

A photograph of a desert landscape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a gradient of orange and blue, with a full moon in the upper right corner. The foreground is dominated by sand dunes with distinct, wavy ripples. A few small, scrubby bushes are scattered across the dunes. The overall scene is serene and natural.

# Conserving natural and cultural heritage

- Goal 1 **Building the protected area system**
- Goal 2 **Conserving natural integrity on protected areas and forests**
- Goal 3 **Conserving our wildlife species**
- Goal 4 **Safeguarding cultural heritage on protected areas**
- Goal 5 **Living in balance—sustainably managing resources on land and sea**



## Goal 1 Building the protected area system

Build an enhanced protected area system for the future to conserve biodiversity on land, water and sea, build resilience to climate change, and deliver benefits to the community.

### Why is this important?

From the oasis of Boodjamulla National Park in north-west Queensland to the easternmost edges of the Great Barrier Reef, and from the Simpson Desert to Round Island in the Torres Strait, Queensland's protected area system makes a major contribution to conserving nature and culture. Protected areas on land and sea form the cornerstones of an integrated strategy for biodiversity conservation. They play an important role in safeguarding the resilience of ecosystems and species to climate change and other threats.

The first national park in Queensland was declared in 1908. In 2008, the Queensland Government committed to increasing the area of national parks to 7.5 per cent of the state by 2020, and the total area of all terrestrial protected areas including nature refuges to 20 million

hectares (11.5 per cent). In addition, the Queensland Government has committed to establishing a more comprehensive system of marine parks around the coast of Queensland.

Significant work has been done to identify where the expansion of the terrestrial protected area system should be directed so that any new additions will improve the representation of Queensland ecosystems. Analysis has shown that particular emphasis should be placed on expanding the protected area system in Queensland's bioregions which are under represented; this includes the Mitchell Grass Downs, Mulga Lands, Einasleigh Uplands, Gulf Plains and Desert Uplands. In addition, while nearly 80 per cent of regional ecosystems have some representation in national

parks, for most of these improving the total area that is protected (the adequacy of protection) is a priority. Freshwater and wetland ecosystems are also important.

In general, new protected areas will be selected following the principles outlined on page 30. Detailed methodology is provided for terrestrial areas in the Protected Areas for the Future companion document to Queensland's draft biodiversity strategy Building Nature's Resilience.

New national parks will bring two kinds of benefits. They will conserve a wider range of biodiversity in one of the most diverse areas on the planet, and they will provide new and exciting opportunities for tourism and recreation across regional and rural Queensland. An expanded and well-managed protected area system will also help Queensland's species and ecosystems maintain their resilience and adapt to climate change.

Nature refuges provide an opportunity for landholders to directly participate in the protected area network and for effective conservation on leasehold and freehold lands to be recognised. Financial support for many nature refuge landholders is provided through the State-funded initiative Nature Assist. As at June 2011, nearly 2.8 million hectares of nature refuges make a crucial contribution to conservation in Queensland. Expansion of this area will strengthen the protected area system and continue partnerships with landholders.

Multiple-use marine parks have been declared to protect the resilience of ecosystems within nine of Queensland's 13 marine bioregions. In 2011, State and Commonwealth marine parks collectively cover approximately 72 per cent of all Queensland's coastal waters—99 per cent of the east coast is now zoned as marine park. Within these waters, about 20 per cent of the area is zoned for strict non-extractive protection and 80 per cent is for managed use.

Some marine bioregions in the Gulf and Torres Strait are not yet represented in protected areas. These areas support significant biodiversity, including the world's most important seagrass beds for dugongs.

Other reserves, such as Indigenous protected areas and private protected areas, are recognised through the National Reserve System and play an increasingly important role in conservation, complementing the state protected area system.

Work to plan a protected area system, acquire strategic areas and manage the gazettal process is undertaken by QPWS and other parts of the Department of Environment and Resource Management.

- Habitat for rare and threatened species such as the yellow-footed rock-wallaby is a consideration in the selection of new protected areas.
- Waterlilies of the Gulf Plains bioregion. Ensuring representation of freshwater ecosystems is an important principle in protected area selection.



Gary Wilson, DERM

## What is our approach?

Queensland's protected area system across land, freshwater and sea will be comprehensive, adequate and representative of biodiversity, landscapes and seascapes. The system will be resilient to climate change, include outstanding examples of natural and cultural heritage, and deliver social, health and economic benefits to the community. World Heritage areas will be key elements of the protected area system. QPWS will:

- build an integrated and well-connected protected area system on land and sea based on the guiding principles (see the next page). The guiding principles will be applied as appropriate to protected area acquisition, to the development of conservation agreements for terrestrial protected areas, and to declaration and zoning of marine parks.
- use the range of the protected area classes from the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and zoning from the *Marine Parks Act 2004* to provide for a variety of natural and cultural conservation needs and other purposes. The system will consist of State-owned, private and community lands and water under a variety of management regimes, including community-based conservation.

