

Rundle Range National Park and Rundle Range Resources Reserve

Management Plan

2000

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

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The Rundle Range National Park and Rundle Range Resources Reserve Management Plan 2000 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 plan's original management intent or direction.

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Contents

1. Management directions and purposes.....	3
1.1 Management directions	3
1.2 Purposes.....	3
2. Basis for management	4
2.1 Bioregional context.....	4
2.2 Values of Rundle Range National Park and Resources Reserve	4
2.2.1 Geology and landform	4
2.2.2 Plants and animals	4
2.2.3 Cultural heritage	5
2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic	5
2.2.5 Scientific and educational	5
2.2.6 Recreation and tourism	5
2.2.7 Economic	5
3. Management Strategies	6
3.1 Management strategies for Rundle Range National Park.....	6
3.1.1 Native plants and animals	6
3.1.2 Introduced plants and animals	6
3.1.3 Fire management	7
3.1.4 Landscape, soil and catchment protection	7
3.1.5 Cultural heritage	8
3.1.6 Recreation and tourism	8
3.1.7 Education and interpretation	9
3.1.8 Plan implementation and monitoring	9
3.2 Management strategies for Rundle Range Resources Reserve	9
3.2.1 Native plants and animals	9
3.2.2 Introduced plants and animals	10
3.2.3 Fire management	10
3.2.4 Landscape, soil and catchment protection	11
3.2.5 Cultural heritage	11
3.2.6 Education and interpretation	11
3.2.7 Resource use	11
3.2.8 Plan implementation and monitoring	12

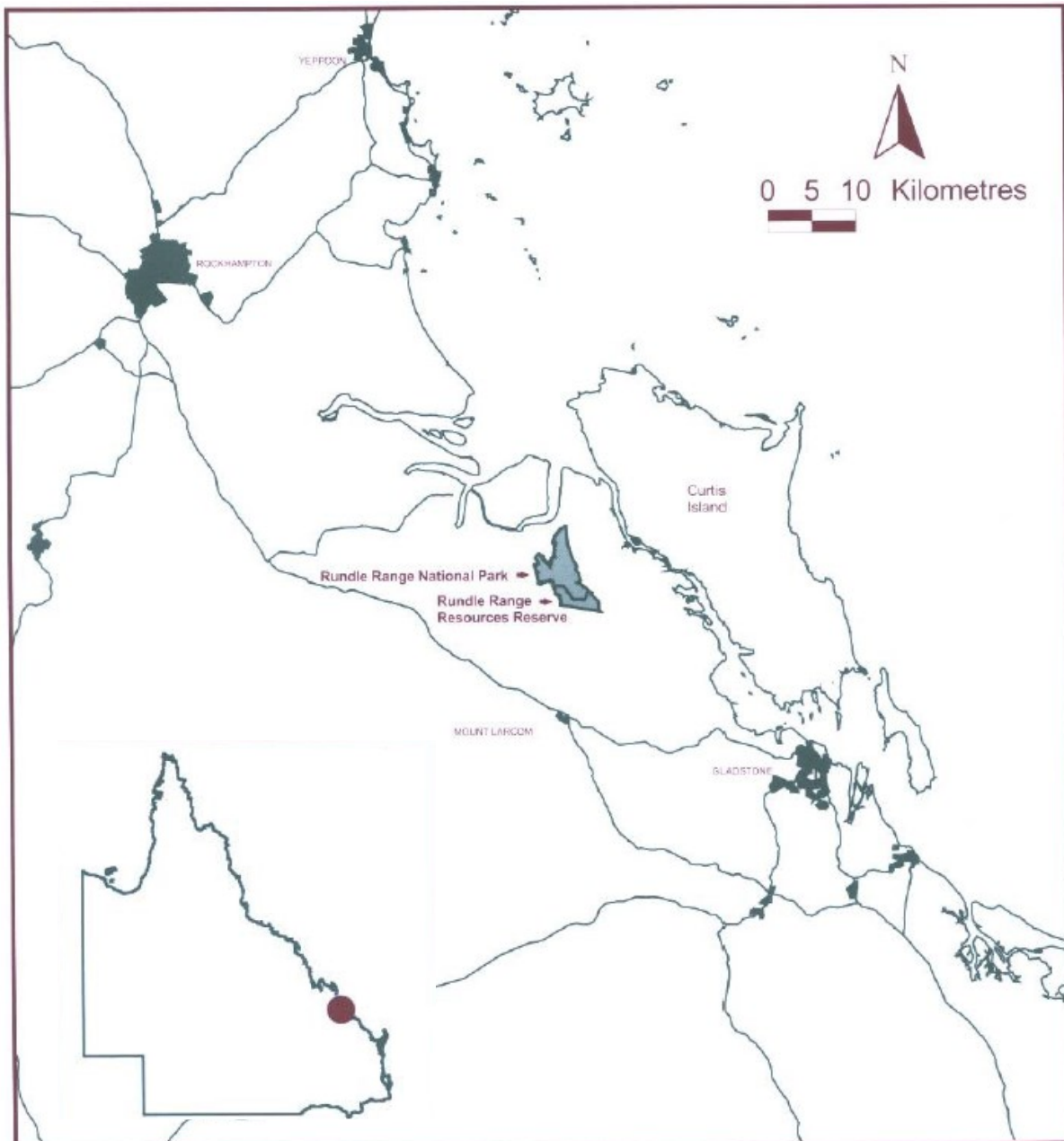
Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Rundle Range National Park and Rundle Range Resources Reserve will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that proposed to form the basis on which day-to-day management decisions are made.

This plan was prepared in October 1999, in accordance with s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Act). In 2023 the plan was extended, in keeping with s 120G of the Act. For further information on this plan or the planning process, please contact the Department of Environment and Science at ParkManagementPlans@des.qld.gov.au.

This management plan was prepared by Department of Environment and Science staff. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

Map 1. Rundle Range National Park and Rundle Range Resources Reserve



1. Management directions and purposes

1.1 Management directions

Rundle Range National Park covers an area of approximately 2,170 hectares (ha) and Rundle Range Resources Reserve is approximately 706 ha. Both fall within the shire of Calliope. The protected areas lie approximately 40 km north-west of Gladstone and 60 km south-east of Rockhampton on the western side of Rundle Range.

The resources reserve is managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and the Department of Mines and Energy (DME) as joint trustees. QPWS is primarily responsible for conservation and recreation matters, while DME is responsible for the management of matters related to mining.

The national park was gazetted to conserve an area of belah *Casuarina cristata* and dry rainforest. The national park will be managed to retain its biological values. This will be achieved by minimising the impacts of surrounding land use, weeds and feral animals. Management priority will be the maintenance of habitat types through a program of fire management and strategic weed control. The national park will operate as a low density recreation area where visitors must be totally self-reliant. No facilities or structures will be built on the national park.

The resources reserve was gazetted to conserve an area of eucalypt woodland that acts as a buffer to the adjacent national park. The reserve also allows for a proposed reservoir that may be developed on adjacent land as part of the Rundle Oil Shale project. The resources reserve will be managed by QPWS and DME as joint trustees. Management priority will be the maintenance of habitat types through a program of fire management. Recreation will not be encouraged in the resources reserve. The only facilities or structures that will be permitted on the resources reserve will be in relation to any future reservoir.

1.2 Purposes

The major purposes of management for Rundle Range National Park will be to ensure that:

- areas of belah, dry rainforest and other native vegetation communities are conserved
- plant and animal diversity are maintained
- problem weeds are actively managed and their spread significantly reduced
- areas which have suffered degradation from weed invasion and past clearing are rehabilitated
- appropriate fire management regimes protect plant and animal communities from the adverse effects of wildfires
- the park is kept free from disturbance caused by the encroachment of cattle
- visitor access to the park is provided; and
- Aboriginal groups, neighbours and the local community are aware of management issues and provided with opportunities to be involved in management.

The major purposes of management for Rundle Range Resources Reserve will be to ensure that:

- construction of a reservoir to service the Rundle Oil Shale project is provided for, while ensuring it has minimal impact on the reserve's natural and cultural values
- areas of dry rainforest and other native vegetation communities are conserved
- plant and animal diversity are maintained
- the reserve acts as a buffer to protect the adjacent national park from wildfires; and
- Aboriginal groups, neighbours and the local community are aware of management issues and provided with opportunities to be involved in management.

2. Basis for management

Rundle Range National Park is gazetted under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* as a national park and will be managed in accordance with s 17 of the Act which sets out the following principles for management:

- to provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values
- to present the area's cultural and natural resources and values; and
- to ensure that the only use of the area is nature-based and ecologically sustainable.

Rundle Range Resources Reserve is gazetted under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* as a resources reserve and will be managed in accordance with s 21 of the Act which sets out the following principles for management:

- recognise and, if appropriate, protect the area's cultural and natural resources
- provide for the controlled use of the area's cultural and natural resources; and
- ensure that the area is maintained predominantly in its natural condition.

Commercial forestry operations must not be conducted in a resources reserve.

The requirements of other legislation administered by the Service and other State and Commonwealth agencies will be met where necessary.

2.1 Bioregional context

Rundle Range National Park and Rundle Range Resources Reserve are surrounded by coastal plains merging into salt pans and mangroves associated with the estuarine complex between Curtis Island and the mouth of the Fitzroy River.

Rundle Range National Park was gazetted in 1990 and Rundle Range Resources Reserve was gazetted in 1993. They are both in the Brigalow Belt biogeographic region. The Rundle Range area is biogeographically important and represents an overlap between tropical and temperate species. The area contains significant rainforest remnants thought to date from the Tertiary period 3-10 million years ago. The Rundle Range area has been listed on the Register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission.

State Forest 60 lies adjacent to the park and reserve on the eastern side. Cattle grazing is the dominant surrounding land use and land to the south and the east has been partially cleared for pasture production. Waters to the north of the park are within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Mackay/Capricorn State Marine Park.

2.2 Values of Rundle Range National Park and Resources Reserve

2.2.1 Geology and landform

Rundle Range is a low range of hills 10 km long rising about 278 m above sea level. The range is a prominent strike ridge. It consists of cherts, sandstones and basic volcanics of the Doonside Formation (Curtis Island Group) which, due to their resistance to erosion, create the range's prominent topography. On the western slopes of the range, where the protected areas lie, the Berserker Beds have weathered to relatively gentle slopes overlain by a variety of podzolic and gravelly loam soils.

2.2.2 Plants and animals

The area is unique in that it supports a replica of typical inland woodland and dry rainforest associations in a coastal situation. The national park contains stands of belah *Casuarina cristata* and is one of the only places remaining in Queensland where intact belah dominated scrubs occur on the coast. Several plant and animal species are at or near their distribution limits at Rundle Range.

The national park conserves 20 vegetation communities, nine of which are dry rainforest types covering an area of about 500 hectares. The park also includes two *belah* dominated communities, and nine eucalypt dominated communities. The resources reserve is dominated by eucalypt species with isolated examples of *belah* and dry rainforest.

The national park contains plant species which are listed as rare under the *Queensland Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 1994* including *Graptophyllum excelsum*, *Ehretia grahamii*, *Dansiea elliptica* and *Actephila sessifolia*.

A variety of birds, reptiles and mammals inhabit the protected areas. The park contains animal species which are listed under the *Queensland Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 1994* as vulnerable, including the squatter pigeon *Geophaps scripta scripta* and the glossy black cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami*, and rare, including the square-tailed kite *Lophoictinia isura*.

2.2.3 Cultural heritage

Little is known about the significance of the protected areas to local Aboriginal people.

The Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng and Gurang people have made native title claim applications over areas that include the national park and resources reserve.

An old telegraph line traverses the national park. This line was constructed in the 1850s and ran between Curtis Island and the mainland. Many of the telegraph poles are still standing complete with insulators. The main access within the park follows the old telegraph line.

2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic

Rundle Range is a prominent local landmark. The national park has high scenic values because it covers a broad variety of landscapes including the range, coastal plains, saltpans and mangroves.

2.2.5 Scientific and educational

The transition zones between the area's vine, eucalypt and open casuarina forests provide a rare opportunity to study succession in drier rainforest types.

2.2.6 Recreation and tourism

The national park is suitable for the enthusiast bushwalker or naturalist. There are no facilities or walking tracks and the going is often very rough. Access to the park and reserve is difficult and should not be attempted during wet conditions. The park's natural beauty, high conservation value and botanical diversity make it a worthy destination for amateur botanists, serious nature lovers and scientists. The park provides access to Connor Creek and is used by locals as a boat launching site and fishing area. Other recreation opportunities include bush camping, hiking, bird watching and photography. Sand flies and mosquitoes are prolific. The resources reserve is seldom used for recreation.

2.2.7 Economic

Land to the east of the national park and resources reserve is underlain by major Rundle oil shale deposits. Mining of these may prove viable in the future and major economic benefits would result. Such a development may involve the construction of a dam on Monduran Creek, with a reservoir backing into the resources reserve. An overflow channel may also be required through the reserve to Gonong Creek.

3. Management Strategies

3.1 Management strategies for Rundle Range National Park

3.1.1 Native plants and animals

Current situation

Complex vegetation patterns have developed on the park. The park contains significant areas of dry rainforest and belah *Casuarina cristata* as well as mixed eucalypt forests and woodlands.

The park contains plants and animals that are listed as rare or vulnerable in the *Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 1994*. A total of 284 plant species and sub-species, and 84 animal species have been recorded. Some baseline data including herbarium samples and mapping of major vegetation communities has been compiled.

A monitoring site was established in 1995 in the belah dominated vegetation community.

Plant and animal species lists are regularly updated.

Desired outcomes

- The composition and extent of vegetation types and their associated fauna is maintained, subject to natural change.
- Knowledge of the extent and distribution of plant and animal species is increased.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Exclude fire from dry rainforest and the belah vegetation types.
- Continue the annual collection of information from the park's existing vegetation monitoring site.
- Establish new vegetation monitoring sites, particularly in areas where weed control and rehabilitation programs are being implemented.
- Modify management practices as a result of information acquired from the park monitoring program.
- Continue surveys to obtain more detailed fauna information.

3.1.2 Introduced plants and animals

Current situation

Major weeds on the park include lantana, creeping lantana, rubber vine, thatch grass *Hyparrhenia rufa*, dwarf poinsettia *Euphorbia cyathophora* and balloon cotton bush *Gomphocarpus physocarpus*.

There is a lantana control program which involves the release of a biological control agent, *Ectarga garcia* (a moth from South America whose larva eat the leaves of lantana). Chemical control of lantana also occurs in areas where this is feasible and on land adjacent to neighbouring properties. Trials of various chemicals were initially undertaken to determine the most effective control method to use in conjunction with fire.

There is a rubber vine control program which focuses on chemical control along drainage lines. This program has significantly reduced the amount of rubber vine in target areas. Biological control of rubber vine was introduced in 1995 however it has only had a limited impact.

Chemical control of infestations of thatch grass, dwarf poinsettia and balloon cotton bush has occurred, particularly along park access roads and firebreaks.

Introduced animals found on the park include cats and dogs. A free feeding program has been undertaken to determine the species and density of animals occurring on the park.

Desired outcomes

- Introduced plants are controlled and, where practical, eliminated from the park.
- The number of introduced animals on the park is reduced to the extent that they have no significant impact on native plant and animal populations.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Continue the weed control programs for lantana and rubber vine. Trial and, if successful, implement new strategies for weed control on the park.
- Continue to liaise with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to trial new biological control strategies for weeds. Continue to map the distribution of major weeds on the park and monitor the spread/ reduction of each major weed species.
- Coordinate weed control and fire management programs to maximise weed reduction.
- Investigate using contract labour for the control of major weed infestations.
- Liaise and negotiate with neighbours to ensure cooperative weed management occurs.
- Continue to survey the park for the presence of animals.
- A range of animal control measures, including shooting and baiting, will be investigated to determine the most effective and practical control method.

3.1.3 Fire management

Current situation

Fire intensity and frequency are significant factors in maintaining habitat diversity and distribution. Eucalypt communities require fire to regenerate. Dry rainforest and belah vegetation communities are both sensitive to fire.

The park does not have an approved fire management plan but does have a set of wildfire response procedures.

A prescribed burning program is implemented to protect fire sensitive vegetation communities and to promote biological diversity among eucalypt communities. The burning program also complements weed control programs as fire can assist in the eradication of rubber vine and lantana.

The fire history of the park is not well documented.

The Ranger-in-Charge of the park liaises with neighbours in relation to cooperative protection burns.

Desired outcomes

- Fire management is based on regionally adopted fire management practices.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Develop, maintain and implement a fire management plan composed of a fire management strategy, a fire management program and a wildfire response procedure.
- A primary fire management strategy will be the exclusion of fire from belah and dry rainforest communities.
- Continue to use fire as a major component of weed control programs.
- Participate in cooperative protection burns with neighbours. Ranger-in- Charge to liaise with park neighbours and the local rural fire brigade concerning QPWS fire management.

3.1.4 Landscape, soil and catchment protection

Current situation

Some areas within the national park were cleared for cattle grazing prior to gazettal.

Desired outcomes

- The park's landscapes are protected from disturbance.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Cleared areas will be allowed to naturally regenerate. Weed control will continue to ensure revegetation is dominated by native plant species.

3.1.5 Cultural heritage

Current situation

Little is known about the park's significance to local Aboriginal groups.

The Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng and Gurang people have made native title claim applications over areas that include the national park.

The park has an old telegraph line which was part of the original telegraph line between the mainland and Curtis Island.

Desired outcomes

- Cultural heritage issues are identified, and local Aboriginal groups are involved in the management of the park.
- Historic structures on the park are not disturbed.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Aboriginal groups will be encouraged to assist in identifying, documenting and protecting Aboriginal sites in the park.
- Consider the protection of all cultural sites before any new road or site development.

3.1.6 Recreation and tourism

Current situation

Visitors can access the park from Raglan or Ambrose along a road that runs through private property. The track is only suitable for 4WDs and does not always follow the gazetted alignment. Within the park the road leads to Sandfly Flats or Mosquito Flats. Roads are not well marked and visitors may become disorientated. Roads become impassable after rain.

Sandfly Flats is used as a boat launching area and occasionally for camping, although the high levels of sandflies and mosquitoes discourage most visitors from staying for long periods.

The park has no facilities and visitors must be self-reliant.

Desired outcomes

- The park has minimal infrastructure and visitors require a high level of self-reliance.
- Recreational access does not compromise the park's natural or cultural values.
- Visitors behave responsibly towards the park's natural and cultural features and ensure their own and other visitor's safety.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Camping will be permitted at Sandfly Flats. The use of fuel stoves for cooking will be encouraged.
- Campers will be required to obtain a camping permit at QPWS in Gladstone or Rockhampton prior to their arrival in the park. Visitors will be responsible for the removal of their own rubbish. No visitor amenities will be constructed.
- Visitor numbers and recreational impacts will be monitored.
- Recreational vehicle access will only be provided to Sandfly Flats and Mosquito Flats. Vehicle access to remaining areas of the park will be for management purposes only. Visitors are permitted walking access only to these areas.
- The Ranger-In-Charge will liaise with neighbours over park visitor access through their property. Signs will be erected to assist visitor access to the park, as required.

3.1.7 Education and interpretation

Current situation

The park has been mentioned in QPWS publications as a worthy site to visit for those interested in nature study. Limited interpretive material is provided for Rundle Range National Park.

Desired outcomes

- Visitors obtain information prior to entering the park.
- Visitors are aware of the limited facilities available and the need to be self-reliant.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Information will be provided at the QPWS offices in Gladstone and Rockhampton to assist tourists with their park visit.

3.1.8 Plan implementation and monitoring

Current situation

The park is managed by a QPWS management unit in Gladstone which is responsible for managing protected areas in the of Gladstone, Calliope, Banana, and Duaringa.

Desired outcomes

- The management plan is an effective set of operational guidelines.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Ranger-in-Charge to submit a brief annual report on the success of the plan's implementation.
- Review the management plan within 10 years from approval according to s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

3.2 Management strategies for Rundle Range Resources Reserve

3.2.1 Native plants and animals

Current situation

The reserve is dominated by mixed eucalypt forests and woodlands. It also contains limited areas of dry rainforest and belah *Casuarina cristata*.

The reserve contains plants and animals that are listed as rare or vulnerable in the *Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 1994*.

Some baseline data including herbarium samples and mapping of major vegetation communities have been compiled.

Plant and animal species lists are available for the national park and resources reserve.

Desired outcomes

- The composition and extent of vegetation types and their associated fauna is maintained, subject to natural change or any future reservoir construction.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Exclude fire from dry rainforest and the belah vegetation types, where practical.
- Modify management practices as a result of new information acquired from the national park's monitoring program.
- Continue incidental surveys to obtain more detailed flora and fauna information.

3.2.2 Introduced plants and animals

Current situation

Major weeds on the reserve include lantana, rubber vine, thatch grass, dwarf poinsettia and balloon cotton bush.

A lantana control program involves the release of a biological control agent, *Ectarga garcia* (a moth from South America whose larva eat the leaves of lantana). Chemical control of lantana also occurs in areas where this is feasible and on land adjacent to neighbouring properties.

Biological control of rubber vine was introduced in 1995 however it has only had a limited impact.

Chemical control of infestations of thatch grass, dwarf poinsettia and balloon cotton bush has occurred, particularly along reserve access roads and firebreaks.

Introduced animals found on the reserve include cats and dogs. A free feeding program has been undertaken to determine the species and density of animals occurring on the reserve.

Desired outcomes

- Introduced plants are controlled where practical.
- The number of introduced animals on the reserve or entering neighbouring properties from the reserve is reduced.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Continue biological weed control programs for lantana.
- Continue to map the distribution of major weeds.
- Coordinate weed control and fire management programs to maximise weed reduction.
- Liaise and negotiate with neighbours to ensure cooperative weed management occurs.
- Continue incidental fauna surveys to detect the presence of animals.
- A range of animal control measures, including shooting and baiting, will be investigated to determine the most effective and practical control methods.

3.2.3 Fire management

Current situation

Fire intensity and frequency are significant factors in maintaining habitat diversity and distribution. Eucalypt communities require fire to regenerate. Dry rainforest and belah vegetation communities are both sensitive to fire.

The reserve does not have an approved fire management plan but does have a set of wildfire response procedures.

A prescribed burning program is implemented to protect fire sensitive vegetation communities and to promote biological diversity among eucalypt communities. The burning program also complements weed control programs as fire can assist in the eradication of rubber vine and lantana.

The fire history of the reserve is not well documented.

The Ranger-in-Charge of the reserve liaises with neighbours in relation to cooperative protection burns.

