

# Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park

**Management Statement**

2013

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

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The Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2023 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:	1,646ha
Bioregion:	South Eastern Queensland
QPWS region:	South East
Local government estate/area:	Redland City Gold Coast City

### Legislative framework

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Environment and Protection Biodiversity Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Marine Parks Act 2004</i>
✓	<i>Marine Parks (Moreton Bay) Zoning Plan 2008</i>
✓	<i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>

### Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
✓	China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✓	Ramsar Convention 1971
✓	Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

### Thematic strategies

✓	Statement of Fire Management Intent
✓	Level 2 pest management strategy

## Vision

Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park will be managed in conjunction with the neighbouring Moreton Bay Marine Park (management area) to maintain connectivity of habitat types and protect the species that occur within this internationally significant wetland system. The presentation values of the management area will be developed to promote the park as part of an entire wetland ecosystem. The visitor experiences and recreation opportunities are largely self-reliant, in keeping with the area's undeveloped natural environment.

The management of this national park as a wetland system will reflect the management intent of the International Ramsar Convention.

## Conservation purpose

Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park was declared in 1998 in recognition of its role as an integral part of the Southern Moreton Bay wetland system. Collectively the park consists of five islands—Coomera Island, Kangaroo Island, Woogoompah Island, Cobby Cobby Island and Willes Island—situated in the southern confines of Moreton Bay. Four of islands were environmental parks which were then dedicated as conservation parks in 1994 before amalgamation into one national park in 1998. Willes Island was added to the national park in 2000 (Table 4). It is assumed areas of the park were conserved for their international significance as a bird roosting and feeding habitat and stopover area for migratory wader species on Woogoompah Island.

The islands and the surrounding marine park together make up a significant and unique wetland ecosystem which is estimated to support over half of the mangroves in Moreton Bay, providing critical habitat for fish, birds, shellfish, dugongs and turtles.

Under the Ramsar Wetland Convention 1971 parts of Moreton Bay are listed as a wetland of international importance. The Moreton Bay Ramsar site was designated on 22 October 1993 and recognised as one of Queensland's most important coastal resources. Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park forms part of the Moreton Bay and Pumicestone Passage Important Bird Area (IBA) recognised as being globally important habitat for the conservation of bird populations.

## Protecting and presenting the park's values

### Landscape

Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park is located 40km south of Brisbane and is between one and 10 kilometres offshore from Redland Bay south to Coomera on the Gold Coast. The park is a series of five islands fringed by tidal flats and beaches, linked by the estuarine waters of Moreton Bay. All of the islands that form the national park are in close proximity to the mainland and other islands, both inhabited and uninhabited. The islands within the national park are accessible only by vessels. Currently there is no landing infrastructure or public moorings adjacent to the islands.

The national park is part of Queensland's internationally significant Moreton Bay Ramsar wetland site, covering more than 120,000ha. The islands, together with the surrounding waterways, form an area of high scenic amenity.

### Regional ecosystems

Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park conserves seven regional ecosystem habitats, one is listed as endangered and four are listed as of concern (Table 1). The diversity of the ecosystems ranges from disturbed areas, mangroves, saltmarsh to mixed open forest.

### Native plants and animals

Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park and its surrounding mangrove communities provide habitat for threatened species including the endangered little tern *Sternula albifrons* and the near threatened eastern curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*. Some of the islands may support vital nesting habitat for the little tern. Other species of conservation significance are listed in Table 2.

Wildnet records indicate that the islands within the national park support approximately 146 species of native animals, eight of which have a state or federal conservation status and 29 species of native plants. Sixteen bird species are listed in international agreements (Table 3) and are known to visit the islands, including the whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and the bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*. These migratory birds make long annual flights between their international breeding grounds in China, Japan, Korea and northern Russia, and Australia where they spend their non-breeding season from September to April. Threats known to affect migratory coastal birds include noisy coastal recreation activities and predation (Rodgers et al. 2002).

Any rise in sea level may further accentuate the restricted size of the protected area. Beach and fore-dune areas would be directly affected. The shoreline would become more dynamic, and altered habitat factors, such as

reduced area and available feeding, foraging and movement ranges, may force species of coastal birds and migratory birds to seek higher ground or move to nearby islands (Johnson et al. 2007; Matson 2009).

The Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park contains the most southern distribution of black mangrove *Lumnitzera racemosa* in Queensland. The population of this species is vulnerable without replacement by juveniles. Current areas of black mangrove are monitored to alert managers to changes in the extent or health of the species.

A key threat to natural values of the area is noise pollution and disturbance from boat users within the marine park. This has the potential to impact wildlife inhabiting the national park. Although the threat is currently considered to be low, it is expected to increase as residential populations grow within the South East Queensland region and seek recreational outlets.

Erosion of the shoreline from boat wash and boats coming ashore is evident in some locations but is considered to have minimal to low impact on native plants and animals that inhabit the area.

## Aboriginal culture

No recorded evidence of Aboriginal habitation has been found within the Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park, although it is assumed that due to their close proximity to other main habitation islands, such as North and South Stradbroke islands, the smaller islands would have been an ideal location as temporary resting spots (Wallin, 1997).

Today, the local native title claimant that covers most of the islands within the Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park is the Gold Coast Native Title Group (QC2006/10). Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) works closely with Traditional Owners to ensure that traditional use of resources are managed at sustainable levels.

## Shared-history culture

Woogoopah Island was worked as a cattle and pig producing property. The remains of an old water well, cattle loading ramp and cattle yards which were erected in the 1950s and 1960s by Mr Burgess still exist.

Coomera Island was also used for grazing of cattle by the Colman family. Cattle were swum across the narrow channel to and from the island daily. In later years a motor boat was used to tow the cattle barge between Coomera Island and the mainland.

Areas on Willes Island were cleared prior to 1976 with the intention to establish crops, however no such activities eventuated.

The *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* would be applicable to any cultural heritage sites registered in the national park.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

The Southern Moreton Bay Islands are considered as a pristine natural wetland system situated in the southern end of Moreton Bay. Visitors can expect a remote, natural experience when visiting the protected area. The islands are viewed most often from boats in the surrounding marine park or from neighbouring islands.

Moving through the waterways past any of the five islands constituting the national park, the islands appear as a shoreline of dense mangrove forests, often with a crown of taller casuarinas or eucalypts set further into the distance. This wetland system supports a diverse array of native wildlife which can also be observed by boat users.

The park is promoted as a series of wetland communities that interconnect the marine and island habitats. Access to the island occurs via independent or commercial vessels, but is impeded in some areas by dense mangrove forests that fringe the islands. Visitor numbers to the park are unknown but are thought to be low due to the lack of accessible areas.

Camping is not currently permitted on the islands, but evidence shows that illegal camping does occur on Woogoopah Island and Kangaroo Island. There is the potential to improve visitor opportunities in the national park. The development of limited camping and day-use areas are proposed to be developed and their management will be investigated.

Human activities can disturb the ability of birds to feed rest and breed. Given the significance of the park for waterbirds, planning of visitor opportunities and infrastructure should take account of these impacts.

The visitor experiences and recreation opportunities in the management area are largely self-reliant, in keeping with the area's undeveloped natural environment. The area is complex and there are competing recreational interests.

## Education and science

The national park provides opportunities for educational studies in a number of subjects including geology, biology and marine studies; however, the lack of safe access points restricts the suitability for field work by schools.

Public education and interpretation programs increase community awareness of the area's values, conservation principles and practices. Education also encourages responsible access to, and appropriate behaviour at, specific sites. Programs have not yet been established for the Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park. However, there is potential to develop programs within the park to meet these objectives.

The national park provides abundant opportunities for ongoing research and monitoring programs which are valuable to establish and incorporate into adaptive park management.

While research within the management area has been limited, participation and information sharing with research institutions is encouraged, where appropriate.

Projects and working groups that develop strategic priorities, such as migratory species research, can strengthen QPWS relationships with local government, community, tourism groups and universities. Any research conducted in the national park will be managed through the appropriate QPWS research permits, where required. Some restrictions apply to research in the marine park area in certain zones.

The University of Queensland, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have research stations in the Moreton Bay region. Other universities and colleges also use the region for research and education. There are some research requirements resulting from the Ramsar designation which aim to contribute to the wider philosophy and international approach to management of these areas.

## Partnerships

QPWS is directly responsible for planning, managing and regulating activities in the management area. Working with organisations and individuals with similar interests in managing the area is highly desirable to achieve the vision. Efficiencies in resource sharing, improved communications, decision making and enhanced on-ground outcomes is to be facilitated, where possible, through working partnerships.

A working relationship with the Traditional Owners is essential so that their views and aspirations for the land can be included in planning and management. Traditional Owners have a role to protect cultural heritage in the management area and a role to educate QPWS and visitors on cultural heritage management as well as cultural obligations.

The future management on the Southern Moreton Bay islands can also be strengthened through establishing a cooperative partnership and retaining strong communication links between QPWS and Jacobs Well Environmental Education Centre.

## Other key issues and responses

### Pest management

Pests have been introduced to the islands through domestic cattle and pigs, visitors, wind and birds. The management area is significant to a number of species that can come under threat from invasive plant and animal species.

There is currently a QPWS Level 2 pest management strategy developed for all of the islands in the national park.

### Pest plants

Some of the major weeds of Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park include bitou bush *Chrysanthemoides monilifera*, lantana *Lantana camara*, groundsel bush *Baccharis halimifolia*, *leucaena* sp., Mossman river grass *Cenchrus echinatus*, broad leaved privet *Ligustrum lucidum*, corky passion flower *Passiflora suberosa*, Rhodes grass *Chloris* sp. and Siratro *Macroptilium atropurpureum*. At present, bitou bush—a Class 1 weed—is of highest concern as it can cause the greatest amount of damage to native vegetation.

### Pest animals

The pest animals that are a cause for concern on the national park include feral pigs *Sus scrofa* and foxes *Vulpes vulpes*. Both pest animals have the potential to create severe widespread vegetation changes and detrimentally impact native wildlife. Cane toads *Rhinella marina* also exist within the park but are expected to have minimal impact to the natural state of the national park. There are reports of dogs *Canis familiaris* on some of the islands, although the extent is unknown.

Ongoing monitoring as part of the pest management strategy enables evaluation of the control effectiveness and extent of damage to native species, ecosystems and habitats. Educating of park visitors and commercial operators on ways to reduce spreading and introducing pest species is essential to protecting the integrity of the national park.

Cooperation with other agencies and community groups has been effective in some areas and will be further considered as they are vital to achieve effective and integrated pest management across all five islands.

## **Fire management**

A fire management system has been adopted statewide by QPWS. Fire strategies provide the overall framework and direction for fire management and are the foundation from developing planned burn programs.

Due to the sensitive nature of the ecosystems found on the Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park, the most recent QPWS Statement of Fire Management Intent adopts a no burn strategy—this is now inconsistent with modern fire management planning. The Statement of Fire Management Intent requires reviewing.

The main threat associated with fire management for the area is inappropriate fire regimes and wildfires. Fire will be excluded from fire sensitive communities and from smaller islands where fire is thought unlikely to be a 'usual' part of natural processes, except perhaps over long timeframes.

## **References**

Wallin A and Associates 1997, An assessment of the historical cultural heritage of the Southern Moreton Bay Islands, Redlands Shire: For the Redlands Shire Council.

Johnson JE and Marshall PA 2007, Climate Change on the Great Barrier Reef. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Australian Greenhouse Office, Australia.

Rodgers J and Schwikert S 2002, Buffer-zone distances to protect foraging and loafing waterbirds from disturbance by personal watercraft and outboard-powered boats. *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 216–224.

## Management directions

**Table 1: Management directions**

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p><b>Landscape</b></p> <p>The health of the regional ecosystems is maintained through best practice natural resource management.</p>	<p>Monitor the impacts from natural processes, pests, fire and visitor activities. Use the information to guide management decisions, amend current practice and develop future plans and strategies.</p> <p>Ensure activities are consistent with the high scenic landscape values. Activities that compromise these values and cannot be mitigated or managed, will not be permitted.</p>
<p><b>Native animals and plants</b></p> <p>Species of conservation significance, including bird species and their habitats are protected.</p>	<p>Protect the diversity and abundance of native plants by implementing appropriate pest control and fire regimes.</p> <p>Maintain incidental monitoring of migratory shorebirds and take action to minimise impacts on them.</p> <p>Identify and monitor any potential roosting sites for the little tern within the management area.</p> <p>Ensure the continued existence of black mangrove, through monitoring of the population distribution and taking actions to address any adverse impacts.</p>
<p><b>Aboriginal culture</b></p> <p>Aboriginal aspirations are incorporated into park management.</p>	<p>Partnerships between the Traditional Owners will be established so that their views and aspirations are included in future management.</p>
<p><b>Shared-history culture</b></p> <p>Cultural heritage sites are identified, recorded and protected where feasible.</p>	<p>Determine the existence and condition of any remaining agricultural remains on Woogoompah Island.</p> <p>Identify and document, if appropriate, and protect places of historic significance in the management area.</p> <p>Contact the Traditional Owners to determine if they have records of Aboriginal cultural history for the management area which can be shared.</p>
<p><b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b></p> <p>Sustainable recreation opportunities are provided with minimal impact on the natural values of the area.</p> <p>Visitor information regarding safety, facilities and park use is provided off-site to facilitate safe and enjoyable experiences by park visitors.</p>	<p>Investigate the possibilities for creating safe, formalised camping and day-use areas, with consideration of the potential hazards associated with improved access.</p> <p>Update and promote information regarding visitor safety.</p> <p>Determine safe access points to the national park.</p>
<p><b>Education and science</b></p> <p>The values of the management area are promoted.</p> <p>Information on natural resources and cultural information is enhanced over time.</p>	<p>Encourage participation and information sharing with research institutions and ensure relevant information is incorporated into adaptive park management and interpretation materials where appropriate.</p> <p>Contact community stakeholders and education groups such as Jacobs Well Environmental Education Centre to develop, implement and manage interpretive and education programs.</p> <p>Examine opportunities to develop an interpretive and educational strategy for</p>

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
	the island.
<p><b>Partnerships</b></p> <p>Cooperative partnerships lead to effective management of the national park.</p>	<p>Proactively seek relationships with research institutions with interests in protected area management.</p> <p>Encourage and support interest groups, residents and the broader community to assist in the management of natural and cultural resources through volunteering in management activities, such as regeneration, pest management, research and monitoring.</p>
<p><b>Pest management</b></p> <p>The integrity of native plant and animal communities is increased, and the impacts of pests are minimised through strategic, sustained management.</p>	<p>Review and implement the Level 2 pest management strategy for the national park.</p> <p>Focus activities on the reduction of the distribution of pest species on the islands.</p>
<p><b>Fire management</b></p> <p>Fire is managed for the protection of life and property, protection of fire sensitive vegetation communities and protection of conservation significant species</p>	<p>Review the Statement of Fire Management Intent and develop a fire management strategy aiming to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• incorporate appropriate fire regimes to suit vegetation types present in the park, exclude fire to areas and vegetation types that are fire sensitive and where rare and threatened species are present</li> <li>• minimise the risk of pest plant introduction</li> <li>• maintain current distribution and extent of native plant communities</li> <li>• maintain fauna habitat diversity</li> <li>• monitor the occurrence of wildfire and take action as appropriate.</li> </ul>

## Tables – Conservation values management

**Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems**

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
12.1.1	<i>Casuarina glauca</i> open-forest on margins of marine clay plains	Endangered
12.2.5	<i>Corymbia</i> spp., <i>Banksia integrifolia</i> , <i>Callitris columellaris</i> , <i>Acacia</i> spp. open forest to low closed forest on beach ridges usually in southern half of bioregion	Of concern
12.2.7	<i>Melaleuca quinquenervia</i> or <i>M. viridiflora</i> open forest to woodland on sand plains	Of concern
12.3.5	<i>Melaleuca quinquenervia</i> open-forest on coastal alluvial plains	Of concern
12.9-10.7a	<i>Eucalyptus tereticornis</i> , <i>E. siderophloia</i> and/or <i>E. crebra</i> , <i>Corymbia intermedia</i> and <i>Lophostemon suaveolens</i> woodland. Occurs on Cainozoic and Mesozoic sediments in near coastal areas	Of concern

**Table 2: Species of conservation significance on the national park**

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>Pterostylis nigricans</i>		Near threatened	-	Low
<b>Animals</b>				
<i>Botaurus poiciloptilus</i>	Australasian bittern	Least concern	Endangered	Medium
<i>Calyptorhynchus lathamii</i>	glossy black-cockatoo	Vulnerable	-	-
<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	black-necked stork	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Ornithoptera richmondia</i>	Richmond birdwing	Vulnerable	-	Critical
<i>Pteropus poliocephalus</i>	grey-headed flying-fox	Least concern	Vulnerable	Critical
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered	-	High
<i>Xeromys myoides</i>	water mouse	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	High

**Table 3: Species listed in international agreements on the national park**

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Ardea modesta</i>	eastern great egret	-	✓	✓	-
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	sharp-tailed sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Coracina tenuirostris</i>	cicadabird	-	-	✓	-
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	-	✓	-	-
<i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>	white-throated needletail	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian tern	-	✓	-	-
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	bar-tailed godwit	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	-	-	✓	-
<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	eastern curlew	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	whimbrel	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Pandion cristatus</i>	eastern osprey	✓	-	-	-
<i>Rhipidura rufifrons</i>	rufous fantail	✓	-	-	-
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	little tern	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	grey-tailed tattler	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	common greenshank	-	✓	✓	✓
<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	terek sandpiper	-	✓	✓	✓

Bonn: Bonn Convention

CAMBA: China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA: Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA: Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

## Historical timeline

**Table 4: History of protection for the Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park**

Year	Description
1987	Cobby Cobby Island declared an environmental park
1991	Kangaroo, Woogoompah and Coomera islands are all declared environmental parks
1994	Kangaroo, Woogoompah, Coomera and Cobby Cobby islands are dedicated as conservation parks
1996	Willes Island is acquired by government for a protected area status
1998	Kangaroo Island Conservation Park, Woogoompah Island Conservation Park, Coomera Island Conservation Park and Cobby Cobby Island Conservation Park combined to form Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park
2000	Willes Island included in the Southern Moreton Bay Islands National Park