**For more details,** see the 'Protected Areas for the Future' methodology available from [www.derm.qld.gov.au](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au).

Page 15 provides an explanation of the different kinds of protected areas in Queensland.

The bioregional approach to reserve selection is outlined in Appendix one.

# Our 10 principles for building the protected area system

Building on scientific guidelines, the bioregional planning system, and national and international commitments, 10 principles for future terrestrial protected area selection have been developed specifically for Queensland through the Protected Areas for the Future initiative. These principles are the core of Queensland's approach to building a protected area system that will be resilient to climate change.

## Conserving natural landscapes, ecosystems and species

**The highest priority is to develop a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) protected area system**, with the primary focus of including as much biological diversity as possible in each bioregion. In terrestrial bioregions, regional ecosystems are used as a surrogate for biodiversity. In marine bioregions, mapping and classification is still underway. In general, preference will be given to areas in good condition with minimal habitat disturbance.

**The design of the protected area system will focus on building resilience to climate change** by recognising new threats to the system, maintaining connectivity at both local and broad scales, and identifying and protecting evolutionary and climate change refugia and trigger points.

**Improved adequacy at system and protected area level** will aim to protect ecological processes and improve land and water management. Broadscale adequacy of the protected area system will ensure large enough areas of a range of habitats are conserved to allow for ecological viability and resilience and for the survival of plant and animal species. At protected area level, adequacy will be improved through creation of larger areas and better management boundaries. Within marine parks, adequacy will relate to the extent of more strictly protected zones.

**Conservation of priority ecosystems and species will be increased** through the above actions and through

the selection of some additional areas specifically for species conservation, primarily where there are known concentrations of threatened species, centres of endemism, and key habitats for priority species.

**The variety of geological features, freshwater ecosystems and wetlands will be represented** as far as practical.

## Providing social, health, educational and economic benefits to the community

**Socio-economic and health impacts and benefits will be considered.** New tourism opportunities will be identified and protected areas will be selected to enhance recreational opportunities for local residents and interstate and international visitors.

**Cultural and scenic values will be a consideration in allocation of priorities**, in particular natural sites of high cultural value to the community.

## Practicality and urgency of acquisition and management

**Costs of acquisition and availability will be considered** in preliminary protected area selection and then in more detail when priority sites have been identified. Practicality and future costs of management will also be taken into account.

**Protected area selection will take into account the location, biodiversity and management of other protected areas**, particularly private protected areas and Indigenous protected areas included in the National Reserve System. Cooperation with managers of these protected areas will be maximised.

**The level of threat to defined biodiversity areas will be considered** in the prioritisation of acquisition and other biodiversity actions, once the optimal protected area design has been developed.

The history of national park selection and the bioregional approach used today are outlined in Appendix one.

▼ Tourism is an important consideration in the expansion of the protected area system.



Adam Creed, DERM

# What we will do: priorities for 2020



Robert Ashdown

## 1.1 Plan a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system which is connected across land, freshwater and the sea.

- a) Complete the terrestrial reserve planning process to fully address all guiding principles, including incorporation of the range of freshwater ecosystems and building resilience to climate change.
- b) Establish planning principles to guide the development of a marine protected area network. Identify potential tools and a strategic approach for future marine conservation at a bioregional scale.

### Targets

- By 2014, the Protected Areas for the Future methodology is updated based on science to incorporate marine park planning for a representative protected area system, and to fully address all the guiding principles.
- By 2014, a situation analysis (including reserve priorities) is complete for each marine bioregion.
- By 2013, a situation analysis (including reserve priorities) is complete for each terrestrial bioregion.

## 1.2 Expand the national park system ensuring that biodiversity and social benefits are maximised.

- a) Identify, acquire and prepare for gazettal an additional five million hectares of terrestrial national parks in accordance with the Protected Areas for the Future guiding principles.

### Targets

- By 2020, 7.5 per cent of Queensland is gazetted as national park\*.
- By 2020, a minimum of 95 per cent of regional ecosystems is represented in national parks.
- By 2020, a minimum of 50 per cent of regional ecosystems is adequately represented in national parks.
- By 2020, all bioregions are conserved to a minimum target.
- By 2020, the variety of freshwater ecosystems are represented to agreed targets.

\* Target from Queensland's draft biodiversity strategy Building Nature's Resilience.

▲ The Mitchell Grass downs bioregion is the most poorly represented bioregions in Queensland's protected area system.

### 1.3 Build a more comprehensive system of marine parks, with appropriate protection mechanisms, around the state.

- a) Establish priority conservation approaches for each marine bioregion.
- b) Work with the Commonwealth Government in consultation with Traditional Owners and local communities to investigate options for a marine park system in the Gulf of Carpentaria and in the waters off the west coast of Cape York Peninsula to accommodate the range of uses such as fishing and recreational activities\*.

#### Targets

- By 2020, establish an expanded network of border-to-border marine parks\*.

### 1.4 Optimise the opportunities for expanding the protected area system.

- a) Identify all areas of Unallocated State Land (USL) that might be suitable for national park and participate in a process to allocate the most appropriate use to these areas.
- b) Ensure any government property dealings including land disposal are assessed against the Protected Areas for the Future methodology.
- c) Continue to transfer identified areas to national park tenure under the Statewide Forests process\*.
- d) Undertake the North Stradbroke Island (NSI) national park conversions and associated Indigenous Land Use Agreements\*.
- e) Work with the Australian National Reserve System program to secure maximum funding for Queensland national park acquisitions\*.
- f) Investigate options to increase the level of private sector investment in national park acquisitions and market these options through a prospectus\*.
- g) Prioritise Ecofund's Balance the Earth Trust funding towards strategic national park acquisitions and ongoing management.

\* Actions and targets from Queensland's draft biodiversity strategy Building Nature's Resilience.

► *Labichea brassii*, found in the Einasleigh Uplands bioregion, is listed as near threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

### 1.5 Build the nature refuge system, ensuring that these protected areas are selected and managed to play important roles in sustainable management of the wider landscape, in providing connectivity, and in complementing the conservation function of national parks.

- a) Support the declaration of nature refuges, including incentives and support to landholders entering into perpetual Conservation Agreements.
- b) Work through Trust for Nature and Balance the Earth operations to purchase selected properties and establish nature refuge agreements.
- c) Adopt the Protected Areas for the Future methodology to guide investment under the nature refuges program\*.
- d) Support the establishment of nature refuges in areas of critical connectivity identified through conservation corridor planning in Queensland's biodiversity strategy, Building Natures Resilience.
- e) Cooperatively establish nature refuges on Aboriginal freehold land at the request of Traditional Owners\*.

#### Targets

- By 2020, conservation agreements are finalised for a total of seven million hectares of nature refuges.



Gethin Morgan

- ▼ The granite hilltops have been a refuge from fire and changing climates over a long time period, allowing the conservation of species that have not survived anywhere else such as *Acacia porcata*.



Andrea Leverington

### 1.6 Progress World Heritage nominations.

- Finalise the work necessary to enable a World Heritage nomination for Cape York Peninsula to proceed with Traditional Owner consent\*.
- In consultation with Traditional Owners, the regional community and key stakeholders, develop the nomination for the recognition of Cooloola in the Fraser Island World Heritage Area for submission to the Commonwealth Government and UNESCO\*.

### 1.7 Support Indigenous Protected Areas.

- Support, at the request of Traditional Owners and to the extent of available resources, declaration and management of Indigenous Protected Areas as important components of the National Reserve System.

### 1.8 Cooperate with private protected areas.

- Cooperate with other land conservancies to develop and manage the best possible reserve system in Queensland, with private protected areas complementing the State reserve system.

\* Action from Queensland's draft biodiversity strategy Building Nature's Resilience.

### Beeran National Park—rugged ranges and precious plants.

Beeran National Park was gazetted in 2009. It was a long-standing park proposal due to its importance as a refuge for rare plants and its rugged scenery. This 7000 hectare national park lies in hilly granite country 80 kilometres south of Munduberra. It is a very important addition to the protected area system as it is a rare well-conserved remnant of the now extensively cleared Brigalow Belt. Two regional ecosystems in the park are not represented elsewhere in the reserve system.

The rugged granite outcrops of Beeran are a refuge for plant species, including three species found nowhere else in the world, and a number of other rare species. Spinifex and scattered shrubs and trees cover the rocky hillsides while on the peaks grow patches of montane heath. Brush-tailed rock wallabies shelter and feed in this granite country. Along the slopes and creek flats are grassy woodlands, home to wallabies, grey kangaroos and greater gliders. The creeks are seasonal with some semipermanent waterholes, but flow rapidly after rains, so the park contributes to catchment protection.

This park has very limited visitor facilities and access is by four-wheel drive only. It provides opportunities for remote adventure activities such as off-track bushwalking and remote camping.