

St Helena Island National Park

Management Statement

2013



Queensland
Government

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

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The St Helena Island 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:	75.1ha
Bioregion:	South Eastern Queensland
QPWS region:	South East
Local government estate/area:	Brisbane City
State electorate:	Lytton

Legislative framework

✓	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
✓	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
✓	<i>Marine Parks Act 2004</i>
✓	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>
✓	<i>Queensland Heritage Act 1992</i>

Plans and agreements

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

Thematic strategies

✓	Level 2 Fire Strategy
✓	Level 2 Pest Strategy

Vision

St Helena Island will have a strong ongoing focus on preserving the built fabric of the site, and developing and implementing high standards in interpretive and educational programs. The island will also be managed to conserve and maximise its inherent natural values.

Conservation purpose

St Helena Island National Park was gazetted in 1979 primarily for its historic and cultural values. The site is listed as being of national significance on the State Heritage Register (Place ID 600315). St Helena Island was the first national park in Queensland to conserve, manage and present an extensive, complex non-Aboriginal historical place to the public.

While the park was gazetted primarily for its cultural heritage values, the island has significant natural values that require ongoing proactive management. St Helena Island is surrounded by Marine Park Green Zone and the area is also included on the international Ramsar listing for its populations of migratory and resident shorebirds. The island is listed as part of the nationally significant Moreton Bay Aggregation Wetlands under the Directory of Important Wetlands. Natural and assisted restoration of the natural ecosystems will be nurtured but restricted to areas that are not part of the interpreted historic landscape.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

St Helena National Park is located on St Helena Island in Moreton Bay five kilometres east of the mouth of the Brisbane River. It lies between Green Island to the south and Mud Island to the north and can be viewed from the mainland foreshore. The park is one of the unique scenic icons of Moreton Bay featuring the historic stone ruins in manicured surrounds and set against a marine backdrop.

Some of the park's agricultural land below the penal structures is still grazed today by a small herd of beef cattle consistent with the sites' cultural heritage. This adds a unique component to the visual character of St Helena and aids in the management of the historic landscape.

Sharing the island at its northern end is a small commercial radio communications infrastructure base with three towers; a feature of the Moreton Bay skyline.

The park is part of Queensland's internationally significant Moreton Bay Ramsar site, covering more than 110,000 hectares (ha). St Helena National Park also forms part of the Moreton Bay Aggregation wetlands, which are listed as nationally significant on the Australian Wetlands Database. It is recognised as being one of the largest estuarine bays in Australia, enclosed by barrier islands of vegetated dunes, which together with the permanent lakes of the sand island provide a diverse and rich suite of wetland habitats. The wetlands are particularly significant as habitat for migratory waders and dugongs *Dugong dugon* (Australian Government 2012).

Surrounding the island is Moreton Bay Marine Park.

Regional ecosystems

The national park estate covers roughly 50% of the island and is now comprised of almost entirely 'non-remnant' vegetation. Its adjoining and low lying lands lease tenure is estuarine mangrove wetlands consisting of regional ecosystems 12.1.2 and 12.1.3.

The historic pre-cleared vegetation of the above tidal section of the island is uncertain but historical accounts as early as 1865 use such terminology as vine scrub, 'new pine', forest dominated by rainforest species and timber that was unsuitable for building. The escarpment from the north and eastern side of the island is now a mixture of recovering native vine forest species and exotics.

Native plants and animals

St Helena Island National Park and its surrounding mangrove and saltmarsh communities provide habitat for the endangered little tern *Sternula albifrons* and birds listed under international agreements (tables 1 and 2).

The island was totally cleared of native vegetation during the construction of the penal complex but recovering littoral vine forest community is establishing itself along the east and south-east escarpments. This natural regeneration is being aided by identifying and managing the threats and implementing some selective plantings.

More work is required to identify, monitor and assist the emerging plants but early indications are that some of the species on this elevated red soil are unique to this region.

Aboriginal culture

The Traditional Owners of the region refer to St Helena Island as 'Noogoon'. It is suggested that the island was not large enough to support permanent habitation but was instead used for harvesting marine based resources and flying foxes (Penny 2010).

Today evidence of former aboriginal use exists providing a tangible link to this history including a shell midden and two areas of stone artefact scatters on the south-western beach ridges.

Shared-history culture

During the 1840s and 50s the island was a base for the hunting and processing of dugong for meat and oil, which was valued for medicinal purposes. For some time this business was highly profitable, however, due to mismanagement and diminishing supplies of dugong, it eventually failed.

In 1865, the vegetation of the island was mangrove swamp, scrub land and grass flats. Its isolation made it an ideal location for a quarantine station. Buildings were designed by Charles Tiffin, Colonial Architect, and construction work commenced in 1865 using labour from the prison hulk 'Proserpine', moored at the mouth of the Brisbane River. The first structure completed was a lock-up for the prisoners working on the island. Work proceeded slowly and by 1867 overcrowding in Brisbane prisons had increased to such an extent that it was decided to convert the proposed quarantine station into a prison and to retain the existing quarantine facilities at Dunwich (Queensland Heritage Register).

For the next 65 years, over 9,000 men were incarcerated within its prison walls (Penny 2010). The remains of the prison and associated buildings and gardens can still be seen today. The prison was at its peak from the 1890s through to the end of the First World War when it was Queensland's primary high security prison. It closed as a penal establishment in 1933. Following 1933 the island was mainly leased for farming until the last lessee (Chas Carroll) left in 1986.

St Helena Island is important in demonstrating the evolution of Queensland's history. It is the earliest attempt in Queensland at providing prison facilities which were essentially self-sufficient and aimed at providing inmates with the opportunity for self-improvement and rehabilitation. As such it provides rare evidence for the operation of a colonial era prison (Queensland Heritage Register).

The cultural record of the island's history also includes a considerable collection of artefacts, historic photographs and documentation covering the prison era.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

St Helena Island's historic infrastructure can be viewed from adjacent bay side vantage points and from vessels in the bay. Additionally, view points on the island itself provide an elevated view of Moreton Bay and the Scenic Rim. St Helena Island's scenic landscape featuring the historic cay stone ruins in manicured surrounds, with scattered groves of trees and adjoining farming paddocks, set against a marine backdrop is unique in Queensland. It is considered by local people as an accessible and serene island to visit away from the bustle of the city.

Access to the island is via independent or commercial vessels. Independent travellers typically anchor in the shallow bay to the west and make use of the southern picnic grounds and southern beach areas.

Long established commercial activities are in place with local tourist operators and Education Queensland. The visitation is primarily school groups, however, there has been a slight decrease in numbers due largely to increased costs and impromptu changes to commercial transport scheduling.

There is significant potential for growth of non-school visitor use which, to date, has predominantly been visitors from the regional catchment. Limited marketing and a lack of regular scheduled services have been identified as significant factors in restricting the growth of visitor use of the site.

St Helena is a potential site for cultural events, such as art, music and theatre opportunities. There is ongoing interest from a variety of groups, however, the logistical issue of island access has limited the outcomes to date. Applications of this nature will continue to be considered on their merit and whether resources are available to support the event in question.

Safety of visitors is paramount. To ensure safe access is provided, ongoing maintenance will be undertaken through regular site inspections and review of visitor access guidelines and strategies.

Community relations are an important component of the management goals for the St Helena National Park. Management will aim to increase usage of the park by ensuring incoming proposals and applications from interested user groups are assessed on a case by case basis.

The island's primary use is a day visitor site and camping is not allowed due to the potential safety risks.

Education and science

Interpretation and education programs have been established for the past 25 years. However, there still remains a significant capacity for increasing the potential of both general interpretation and educational programs with the advent of the national education curriculum and further development of innovative education programs.

Accreditation courses and current strategies work well to maximise the education objectives. Ongoing support is given to commercial operators via training of guides and access to research and documentation about the historical record. This also requires ongoing monitoring of standards of interpretive tours to ensure maintenance of minimal standards and to support the commercial tourist guides in their work.

The current museum display was installed in 2000 and is still of a high quality. Further interpretive displays and signage installed in the museum and elsewhere on the island would augment the core display and provide new attractions that would refresh local interest in the island.

With the advent of the national educational curriculum, there is a need to develop a new interpretive and educational strategy for the island. The development of a dedicated interactive website would also significantly enhance access and create new dynamic options for presenting, recording and utilising the cultural heritage record of the island.

