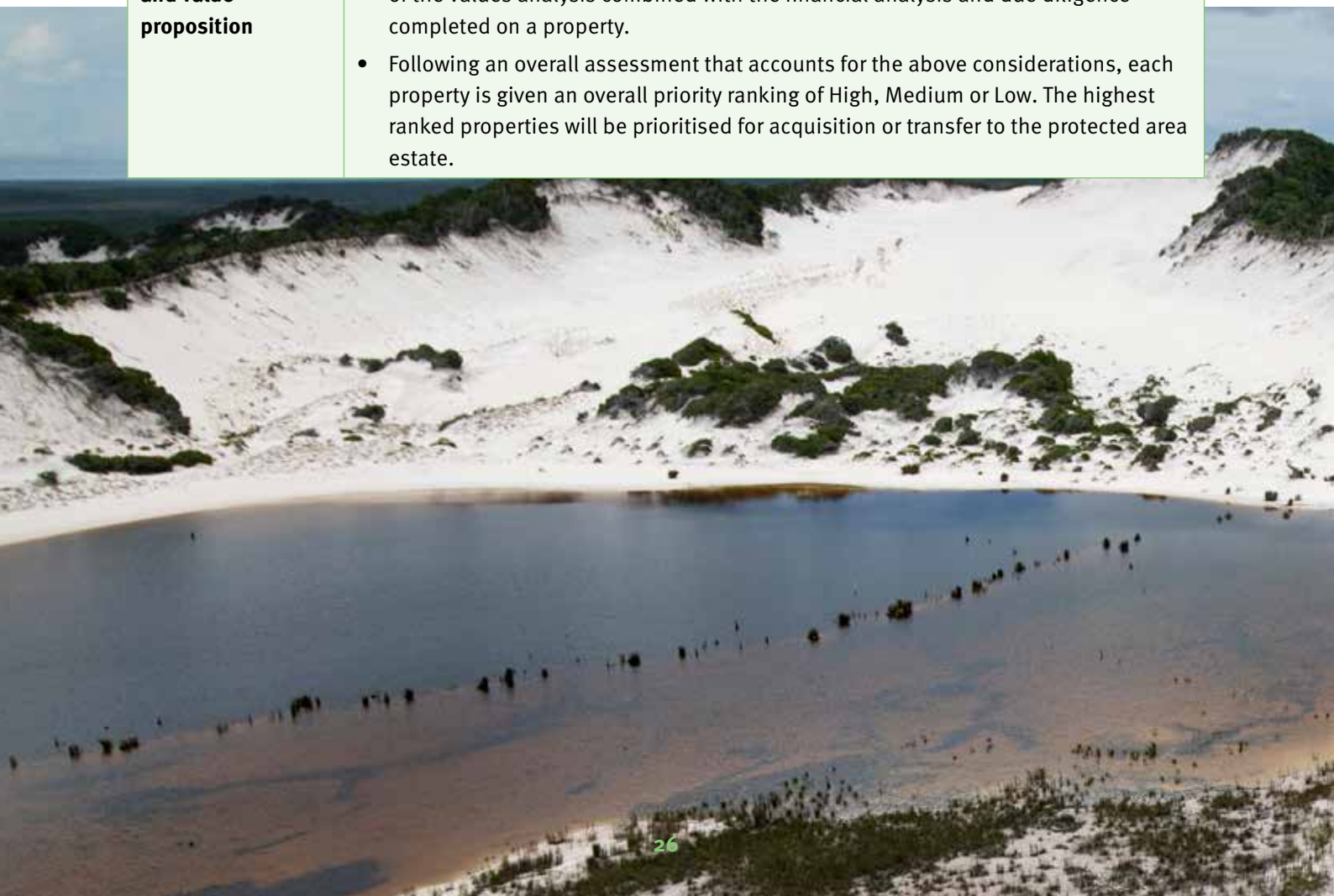


Table 1: Summary of assessment criteria and considerations

Assessment category	Criteria and considerations
<p>Biodiversity conservation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes most to the CAR reserve system principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – prioritises Ecosystem Contribution—ecosystems or species habitats that are not represented or not adequately represented – prioritises Ecosystem Irreplaceability—the conservation of that ecosystem or species could not be achieved elsewhere or is less likely to be achieved elsewhere in the landscape – prioritises Ecosystem Urgency—ecosystems, habitats or species under threat of loss or degradation through competing land uses. • Enhances the climate change resilience and ecosystem adaptation of the protected area estate • Improves landscape or habitat connectivity or enhances the ecosystem health of protected areas • Consolidates high biodiversity value areas, e.g. intact high value bushland in a highly fragmented landscape near or adjacent to existing national parks or other protected areas, a large tract of an at-risk regional ecosystem associated with a threatened species, or an area identified as an appropriate environment offsets site.
<p>Indigenous cultural values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represents areas of likely Indigenous cultural significance • Provides or enriches social, cultural and economic benefits and connection to the First Nations custodians • Advances Native Title outcomes such as consent determinations or supports Indigenous Land Use Agreements • Support increased opportunities for co-stewardship arrangements with the First Nations custodians.
<p>Strategic directions, commitments, partnerships and opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfils government commitments, interstate or national agreements • Facilitates co-investment conservation partnerships between government and non-government and conservation, philanthropic organisations; and other investors with an interest in conservation • Facilitates co-investment cultural conservation partnerships between First Nations Peoples, government and non-government, conservation and philanthropic organisations.
<p>Regional and operational considerations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasible according to the cost analysis of the operational setup and ongoing management • Consolidates boundary configurations • Secures landscapes and places of special regional significance.



Assessment category	Criteria and considerations
Social and economic values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides direct or indirect benefits to the Queensland economy • Presents opportunities for environmental research, citizen science and education • Offers potential for nature-based recreation and ecotourism activities • Provides potential economic opportunity for First Nations peoples to manage businesses autonomously and connect to Country • Protects non-Indigenous cultural heritage or places of historical significance.
Due diligence and financial considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a confirmed willing and legal vendor • May be purchased in accordance with the overall acquisitions budget • Satisfies due diligence checks regarding other State interests and impediments • Provides opportunities for management costs to be offset by revenue generated through the natural capital market • Provide opportunities to realise cultural, social and economic co-benefits from participating in the natural capital market.
Overall assessment and value proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall value proposition of the proposed area is determined based on assessment of the values analysis combined with the financial analysis and due diligence completed on a property. • Following an overall assessment that accounts for the above considerations, each property is given an overall priority ranking of High, Medium or Low. The highest ranked properties will be prioritised for acquisition or transfer to the protected area estate.



7. Monitoring and *reporting*



The Queensland Government’s national park acquisition capital expenditure will continue to be published and reported on in the DES Annual Report.

DES also reports on its protected area estate growth targets in the Annual Service Delivery Statements and protected area downgrading, downsizing and degazettement (PADD) events are reported in the annual report on the administration of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Progress in implementing the Strategy will be reported regularly and published online. An annual report card will detail what has been achieved during the year, and measure progress being made towards meeting the Strategy’s objectives and delivering its strategic priorities, including ‘Grow’.

In line with the Strategy, it is proposed that the effectiveness of the acquisition program and this framework will be evaluated and reviewed every five years.

This review will seek to measure the outcomes achieved against the objectives set out in the framework and the overall Strategy—Grow outcome.

Metrics being considered include protected area percentage by each year by IUCN category, analysing historic changes in representation through a representation achievement score, condition metrics and threatened species data.



Tannin-stained lakes near Ussher Point, Cape York Peninsula, Queensland
Photographer Kerry Trapnell

