

Mount Cook National Park

Management Statement

2013



Prepared by: **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment, Science and Innovation**

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The Mount Cook National Park 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 statement's original management intent and direction.

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Park size:	502ha
Bioregion:	Cape York Peninsula (ecotone with the Wet Tropics)
QPWS region:	Northern
Local government estate/area:	Cook Shire
State electorate:	Cook

Legislative framework

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

Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
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Thematic strategies

✓	Statement of Interpretive Intent
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Vision

Mount Cook National Park is managed to conserve the undeveloped and predominantly natural state of its tropical woodlands, dense patches of notophyll vine forests, low and exposed shrublands and native grasslands.

The park is promoted as a day-use destination with short but moderately-difficult walking opportunities. Strategic viewing points along the walking track showcase the Great Barrier Reef to the east and the Endeavour Valley to the west.

The walking track will be linked to the Cooktown Heritage and Scenic Rim Walking Trail which is managed by the Cook Shire Council.

Conservation purpose

Mount Cook National Park was gazetted in December 1970 to protect significant natural, cultural and scenic values.

A historical landmark in northern Australia, Mount Cook offers a scenic backdrop to the township of Cooktown and panoramic views to the east and west.

Located near the boundary between the Cape York Peninsula and Wet Tropics bioregional areas, Mount Cook National Park supports a high diversity of plant and animal communities and associated habitats.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

Mount Cook is a very steep mountain, rising to 431 metres (m). It is located in close proximity to the small township of Cooktown and is a key landscape feature in the local area.

Like the nearby Black Mountain, Mount Cook is comprised of granite which was formed deep below the ground about 260 million years ago and slowly exposed by erosion. Boulders and granite rock platforms are common throughout the park. The soils tend to be shallow and friable.

The tropical eucalypt and angophora woodlands which are predominant on the mountain are interspersed with dense patches of notophyll vine forests in sheltered gullies, low and exposed shrublands and small areas of native grassland on southern slopes.

Alligator Creek is the main watercourse in the park. It is a small catchment that feeds into Finch Bay.

Mount Cook National Park is surrounded by various tenures including a reserve for parks and gardens, an area of Unallocated State Land, the Cooktown State School and various freehold and leasehold blocks.

Regional ecosystems

Twelve regional ecosystems are mapped in Mount Cook National Park. Six of these are of concern communities (Table 1). The remaining six are not of concern at present.

The main threats to the regional ecosystems are an inappropriate fire regime, rainforest encroachment and invasion by pest plants. Rainforest encroachment threatens the native grasslands on the southern slopes of Mount Cook.

Native plants and animals

Mount Cook National Park is currently known to protect one species of special conservation significance (Table 2). Four birds recorded from the park are listed in international agreements (Table 3).

The orange-footed scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt*, dusky honeyeater *Myzomela obscura* and northern fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris* have specific management actions identified through the national Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000.

The northern quoll *Dasyurus hallucatus* (endangered under the EPBC) has not been formally recorded from the park, but is known to occur in nearby areas. This species has specific management actions identified in the 1996 Action Plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes.

Nearing its northern limit, the lace monitor *Varanus varius* occurs on Mount Cook National Park.

The species management profile for *Austromyrtus* sp. (McIlwraith Range B.P.Hyland 11148)—also known as *Gossia macilwraithensis*—identifies competition and disturbance of habitat by lantana as a threatening process.

Candlewood *Cinnamomum baileyianum* has a restricted distribution in Australia, with disjunct populations found in

north-eastern and south-eastern Queensland.

Aboriginal culture

Currently no formalised management arrangements have been established with the relevant Traditional Owners for Mount Cook National Park. No current Native Title applications exist over Mount Cook National Park.

Subject to successful negotiation with 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.

It is unknown whether any sites of Aboriginal material culture exist on Mount Cook National Park.

Shared-history culture

Mount Cook was named by Lieutenant Phillip Parker King in 1819 during his circumnavigation voyage.

An area, known locally as the Chinese Gardens, was historically used to grow vegetables. Staff know the site is positioned close to the northern boundary of the park but are unsure of its exact location.

An old dam is located along Four Mile Creek. Little is known about the history or significance of the dam.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

Only two kilometres from Cooktown's main street, Mount Cook National Park is popular with both local residents and visitors to the area. The park receives most visitors during the dry season (April to September).

Mount Cook National Park offers a self-reliant visitor experience for day visitors. Camping facilities are not provided on the park and visitors are encouraged to seek accommodation in Cooktown.

Day-use of the park is concentrated on a three kilometre walking track which leads to the summit of Mount Cook. The lower section of the track offers a relatively easy walk and the opportunity to look over the western side of Cooktown and the Endeavour River valley. It has however been built on a drainage line and its alignment becomes problematic during the wet season when springs appear and visitors skirt the wet areas. The second section of the walking track, which provides views over Quarantine Bay and the Coral Sea, is much steeper and relatively challenging.

The walking track crosses two different tenures before entering the national park. The car park is located on a reserve for Parks and Gardens and the lower section of the track traverses an area of Unallocated State Land adjoining Finch Bay.

Two constructed viewing platforms are located at key lookout opportunities along the summit walking track.

Cook Shire Council is actively engaged in developing the Cooktown Heritage and Scenic Rim Walking Trail. Their proposal incorporates the Mount Cook summit walk.

Education and science

Local schools occasionally use Mount Cook National Park for field studies.

Partnerships

Staff foster and maintain working relationships with park neighbours, Cook Shire Council and local community members.

Where possible, fire is managed cooperatively with park neighbours.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

Lantana *Lantana camara*, snake weed *Stachytarpheta* spp. and sensitive plant *Mimosa pudica* are scattered as isolated plants along the lower reaches of the walking track. They are more prevalent in areas where people are skirting the wet areas of the track. The walking track is currently being realigned to help address this issue.

A few small patches of lantana have the potential to encroach into the park and the native grasslands. Guinea grass *Megathyrsus maximus* is starting to encroach on areas of native grasslands on the southern slopes of Mount Cook.

Lantana, Guinea grass, Mossman River grass *Cenchrus echinatus*, snake weed and an unknown grass species occur in the area surrounding the communications tower on the top of the summit. They are confined to a relatively small area, forming dense infestations in places. Lantana has the potential to spread into the rainforest.

Potential exists for exotics to escape from private gardens and the Botanic Gardens. This is considered a minor risk.

Pest animal species do not currently pose a significant threat to the natural integrity of Mount Cook National Park. A baiting program undertaken by Cook Shire Council is likely to be assisting in the control of pest animal species on the park.

Fire management

If not managed appropriately, fire poses the most serious threat to the park's natural environment and, as such, should be a high priority for park staff. Planned burns are conducted on Mount Cook National Park to reduce hazards, protect life and property and to maintain the floristic diversity and structure of the park's vegetation communities.

Wildfires have occurred in the area. However, no baseline data exists to determine whether the edges of vine thickets have been impacted.

Guinea grass has the potential to create high intensity fires, and therefore poses a threat to the notophyll vine thickets.

A lack of fire in communities adjacent to the native grasslands is leading to their encroachment by vine thickets.

Other management issues

A communications tower located on the summit of Mount Cook National Park provides communication infrastructure for Police, Emergency Services and Cook Shire Council.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Native plants and animals</p> <p>The health and diversity of plant and animal communities on the park are maintained.</p>	<p>Implement fire regimes that will maintain the current health and diversity of plant and animal communities, with an emphasis on maintaining the current extent of the park's native grasslands and vine thickets.</p> <p>Focus pest plant management on the lower reaches of the walking track, the native grasslands and the communications tower on the top of the summit.</p> <p>Address new pest plant infestations while it is still possible to eradicate or contain them.</p>
<p>Aboriginal culture</p> <p>Traditional Owners are involved in park management.</p>	<p>Establish and implement a formal joint management regime with Traditional Owners 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>Tourism and visitor opportunities</p> <p>Recreation opportunities on Mount Cook National Park are safe and complement those provided in the surrounding Cooktown area.</p> <p>Retain the largely undeveloped character of the park.</p>	<p>Link the summit walking track to the Cooktown Heritage and Scenic Rim Walking Trail which is managed by the Cook Shire Council.</p> <p>Realign the lower section of the walking track to avoid springs which rise to the surface during the wet season.</p> <p>Maintain a physically challenging walking opportunity.</p>
<p>Other management issues</p> <p>Park management is supported by appropriate tenures.</p> <p>Formal arrangements are in place for interests over the park.</p>	<p>Resolve the tenure of the area of Unallocated State Land adjacent to Mount Cook National Park (i.e. Lot 11 on USL8204).</p> <p>Formalise access and maintenance arrangements for the communications tower on the summit of Mount Cook National Park.</p>

Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
3.11.6b	<i>Eucalyptus platyphylla</i> , <i>E. leptophleba</i> open forest to woodland on hill slopes	Of concern
3.12.31	<i>Themeda triandra</i> tussock grassland on headlands and islands on acid volcanic rocks	Of concern
7.11.3	Semi-deciduous mesophyll vine forest on metamorphics, of the moist and dry foothills and lowlands	Of concern
7.11.34	Complex of shrublands, low heathy or shrubby woodlands and low forests, with <i>Corymbia tessellaris</i> and <i>C. intermedia</i> or <i>Melaleuca viridiflora</i> , <i>Allocasuarina</i> spp. and <i>Acacia</i> spp. on metamorphic coastal headlands and islands	Of concern
7.11.51	<i>Corymbia clarksoniana</i> and/or <i>Eucalyptus drepanophylla</i> open forest to woodland on metamorphics	Of concern
7.12.9	<i>Acacia celsa</i> open to closed forest on granites and rhyolites	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
Plants				
<i>Cinnamomum baileyannum</i>	candlewood	Least concern		
<i>Gossia lucida</i>	-	Least concern (was Near threatened until 26/7/2012)	-	Low
<i>Gossia macilwraithensis</i>	-	Least concern (was Near threatened until 26/7/2012)	-	Low
Animals				
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	Near threatened	-	Low

Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	BONN	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Monarcha melanopsis</i>	black-faced monarch	✓	-	-	-
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Symposiarchus trivirgatus</i>	spectacled monarch	✓	-	-	-
<i>Rhipidura rufifrons</i>	rufous fantail	✓	-	-	-

BONN – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement