

Mount Coolum National Park



Visitor Strategy

2019

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



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1. Introduction

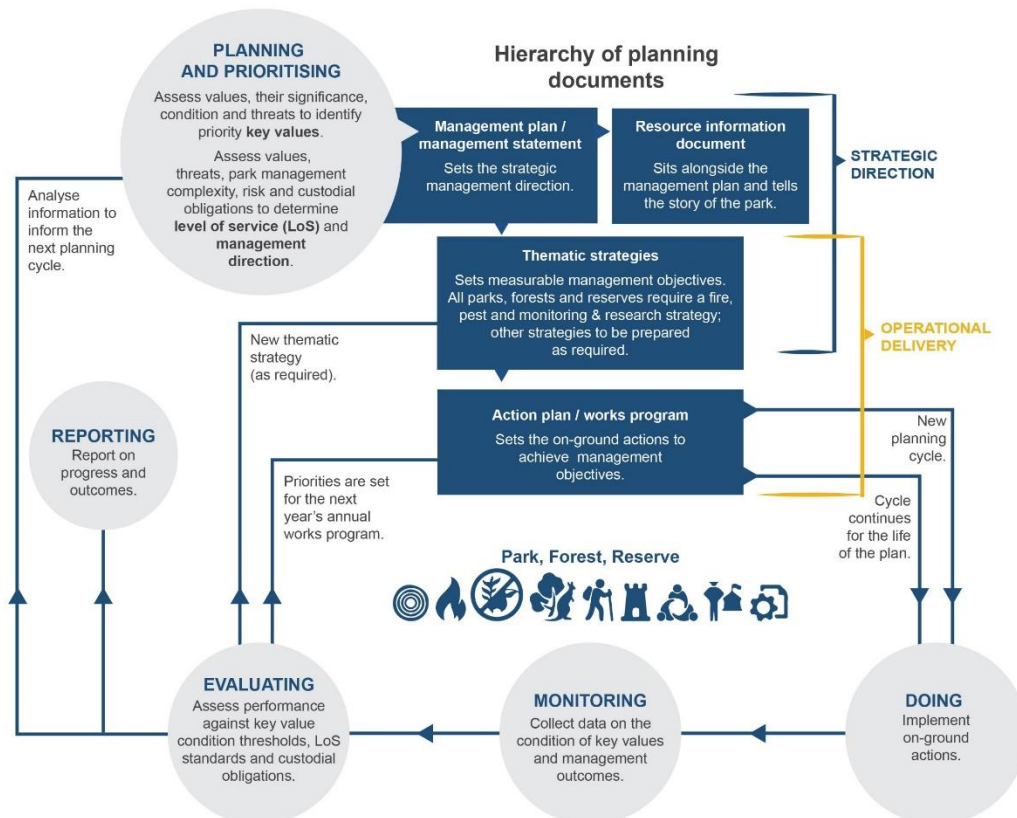
Queensland’s parks, forests and reserves provide local communities and visitors from around the world the opportunity to experience our rich natural and cultural heritage. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships (QPWS&P), within the Department of Environment and Science (DES), strives to achieve a responsible balance between visitor needs and sensitive park resources in accordance with the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*.

QPWS&P’s management planning process aligns with the values-based management framework (VBMF), an adaptive management cycle that incorporates planning, prioritising, doing, monitoring, evaluating and reporting into all areas of our business (Figure 2). Management plans and statements set the strategic management direction, guiding the next tier of planning and the development of thematic strategies which in turn inform and prioritise our on-ground operations. A glossary of the value-based management framework’s key concepts is available in Appendix 3.

This Visitor Strategy details management objectives for visitor management (Section 2) and the desired management outcomes for visitor sites through zoning (Section 3). Zoning and visitor site management objectives consider the physical, social and managerial impacts to the visitor experiences as well as sustainability of the sites, therefore visitor strategies clearly state the desired site capacity to achieve a diversity of experiences for visitors and site sustainability.

Information about QPWS&P’s values-based management framework is available on the Department of Environment and Science (DES) website at www.des.qld.gov.au.

Figure 2. Phases of the values-based management framework cycle for planning and the hierarchy of planning documents.



2. Visitor management

Mount Coolum National Park is a well-known regional tourism destination and one of the most prominent landmarks on the Sunshine Coast—attracting about 240,000 visitors per year. Visitor management aims to:

- encourage the summit walk to be viewed as a nature-based experience, while discouraging inappropriate commercial activities
- minimise visitor impacts on natural and Aboriginal and Historic cultural values
- minimise visitor impacts on sensitive wet heath communities of the Marcoola sections of the park.

The *Mount Coolum National Park Management Plan* sets the strategic management direction for visitor management. The Visitor Strategy details management objectives and provides the link between the high-level strategies of the plan and the on-ground operations in action plans and work programs.

2.1 Kabi Kabi First Nations

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
Strengthen the engagement with Kabi Kabi First Nation and the Australian Climbing Association (Qld) Inc. in regards to the future management of rock climbing.	Facilitate meetings with Kabi Kabi First Nation and the Australian Climbing Association (Qld) Inc (ACAQ) to discuss the future management of rock climbing on Mount Coolum National Park.	1 (2019)
Minimise visitor impacts, caused by trampling and people walking off designated tracks and lookouts, on Kabi Kabi First Nation cultural heritage on Mount Coolum.	Better define track alignments and viewing opportunities to alleviate crowding and trampling of Aboriginal cultural heritage alongside the track and on the summit.	1 (2019)

2.2 Key values

Coolum Creek and Lower Maroochy River nationally important wetland (Marcoola)

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
Minimise visitor impacts on wetland by restricting access.	Ensure access points to the Marcoola Section of the park are gated and signed.	4 (2021)

Montane Heath




Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
Minimise visitor impacts to the summit track area by better defining track alignments and viewing opportunities.	Better define track alignments and viewing opportunities to alleviate crowding and trampling of the key value Montane Heath alongside the track and on the summit.	1 (2021)

Iconic summit track

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
Enhance the experience of recreational walkers on the summit track, through improved education of users using interpretation to modify behaviour (i.e. staying on the designated tracks and not creating informal walking tracks).	Provide interpretation that improves visitors' understanding of the key value Montane Heath, and importance of remaining on defined paths.	2 (2021)
	Explore options for interpretation on the summit to highlight surrounding key values.	
	Confine visitor access, car parking and other facilities to existing footprints.	
	Continue to partner with Kabi Kabi First Nation to include cultural heritage values and stories in interpretation.	
Enhance the experience of recreational walkers on the summit track, by reducing incompatible uses.	Educate users about courteous use of the track.	3 (2020)
	Limit organised and commercial activities to small groups to ensure visitor safety and minimise impacts on visitor experience.	
	Implement compliance activities to manage incompatible uses.	
	Redirect competitive events and large groups to more suitable locations.	

2.3 Management direction

Mount Coolum National Park's management direction for visitor management is to increase its level of service to *High* to meet the park's visitor management needs and to conserve the park's high natural and cultural value.

<p>Mount Coolum will be managed at a high LoS for visitor management due to the significant number of visitors, its status as a regional tourism destination and the need to conserve the high natural and cultural values.</p>	Current LoS	Change in management direction	Desired LoS
			

Improved knowledge

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
<p>Improve knowledge of visitor use by monitoring visitor numbers and their satisfaction with the visitor experience.</p>	Maintain a quality visitor monitoring system to better understand visitor expectations and use, including use of the Marcoola Section.	2
	Explore options for post-visit feedback through social media.	5 (2024)

Level of engagement required for commercial operators and competitive events

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
<p>Improve the level of engagement with park users, by improving communication with different user groups.</p>	Identify opportunities for enhanced communication with commercial and organised activity groups about appropriate use and times on the summit track.	3 (2020)

Improve overall approach to visitor management

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
<p>Improve visitor management by developing a proactive approach to track maintenance, including monitoring of new informal tracks.</p>	Undertake annual 'health checks' on key values to monitor for emerging impacts.	2
	Review the current track maintenance regime with the aim of improving track condition and preventing the formation of informal tracks.	2 (2019)
	Encourage staff to engage with visitors to educate them about key values and sustainable use of the park.	2 (2019)

Overall approach to facility maintenance

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
<p>Investigate opportunities to improve visitor experience at Mount Coolum National Park</p>	Continue to work with Sunshine Coast Council to address issues outside and surrounding Mount Coolum National Park, including access to toilet facilities, car parking, and traffic management.	1

2.4 Other values

These are recreational activities and experiences that are currently available at Mount Coolum National Park. The strategic management direction is in addition to those identified in the Mount Coolum Management Plan.

Cross landscape walking experiences

Strategic management direction	Management objective	Priority*
<p>Enhance recreation opportunities within Mount Coolum National Park.</p>	Investigate the potential for new walking experiences including linking existing or new trails to council's surrounding multi-use trail networks within Mount Coolum National Park.	3



*KEY: Priority ratings: M – maintain current priorities; Scale 1 (extremely urgent and extremely necessary) to 5 (optional and not urgent).

3. Zones and site management

3.1 Visitor management zones and sites

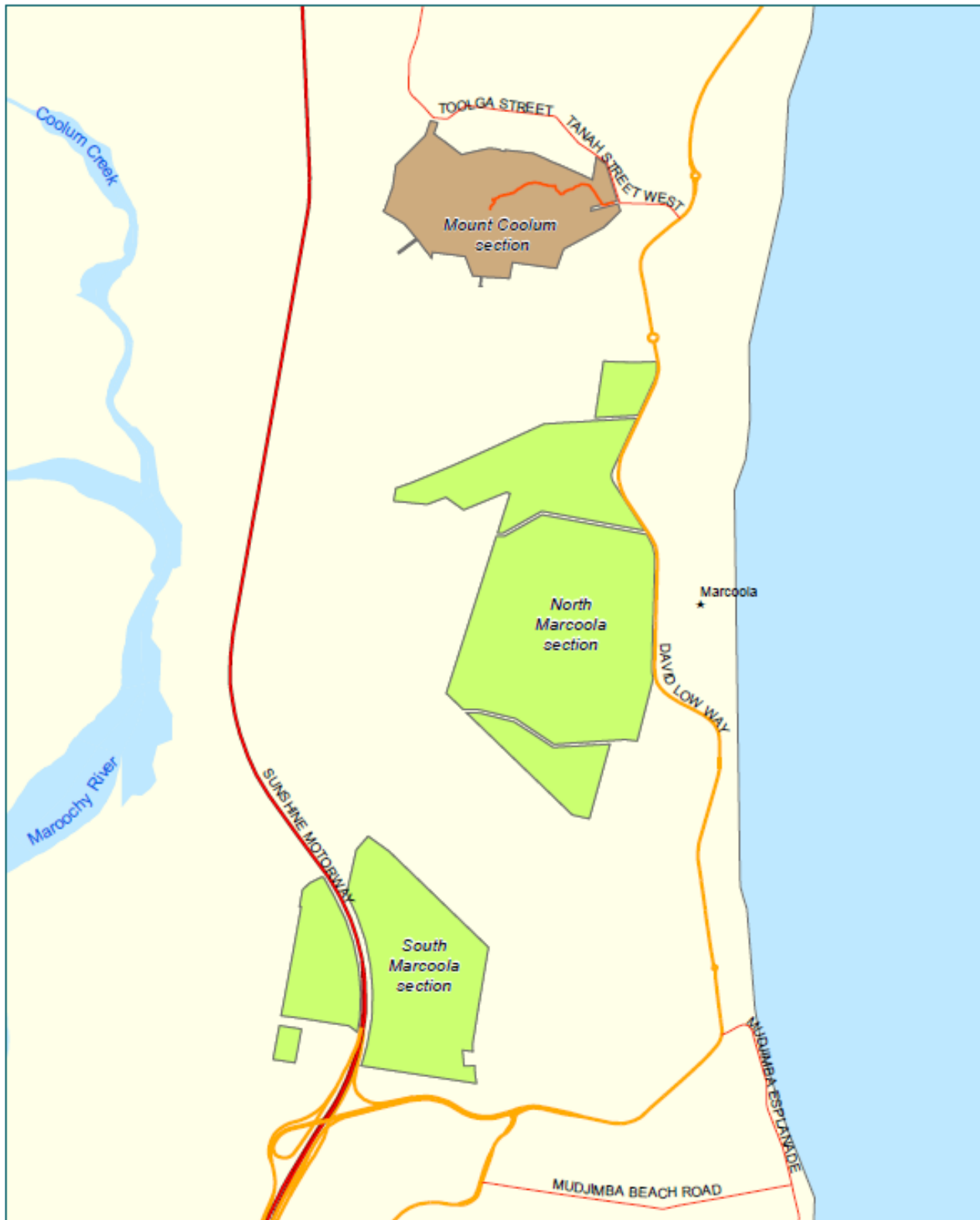
This section identifies visitor management zones and sites for Mount Coolum National Park. The visitor management zones provide guidance for managing the acceptable level of development, the acceptable range of persons at one time (PAOT), group sizes, visitor site standards, and visitor experience and expectations. Visitor management zone definitions are provided in Appendix 1 and the zones are shown on Map 1. Definitions for shared trail level of service for maintenance, and walking track classification, are provided in Appendix 2.

Mount Coolum National Park site table by zone

	Site	Existing Los	Desired Los	Current site use	Site management	Site management objectives
Zone 2	Marcoola Sections	–	–	Currently no visitor opportunities available.	Cross-tenure linkages will be explored as they arise.	Explore linkages with new and existing trails to council's multi-use trail networks.
Zone 4	Mount Coolum Section – Iconic Summit Track	Class 3 	Class 3 	<p>Very popular track for both tourists and local community.</p> <p>Peak periods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10am - 2pm weekdays • Weekends • School Holidays. <p>Access is limited by car parking.</p>	<p>Key value – Iconic Summit Track</p> <p>Organised and commercial activities are restricted by permitting conditions due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impacts to the key value montane heath that occurs on the sides of track • impact to the narrow track • impact to visitor social experience and safety • capacity of existing park facilities. <p>Conditions for organised and commercial activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • larger groups to be split into groups sizes of 15 PAOT • groups to be staggered • groups to be required to walk in single file for safety reasons and to reduce social impacts • preference for activities to occur outside peak periods. <p>The Summit Track is not suitable for events for the above-mentioned reasons.</p>	<p>Minimise visitor impacts to the summit section of track.</p> <p>Minimise incompatible use of the track by applying permit conditions.</p> <p>Continue to work with Sunshine Coast Council to identify options for facilities and car parking outside of the national park tenure.</p>

PAOT – People at one time

Map 1. Mount Coolum National Park visitor management zones



Mount Coolum National Park

Visitor Zones

- Mount Coolum track
- Marcoola track
- Zone 2
- Zone 4

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Scale bar

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4. Appendices

Appendix 1. Key to visitor management zones definitions

Zone	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Special Management Setting
Zone description	A totally, or almost totally natural landscape, with minimal evidence of modern human activity. Usually large remote areas.	Predominantly natural landscape with only minor disturbance. Inconspicuous evidence of modern human activity in small limited areas.	Predominantly natural landscape with some disturbed areas; human activity apparent at small sites.	Mostly natural areas, but with disturbance and high levels of human activity apparent at some sites at some times.	Modified immediate environment but with rural, natural or semi-urban background. Human activity is primary intent of site.	Special management settings are applied to areas that have special values, opportunities or management issues, to enhance visitor experience, ensure visitor safety or protect key values.
General visitor experience	Totally self-reliant visitor experience in wilderness setting. High degree of isolation and sense of solitude. Very high level of outdoor skills required.	Highly self-reliant visitor experience in very natural area. Frequent opportunities for sense of solitude. High level of outdoor skills required.	Degree of self-reliance required in predominantly natural setting. Sense of isolation and solitude moderate to low. Moderate level of outdoor skill required.	Infrequent opportunities for solitude. Encounters with others frequent. Sites managed for visitor safety and comfort. Low level of outdoor skills required.	Semi-urban recreation experience with no opportunity for solitude. Encounters with individuals and groups constant. Site may be crowded at peak times. No outdoor skills required.	
Sites LCS* up to	LCS 3	LCS 4	LCS 6	LCS 8	LCS 8 above	
Suggested group sizes	LoS PAOT Range Very small	LoS PAOT Range Very small to small	LoS PAOT Range Very small to medium	LoS PAOT Range Very small to large	LoS PAOT Range Very small to very large	
	Managed group size: <6	Managed group size: <25	Managed group size: <25	Managed group size: <50	Managed group size: <75	

* Notes the equivalent Landscape Classification System's (LCS) represented in the Visitor Management Zone.
LoS – Levels of Service. PAOT – Persons at one time.

Appendix 2. Key to shared trail definitions

Shared trail level of service for maintenance	 Bronze Maintenance intervention is minimal, of acceptable quality and enough to ensure tracks are safe and free of major foreseeable hazards; and keep most tracks available for use in normal circumstances. Maintenance standards will be acceptable to client expectations.	 Silver Maintenance provides good quality presentation of park features through good visitor access, visitor facilities, vegetation and environmental management of the tracks. Maintenance intervention is routine, good quality and enough to ensure the site is safe and free of major foreseeable hazards; and keep most tracks available for use in most circumstances. Maintenance standards will adequately meet client expectations.	 Gold Maintenance provides high quality presentation of the park features through high level visitor access, visitor facilities and vegetation and environmental management of the tracks. Maintenance intervention is frequent, good quality and enough to ensure tracks are safe and free of most foreseeable hazards; and keep all tracks available for use in most circumstances. Maintenance standards will easily meet client expectations.	 Platinum Maintenance provides outstanding and ageless presentation of the park features through unsurpassed visitor access, visitor facilities and vegetation and environmental management of the tracks. Maintenance is well planned and responsive, of high quality and aimed at ensuring the tracks are safe and free of all foreseeable hazards; and keep all tracks available in all but exceptional circumstances. Maintenance standards will exceed client expectations.		
Walking track classification [^]	Class 1 Opportunity for large numbers of visitors, including those with reduced mobility, to undertake walks that are provided with a high level of interpretation and facilities. Users can expect abundant opportunities to learn about the natural environment through interpretive signs or brochures. Users can expect frequent encounters with others.	Class 2 Opportunity for large numbers of visitors to walk easily in natural environments that are provided with a moderate to high level of interpretation and facilities. Users can expect to learn about the natural environment with moderate to abundant opportunities to learn through interpretive signs or brochures. Users can expect frequent encounters with others.	Class 3 Opportunity for visitors to walk in slightly modified natural environments requiring a moderate level of fitness and where the provision of interpretation and facilities is not common. Users can expect opportunities to observe and appreciate the natural environment with limited provision of interpretive signage. Users can expect occasional encounters with others.	Class 4 Opportunity for visitors to explore and discover relatively undisturbed natural environments along defined and distinct tracks with minimal (if any) facilities. Users can expect opportunities to observe and appreciate the natural environment without provision of interpretive signage. Users can expect opportunities for solitude with few encounters with others.	Class 5 Opportunity for visitors with advanced outdoor knowledge and skills to find their own way along often-indistinct tracks in remote locations. Users can expect frequent opportunities for solitude with few encounters with others.	Class 6 Opportunity for highly experienced walkers to explore remote and challenging natural areas without reliance on managed tracks. Users can expect extended periods of solitude with few encounters with others.

PAOT – Persons at one time. ^ Walking track classification (AUS Standards).

Appendix 3. Glossary

Interpreting key values-based management framework concepts

Adaptive management	The process of adjusting and improving how we manage parks, forests and reserves after assessing the outcomes of previous strategies and on-ground actions.
Condition and trend	The condition of a key value is assessed as either good, good with some concern, significant concern or critical. Trend describes what is happening to the condition: is it improving, stable, or deteriorating. A key value's current condition is determined during the planning process. A desired condition is a realistic goal for the future condition of the key value. The ongoing condition of key values is assessed with regular health checks, monitoring and scientific assessment.
Custodial obligations	The requirements in legislation and government policies that we, as the land management agency, have to ensure QPWS&P's parks, forests and reserves are lawfully managed and good neighbours. Management provides for the protection of life and property, biosecurity and positive relationships with adjacent communities and landholders, as well as enhancing and protecting our values.
Desired outcome	A statement in the key value and management direction statements about moving from the current status (condition or LoS) to a desired status. The goal for management.
Health check	Basic form of monitoring that uses indicators and visual assessments to regularly evaluate the condition of key values. Regular health checks ensure QPWS&P can respond quickly to adverse change and redirect management priorities.
Key value	A natural, cultural, and/or social value that is of most significance to that area. It is what makes the area special and if lost, would diminish what makes the area distinct from others.
Key value statement	A statement in the management plan/statement that is developed for each key value. It describes the key value, current condition, desired condition, current threats and threat ratings, strategic management direction and priorities for further thematic strategy planning and on-ground management action.
Level of service (LoS)	A planning tool used to identify the acceptable management standard, or level of resourcing that is required to maintain an area based on its values, threats and the complexity of management. There are five LoS ratings ranging from 'acceptable' to 'exceptional' noting that an acceptable rating is the minimum standard required to deliver good management and meet our custodial obligations under law as a land manager. A 'current' LoS rating is the level at the time of planning, the 'desired' LoS is where we want to be.
Management direction statement	A statement in the management plan/statement, developed for each management theme that describes the current LoS, desired LoS, custodial obligations, strategic management direction and priorities for further thematic strategy planning and on-ground management action.
Management theme	QPWS&P has identified a number of management theme that are common to most of the parks, forests and reserves in our estate: fire management; pest management; natural values management; historic cultural heritage management; visitor management; community, partnerships and other interest; field management capability; operational planning and management support.
Management instrument	A management plan or management statement.
Priority rating (key value SMDs)	<p>A rating given to a strategic management direction according to the need for action to prevent further decline, stabilise current condition, or restore and enhance values, with consideration given to legislative obligations, cost, social, economic and political factors.</p> <p>Critical (1) Loss or very significant decline in the condition of key value/s is highly likely if action not taken OR significant improvement in the condition of key value/s is highly likely if action is taken.</p> <p>Very high (2) - Significant decline in the condition of key value/s is likely if action is not taken OR significant improvement in the condition of key value/s is likely if action is taken.</p> <p>High (3) -Decline in the condition of key value/s is likely if action is not taken OR improvement in the condition of key value/s is likely if action is taken.</p> <p>Moderate (4) -Some decline in the condition of key value/s is possible if action is not taken OR some improvement in the condition of key value/s is possible if action is taken.</p> <p>Desirable (5) - While decline in the condition of key value/s is not likely in the short term, the action, if taken would help build long-term resilience of key value/s.</p>
Priority rating (LoS SMDs)	A rating given to a LoS or custodial obligation strategic management direction. A scale from 1 (extremely urgent) – 5 (not urgent or optional) is assigned, with consideration given to legislative obligations, cost, social, economic and political factors.
Management direction	How we manage the each management theme to protect and enhance our key values and meet our custodial management obligations.
Strategic management direction	A broad strategy aimed at mitigating or removing a threat to a key value and maintaining or improving the condition of a park's value; or addressing the gap between the current LoS and desired LoS for a management theme.
Threat or threatening process and threat rating	Based on IUCN's classifications, QPWS&P has identified threatening processes that have the potential to affect Queensland's values (e.g. natural systems modifications, invasive species etc.). Current threats to key values are identified and given a threat rating based on a combination of the extent of the impact, the severity of the impact, and the urgency of action.