Having all guides undertake the accreditation course under Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre (MBEEC) standards not only assists in training the commercial guides but is also a major strategy in managing the integrity and accuracy of the historic record.

Research into the original (pre-1860s clearing) habitat is necessary and more work is required to identify and monitor the emerging plants along the south-eastern escarpments to assist the restoration of littoral vine forest.

Considerable research into the historic record has been undertaken in the past but much more remains to be done. Local authors and community interest groups (the Queensland Prison and Penal Association) are the primary groups undertaking contemporary research. There is considerable potential to develop more formal partnerships with the University of Queensland and other tertiary groups to undertake further archaeological projects or other related works.

Partnerships

Education Queensland - MBEEC has been the major partner in managing and presenting the values of the site for the past 25 years. There is a strong relationship and partnership with MBEEC and the potential to further expand opportunities by running more joint programs between MBEEC and QPWS.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

The park is managed under a Level 2 Pest Management Strategy.

A number of pest plants have been recorded on St Helena National Park. At present Mossman River grass *Cenchrus echinatus*, cat's claw *Caesalpinia decapetala* and lantana *Lantana camara* are presenting a moderate impact. The others pest plants are only causing minor problems in grazing and recreation areas. Current management as prescribed in the pest management strategy is to prevent the spread of pest plants and control any new infestations of Mossman River grass.

Many other exotic species including mango, jacaranda, oleander, Brazilian cherry tree, custard apple and camphor laurel were planted and are part of the historic landscape. They are not considered pests but in some cases cause a threat to historic buildings. All trees are regularly assessed and removed if posing a threat to infrastructure or safety. The fact that St Helena is an island significantly lessens the threat of the spread of any introduced plants to other properties.

Peacocks are thought to have been introduced on the island in the 1970's. The lack of natural predators saw the population grow rapidly over the past decades and they have caused problems by roosting on and damaging cay-stone walls, spreading pest plant species and generally creating a nuisance and mess by sheer weight of numbers. All the females were removed years ago with the remaining few males providing a connection with the past but with

no ability to breed.

A handful of red-necked wallabies *Macropus rufogriseus* were also introduced in the 1980s. The growing population has resulted in erosion of hillsides, damage to regrowth and regeneration of natural plant species, spread of pest plants.

Fire management

The current level 2 fire management strategy designates the whole park as protection zone due to the cultural heritage nature of this site; that is the buildings surrounded by maintained lawns and fringing mangroves. The management of fire fuel is achieved by mechanical and grazing methods. The small areas of developing natural revegetation along the escarpments will be reviewed in the future as to their potential fire threat.

Infrastructure management

Weathering is the greatest threat to the remaining fabric of the penal complex. Cay-stone was the primary building material and was quarried from the island. It is soft, porous and consequently is very susceptible to the elements.

Conservation of the cay stone walls has been undertaken using a variety of techniques. These include direct propping of walls, lime capping and constructing roofing over individual structures. The Stores Building, the largest original building on site, was protected by the installation of a floating roof structure in 2004. Several other structures suitable for similar works have been identified for future protection. These include the blacksmith shop and a representative of the remaining sugar silos.

The major vegetation threats to the site include the germination of fig and casuarina seedlings in the building structures along with advancing tree roots and overhanging branches. This threat is managed by periodic site inspection and act to remove these threats.

Termite activity requires regular inspections and treatment to minimise the ongoing threat to Chief Warder's Quarters (the museum). This is the only original timber and tin building remaining on the island.

A long-term risk from beach erosion on the southern aspect has the potential to undermine the lime kiln and two cemeteries. The sea wall and ongoing colonisation of mangroves currently provides protection but the situation requires ongoing monitoring.

A restricted access area has been in place since the 1980s. It covers most of the historic zone and only allows legal access for people who are accompanied by an accredited tour guide or QPWS staff. This has proven to be the major strategy in keeping the site and visitors safe. It also further enhances the interpretive value of the site by having visitors going on guided tours and maximises the opportunities and market for commercial operators.

