

Bakers Creek Conservation Park

Management Plan

2000

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

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The Bakers Creek Conservation Park 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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Summary

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

This original plan was prepared in October 1999, in accordance with s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (the 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. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

1. Management directions and purposes

1.1 Management directions

Bakers Creek Conservation Park is located 6 kilometres (km) south of Mackay and 4 km east of the Bakers Creek township. Park management will focus on the protection of shorebird habitat.

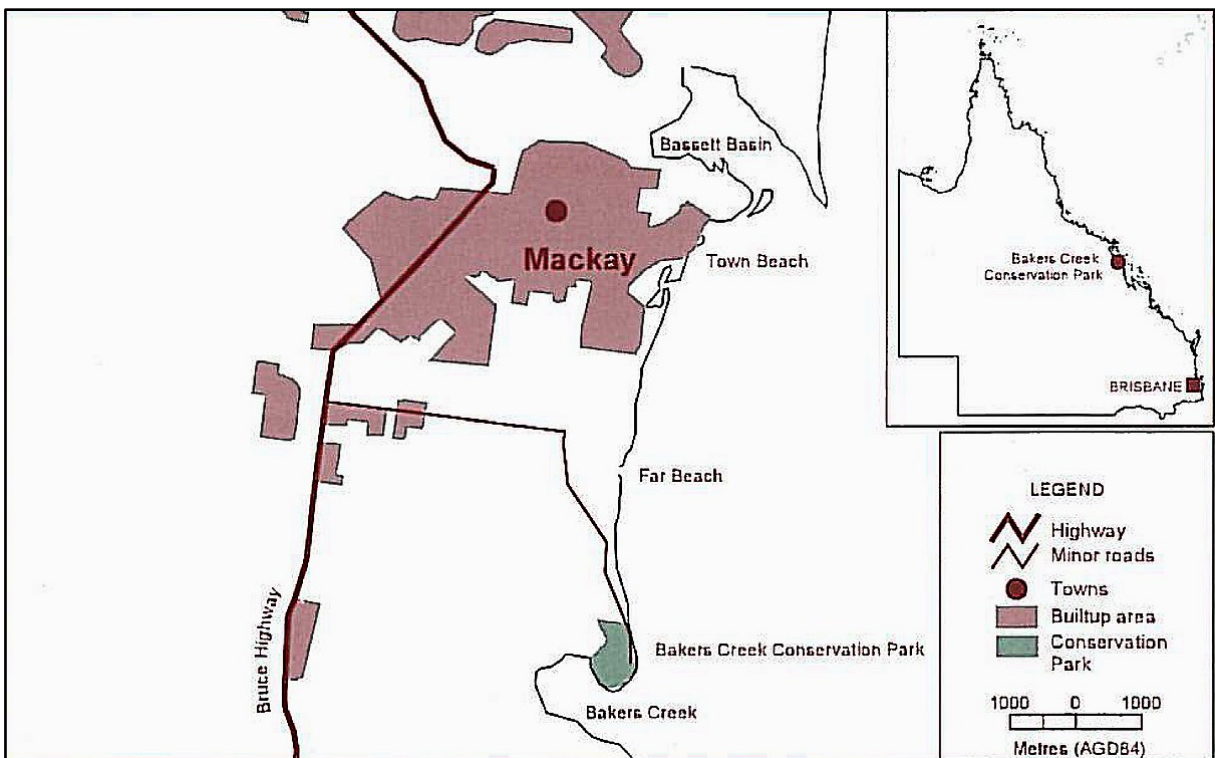
Low impact recreation will be allowed as long as this poses no threat to shorebird habitat and nesting sites. No visitor facilities will be provided on the park.

Where monitoring programs suggest that recreational use is adversely affecting shorebird breeding behaviour, then temporary closure of the park during the nesting season will be considered.

