

Objective:

To provide ongoing benefits to Queensland by–

- effectively managing and sustainably using the state's natural resources
- implementing effective land ownership and access strategies, and protecting cultural heritage and native title for Indigenous Queenslanders
- maintaining security of access to resources and resource information, and through this underpin the state's economic activity

Land and Vegetation Services

The Land and Vegetation Services output incorporates service delivery, policy and program development, and science to support land and vegetation management. The responsibilities of this output include activities relating to management of:

- State land, including reserves, leasehold land, unallocated State land, roads and stock routes
- native vegetation associated with vegetation management legislation
- commercial use of natural forest products, including native forest timbers and quarry materials
- information for planning and development purposes, including land valuations, titles registration, and mapping, surveying infrastructure and spatial data
- Indigenous services, including native title, cultural heritage, and Indigenous access to land through the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* and the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991*.

Vegetation framework

Following the release earlier in the year of the annual Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) report for 2006–07, the government made a commitment to a moratorium on the clearing of endangered regrowth vegetation while it consulted with stakeholder groups about ways to improve vegetation clearing laws.

The Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Bill 2009 gave effect to the moratorium from 8 April 2009 until it ends on 7 October 2009.

The moratorium applies to all native woody vegetation within 50 metres of a watercourse in priority reef catchments of Burdekin, Mackay Whitsundays and Wet Tropics and endangered regrowth vegetation across the state, on freehold and agricultural and grazing leasehold land.

The moratorium covers a million hectares of endangered regrowth vegetation—i.e., vegetation which has been severely affected by past broad-scale clearing practices and needs help to recover.

Submissions from interested stakeholders and landholders were invited during the moratorium. Almost 400 submissions were received by the closing date of 15 May 2009 and are currently being considered by government.

New regrowth regulations will come into effect after the moratorium that will secure the long-term biodiversity of Queensland and protect landscapes—like

riparian areas in reef catchments—which need trees to prevent land degradation and a decline in water quality.

Amendments to simplify and streamline the vegetation management framework are also expected to progress in late 2009.

Work continued on managing the \$150 million vegetation management structural adjustment package that was introduced to assist farm businesses affected by the introduction of the new Vegetation Management Framework in 2004.

The financial assistance package has been managed by QRAA (formerly Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority) on behalf of the Queensland Government, with DERM providing technical advice and assistance to both farm businesses and QRAA.

At the end of June, 1610 landholders had applied for enterprise assistance. A total of \$109.1million has been disbursed to landholders for enterprise assistance, and \$10.353 million for six exit properties.

Land planning

During the reporting period, the department continued to contribute to planning outcomes at the state and regional levels in the areas of:

- local government planning schemes
- statutory regional plans
- master planned areas
- development schemes for Urban Development Areas
- state development areas
- State Coastal Management Plan
- strategic port land-use plans.

The department's OnePlan approach provides a framework for streamlining and simplifying regulatory requirements for landholders. The project was funded under Blueprint for the Bush over four years until the end June 2010. The OnePlan web pages were revised during the reporting period to include more comprehensive information on property planning and resource management and links to industry programs. The website content is expected to be finalised and ready for public release later in 2009.

The Delbessie Agreement

During the reporting period, the department continued to implement the Delbessie Agreement as part of its commitment to improving rural leasehold land management. This included consultation with stakeholders on the requirements for land management agreements, Indigenous access and use agreements, and other supporting policies and guidelines.

The State Rural Leasehold Land Ministerial Advisory Committee considered the draft template/guide for land management agreements out of session, and provided its advice and recommendations to the Minister in May. These agreements will be negotiated with landholders and guide the way in which they manage their land for future sustainable production.

DERM specialist assessment officers in Cairns, Townsville, Longreach, Emerald, Roma, Charleville and Toowoomba continued to undertake land condition assessments to progress lease renewals under the Delbessie Agreement.

Land condition assessments comprise a pre-visit desktop investigation and the preparation of maps and related information to support the on-ground assessment. Assessments are conducted in full consultation with the lessee. Lease information is captured electronically for collation into a report, and provides the basis for negotiating land management agreements.

It is expected that the first lease renewal under the Delbessie Agreement will be made later in 2009.

