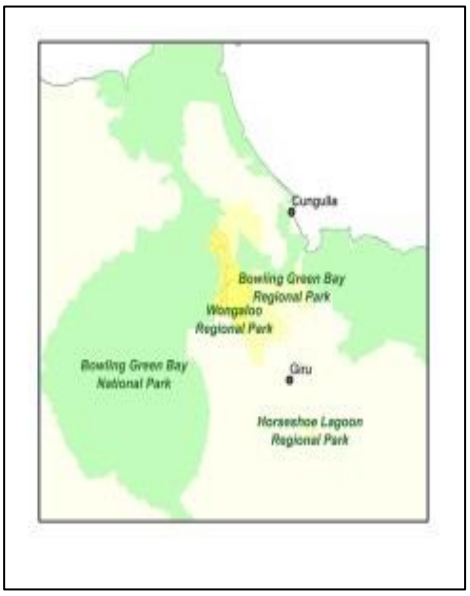
Wongaloo Regional Park
Management Statement 2015



Context

Wongaloo Regional Park is listed in the 'Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia' (DIWA) and adjoins the Bowling Green Bay Ramsar site. It is part of one of the largest coastal wetland complexes on the east coast of Australia and has remained a natural ephemeral hydrological system. Wongaloo Regional Park offers stunning wildlife observation opportunities as it presents the seasonal movement of wildlife across the coastal plain.

The primary purpose for conserving Wongaloo Regional Park is protection of the Wongaloo Swamps and associated grasslands. The wetlands and grasslands of Wongaloo have traditionally been used by the largest known regional population of brolgas (up to 8000 birds at one time). Wongaloo has been used by brolgas as a post breeding congregation site which is a notable aspect of nearly all crane species and plays an important role in social interaction and pair formation.

Wongaloo Regional Park also provides important wetland habitat and breeding sites for internationally and nationally conservation significant species. Within the park are also the regionally unique 'Black Scrub' and 'Mackenzie Scrub', lowland alluvial tall closed forests. The park provides an important representation of poplar gum woodlands that provide potential habitat for conservation significant birds such as the endangered sub-species of black-throated finch.

There are currently no registered native title claims or Indigenous land use agreements (ILUA) covering Wongaloo Regional Park. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is working with the Traditional Owners, the Bindal people, and the Gudjuda Aboriginal Reference Group.

Bioregion	Brigalow Belt North	**Area**	1 664.5ha
Local Government Area	Burdekin Shire	**State electorate**	Burdekin
Designations over the Park	Trustee – The Wetlands and Grasslands Foundation Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia (DIWA)		
Management Obligations	China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA), Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA), Republic of Korea-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA), Bonn Convention		

This management statement provides high-level strategic direction for the protection and management of key park values. Management will be undertaken in accordance with the management principles for the tenure as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and supporting regulations, other appropriate legislation including the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003, Fisheries Act 1994,* ILUA, government policies, procedures, and protocols.

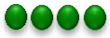
Key park values

While all parks are important, and all values help make parks worthwhile, management needs to focus on protecting and presenting the most important values – the key values. These are the values that will form the basis of ongoing evaluation of management effectiveness. Protecting these key values will help frame the purpose of management for each park. The table below shows how each key value's condition is represented, how the condition is trending and the confidence in the information used to make the ratings. Details of key values are listed in **Table 1** and illustrated in **Map 1**.

Key to condition, trend, and confidence icons

Condition	**Good** 	**Good with some concern** 	**Significant concern** 	**Critical** 
Description	*The value is in good condition and is likely to be maintained for the foreseeable future, provided that current conservation measures are maintained.*	*The value is likely to be essentially maintained over the long-term with minor additional conservation measures to address existing concerns.*	*The value is threatened by a number of current and/or potential threats. Significant additional conservation measures are required to preserve the value over the medium to long-term.*	*The value is severely threatened. Urgent additional large-scale conservation measures are required or the value may be lost.*
Trend rating	Improving 	Deteriorating 	Stable	No current trend/unknown 
Confidence	Inferred ○	Limited ◐	Adequate ●	

1. Wetlands and Grasslands (habitat for diverse and significant aggregations of avifauna)

Description	Condition		Trend	Confidence	
				Condition	Trend
Listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia (DIWA) and feeds into the Bowling Green Bay RAMSAR site. Provides important connectivity for wildlife and habitat for internationally significant migratory bird species and large aggregations of brolga, magpie geese and other waterbirds.	2015: 	Desired: 		●	◐

Wongaloo Fans Aggregation, Wongaloo Swamps Aggregation, and Burdekin-Townsville Wetland Aggregation are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia (DIWA). These feed into the Bowling Green Bay Ramsar site. The wetlands are a combination of riverine, palustrine, lacustrine, and estuarine, and are highly productive supporting a large biomass of fish species. They provide important connectivity for wildlife and a significant breeding site for brolga, magpie geese and black swans. The grasslands and sedgelands are particularly important as they are a nocturnal feeding area for waterfowl. They provide habitat for internationally significant migratory bird species.

Threats: The primary threatening process is the modification of the habitat by aquatic pasture grasses (para grass, olive hymenachne and aleman grass) to the detriment of sedgelands and open water habitat. The secondary threatening process is loss of grasslands to woody thickening (often by native *Melaleuca* spp). Extensive disturbance by feral pigs foraging and wallowing also causes water quality issues by mobilising sediments and acid sulfate soils. A significant potential threat is sea level rise and saltwater inundation as the Wongaloo Swamps are located just above tidal limits. Man-made bunds are in place and their future needs rigorous consideration.

Strategic management directions: The aim is to improve the condition of the wetlands habitat by reducing the impacts of feral pigs, para grass, olive hymenachne, and aleman grass. This will encourage the regrowth of extensive native sedges (particularly bulkuru) and maintain the seasonal availability of open water.

The aim is to also reduce the impacts of woody vegetation through the grasslands, and coordinate management with the adjoining Bowling Green Bay National Park and Regional Park to reduce pest impacts across a continuous habitat. There is also potential to investigate exposure of the wetlands to changes in salt water inundation.

2. Lowland tall closed forests

Description	Condition		Trend	Confidence	
				Condition	Trend
Regionally important and breeding habitat for nationally conservation significant species.	2015: 	Desired: 		●	◐

Lowland tall closed forests regionally known as the 'Black Scrub' and 'Mackenzie Scrub' (RE11.3.11) are the largest and most complex examples of this habitat type between Townsville and Proserpine. Wongaloo Regional Park contains 28.5% of the total protected regional ecosystem within Queensland. It is nesting habitat for black-necked storks, provides significant seasonal resources for frugivorous birds and provides range limits for closed forest species like spectacled monarchs.

Threats: The main threatening process is the damage and replacement of native plants by introduced weeds such as pink bauhinia, lantana, and other woody weeds. The secondary threatening process is possible ecosystem modification due to fire encroaching into the lowland tall closed forests.

Strategic management directions: The aims are to improve the condition of the scrubs by reducing the impacts of introduced weeds and minimising intrusion by stock to allow recruitment, and the exclusion of fire.

3. Poplar gum woodlands

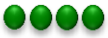
Description	Condition		Trend	Confidence	
				Condition	Trend
Dominant regional ecosystem in the park and habitat for nationally conservation significant species.	2015: 	Desired: 		●	◐

The poplar gum woodlands contain *Eucalyptus platyphylla* and *Corymbia clarksoniana* on alluvial plains and cover approximately 29% of the park. Wongaloo Regional Park contains 29.73% of the total protected area for this regional ecosystem within Queensland. It is also potential habitat for the endangered black-throated finch.

Threats: The main threatening process is thickening by introduced weeds such as lantana, rubber vine and native species. The secondary threatening process is ecosystem modification due to infrequent fire—most importantly the fire/grazing relationship. In recent times there has been too much grazing and not enough fire.

Strategic management directions: The aim is to improve the condition of the woodlands by reducing the impacts of introduced weeds and over-abundant natives on the understorey, including implementation of planned burns to promote a healthy open community with a strong native grassy groundcover.

Table 1. Wongaloo Regional Park — Strategic management direction for key values

Condition	Trend	Key threatening process	Strategic management directions: Values	Priority (1-5)
1. Wetlands and Grasslands (habitat for diverse and significant aggregations of avifauna)				
2015:  Desired: 		Introduced animals Introduced weeds Poorly managed grazing	Reduce impacts of feral pigs, para grass, olive hymenachne and aleman grass within the wetlands to encourage the regrowth of native sedges and maintenance of open water. Reduce the impacts of *Melaleuca* spp and other woody vegetation on the grasslands. Coordinate management with the adjoining Bowling Bay National Park and Regional Park to reduce pest impacts across a continuous habitat.	1
2. Lowland tall closed forest				
2015:  Desired: 		Introduced weeds Fire Poorly managed grazing	Reduce the impacts of pink bauhinia, lantana and other woody weeds on the lowland tall closed forest. Exclusion of fire. Minimise stock incursions into the lowland tall closed forest where possible.	2
3. Poplar gum woodlands				
2015:  Desired: 		Fire Introduced weeds	Implement planned burning to promote healthy open woodlands. Minimise grazing by stock to allow build-up of grasses to in turn enable planned burning. Reduce impacts of weeds and native woody vegetation in the understorey of the open woodlands.	2

Levels of Service

Levels of Service (LoS) standards have been developed to identify the current and desired future standards for a range of critical management elements and associated performance measures. Wongaloo Regional Park has been assessed as requiring a standard level of service for most aspects of management based on the identified:

- values
- threats and pressures
- community interface challenges
- special management intervention.

The desired LoS standards for nine management elements have been identified to guide the level of management effort required for Wongaloo Regional Park within a state-wide context. These nine elements reflect the most common management activities undertaken by QPWS across all protected lands and waters and include Indigenous cultural heritage management and engagement; fire and pest management, visitor management and natural values management.

For further detail on the levels of service standards for Wongaloo Regional Park, refer to **Table 2**.

Table 2. Wongaloo Regional Park – Strategic management direction for Levels of Service

Management element	Levels of Service			Strategic management directions	Priority
	Current	Desired	Description		
1. Fire management	Base	Base	Fire is currently managed at a very broad scale consistent with generic guidelines to protect life and property on and adjacent to the park and mitigate threats to key fire affected park values. Planned burns focus on life, property, and special conservation purposes.	Implement planned burns as per the fire strategy with stakeholder consultation. Maintain current conservation zones to ensure ecosystem health and function values.	1
2. Pest management	Base	Medium	Pests are managed consistent with generic guidelines to exclude new introductions and mitigate impacts of existing critical and very high priority species on key pest affected park values and neighbouring land uses. Pest management focuses on exclusion, impact reduction, and key value protection.	Investigate and continue relationships with surrounding parks and relevant stakeholders for pest management. Priority on managing pests impacting on key values. Develop an inventory of exotic aquatic grasses and the extent of incursion. Implement grazing of cattle to control exotic grasses in wetlands under specified conditions focussing on habitat restoration. Maintain open woodlands on the park in areas neighbouring wetlands.	1
3. Natural values management	Medium	Medium	Natural values are currently managed at a broad scale consistent with mostly generic guidelines to mitigate critical and very high level threats and maintain key park values. Known threats are managed to prevent decline and/or stabilise the condition of natural values. Documented critical and very high priorities are implemented.	Improve research and understanding of natural values as it applies to management strategies. Develop and implement a wetland habitat plan.	2
4. Indigenous cultural value management	Base	Medium	Indigenous cultural heritage values are currently managed at a very broad scale consistent with generic guidelines to mitigate critical and very high level threats and maintain key Indigenous cultural heritage values. Known threats are managed to prevent stabilise or slow the rate of unacceptable decline in the condition of Indigenous cultural heritage values. Documented critical priorities are implemented. Notification of potential impacts follow routine advisory, negotiated and consent doctrine. Indigenous cultural heritage values need to be managed at a slightly finer scale with focus on park specific guidelines and the improvement of the condition of the value through managing known threats.	Encourage active involvement of relevant Indigenous people in park management. Consult with the relevant Indigenous people and representative Indigenous organisations to identify the park's cultural values and the TO's interests in the park. Identify, record and protect sites of significance and physical artefacts provided an agreement has been reached with the relevant Indigenous people.	4
5. Historic heritage management	Base	Base	Historic heritage values are currently managed at a very broad scale consistent with generic guidelines to mitigate critical and very high level threats and maintain key values. Known threats are managed to prevent, stabilise or slow down the rate of unnatural decline in the condition of key values (including graceful decline). Documented critical priorities are implemented.	Maintain current historic heritage management actions. Meets current LoS standards.	5

6. Other community and commercial engagement	Base	High	Community and commercial engagement currently occurs at a very broad scale consistent with generic guidelines to ensure critical and very high level risks are managed. Effective engagement with commercial and community interests to ensure critical priority initiatives are delivered. Operational management activity is aligned with documented priorities. Documented critical priorities are implemented. Community and commercial engagement must occur at a finer scale with focus on park specific guidelines and including very high and high initiatives and risks.	Build an inclusive management relationship with the trustees. Ensure effective communication between senior ranger and trustees. Form structured arrangements with trustees including a steering committee to provide governance. Investigate and continue relationships with surrounding parks and relevant stakeholders for pest management. Explore strategies to retain and enhance community passion.	2
7. Visitor management	Base	Medium	Visitor management currently occurs at a very broad scale consistent with generic guidelines to maintain the safety and sustainability of very limited existing visitor opportunities. Park values protected from major new unacceptable visitor impacts. Reasonable visitor safety achieved through shared responsibility framework. Diversity of opportunity is maintained. Management focus in landscape class, values protection, setting protection, and visitor safety. Visitor management must be managed at a slightly finer scale with focus on regional quality visitor opportunities.	Revisit the concept of developing ecotourism opportunities. Provide visitor interpretations at key points within the park. Provide/update basic visitor infrastructure.	5
8. Field management capability	Base	Medium	Management capability typically located very remotely with a very small, mostly generalist and/or limited on-ground management presence to respond to critical priority issues. The intensity and timing of management effort currently ensures critical priority initiatives are delivered. Operational management activity is aligned with documented priorities. Documented critical priorities in annual operational business plans are implemented. Field management capability must be managed at a slightly finer scale with focus on including very high priority issues and initiatives.	Routine management inspections every three months. Implementing critical and very high priority initiatives identified in annual operational business plans.	3
9. Operational planning and management	Base	Medium	Operational planning and management currently occurs at a very broad scale consistent with generic guidelines with very limited expert support for planning, implementing, and evaluating park management activities. Management focused on critical priorities only. Planning processes ensure the most significant park values are identified with actions identified and taken to maintain them in at least a stable condition. Base level planning processes are undertaken in accordance with the LoS standard. Operational planning and management must be managed at a slightly finer scale with focus on including very high priorities and improving the key values of the park.	Undertake moderate planning process in accordance with the LoS standard including the development of appropriate thematic strategies.	2

Thematic strategies

Each protected area will require one or more thematic management strategies depending on the key values identified and complexity of management requirements. The levels of service standards provide guidance for each individual element to indicate the requirement for a thematic strategy and its appropriate level of detail.

Thematic strategies provide a linkage between the strategic management direction identified in this document and the delivery of operational management actions. Thematic strategies present detailed actions to address the strategic management directions identified to manage key values and achieve target levels of service.

Thematic strategies required for Wongaloo Regional Park

- Fire Strategy
- Pest Strategy
- Community and Commercial Engagement

Evaluation and reporting

Management effectiveness will be evaluated for Wongaloo Regional Park as part of a monitoring framework. This will guide an adaptive management approach to set clear benchmarks for management, ensure the condition of key values is within acceptable thresholds, deliver transparent and accountable reporting and inform future management. Management effectiveness will be measured against:

- condition and trend for key values
- achievement of Levels of Service standards
- implementation of management actions
- outcomes of strategic management directions.

Map 1: Wongaloo Regional Park - key values