

Alwal National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)

Management Statement

2013

The Department of Environment, Science and Innovation 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.

The department is committed to respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the Human Rights Act 2019.

This management statement does not intend to affect, diminish, or extinguish native title or associated rights.

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Disclaimer

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The Alwal National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2024 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the plan's original management intent and direction.

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The underlying tenure of this park is Aboriginal freehold land, owned by the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Land Trust (Olkola).

Olkola and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) jointly manage this park.

Park size:	42,510 hectares
Bioregion:	Cape York Peninsula
QPWS region:	Northern
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire Council
State electorate:	Cook

The Olkola people are the Traditional Owners of Alwal National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) (NP (CYPAL)).

The Olkola people welcome to their traditional lands those people who will respect and take care of their land and waters, as well as the native plants and animals.

Legislative framework

✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>
✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Aboriginal Land Act 1991</i>

Plans and agreements

✓	Alwal Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) between Michael Ball, Esmee Bowen, Delores Friday, Aileen Gale, Gavin Goggleye, Kevin Johnson, Thomas George (Jnr), Colin Lawrence, Elaine Price, Michael Ross, Josephine Sailor, Edward Turpin and Brandon Ford and State of Queensland
✓	Indigenous Management Agreement (IMA) between Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Land Trust and State of Queensland for Alwal National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)
✓	China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	1999 Burra Charter
✓	Action Plan for Australian Bats 1999
✓	Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010
✓	Action Plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes 1996
✓	Recovery plan for the golden-shouldered parrot <i>Psephotus chrysopterygius</i> 2003–2007

Vision

The Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Land Trust (Olkola) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service work together cooperatively to protect the diverse values of Alwal National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land), including its grassy alluvial flats, vine scrubs with species of limited distribution and the river corridor of the Morehead River.

Alwal NP (CYPAL) continues to provide important wildlife habitat for rare species such as the Cape York rock-wallaby *Petrogale coenensis*, ghost bat *Megaderma gigas* and the golden-shouldered parrot *Psephotus chrysopterygius*.

Aspirations and cultural responsibilities of the Olkola people are recognised and reflected in park management, and the park's significant cultural assets and values are protected.

Conservation purpose

Originally Alwal NP (CYPAL) was part of the Kalinga Pastoral Holding and known as the Mulkay block. On 2 June 2010, the 42,510 hectare Alwal NP (CYPAL) was created when the Mulkay block was formally separated from Kalinga.

Alwal NP (CYPAL) was created to conserve essential habitat of the golden-shouldered parrot, escarpment habitat of species such as the Cape York rock-wallaby *Petrogale coenensis*, a number of bat species and the small vine scrub dominated by *Jedda multicaulis*.

The park is jointly managed by Olkola and QPWS in accordance with the Alwal Indigenous Management Agreement and other relevant legislation.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

Alwal NP (CYPAL) is situated in the southern part of the Cape York Peninsula Bioregion. This is an area typified by poor soils and a regular wet season rainfall. The park forms part of the Laura Lowlands biogeographical province which includes Rinyirru (Lakefield) NP (CYPAL).

The eastern third of Alwal NP (CYPAL) consists of an elevated, gently sloping plateau. Here, deep sands have accumulated over the ancient sandstones which represent the original level of the Cape York landscape. This area is dominated by tall eucalypt forests on the well drained soils and lower forests containing plants such as melaleucas on areas with impeded drainage. Several old fences and cattle yards were constructed in this area during the pastoral era.

The high escarpment within the park is bisected in many places, often by ephemeral streams that run strongly in the wet season. These streams deposit freshly eroded sandstone on the gravelly, inclined talus slopes which lead down onto the grassy flats flanking the Morehead River. The deeper gorges of the escarpment have provided a fire refuge for many species and a regionally significant vine scrub.

The Morehead River dries to a series of pools within its sandy bed during the dry season but, in the wet season, it becomes a substantial river that flows east to flood out across Rinyirru (Lakefield) NP (CYPAL). The path of the Morehead River has been determined largely by the contact zone between the soft eastern and southern metamorphic rocks and the harder igneous types to the west and north.

Distinctive ephemeral wetlands occur on the flats with impeded drainage adjacent to the river.

Regional ecosystems

Twenty-six regional ecosystems have been mapped for Alwal NP (CYPAL). While most of these are significant for supporting fauna habitat, only one community is of concern (Table 1). The remaining 25 vegetation communities are not of concern at present.