Using science and information

DERM undertakes scientific studies and monitoring activities to support its delivery on State interests. It gathers and maintains information about Queensland's environment, land, water and vegetation to ensure new legislation, policies or plans are evidence-based.

DERM's scientific and technical information is packaged into decision-support tools and products and used for government policy and guidelines on the sustainable management of the state's environment and natural resources. DERM:

- uses satellite imagery, field validation and modelling to monitor changes in vegetation and land condition and use
- provides core information for studying land use and climate change

- studies landscape processes in Queensland catchments through soil and land mapping and modelling, which are critical to keeping land management practices sustainable and productive
- develops land degradation risk strategies
- studies land management processes that affect nutrient movement and greenhouse gases.

During the reporting period, DERM used its scientific and technical data and information to support government priorities such as the Delbessie Agreement and preparation of the Vegetation Moratorium maps. The department also developed a hazard and risk framework to support land and water management plans. The framework is designed to use 'best available' data and value-add to current knowledge. It is being trialled in the Mackay region.

Online environmental mapping service

DERM's expertise and ability to deliver on government election commitments were highlighted in the reporting period when staff designed, developed and delivered the Vegetation Moratorium mapping web-based system in a very short timeframe.

The government committed to a three-month moratorium on 15 March 2009 and DERM delivered the system that allowed public access to supporting information and data on 7 April 2009, the day before the Vegetation Moratorium came into effect.

The department built onto its free online map service. This mapping facility allows the public to produce a range of customised, high-quality maps that provide information about the environment and natural resources for any area of interest throughout the state. Previously, applicants had to contact or visit the department to obtain similar maps.

The system produced more than 32 000 certified moratorium maps from April to June. These maps were a very effective communication and information mechanism for landholders and the public.

The online service is consistent with the Right to Information legislation and the public can access the same information as the government, providing further transparency about government processes. The successful outcome was due to the collaboration of DERM's many data custodians and is a good demonstration of science, service delivery and policy divisions working together to achieve a positive outcome.

Spatial information

The department manages a significant volume of information related to Queensland's land and natural resources. Much of this information is required by other departments, other tiers of government, industry and the community to enable them to carry out their activities.

DERM provides many spatial and scientific information services that support sustainable natural resource management and assist corporate and community enterprises and individuals in their decision making. Some key activities undertaken during the reporting period were:

- progressing the development of an Address Management Framework for Queensland with other government agencies as part of a government commitment
- providing ready access to natural resource and administrative spatial information and scientific data, including maps, geographical data products and survey infrastructure services that define the location and extent of features
- providing high-resolution pictorial records of the state over time through the aerial and satellite imagery library, and coordinating imagery acquisition for government in Queensland
- setting policy and standards for the maintenance of the state's cadastre and survey infrastructure
- providing opportunities for third-party data brokers to facilitate distribution of DERM datasets
- managing high-performance computing systems and data storage and retrieval to support scientific studies and climate modelling.

During the reporting period, the department continued to implement the Electronic Access for Registry Lodgement (EARL) program—a three-stage project to help improve business practices within government and the survey industry for the lodgement and transmission of cadastral survey information. EARL will eventually allow full electronic lodgements of survey plans with the department.

Detailed planning and design work for EARL Stage 2 began in March. The surveying industry will be able to use, value-add and submit an electronic file of a survey to DERM when this stage is completed (anticipated completion date in mid-2010).

DERM continued to provide a high standard of client service for entering cadastral survey plan records into

the Digital Cadastral Database (DCDB), with 90 per cent of these records entered in the DCDB within seven working days of plan registration. The currency of the DCDB is vital to both government and industry, with many benefits ranging from enhanced land planning to better emergency response management.

DERM continued to implement the Queensland Spatial Imagery Acquisition Program, which identifies the minimum requirements for imagery to support public administration across a range of activities in Queensland.

Being prepared and having a response capability for coastal surges and/or a tsunami event has been a government priority since 2007. The department continued to coordinate topographic data collection and height modelling activities for existing topographic information, and collected new data using funds from the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program and the Protecting Our Coastal Communities project. These projects are capturing land elevation data, ensuring the most vulnerable parts of the Queensland coastline are identified.

During the reporting period, the department continued to ensure that it has an effective distribution network (in addition to departmental business centres). There were seven online distributors (based in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne) who distributed more than 96 per cent of land title and related searches, allowing clients to remain in their own offices. There were also 35 product distributors for the wholesale or resell of a range of departmental physical products.