1.2 Purposes

The major purposes of management of Bakers Creek Conservation Park will be to ensure that:

- shorebird habitat and nesting sites are protected, and breeding behaviour is not detrimentally affected by recreational use of the park
- mangrove and dune vegetation is maintained in its natural condition, and is protected from grazing and weed infestation
- rare and threatened plant and animal species are identified and monitored to ensure their protection from potential threats
- disturbance of fragile dune systems by vehicles is prevented
- Aboriginal artefacts are identified and protected from potential threats
- self-reliant recreational, scientific and educational use of the park is allowed provided that these activities do not threaten the area's ecological integrity
- neighbours, local government, Aboriginal people with traditional links to the area and other interested parties are made aware of park management issues and are provided with opportunities to contribute to management; and
- the Mackay Port Authority has continued access to the beach for plane recovery.



Map 1. Location map of Bakers Creek Conservation Park

2. Basis for management

Bakers Creek Conservation Park is gazetted under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and must be managed under s 20 of the Act to:

- conserve and present the area's cultural and natural resources and their values.
- provide for the permanent conservation of the area's natural condition to the greatest possible extent; and
- ensure that any commercial use of the area's natural resources, including fishing and grazing is ecologically sustainable.

2.1 Regional and management context

Bakers Creek Conservation Park covers 46 hectares and lies within the Sarina-Proserpine Lowlands natural province of the Central Mackay Coast biogeographical region. Park vegetation includes samphire flats, mangroves, Casuarina strand, eucalypt open forest and beach scrub on dunes. The park is part of the Sandringham Bay-Bakers Creek aggregation which is considered to be a wetland of national significance. Extensive expanses of intertidal and shallow water habitat, shoreline diversity, and the extent of mangroves make this a nationally important area for shorebirds (Australian Nature Conservation Agency, 1996). Many of the shorebird species and their habitat are protected by international agreements. The clearing of coastal lowlands for urban or agricultural development and subsequent altered hydrology threaten the integrity of coastal wetland and mangrove communities, and increase the regional importance of Bakers Creek Conservation Park

Park management is undertaken by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Mackay District Office. The park has no permanent ranger presence. Access is primarily by boat, although there is also an access track through private property.

2.2 Values of Bakers Creek Conservation Park

2.2.1 Geology and landform

The landforms of the park include intertidal flats, beaches, estuaries and low dune complexes. The geology consists of Quaternary sand, silt, mud and gravels. Dune systems are particularly prone to erosion when vegetation cover is disturbed.

2.2.2 Plants and animals

The park contains four major vegetation associations: littoral areas of samphire flats and mangroves, beach scrub, eucalypt open forest with beach scrub elements and casuarina strand community. Dominant species within the park include tuckeroo *Cupaniopsis anatoroides*, cocky apple *Planchonia toreya*, red ash *Alphitonia excelsa*, Moreton Bay ash *Torymbia tesselfaris*, ribbonwood *Euroschinus falcata* and coastal casuarina *Casuarina equisetifolia*. The mangrove communities of the Mackay area are diverse and include smooth-barked grey mangrove *Avicennia eucalyptifolia*, small stilted mangrove *Rhizophora stylosa* and white flowered black mangrove *Lumnitzera racemosa*.

Birdlife is prolific. The park supports a population of the vulnerable beach stone-curlew *Esacus neglectus*. The park is part of an area considered of international importance for several species of migratory shorebirds which are protected by international agreements (the Japan /Australia Migratory Bird Agreement and the China/ Australia Migratory Bird Agreement). These species include the lesser sand (Mongolian) plover *Charadius mongolus*, eastern curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, great knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and sooty oystercatcher *Haemotopus fuliginosus*. The area is of national importance for the terek sandpiper *Tringa terek*, bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica* and ruddy turnstone *Arenaria interpres*. Other species of note recorded on the park include the pied imperial pigeon *Ducula bitolor* and orange-footed scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt*.

Other than birdlife, no detailed surveys have been undertaken, and the presence of other rare and threatened plant and animal species is unknown. Low density nesting of the flatback turtle *Natator depressa* and infrequent nesting of the green turtle *Chelonia mydas* has been reported in the area.