References and resources

Australian Government 2012, Directory of Important Wetlands website <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/wetlands/report.pl>

Penny L 2010, St Helena Island Moreton Bay - An Historical Account, Inspire publishing.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Landscape</p> <p>The national park is maintained in its unique historic landscape consistent with its cultural heritage status.</p>	<p>Maintain and enhance the remaining historic garden elements and replant significant heritage vegetation.</p> <p>Monitor and manage long-term erosion threat to the lime kiln and two cemeteries on the southern aspect.</p> <p>Maintain the modified landscape consistent with its cultural heritage status.</p>
<p>Native plants and animals</p> <p>Animal and plant surveys, mapping and monitoring contribute to a better knowledge base for ecological management and securing viable populations.</p>	<p>Identify and manage threats to the recovering littoral vine forest community establishing itself along the east and south-east escarpments.</p> <p>Research pre-clearing and monitor current vegetation in east and the south-east escarpments and assist natural regeneration with some selective plantings.</p> <p>Initiate regular shorebird monitoring on the island four times per year in line with Queensland Wader Study Group counts in Moreton Bay. Identify and act on any disturbance threats.</p> <p>Implement a program of incidental recordings of all wildlife on site with the addition of expertise where required to improve knowledge gaps.</p> <p>Continue to remove sick and injured red-necked wallabies while investigating a more specific management regime for managing rapid population increase.</p>
<p>Aboriginal culture</p> <p>Aboriginal cultural heritage sites are protected.</p>	<p>Protect the Aboriginal cultural heritage sites by preventing any works in the vicinity and not publicly identifying site locations.</p> <p>Encourage Traditional Owners to identify, interpret and preserve the Aboriginal cultural history within the historic landscape.</p>
<p>Shared-history culture</p> <p>The distinctive quality of the historic landscapes are preserved and presented in an appropriate format.</p> <p>Historic records, data, photographs and artefacts are preserved.</p>	<p>Maintain ongoing preservation and maintenance programs and develop more comprehensive infrastructure monitoring programs.</p> <p>Continue to develop awareness and understanding of the cultural heritage values and significance by working with local community and user groups in development and delivery of education and interpretation programs.</p> <p>Support appropriate research and cultural heritage programs such as development of historic records and associated systems, by research institutions and community groups.</p> <p>Establish specialised cultural heritage staff expertise to lead and coordinate cultural heritage programs in the Moreton Bay Region with a focus on Heritage Parks.</p>
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities</p> <p>Presentation values of the park are improved.</p> <p>Suitable and appropriate interpretive and educational programs are developed to suit the historical context of the island.</p> <p>The quality of visitor experience is ensured and safety maintained.</p>	<p>Develop an interpretive and educational strategy for the island, considering:</p> <p>The development of a dedicated interactive website which may further significantly enhance access and create new dynamic options for presenting, recording and utilising the cultural heritage record of the island.</p> <p>Working with community stakeholders and partners (e.g. Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre) and commercial operators to develop, implement and manage interpretive and educational programs.</p> <p>Further enhanced access for the public and educational groups by the creation of internet web based sites, CD Roms and adopting developing effective technologies.</p> <p>Commercial Operators will be required under their commercial activity permits to have their guides accredited under QPWS and MBEEC standards.</p>

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
Safe access to the island is maintained for visitors. More regular commercial services are made available.	Continue to support the local tourism industry by training, accrediting and supporting guides in conjunction with the MBEEC Continue to evaluate and support suitable proposals to utilise the site for other cultural and recreational activities (e.g. festivals, art projects and events). Work with commercial operators to provide more structured visitation schedules. Review and review aging interpretive displays and information.

Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Species of conservation significance

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	little tern	Endangered		High

Table 2: Bird species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	BONN	JAMBA	ROKAMBA	CAMBA
<i>Ardea ibis</i>	cattle egret	-	✓	-	✓
<i>Ardea modesta</i>	eastern great egret	-	✓	-	✓
<i>Charadrius bicinctus</i>	double-banded plover	✓	-	-	-
<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	lesser sand plover	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	eastern reef egret	-	-	-	✓
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	white-bellied sea-eagle	-	-	-	✓
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian tern	-	-	-	✓
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	-	✓	-	-
<i>Pandion cristatus</i>	eastern osprey	✓	-	-	-
<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	pacific golden plover	-	-	✓	-
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	little tern	✓	✓	✓	✓

BONN: Bonn Convention

CAMBA: China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA: Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA: Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement