

# Starcke National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	7,960ha
Bioregion:	Cape York Peninsula
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 Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>

## Plans and agreements

✓	Bonn Convention
✓	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement



View of Starcke National Park. Photo: NPRSR.

## Vision

Starcke National Park is managed to conserve its natural and cultural values, with particular emphasis on maintaining the high diversity of its plants.

Recreation focuses on remote hiking and camping by experienced bushwalkers.

Starcke National Park is transferred to Aboriginal freehold under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* and jointly managed in perpetuity by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and the relevant Aboriginal land trusts.

The aspirations and cultural rights and responsibilities of the Traditional Owners is recognised and reflected in park management.

## Conservation purpose

Starcke National Park was gazetted in 1977 to conserve sandstone plateaux and escarpments of high scenic value and some vegetation types that are uncommon on Cape York Peninsula. The park contains some of the most rugged country on the peninsula.

## Protecting and presenting the park's values

### Landscape

Starcke National Park is located approximately 25km west of Cape Flattery and 35km north of Hope Vale. The park is comprised predominantly of mountainous country that forms part of the Great Dividing Range and includes the headwaters of the Mclvor and Morgan rivers and various tributaries of Starcke River, including Running Creek.

Notable features in the landscape include Mount Norkwa, Mount Sumbailbe, Mount Paielwego, numerous waterfalls and rainforest-shrouded creeks. The park retains a high level of natural integrity and provides important habitat for a wide range of animal and plant species.

### Regional ecosystems

Twenty-five regional ecosystems are mapped within Starcke National Park. Some of these are unique variants on the more widespread regional ecosystem types. Five are of concern communities (Table 1). The remaining 20 are listed as not of concern at present.

Except for the cliff faces and higher sandstone plateaux which carry heath and shrubland, the area is heavily vegetated. Eucalypt communities occur on the slopes below the escarpments and appear to be relatively free of pest plants and evidence of pig impacts.

The rainforests which fringe the watercourses appear to be in good condition. Pigs *Sus scrofa* pose a potential threat to these communities, as does lantana *Lantana camara* infestations on 'Munburra', an adjacent property on the northern side of the park. The significant sicklepod *Senna obtusifolia* and grader grass *Themeda quadrivalvis* populations along the road corridor north of Hope Vale through to Wakooka also pose some threat to the natural values of the park which is located on the windward side of the corridor.

### Native plants and animals

Starcke National Park is not currently known to protect any species of state or national conservation significance. Three species from the park are listed in international agreements (Table 2).

*Xanthorrhoea* sp. (Cape Bedford M.Gandini AQ601576) is found on the park. It is only known to occur on the Cape Bedford headland, the Starcke escarpment and on a major hill to the east of Saddle Hill. This grass tree is unusual in that it has bark.

Park staff currently have a limited knowledge and understanding of the park's animal and plant communities.

### Aboriginal culture

The area is known to be of significance to the Guugu Yimidhirr Traditional Owners particularly the Daarba, Juunju and Nirrpan language and social groups. They use the area for traditional hunting, gathering and other cultural and social purposes. Currently no formalised management arrangements have been established with these Traditional Owner groups.

No current native title applications or Indigenous Land Use Agreements exist over Starcke National Park.

Subject to successful negotiation with the Traditional Owners, the park is identified for future transfer to Aboriginal freehold land tenure under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*. A joint management regime, including dedication of the park as national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) will also be established under the framework provided by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* for the Cape York Peninsula Region.

Sites of material culture and places of cultural significance to the Traditional Owners are known to exist on Starcke National Park.

## Shared-history culture

In the 1870s the Palmer River gold rush brought large numbers of non-Aboriginal people into the area. Mining and grazing were major land uses associated with the Starcke district surrounding the area now gazetted as Starcke National Park.

The national park was previously managed as part of Starcke Pastoral Holding from 1951. No infrastructure was established in this part of the former pastoral holding due to difficult access.

## Tourism and visitor opportunities

Starcke National Park is a remote park with no visitor facilities or other departmental infrastructure.

The park is only accessible during the dry season, generally between May and November. On-ground management is also limited to this period.

Starcke National Park is not suited to vehicle access. Very rugged landscape, reliable water supply and cooler, higher altitude temperatures do however make it well-suited to hiking with overnight camping by experienced bushwalkers.

The Mount Webb–Wakooka Road, located approximately 1km from the eastern boundary of the park, provides good views of the cliff-lines.

Waterfalls within the park are very significant cultural sites. Traditional owners are concerned about allowing unsupervised public visitation to sites and places of cultural significance.

The Darrpa people have expressed an interest in running helicopter tours to the tops of the escarpments.

## Education and science

Little survey and collection work has been undertaken on Starcke National Park to date.

## Partnerships

Starcke National Park is adjoined by Aboriginal land managed by the Ngulun Land Trust, the Juunijwarra Land Trust ('Munburra') and the Darrpa Land Trust. Other Queensland Government lands adjoin the remainder of the park and are part of the current State land dealings. The tenure of these parcels is currently under negotiation.

QPWS staff maintain working relationships with the Aboriginal land trusts to ensure protected area values are appropriately managed.

## Other key issues and responses

### Pest management

#### Pest plants

No pest plants are currently known to occur in the park. Lantana *Lantana camara* has been recorded adjacent to the fenceline to the north of the park and has the potential to spread upstream along Running Creek. Sicklepod *Senna obtusifolia* and grader grass occurs in the broader area, but is currently unknown from the park.

#### Pest animals

Feral pigs *Sus scrofa* are known to occur in Starcke National Park where there is permanent water, such as along Running Creek.

It is unknown if wild cattle *Bos* spp. still exist on the park; however it is considered likely as a consequence of previous and surrounding land uses and limited stock fencing.

## **Fire management**

Fire occasionally enters the park from adjacent properties.

It is assumed that a lack of fire may result in the potential encroachment of rainforest into adjacent eucalypt woodlands. Late season wildfires after big wet seasons have the potential to burn the whole park at one time, due to the large amount of cured fuel. This could significantly alter habitat and threaten ecosystems.

## **Other management issues**

### **Safety**

Starcke National Park presents many safety hazards for park visitors, especially in steep and isolated gorge environments. Potential exists for interactions with dangerous wildlife and from other natural hazards.

## Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p><b>Native plants and animals</b></p> <p>Park staff progressively improve knowledge and understanding of the park's natural resources.</p>	<p>A1. Support the ongoing recording of baseline natural resource data by QPWS staff.</p>
<p><b>Aboriginal culture</b></p> <p>Starcke National Park is jointly managed by the Traditional Owners and QPWS and the partners have a strong collaborative working relationship.</p>	<p>A2. 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>A3. Following formal establishment of joint management arrangements, work with the Traditional Owners to protect sites and places of particular cultural significance.</p> <p>A4. Maintain cooperative working relations with nearby land trusts to maximise management effectiveness of Starcke National Park and adjacent traditional country.</p>
<p><b>Tourism and visitor opportunities</b></p> <p>Remote bushwalking opportunities are culturally-appropriate and complementary to the rugged nature of the park.</p>	<p>A5. Promote Starcke National Park as a wild and rugged landscape suited to remote hiking and camping by experienced bushwalkers.</p> <p>A6. Inform visitors of the hazards and risks presented by the remote, natural environment through written materials. Emphasise the need for visitors to be self-sufficient and respectful of cultural protocols attached to the significant sites and places.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships</b></p> <p>Park staff maintain good working relationships with community partners and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>A7. Maintain good working relations with neighbouring landholders and, where possible, cooperatively undertake fire and pest management programs.</p>
<p><b>Pest management</b></p> <p>Landscape values remain in a near-natural condition, largely free of pest plants.</p>	<p>A8. Newly-identified pest threats are treated while it is still possible to eradicate or contain them.</p>
<p><b>Fire management</b></p> <p>The natural biological diversity and integrity of native plant and animal communities on the park is promoted.</p>	<p>A9. Minimise impacts from late season, large-scale and high intensity fires by implementing suitable fire regimes with relation to the frequency, intensity and timing of burns for natural communities and populations within the park.</p> <p>A10. Where possible, coordinate planned burns with neighbouring properties.</p> <p>A11. Implement fire regimes that will maintain the current health and diversity of plant and animal communities, with an emphasis on eucalypt communities, heaths and vine thickets.</p>

## Tables – Conservation values management

**Table 1: Of concern regional ecosystems**

Regional ecosystem	Description	Biodiversity status
3.8.2a	Semi-deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine forest	Of concern
3.10.1	Evergreen mesophyll/notophyll vine forest. Restricted to sandstone gullies	Of concern
3.10.5a	Deciduous notophyll/microphyll vine thicket ± <i>Gyrocarpus americanus</i> on sandstone hills	Of concern
3.11.2a	Semi-deciduous mesophyll vine forest on metamorphic ranges in the south	Of concern
3.11.6b	<i>Eucalyptus platyphylla</i> ± <i>E. leptophleba</i> ± <i>Corymbia nesophila</i> open forest to woodland on hill slopes	Of concern

**Table 2: Species listed in international agreements**

Scientific name	Common name	BONN	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	-	-	✓	
<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