2.2.3 Cultural heritage

Aboriginal middens are found within the park, however no other information on the area's traditional use by Aboriginal people and its cultural significance is available.

Queensland's first government Aboriginal reserve was established in 1871 across the creek from the park. The reserve was established for humanitarian reasons and to provide a cheap pool of labour for the emerging sugar industry. The reserve struggled along for 14 years with mixed support and limited money from the government. Eventually pressure to open the land up for selection convinced the government to close what was left of the reserve in 1885.

2.2.4 Scenic and aesthetic

The beaches fringing the park are overhung with coastal she-oaks and provide undisturbed views of the ocean, nearby islands and mangrove areas to the south.

2.2.5 Scientific and educational

The primary scientific value of the park lies in its shorebird population. The park may present opportunities for research on the populations, ecological and breeding behaviour and habitat requirements of several shorebird species. The park's proximity to Mackay and Bakers Creek means it has potential for educational use by both school and university groups.

2.2.6 Recreation and tourism

The park is currently used by visitors to access Bakers Creek for fishing and crabbing, and for nature-based recreation, such as picnicking and bird-watching. No visitor facilities are provided.

3. Management strategies

3.1 Native plants and animals

Current situation

Species of shorebirds found within the park and surrounding areas are well documented. Migratory shorebirds are protected under the JAMBA and CAMBA agreements. Beach stone-curlews (vulnerable under the *Nature Conservation Wildlife Regulations 1994*) have been recorded on the park. The park is considered to contain beach stone-curlew nesting sites.

Little information exists on the park's other animals or plants. Detailed surveys have not been undertaken. The presence of rare or threatened species is unknown.

Desired outcomes

- Migratory shorebirds and their habitat are protected in accordance with international agreements.
- Beach stone-curlew nesting sites are protected from disturbance.
- The integrity and extent of native plant and animal communities are maintained.
- More extensive knowledge of the park's plants and animals is gained through surveys and monitoring programs.
- The habitat of any rare or threatened plant and animal species is identified and conserved.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Protect migratory shorebirds and their habitat in accordance with the JAMBA and CAMBA agreements.
- Undertake plant and animal surveys of the park.
- Establish a monitoring program to assess changes in plant and animal communities. Monitoring programs will pay attention to the impacts of indiscriminate vehicle use on native plants and animals, and to the presence of weed and feral animal species.
- Protect the nesting areas of the beach stone-curlew. If monitoring programs suggest that recreational use of the park is detrimentally affecting beach stone-curlew breeding behaviour, then the park will be temporarily closed during the breeding season.

3.2 Introduced plants and animals**Current situation**

Detailed information on weed type and extent is unavailable. Lantana, prickly pear, snakeweed and red-headed cotton bush have been recorded on the park.

The presence of feral animals is not documented, although feral cats, pigs and cane toads are likely to be present. Cats and pigs would present a particular threat to bird life, especially when birds are nesting.

A fence, which excludes neighbouring stock, is constructed within the park.

Desired outcomes

- Weeds and feral animals are managed so that their presence has no significant impact on native plants and animals.
- Where possible, complete eradication of feral species on the park is achieved.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Weeds, feral animals and other threats will be identified and controlled. Special consideration will be given to the control of weeds along the park boundary to prevent new weed species from spreading into the park.
- Stock grazing on the park will not be permitted. Relocate the fenceline to the correct park boundary.
- Liaise and negotiate with the park neighbour in relation to maintaining fencelines in stock-proof condition, in accordance with the Service's Good Neighbour Policy.

3.3 Landscape, soil and catchment protection**Current situation**

An unnecessary amount of vehicle tracks traverse the park causing damage to the dunes, creating erosion and disturbing native plant and animal communities. Some remains of shacks and associated rubbish lie abandoned within the park.

Desired outcomes

- Minimise vehicle damage to dunes yet maintain the Mackay Port Authority's access for plane recovery.
- Use of the park for recreation does not degrade the natural landscape of the park.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Where possible, close and rehabilitate unnecessary tracks.
- Restrict vehicle access to the park by closing gates, blocking tracks and erecting signs which state that vehicles are prohibited on the park.
- Remove shacks and associated rubbish from the park and ensure that no squatters establish a presence on the park in the future.