Desired outcomes

- Fire management is based on regionally adopted fire management practices.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Include the resources reserve in a fire management plan for the adjacent national park. The primary fire management strategy will be to use the reserve as a buffer zone against wildfire entering the adjacent national park.
- Encouraging species diversity within the eucalypt communities in the reserve will also be considered as part of the fire management strategy.
- Continue to use fire as a major component of weed control programs on the reserve.
- Participate in cooperative protection burns with neighbours. Ranger-in-Charge to liaise with reserve neighbours and the local rural fire brigade concerning QPWS fire management.

3.2.4 Landscape, soil and catchment protection

Current situation

There are several dams within the reserve. Some of these dams still hold water.

Desired outcomes

- The reserve's landscapes are protected from disturbance, subject to natural change or any future mining activity.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- No alteration or management of the dams will occur.

3.2.5 Cultural heritage

Current situation

Little is known about the significance of the reserve to local traditional Aboriginal groups. The Gooreng Gooreng and Gurang people have lodged native title claim applications over areas that include the resources reserve.

Desired outcomes

- Cultural heritage issues are identified and local traditional Aboriginal groups are involved in the management of the reserve.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Aboriginal groups will be encouraged to assist in identifying, documenting and protecting Aboriginal sites in the reserve.
- Consider the protection of all cultural sites before any new road or site development.

3.2.6 Education and interpretation

Current situation

Some management signs are located on the reserve.

Desired outcomes

- Visitors are informed of the status of the reserve.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Maintain boundary signage on all tracks to the reserve.
- No information will be provided for the general public other than to make them aware that the reserve is not suitable for recreation.

3.2.7 Resource use

Current situation

The reserve is covered by Exploration Permit for Minerals No. 4612, currently held by Esso Australia Resources Ltd. Esso intends to use a section of the reserve for a reservoir, as part of their Rundle Shale Oil project, which is proposed on adjacent land to the east.

Part of the reserve is currently being grazed by the lessee of the neighbouring State Forest 60. This grazing is occurring under an informal arrangement which dates back prior to the original reserve gazettal.

The reserve is fenced along its gazetted boundary to the south, west and north. In the reserve's eastern section, the existing fence does not follow the gazetted boundary, but is located at least 1 km within the reserve. Cattle grazing and frequent burning occurs in the section east of this fence line.

Desired outcomes

- Any reservoir or grazing activity has limited impact on significant cultural sites and the reserve's special natural values.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- If the proposed reservoir is constructed under a mining lease, an Environmental Overview Strategy (EMOS) and a Plan of Operations will be required before any site alteration commences. Such plans must cover ways of minimising erosion and disturbance to the reserve's natural and cultural values. DME will consult with QPWS on these matters before they are approved. If the reservoir is constructed under the *Water Resources Act 1989*, the trustees will assist in the preparation of any environmental management plan.
- The mining company must obtain all relevant permits required under the *Nature Conservation Regulation 1994* for activities not authorised under the *Mineral Resources Act 1989* or *Water Resources Act 1989*.
- Water extraction, other than from the proposed reservoir, will be subject to the approval of the trustees.
- Any grazing on the reserve will occur under a Stock Grazing Permit issued by the QPWS.
- Investigate the possibility of locating the eastern fence line of the reserve along the gazetted boundary, and construct the fence if appropriate.

3.2.8 Plan implementation and monitoring

Current situation

The reserve is managed by a QPWS management unit in Gladstone which is responsible for managing protected areas in the shires of Gladstone, Calliope, Banana, and Duinga.

Mining related activity is managed by the DME based in Rockhampton.

Desired outcomes

- The management plan is an effective set of operational guidelines.

Policies, guidelines and actions

- Ranger-in-Charge to submit a brief annual report on the success of the plan's implementation.
- Review the management plan within 10 years from approval according to s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* or sooner, should mining interest cease.