The variable topography and rock types have given rise to a surprising array of vegetation types in a relatively small area. A small vine thicket has developed within one of the protected sandstone gorges where a suitable microclimate exists.

Overall, vegetation communities within the park are in good condition although there has been some disturbance from fences, mineral exploration and tracks. General threats to the regional ecosystems include inappropriate fire regimes, pest animals and pest plants, and human impacts.

Plants and animals

While the vegetation of Alwal NP (CYPAL) has been mapped and documented to a reasonable scale, the animal species remain poorly known. For a small geographic area, Alwal NP (CYPAL) is important habitat for a number of significant species.

Two invertebrates, a moth *Trisyntopa scatophaga* and a termite *Amitermes scopulus* are considered important because of their strong association with the nesting success of the endangered golden-shouldered parrot *Psephotus chrysopterygius* (Action Plan for Australian Birds, 2000).

The forests of the park are in good ecological condition and they have maintained bird communities that have declined or become disrupted elsewhere. These include the black tree-creeper *Climacteris picumnus melanura*, noisy miner *Manorina melanocephala*, the black-faced woodswallow *Artamus cinereus*, red goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radiatus* and the golden-shouldered parrot.

In contrast the mammal fauna has seen the reduction of some species such as the black-footed tree-rat *Mesembriomys gouldii rattoides* and brush-tailed possum *Trichosurus vulpecular*, while other species such as the northern quoll *Dasyurus hallucatus* have disappeared. These patterns are not unique to Alwal NP (CYPAL) and appear to be occurring across Cape York Peninsula.

The escarpment has important habitat value for a variety of bats and species such as the Cape York rock-wallaby.

Several action plans have relevance for species found at Alwal NP (CYPAL):

- Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000 – red goshawk, brown treecreeper (Cape York Peninsula) *Climacteris picumnus melanota*, golden-shouldered parrot, black-faced woodswallow (Cape York Peninsula), black-necked stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* and radjah shelduck *Tadorna radjah*
- Action Plan for Australian Bats 1999 – Papuan sheathtail bat *Saccolaimus mixtus* and ghost bat *Macroderma gigas*; and
- Action Plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes 1996 – Cape York rock-wallaby, black-footed tree-rat (Cape York Peninsula) and southern brown bandicoot *Isodon obesulus peninsulae*.

Aboriginal culture

The Olkola people maintain their connection to country by managing significant cultural sites, the landscapes and plants and animals within the park. The Olkola people continue to improve their connection to country by recording and mapping evidence of their ancestors' inhabitation of this land.

Shared-history culture

Alwal NP (CYPAL) was once part of the Kalinga pastoral property. Past grazing activity is evidenced by the presence of fences, old burnt-out yards, sheds and old dams.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

Alwal NP (CYPAL) currently has no formed access and is remote from regular traffic routes. No tracks, campgrounds or facilities exist on the park. Consequently it currently receives no tourist traffic and visitors.

Education and science

Knowledge gained from research and monitoring programs is an integral part of adaptive park management. Research projects should however conform to park management objectives and only be undertaken if they cannot be performed satisfactorily off-park.

Partnerships

Olkola and QPWS staff maintain working relationships with neighbouring landholders, state and local government agencies, local catchment groups and other stakeholders to ensure the values of the NP (CYPAL) are managed appropriately. Where possible, fire and pest management activities are coordinated with park neighbours.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

Pest plants

Alwal NP (CYPAL) has a small number of pest plants. Several of these pest plants have the potential to significantly and adversely affect the ecosystems and communities found on the park. Two species, gamba grass *Andropogon guyanus* and roundleaf cassia *Chamaecrista rotundifolia*, have the potential to change habitat suitability for all the animals on Alwal NP (CYPAL).

Gamba grass is a declared Class 2 pest plant and poses a major threat to the conservation values of Alwal NP (CYPAL). It is known to change fuel loads and thereby destroy forest structure leading ultimately to a landscape dominated by gamba grass.

Sicklepod *Senna obtusifolia* is a declared Class 2 pest plant that colonises the moist fertile soils along water courses. It can alter the natural vegetation associations by forming dense stands that prevent natural germination and recruitment of native species.

Pasture legumes *Stylosanthes* spp. and roundleaf cassia are present as ground layer species throughout the park. They were previously introduced to provide improved pasture conditions for cattle. The *Stylosanthes* group appear to be of little ecological consequence. On the other hand, roundleaf cassia is demonstrating the potential to adversely affect fuel loads and thereby influence forest structure.

Hyptis *Hyptis suaveolens* is a pest plant common in disturbance areas such as roadsides, around dams and other places where cattle gather.