3.4 Cultural heritage

Current situation

The park is an important relatively undisturbed part of the Aboriginal landscape which may be culturally and spiritually significant for the traditional owners of the area. No Aboriginal cultural heritage investigations have been conducted in the park, but it is possible that there are significant places for Aboriginal people, and there have been reports of Aboriginal middens located within the park. Traditional owners have made a number of native title claims over land which includes the park to have their native title rights recognised.

Desired outcomes

- Traditional owners have ownership, control and/or management of their cultural heritage.
- Cultural sites within the park are identified and are protected in accordance with the wishes of Aboriginal people with links to the area.
- Native title rights are not limited or compromised by this plan.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Undertake surveys to document Aboriginal cultural sites within the park.
- Keep open lines of communication with traditional owners and people with a historic connection to the park.
- After any successful native title determination, traditional rights to the land will be recognised and traditional owners will be involved in joint management of the park, including the protection of their cultural heritage.

3.5 Recreational and tourism

Current situation

It is uncertain how many people visit the park. No visitor facilities are provided. No formal park entrance exists. Directional and boundary signs are not provided. There is no gazetted access and vehicle access is currently through private property. The park is easily accessible by boat. There are numerous vehicle sand tracks through the park and evidence of old campsites. There has been some vehicle damage to dunes, and it is possible this has affected shorebird nesting.

Desired outcomes

- Recreation does not significantly impact on park values.
- Recreation does not disturb beach stone-curlew breeding behaviour.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- No visitor facilities will be provided on the park. Low-impact recreational day-use will be permitted unless monitoring programs suggests that park flora, fauna or physical habitat is being significantly disturbed. Camping on the park will not be encouraged.
- Recreational impacts on beach stone-curlew breeding behaviour will be given particular attention. If recreation is disturbing breeding behaviour, then the park will be temporarily closed during the breeding season.
- Erect park identification signs at park boundaries.
- No vehicles will be permitted in the park, with the exception of the Mackay Port Authority as set out below. Visitor access will be by foot from the boundary fence, or by boat.
- Any proposals for commercial use of the park will be considered and approved only if they have no significant impact on the park's natural environment.

3.6 Education and interpretation

Current situation

Difficult access makes the park unsuited for education, although some low-key educational use by small groups may occur. There is no park information sheet.

Desired outcomes

- Information on the park is available to the public, particularly in regard to restrictions on access and sensitive bird breeding sites.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- A park information sheet will be prepared.

3.7 Resource use

Current situation

No commercial use of the park is currently authorised. The park may be suitable for shorebird research. The Mackay Port Authority uses the beach adjacent to the park as a put-down area for light planes in trouble, and requires access to the beach to retrieve these planes.

Desired outcomes

- Opportunities for low-impact relevant scientific research are available, particularly with regard to shorebirds.
- Access for the Mackay Port Authority is maintained.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Scientific research will be permitted.
- Apart from uses proposed within this management plan, no other use of the park's resources will be permitted.
- The Mackay Port Authority will be allowed vehicle access to the park for light plane retrieval as necessary. An agreement covering this access will be negotiated.

3.8 Plan implementation and monitoring

Current situation

This is a little-used park which requires only minimal management. Clearly, priorities are to ensure shorebird habitat is undisturbed and more information on the park's natural and cultural resources is obtained.

Desired outcomes

- The park is being managed in line with the provisions of this plan.

Proposed policies, guidelines and actions

- Priority will be given to protection of shorebird habitat and to the collection of information on the park's plants, animals and cultural resources. Information collected as a result of the implementation of this plan will be used to modify management strategies as required.
- The final plan will be implemented as resources permit.
- Ranger-in-charge to submit a brief annual report on the success of the plan's implementation.
- Review the management plan within 10 years of approval according to s 125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.