Titles Registry services

DERM's Titles Registry, through its Automated Titles System (ATS), provides Queenslanders and other stakeholders with authoritative current and historical information about ownership and other interests in land and water allocations throughout the state. Stakeholders ranging from first home owners to property investors, industry and government agencies all rely on ready access to timely and accurate title-related information.

From 27 March to 30 June 2009, the department processed approximately 782 000 title-related information searches for customers. Over 97 per cent were conducted from the convenience of customers' homes and offices. This included via online distributors in real-time and direct access by government agencies.

More than 254 000 title transactions were completed during the reporting period. This figure included a higher proportion than in previous years of complex legal transactions such as community title dealings and transmission of deceased estates. Approximately 94 per cent of all lodgements were processed within five days with most completed within just two days.

The quality of system data remains a priority for DERM's Titles Registry. During the reporting period, less than 0.3 per cent of registry records required correction and these were generally minor typographical errors with no significant effect on legal entitlements.

Titles Registry staff continued to work closely with the Department of Justice and Attorney-General to improve the witnessing of prescribed forms for title transactions, with the aim of minimising the likelihood of title fraud and reducing the State's exposure to potential compensation.

Indigenous land activities

The department in collaboration with native title representative bodies continued to conduct training sessions to equip traditional owners with governance and business management skills through the Capacity Development Officer Program. This program supported the Queensland Government's commitment to strengthen Indigenous communities, within a natural resource management framework.

The Indigenous Land Trust Support Unit located in Cairns assisted trustees with leasing provisions under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Amendment Act 2008*. The unit also provided training to trustees and the general community on leasing processes and helped Indigenous communities with administrative processes associated with lease applications.

The review of the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* continued and is expected to be completed towards the end of 2009. Comprehensive consultation with Torres Strait Islander communities was ongoing during the reporting period.

DERM continued to coordinate the state's response to native title claims and litigation, and carried out tenure, historical and anthropological assessments of native title claims.

Since the operational provisions of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1994* commenced, 482 claims have been lodged over Queensland land and waters.

As at 30 June 2009, there were 141 native title claims in Queensland which remain to be settled—137 claimant, three compensation and one non-claimant applications. At that time, 70 consent determinations that native title exists had been recorded in Australia. Of these, 41 were in Queensland, which represents over 58 per cent of the national total.

On 25 June 2009, the Federal Court consented to the KuuKu Y'au native title determination at Portland Roads, north of Lockhart River. This determination covered areas on the mainland, some islands and, for the first time, areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as well as areas of State marine park. This was the largest native title determination made by consent for an area of sea in Australia.

Importantly, the exercise of the rights including the taking of dugong and turtle were regulated under separate Indigenous Land Use Agreements between the State, the Commonwealth and the KuuKu Y'au people. The agreements also provide for training for KuuKu Y'au people to enable them to take up voluntary ranger positions in the parks.

DERM oversees the transfer of land to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, enabling land management in accordance with traditional custom. To date in Queensland, over 1.6 million hectares have been transferred to Indigenous ownership under the Aboriginal Land Act and the Torres Strait Islander Land Act.

In June 2009, DERM handed back a block of unallocated State land on Bribie Island to the Ngunda-Joondoburri Land Trust, on behalf of the Joondoburri Clan, the Kabi Kabi Nation and all Aboriginal people connected with the land. The 24 hectare site contains a sacred bora ring.

The Ngunda-Joondoburri Land Trust became the owner of the site and is now responsible for managing the land. This is the 65th land trust established in Queensland since the Aboriginal Land Act came in to effect in 1991.

Access to land for private and social housing, economic development and government infrastructure purposes is a Queensland Government objective. An appropriate survey network and efficient land planning are required to achieve this objective. This work will be a priority for the department in 2009–10.

Indigenous cultural heritage

The department finalised the process for the review of the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* and *Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003* during the reporting period.

The Indigenous Cultural Heritage Acts Review aimed to determine how and if the legislation was working as planned and whether it provided effective recognition, protection and conservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage. The department consulted widely with key stakeholders and on 16 April 2009 a draft report was submitted to the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade for consideration.

Recommendations from the draft report will be released in the second half of 2009 for further consultation with key stakeholders, before a final report and recommendations is provided for government consideration.

Valuations

The department provides unimproved land values for approximately 1.6 million properties in Queensland. Unimproved value is the amount which properties could be expected to sell for without improvements such as houses, fences and earthworks. Valuations may be used by local governments to calculate rates, the Office of State Revenue to calculate land tax, and the department to calculate State land rental.

Land valuations were not issued in 2009 following a decision made in February 2009 not to revalue 17 local government areas previously nominated. This was due to the global financial and economic uncertainty and also extreme weather conditions in north and north-west Queensland at that time.

During the reporting period, the State Valuation Service continued to provide:

- statutory valuations to keep the valuation roll up to date
- client valuations of buildings, infrastructure, plant and equipment
- market rental assessments, resumptions, and valuations for government department property disposals.

Departmental valuers have continued to monitor the property market as part of the annual market survey process which will inform the next valuation program. All local governments were written to in June and

requested to provide an opinion on whether a new valuation was required in their area. Other key stakeholders were also consulted.

State land dealings

The department administers about 71 percent of Queensland under the *Land Act 1994*. Commonly referred to as State land, this excludes freehold land, Commonwealth land and land administered under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

The department finalised 1770 state land applications and dealings during the reporting period, and 7330 for the full financial year to 30 June 2009.

DERM had a target to complete 9500 State land applications and dealings in 2008–09. The department could not reach this target because it received fewer applications and also a larger proportion of these applications had a higher level of complexity. It did complete, however, more than 80 per cent of all new cases opened during 2008–09, within customer service standards.

There has been a targeted effort over the past 10 years to improve completion rates and reduce the total number of jobs on hand which has resulted in improved turnaround times for most applications.

Significant legislative, procedural and system improvements are expected to produce considerable productivity benefits next year.

Unallocated State land

The department continued to manage the portfolio of unallocated State land, which comprises around 1 026 667 hectares, consisting of about 19 077 parcels of land widely dispersed across the state.

Sale of timber and quarry materials

The department's Forest Products business group works to maximise financial returns to the State from the sale of State-owned native forest timber and quarry materials within social, environmental and cultural expectations. The group's primary customers are timber processors and quarry operators.

State-owned native forests are a key source of log timber supplies for regionally based timber-processing companies. Forest Products conducts commercial forestry operations in State-owned forests under the *Forestry Act 1959*, and in line with the Code of practice for native forest timber production on State lands 2007 administered by DERM.

Forest Products achieved an operating surplus of \$1.7 million as at 30 June 2009. This result is down on the business unit's budget target of \$3.45 million, mainly due to lower-than-expected log timber sales during the year. Forest Products' timber—most of which is processed for use in building construction—is closely linked to cyclical activity in the building industry which was suffering a major downturn. Consequently, Forest Products sales of native forest hardwood and cypress log timber were 239 000 cubic metres, eight per cent below the year's target.

Forest Products sales of quarry materials, such as sand, gravel, rock and road base, were 3.4 million cubic metres, again six per cent below the year's target. Demand for quarry materials was affected by reduced building activity during the second half of the year, offset in part by continuing strong investment in key infrastructure and mining projects.

Integrated Planning Act 1997

DERM is an assessment manager and a concurrence agency for applications submitted under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* relating to clearing remnant vegetation, operational works affecting watercourses, referable dams and wild rivers. The Act sets timeframes for dealing with applications.

Following the recent machinery-of-government changes, the department has been integrating its systems and processes to provide coordinated and streamlined service delivery across legislative responsibilities. This will reduce duplication of effort and confusion for clients, lead to efficiencies and better management of timeframes, and potentially cut development costs.

During the reporting period, 252 concurrence applications and 71 applications where the department was the assessment manager were decided within statutory timeframes across the state.

Compliance

The department administers the *Land Act 1994* and *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, which have been put in place to meet specific natural resource management objectives. The department performed a wide range of initiatives to encourage compliance with the legislation.

DERM promoted voluntary compliance with the natural resource laws through education and awareness-raising in the community. Staff attended local field days and regional shows to talk with the community and provide information and educational materials.

During the reporting period, investigations of all very high-priority notifications of alleged non-compliance with land and vegetation legislation were undertaken.