Noogoora burr *Xanthium pungens* occurs along the unstable alluvial banks of the Morehead River. Due to rapid water movement and seasonal effects, its density and distribution varies from year to year.

Pest animals

Feral pigs *Sus scrofa* have the biggest impact in moist rainforest areas, wetland areas and the moist sandy soils of the plateau. Their activity can threaten the vine scrubs through seed destruction, and nesting opportunities of the golden-shouldered parrot, by destroying nesting mounds.

Feral cattle *Bos* spp. enter the park from surrounding lands or are the progeny of cattle which were not recovered following the grazing era. They occur throughout the park and concentrate on dams and permanent water in the dry season. Their grazing pressure impacts fuel loads which in turn affects fire patterns on the park. Concentration and heavy use areas also promote weed growth and accelerate erosion.

Horses *Aquus caballus* occur on the park in small numbers. Dams create artificial water points that help sustain the population through the dry season. They are known to significantly damage fences and accelerate erosion.

Feral cats *Felias catus* occur at low numbers through the park, and exert pressure on the native wildlife through predation.

Cane toads *Rhinella marina* are toxic to native predators, eat small native animals and compete with them for food and breeding resources. Their arrival at Alwal NP (CYPAL) coincided with the decline and disappearance of the northern quoll.

Fire management

Fire regimes at Alwal NP (CYPAL) have been difficult to manage due to the access restrictions, topography and proximity of neighbours with differing fire requirements. The climate, soil types and topography result in a landscape that transition rapidly from moist to quite dry. As a result, there is often only a short interval within the year where burns can be successfully conducted.

In the absence of appropriate fire management, it is likely that golden-shouldered parrot nesting and feeding habitat, and patches of seasonally moist grassy flats, will be lost due to woody thickening.

Other management issues

Safety

The natural environment at Alwal NP (CYPAL) presents some safety hazards, including the potential presence of the estuarine crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* and unstable rock escarpments. Some caves are home to bat colonies and can contain diseases.

During the dry season water can be difficult to find in some areas of the park.

References

Johnson R 1997, The Vertebrate Fauna of the Mitchell Grass Downs Biogeographical Region of Queensland, 'A Report to the Australian Heritage Commission', Department of Environment, Queensland.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Landscape</p> <p>Landscape and catchment values are largely undisturbed.</p> <p>The health, diversity and integrity of regional ecosystems are protected and maintained.</p>	<p>Maintain the biodiversity and complexity of native vegetation communities, including important escarpment areas, through appropriate fire and pest management.</p> <p>Maintain the open structure of the eucalypt woodlands and the wet grassy flats through a combination of feral cattle management and implementation of appropriate fire regimes.</p> <p>Monitor erosion caused by pest animal activity.</p>
<p>Native plants and animals</p> <p>Species of conservation significance and ecosystems with a significant biodiversity status are protected through direct and active management activities.</p>	<p>Implement fire regimes that maintain suitable foraging and nesting habitat for the golden-shouldered parrot <i>Psephotus chrysopterygius</i>.</p> <p>Focus management on species and ecosystems that have a limited distribution and are currently threatened by human impacts, fire, pest plants or pest animals (e.g. vine scrubs).</p> <p>Conserve critical habitats for threatened species, and manage threatening processes.</p> <p>Continue to increase and record baseline knowledge of plants and animals.</p>
<p>Aboriginal culture</p> <p>The Olkola Land Trust and QPWS have a strong and positive collaborative working relationship, built on trust and respect for each others knowledge and responsibilities.</p> <p>Places and species of cultural significance are appropriately protected and presented.</p>	<p>Manage Alwal NP (CYPAL) to ensure the responsibilities, interests and aspirations of the Olkola people are acknowledged and respected.</p> <p>Further strengthen joint management relationships with the Olkola Land Trust by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with the Olkola people to inform QPWS on culturally appropriate management and decision making on Alwal NP (CYPAL) • cooperatively developing protocols for various park management activities in accordance with the Indigenous Management Agreement for the park • supporting the investigation of possible commercial tourism, employment and business opportunities for the Olkola people • supporting the recording of cultural values in a form agreeable to the Olkola people • providing opportunities for cultural interpretation on and off park.
<p>Shared-history culture</p> <p>Sites of heritage significance are appropriately protected and presented or allowed to decay where appropriate.</p>	<p>Identify and record shared-history cultural heritage places, including documentation of their significance (if known).</p> <p>Allow all other sites and places of shared-heritage significance, with no feasible management use or other significance, to age naturally over time.</p>
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities</p> <p>Alwal NP (CYPAL) offers a range of sustainable recreational opportunities which cause minimal disturbance to the park's landscape values.</p>	<p>Work with Olkola to explore visitor use options which complement other recreational opportunities on public lands in the region and are ecologically and culturally appropriate.</p> <p>Investigate access options.</p>
<p>Education and science</p> <p>Research and monitoring programs increase understanding of values and provide information to improve management decisions.</p>	<p>Actively engage in a monitoring program for golden-shouldered parrots and feed this information back into the fire program.</p> <p>Support recording and mapping of cultural art sites.</p> <p>Investigate the potential re-introduction of the northern quoll.</p> <p>Continue to gather wildlife records for the park that assists with management.</p> <p>Establish monitoring of the Jemma vine scrubs.</p> <p>Identify and record significant bat roosting areas.</p> <p>Define the habitat needs and distribution of the Cape York rock-wallaby.</p>

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Partnerships</p> <p>The joint managers maintain good working relationships with community partners and other stakeholders and collaborative management occurs across the landscape.</p>	<p>Establish and maintain good working relationships with neighbouring property owners including nature refuge holders.</p> <p>Where possible, cooperatively undertake fire and pest management programs.</p>
<p>Pest management</p> <p>The integrity of native plant and animal communities is maintained through strategic, sustained pest management.</p>	<p>Develop and implement a Level 2 Pest Management Strategy for Alwal NP (CYPAL) that considers the most effective pest plant and pest animal control methods and involves cooperative management of species where appropriate.</p> <p>Undertake pest plant surveillance and, where possible, treat infestations while it remains possible to eradicate or contain them.</p> <p>Remove gamba grass from the park as a matter of priority.</p> <p>If found within Alwal NP (CYPAL), respond rapidly to rubbervine incursions.</p> <p>Ensure the joint managers develop and implement pest plant hygiene measures.</p> <p>Maintain boundary fences and ensure ongoing maintenance of existing fence to exclude domestic stock, where possible.</p> <p>Review the need for the existing artificial waters.</p>
<p>Fire management</p> <p>The integrity of native plant and animal communities is maintained through strategic, sustained fire management.</p>	<p>As a matter of priority, prepare a Level 2 Fire Strategy for the NP (CYPAL).</p> <p>Where possible, coordinate fire management activities with park neighbours and other relevant stakeholders.</p>

Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
3.10.5b	Jedda vine scrubs with a fairly even, closed canopy composed of rainforest species, scattered vines and the rare shrub <i>Jedda multicaulis</i> frequently in the understory. Occurs on sandstone talus slopes.	Of concern

Table 2: Species of conservation significance

Scientific name	Common name	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i> status	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> status	Back on Track status
Animals				
<i>Rhinolophus philippinensis</i>	greater large-eared horseshoe bat	Endangered	Endangered	High
<i>Hipposideros semoni</i>	Semon's leaf-nosed bat	Endangered	Endangered	Medium
<i>Psephotus chrysopterygius</i>	golden-shouldered parrot	Endangered	Endangered	Critical
<i>Erythrotriorchis radiatus</i>	red goshawk	Endangered	Vulnerable	High
<i>Hipposideros cervinus</i>	fawn leaf-nosed bat	Vulnerable		High
<i>Saccolaimus mixtus</i>	Papuan sheath-tail bat	Near threatened		Medium
<i>Tadorna radjah</i>	radjah shelduck	Near threatened		Low
<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	black-necked stork	Near threatened		Low
<i>Petrogale coenensis</i>	Cape York rock-wallaby	Near threatened		Low
<i>Dasyurus hallucatus</i>	northern quoll	Least concern	Endangered	Medium
Plants				
<i>Cajanus mareebensis</i>		Endangered	Endangered	Medium
<i>Samadera sp. (Kennedy River J.R. Clarkson 5645)</i>		Vulnerable		
<i>Jedda multicaulis</i>		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
<i>Stemona angusta</i>		Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Data deficient
<i>Rhamphicarpa australiensis</i>		Near threatened		Low
<i>Homoranthus tropicus</i>		Near threatened		Low
<i>Polygala pycnophylla</i>		Near threatened		Data deficient
<i>Cucumis costatus</i>		Near threatened		
<i>Brachychiton vitifolius</i>		Least concern	Vulnerable	Low

Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	BONN	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Cuculus optatus</i>	oriental cuckoo	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	-	-	✓	-
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	-	✓	-	-

BONN – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement