protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

Coming together for protected areas

FEATURING

Wetlands under threat

ALSO

- Our living outback
- Quoll island network
- Dingo dinners

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND INC.
connect and protect

Issue 23
SUMMER 2018

Connect and Protect

Contents

Editorial team

Reece Pianta, Jeannie Rice and Marika Strand.

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Contributors, please include contact details and brief personal summary. Articles can be submitted via email or hard copy. Digital photos should be minimum 300dpi.

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Cover photo: Laura Rangers in Cape York (Kerry Trapnell via Our Living Outback)

Left image: (NPAQ Library)

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The National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) promotes the preservation, expansion and good management of national parks in Queensland.

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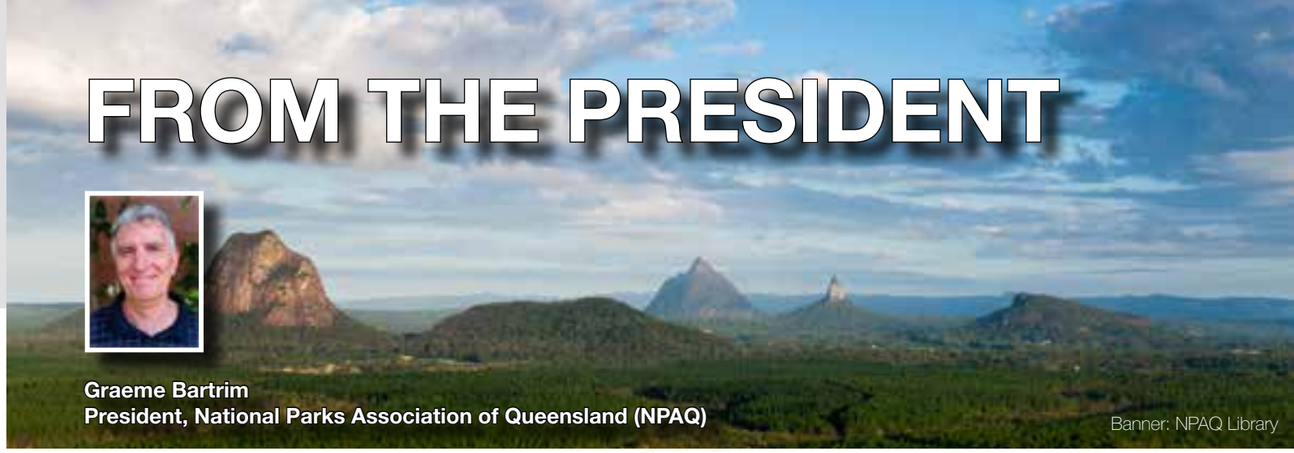


FROM THE PRESIDENT

Graeme Bartrim
President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

Banner: NPAQ Library

Welcome to the Summer 2018 edition of *Protected*.

As 2018 ends it is worthwhile to consider our work in 2018 and how we might be more effective in the coming year.

The attention given a few months ago to using the Sydney Opera House as a billboard for a horse race with its implied message supporting gambling is relevant to us in our advocacy work for national parks.

For many a line was crossed when a beloved public asset, the Opera House, was used for commercial gain. Although the long-term impact of projecting images onto the sails of the Opera House is zero, the sense of outrage felt by many was palpable.

The justification for using the Opera House for horse race marketing was that NSW must compete with other states for the tourist dollar. This is a familiar pretext used to justify all manner of proposals for national parks. Too often this pretext goes unquestioned.

In Queensland the last state budget allocated effectively no money to national park acquisition. It is generally accepted that funding for existing park management is inadequate and this also remained stagnant. At the same time the government is adding further challenge to our parks by encouraging and facilitating eco-tourism developments in our national parks.

Again, we are told that the State must compete with other states for the tourist dollar, that our wonderful natural areas should be showcased and that it would be ensured that any development would have an undefined soft touch. We are also told that eco-tourism developments in Tasmania and New Zealand are a win-win for the economy and the environment. We are keen to see the evidence of minimal impact/ enhanced biodiversity outcomes at these locations.

Last month the state government called for expressions of interest to build eco-tourism developments at Thorsborne Track, Cooloola Great Walk and Whitsunday Island Trail. It is proposed that these developments will be partnered and financially supported by the government. Fast-tracked approvals and leases of up to 60 years are being suggested.

National parks were not proclaimed as a resource to be exploited.

This piecemeal planning is unacceptable whilst we await a funded Protected Area Strategy which is anticipated to address our state's biodiversity decline, predicted greenhouse changes and visitation.

Our national parks are already under threat. The present tragic fires that are causing enormous loss for residents and businesses remind us of this. In addition to the sadness and loss for people there is a concern that the vegetation of Eungella National Park may not recover from the severe fire.

Of course, our parks should be visited, and we do not object to this. Already our national parks bring over $900 million a year in revenue to Queensland.

National parks were visited by 58 million people last year. This shows their existing popularity and it would be worthwhile to understand both the benefits and impacts of this level of visitation prior to encouraging more.

We call on the government to develop a plan to grow and manage our protected area estate for the long term. This plan should give nature conservation priority and within that context optimise visitation.

This year NPAQ and over 20 other conservation groups came together to call for national park expansion and better management. We are hopeful that government funding and resources will be focused on enhancing our protected area estate. In the meantime we seek a moratorium on Eco- tourism developments.

We are campaigning and petitioning to make this happen.

Visit **www.npaq.org.au** to sign the parliamentary petition against development in national parks and support our campaign.

Finally, I would like to thank our collegiate and dedicated council very much, staff who are often doing a lot with very little and volunteers who make a great contribution.

Wishing you all a happy and peaceful Christmas!

www.facebook.com/NPAQld @nationalparksassocqld @NPA_Qld

COMING TOGETHER
FOR PROTECTED AREAS

Graeme Bartrim
NPAQ President

Images: *banner: Bette Devine. Left: NPAQ Image Library.*

Queensland is a large biologically diverse state that European settlement has dramatically altered.

Over 200 years the area of forest, shrubland and heathland in Queensland has declined from 80% to 30% of the state (Bradshaw, 2012).

64% of Queensland is leased crown land.

28% of Queensland is private freehold land.

33.27% of the state is presently occupied by some form of tenure that allows commercial extraction or exploitative use of the land.

It is not unreasonable that we reserve 17% of Queensland's land area for nature conservation.

While there is no doubt that development has contributed to the high standard of living that most of us enjoy, all actions have consequences. The price of land exploitation over the last two centuries, has not been fully factored into our economy.

As we move from a production to a service-based economy it is reasonable to ask: can we keep doing what we have been doing? How do we focus on the long term and the quality of life for future generations?

Our state's biodiversity has borne the brunt of much of our activity. The last *State of the Environment Report* contains some sobering figures. From 2007 to 2015 a further 61 fauna species became extinct, endangered or vulnerable (threatened). 68 recognised threats are contributing to this; key ones being vegetation clearing and inappropriate fire and grazing regimes. During the same period 275 plant species became threatened - the key contributing processes again being clearing, the spread of weeds and inappropriate fire regimes.

There is a logical relationship between protecting land in its natural state and biodiversity conservation. Of course, other matters such as management, connectivity, and edge effects all come into play.

...our national parks require better resourcing to maintain and enhance biodiversity values.

The Queensland Government has embraced a target of 17% of its land area being protected through formal conservation frameworks. We support this, but our fear is that this 17% could end up being the land that nobody wants, not the land that most needs conserving.

Further, this kind of aspirational target without a realistic pathway to achieve it is meaningless. We will certainly not achieve this target by 2020 – the date set in the *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

Indeed, our projections show that at our current rate, we might not even achieve this milestone this century.

Our further fear too is that as the government embraces private protected areas, that we will not see new national parks and the current protected area ratio of 70:30 in favour of national park land will be lost.

Queensland's present protected areas, amounting to 8% of our state, need to be increased, but in a targeted way so that those plant and animal communities with least secure protection are prioritised and a baseline strong network of national park protections is assured. Apart from being sound stewardship of our land, this can have potential economic benefits. Tourist interest in natural areas is growing, bringing in approximately $952 million each year and our government is enthusiastic to capitalize on this. We can transition from a model of exploitation – with its focus on jobs and economic activity, to one tempered with proper management of our land so that its values remain for the long term.

Our state has made incremental increases in our protected area estate, apart from the recent *Cape York Joint Management Areas*. The Cape York expansion resulted in $35.9 million being devoted to managing an additional 700,000 ha of new dedications and has been hailed as a success. Prior to this, it was the Labor government of Wayne Goss with Pat Comben as Environment Minister that dramatically increased our protected area estate.

The graph below shows Queensland in comparison to other states. It paints an unfortunate picture.

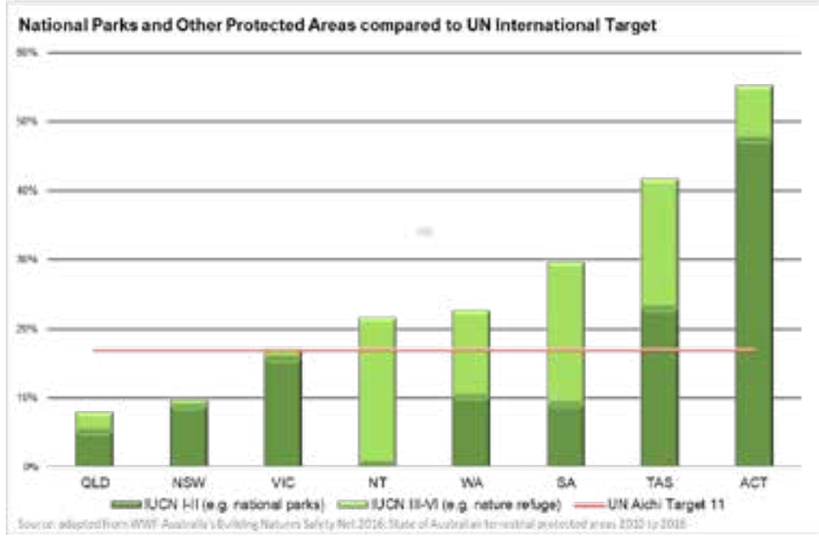
Apart from expansions in park area, management of our national parks requires better resourcing to maintain and enhance biodiversity values.

Expansion and management are the focus of the new alliance of conservation groups, which have endorsed a considered position paper suggesting a way forward for the state.

The six key requests directed to government in this paper are:

- Strengthen the law - Cardinal Principle
- Grow and better manage our national parks
- Grow private protected areas
- Support Indigenous land management
- Restore land to Traditional Owners and create new protected areas
- Fund our protected areas

The state has an opportunity to incorporate the recommendations of the position paper into the next and subsequent budget rounds. We are also yet to see a revised *Protected Area Strategy* for the state. The timing is right to be bold and re-affirm the value we place on our natural areas. Our government can prepare and commit to a multi-year plan of acquisition and enhanced management with clearly articulated objectives.



Bradshaw, C.J.A, 2012 Little left to lose: deforestation and forest degradation in Australia since European colonization, Journal of Plant Ecology, V 5, 1, pp. 109–120

OUR LIVING OUTBACK

PEOPLE NEED NATURE AND NATURE NEEDS PEOPLE

Hannah Schuch
Community Campaigner - Our Living Outback

Banner: Windorah Sand Dune (Qld Museum)
All other images in this article supplied by auth

A place of beauty and diversity, the Australian outback is one of the last great regions of nature left on Earth. Outback Queensland boasts landscapes, rich in natural and cultural heritage, covering nearly two thirds of our state.

Stretching from the tropical rainforests of Cape York to the Gulf Country's savanna plains and the vast floodplains of the Channel Country, our outback is as diverse as the people and wildlife who call it home.

Outback Queensland is home to an extraordinary range of native plants and animals; from cassowaries and cuscus in the rainforests of Cape York, to bilbies and budgerigars in the desert lands of western Queensland.

Our Living Outback is a new and exciting campaign working to secure much needed investment in programs that support people and nature in outback Queensland.

72% of Australia's native bird species live in Queensland, along with 85% of its mammals, and just over half its native reptiles and frogs.

88,000 Queenslanders live in the outback, working across a range of industries and living in diverse communities. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents share a strong bond with the land.

For thousands of years, the health of nature in outback Queensland depended on people carefully managing the land - but that delicate balance has become increasingly threatened as people move away from our outback.

Once-thriving outback towns experienced significant declines over the second half of the 20th century. With both colonisation and the continuous rapid urbanisation of modern Australia, we have seen the removal of people from the land, resulting in a lack of people on the ground to manage and protect outback landscapes.

Wildfires have increased in scale and intensity in parts of Queensland's desert regions and the tropical savannahs of the north.

Feral animals and noxious weeds spread further, taking over from native plants and animals and damaging precious ecosystems.

The Talaroo Nature Refuge is managed by Ewamian Traditional Owners. They are excited by the opportunities presented by the Nature Refuges program however are experiencing the under-investment first hand.

Having people to actively manage the land is essential in the battle to address these threats and sustain the health of outback landscapes.

Despite its extraordinary ecological significance, Queensland has long suffered from an under-investment in conservation and land management with only 8.2% of its land area protected — the lowest proportion of Australia's states and territories.

Fortunately, there are three successful programs that provide a strong foundation for protection of our outback. However, they are suffering from under investment, putting nature in the outback at risk.

Nature refuges: supporting landholders to care for their land

Nature refuges are a form of private protected area. They are a voluntary agreement between the state government and the landholder, aimed at protecting high conservation values on private land.

Nature refuge landholders can access modest funding for their conservation commitments, such as fencing off sensitive areas from stock, management of feral animals and weeds, or to install water infrastructure.

This program has huge potential with more than 500 landholders dedicating part or all of their land for conservation, covering a total of more than 4 million hectares.

However, with the rapid growth of the program the funding hasn't kept pace, and now there is not enough funding to provide support for landholders to manage their lands or to encourage new landholders to enter the program.

The limited investment in recent years presents a threat to the program's future growth and ability to deliver conservation outcomes at scale. The Queensland Government must urgently increase investment in this program to support landholders to care for their land, and to ensure it is delivering what is needed for nature.

Indigenous land and sea management

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to country has stretched for many thousands of years and has forged much of the spirituality and cultural heritage, that underpins not only Indigenous modern culture heritage but that of Australian society. Since the 1980s, there has been a revival of Indigenous land management practices and increasing recognition of native title, but there are still fewer people actively caring for the outback than at any time in thousands of years.

The Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger program provides funding and technical support to rangers in 17 communities across Queensland. Rangers employed through the program care for land and sea country using both Indigenous knowledge and modern science. They conduct species surveys, control introduced predators such as feral cats, and set small, controlled burns to reduce the risk of large, destructive wildfires. They also maintain tourism facilities and cultural sites.

The Queensland Land and Sea Ranger program is a true success story. It's delivering real environmental, social and economic benefits for Indigenous communities, including meaningful employment, positive health outcomes and improved management of feral animals, weeds and wildfire.

Indigenous rangers are essential for caring for many of Queensland's most ecologically and culturally significant places. Ranger programs provide a platform for Indigenous organisations to expand business opportunities, including engaging in the carbon economy through reduced emissions because of fire management which limits destructive wildfires.

There is strong support for the growth of the Indigenous ranger program amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the community.

National parks

Queensland has more plant and animal species than any other Australian state. National parks are incredibly important to protect our wildlife.

Queensland boasts some of Australia's most iconic outback national parks. This includes the lagoons of Rinyirru National Park (Lakefield) on Cape York and the deep gorges of Boodjamulla National Park (Lawn Hill) in the state's far north-west.

National parks provide a vital haven for native wildlife and are highly valued by Queenslanders as a place to spend time in the outdoors with family and friends.

The state's national parks are a powerful drawcard for tourists from across Australia and around the world. Domestic and international visitors to Queensland's national parks are estimated to contribute more than AU $952 million to the state economy each year.

In 2017, Galaxy Research found that support for Queensland's national parks remains very strong with 84% of respondents indicating

National parks provide a habitat to cassowaries, a threatened yet extremely significant bird for the health of Queensland's rainforests.

that more land should be protected in national parks and reserves, with three quarters stating that 20% or more of Queensland should be protected.

If Queensland is to sustain nature in the outback, the Government must expand and better manage our national parks. This will create new tourism and employment opportunities for regional communities and to help safeguard the state's native wildlife.

Our outback is one of the very few great natural places left on the planet. To keep it healthy and to maintain its nature, its wildlife, its people, its economies we need to support programs like these - programs that support the people who live there, looking after and managing its lands.

The *Our Living Outback* campaign is an alliance of The Pew Charitable Trusts, Queensland Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage Australia.

For more information on the campaign, or to sign a petition visit:

www.outbackqueensland.org.au

WETLANDS: UNDER THREAT

Sheena Gilman
Birds Queensland. Protect the Bush Alliance. NPAQ Member.

Images: Banner: *Cassim Island at Toondah Harbour, a wetland at risk (Panthus Wikimedia Commons)*

Left: Mary River under threat from coal mine (Mattinbgn Wikimedia Commons)

Right: Broadsound, also under coal mine threat is an important nesting site for Straw Necked Ibis (Cyron Ray Macey Wikimedia Commons)

***Ramsar* is not an acronym; it is a small town on the southern edge of the Caspian Sea in Iran**.

It is the westernmost city in Mazandaran province with a population of 35,000 people. An early Iranian civilization flourished in the beginning of the first millennium BC in Tabarestan (Māzandarān). It was overrun in about AD 720 by the Arab general Yezid ibn Mohallab and was the last part of Iran to be converted to Islām. It was ceded to the Russian Empire by a treaty in 1723, but was restored to Iran under the Oajar dynasty. The northern section of the region consists of a lowland alongside the Caspian and an upland along the northern slopes of the Elburz Mountains. Marshy backlands dominate the coastal plain, and extensive gravel fans fringe the mountains. The climate is permanently subtropical and humid with very hot summers.

The *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance* holds the unique distinction of being the first modern treaty between nations aimed at conserving natural resources.

The signing of the convention on wetlands took place in 1971 at this small Iranian town of Ramsar. Since then, the convention on wetlands has been known as the *Ramsar convention*.

The Ramsar convention's broad aims are to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise use and management, those that remain. This requires international cooperation, policy making, capacity building and technology transfer.

The Ramsar convention encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity.

Once designated, these sites are added to the convention's list of wetlands of international importance and become known as Ramsar sites.

In designating a wetland as a Ramsar site, countries agree to establish and oversee a management framework aimed at conserving the wetland and ensuring its wise use.

Under the Ramsar convention, a wide variety of natural and human-made habitat types ranging from rivers to coral reefs can be classified as wetlands. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, fens, peat bogs, or bodies of water - whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary. Water within these areas can be static or flowing; fresh, brackish or saline and can include inland rivers and coastal or marine water to a depth of six metres at low tide.

Contracting parties to the convention agree to:

1. Designate at least one site that meets the Ramsar criteria for inclusion in the list of wetlands of international importance.
2. Promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
3. Include wetland conservation within their national land-use planning.
4. Establish nature reserves on wetlands and promote wetland training.
5. Consult with other contracting parties about the implementation of the Ramsar convention.

Australia was one of the first countries to sign the Ramsar convention, and in 1974 designated the world's first wetland of international importance - the Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory.

The Ramsar Convention encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity.

Australia currently has 65 wetlands of international importance listed under the Ramsar convention, covering approximately 8.1 million hectares, an area greater than Scotland or Tasmania. Queensland has 6 Ramsar Sites:

- Coral Sea reserves of Coringa, Herald and Lihou Reefs & Cays
- Bowling Green Bay
- Shoalwater and part of Coria Bay
- Great Sandy Straits including Tin Can Bay and part of Tin Can inlet
- Moreton Bay
- Currawinya Lakes Wyara and Numalla & supporting wetlands

Moreton Bay, Shoalwater Bay and The Great Sandy Straits are three Ramsar sites under threat of adverse development and all are significant coastal environments for critically endangered, endangered, and vulnerable migratory waders and shore birds

The Ramsar treaty prohibits the destruction of any part of a Ramsar site unless that destruction is in the *urgent national interest*.

Moreton Bay is the site for the Walker Corporation development of Toondah Harbour. This is a precedent case of a development application over both marine park and the roost sites of Cassim Island.

A coal mine application threatens the Great Sandy Straits and a further coal mine proposal looms over the magnificent Broadsound.

These significant sites meet the criteria for listing to the Ramsar convention and both state and federal governments must protect them against any inimical activity, now and into the future. Apart from being significant for migratory shorebirds, all provide safe marine environments for Dugong and turtle species; they are deemed *key biodiversity areas*.

Destroying part of a Ramsar site for a residential development or a coal mine, is not in the 'urgent national interest'. Approval of these developments sends the completely wrong message to other countries where ongoing loss and degradation of habitat is clearly responsible for large declines in migratory shorebirds.

It is incongruent that government has an active application for UNESCO World Heritage listing of the Great Sandy Straits and in asking the federal environment department to insist on an Environment Impact Assessment (EIS), we were informed 'there had been no material changes' since the initial permits were provided over ten years ago.

We would also argue there have been considerable changes in the past decade including the up listing and continued decline of several shorebird species; 18 nationally listed threatened species visit our shores each year. Threatened Australian humpback dolphin frequents shallow estuarine water in the Styx River mouth at Broadsound and the area has six species of marine turtles including threatened loggerheads and green turtles.

We should treat their habitats with reverence; we have unique systems worthy of protection. That is why they are Ramsar sites. We are calling for increased accountability for the protection of some of the most magnificent coastal areas in Queensland. Australians are obliged at the highest level to protect not exploit; we must value nature for what it is, *irreplaceable*.

PARK IN FOCUS

Sundown National Park - conservation on neighbouring lands

Jailene Santana
Conservation Program Manager

All images in this article supplied by author.

Nestled along the border with New South Wales, Queensland's Sundown National Park is a rocky gem about 300 kilometres southwest of Brisbane. Noted for its ridges and steep gorges, Sundown National Park can be reached by walking track and off-road vehicle.

While the trap rock region around Sundown National Park is primarily known as sheep farming country, the region provides suitable habitat for a vast quantity of native flora and fauna. In fact, a number of threatened species and ecological communities are dependent on this part of Queensland's small portion of the new England tableland bioregion. Some of the threatened fauna include the squatter pigeon (*Geophaps scripta scripta*), classified as Vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC), as well as the regent honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*) and the swift parrot (*Lathamus discolor*), both of which are classified as Critically Endangered.

Amongst these threatened species is the spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus maculatus*), a carnivorous marsupial that is classified as Endangered under the EPBC Act and as Vulnerable under Queensland's *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Considering the immense responsibility that we have as stewards of our planet, its ecosystems and natural resources, the importance of wildlife corridors continue to be a big theme in the subject of wildlife habitat conservation. While national parks are a great example of how the public sector values and protects nature for its existence value, the amount of land protected for wildlife in Queensland is comparatively small and fragmented. With this being the case, the existence of protected, privately-owned land able to form types of wildlife corridors around national parks is of utmost importance to the survival of many of Queensland's threatened species.

Northwest of Sundown National Park lies an area of privately-owned land, called the quoll island network, that is being managed for the needs of native wildlife. These properties are privately-owned by individuals who appreciate the value of biodiversity and have recently come together to cooperate on the objective of protecting habitat suitable to species such as the spotted-tailed quoll. While some of these properties are not directly adjacent to the national park (the northernmost property is located about 50km northwest from the national park), the quoll island network members hope to make a positive impact on the existing populations of the region's native fauna. Importantly, these landowners recognise their contribution to habitat protection in a region more focused on production than on protection.

The quoll island member properties consist of the following properties: Wilga Park Wildlife Corridor, Silver Hills, Bundanoon, Sierra and Peakvale.

Wilga Park Wildlife Corridor is a 7,124 ha contiguous wildlife corridor owned by TJM Select Investments Pty Ltd, consisting of three nature refuges and one conservation area. The properties are primarily focused on wildlife habitat conservation. A part of the corridor was previously sheep farming and logging land. Preparations are currently underway to develop a native bush-tucker plantation to both restore and produce from the land. Over 400,000 trees have also been planted on TJM's wildlife corridor over the past year by C02 Australia, under the federal government's 20 Million Trees Program, to further contribute to wildlife habitat enhancement.

Silver Hills is an approximately 1,200 ha property, forming a wildlife corridor in the middle of approximately 14,000ha of protected remnant vegetation and state forests. It is located northeast of Texas, Qld. Approximately 90% of the property is protected as either category B or C vegetation which prohibits any significant land clearing. The greatest threat to the habitat is the potential for catastrophic fire. Due to the fuel loads, rugged terrain and highly variable winds, a fire could potentially cause great damage to the flora and fauna in the area. This could seriously compromise the survival of local populations, including iconic animals such as spotted-tailed quolls.

Bundanoon has traditionally been a sheep grazing property and is today a nature refuge. The property is made up of virgin remnant dry forest with some parts cleared and semi-cleared. Bundanoon Nature Refuge sits on basalt trap rock terrain and is located at the peak of the watershed at an elevation of 700 metres above sea level, which allows for the flourishing of diverse native wildlife. Bundanoon's areas of forest and scrub have a diverse ecology and support many species from sundews to quolls and from swamp wallabies to orchids. Bundanoon is a local Aboriginal word meaning *land of many hills and valleys*.

Sierra is a former grazing property adjacent to Sundown National Park (on the western side of the park near the Severn River) in trap rock country. It is, along with Peakvale, one of the two closest quoll island network properties to Sundown National Park. Sierra is approximately 810 ha and is elevated with some steep hills and valleys running east-west, with the highest elevation around 760 metres. The property is host to a variety of native trees including iron bark, yellow box, red gum, pechey wattle, black cypress pine, and xanthorrhoea, as well as many other native trees endemic to the region. The property hosts a large variety of avian species, many of which are found throughout Sundown National Park. The property also has some interesting evidence of early settlement history from the 1800s.

Peakvale is a privately-owned 1,164 ha former sheep grazing property. Peakvale is one of the two quoll island network properties closest to Sundown National Park, being adjacent to the national park's northern boundary. Much of this property is made up of category B remnant vegetation spread across both undulating terrain as well as rugged gorge country. There have been regular sightings of spotted-tailed quolls on this property.

The quoll island network's most recent work has included liaising with carnivorous marsupial expert, Dr Scott Burnett of the University of the Sunshine Coast. Dr Burnett met with the quoll island network in mid-2018 to discuss quoll habitat suitability, risks to the species' survival and likelihood of studies and surveys on the properties. Dr Burnett recently paid a visit to the properties to assess quoll habitat suitability and advise on the best locations to install baited camera traps. All properities in the quoll island network work hard to ensure the protection of quoll habitat and monitor surveillance footage to confirm their location on these protected properties, resulting in a couple of confirmed sightings.

The quoll island network hopes to be able to protect and host the many fantastic species of Queensland's trap rock country for years to come. It is also hoped that the quoll island network's efforts contribute to the positive impact that Sundown National Park is making on the region.

WILDLIFE FEATURE

Dingo dinners: what's on the menu for Australia's top predator?

Tim Doherty, Deakin University
Chris Dickman, University of Sydney
Dale Nimmo, Charles Sturt University
Euan Ritchie, Deakin University
Thomas Newsome, University of Sydney

THE CONVERSATION
www.theconversation.com/dingo-dinners-whats-on-the-menu-for-australias-top-predator-103846

Banner: Fraser Island Dingo finds a fish (Marc Tarlock Wikimedia Commons)

The dingo is Australia's largest land-based predator, occurring across most of the mainland and on many nearshore islands.

Our new research, published in the journal Mammal Review, reveals the breadth and diversity of dingo diets across the continent.

We compiled and analysed 73 sets of data, containing details of more than 32,000 dingo droppings or stomach contents, to document the range of different species that dingoes eat, and how their diets vary between different environments.

A wide-ranging diet

We found that dingoes eat at least 229 vertebrate species. This includes 62 small mammals (less than 500 grams in mass), 79 medium-sized and larger mammals, 10 species of hoofed mammals, 50 birds and 26 reptiles. Dingoes also eat insects, crustaceans, centipedes, fish and frogs.

The true number of species is likely to be much higher because dingo diets have been poorly studied in many parts of Australia, such as Cape York Peninsula.

Large (at least 7kg) and medium-sized (0.5-6.9kg) mammals were the most common components of dingo diets, followed by small mammals, rabbits, arthropods, reptiles, birds and hoofed animals.

A range of introduced pest species also feature in dingo diets, including deer, goats, rabbits, hares, black rats, house mice, foxes and cats. In recent decades, the occurrence of sambar deer in dingo diets has increased as this invasive species has expanded its range.

Dingoes also eat sheep and cattle, although dietary samples are unable to distinguish between predation and scavenging, and hence tell us little about dingo impacts on livestock production. Dietary samples also do not reveal instances of dingoes killing livestock without eating them.

Regional variation

We found that what dingoes eat depends on where they live. For instance, in arid central Australia, birds, reptiles, rabbits, small mammals and insects form major parts of dingo diets. In contrast, these food groups are less important in temperate and subtropical eastern Australia, where medium-sized and large mammals such as kangaroos, bandicoots and possums are more important.

The higher occurrence of medium-sized mammals in dingo diets in eastern Australia may be due to the lower extinction rates of native mammals there. In contrast, central Australia is a global mammal extinction hotspot, which probably accounts for the low occurrence of medium-sized mammals in dingo diets in arid and semi-arid areas.

Nonetheless, one medium-sized mammal was a major food item for dingoes in arid areas: the European rabbit. In some areas, more than 50% of dingo droppings or stomachs contained the remains of this invasive species. It is possible that native medium-sized mammals previously constituted a major part of dingo diets in arid Australia, but have since been replaced by rabbits.

Local prey availability plays a major role in determining what dingoes eat. For instance, in the Tanami Desert, reptiles were most common in dingo diets during warmer months when they are most active. However, very few studies have collected data on prey availability, partly because of the sheer number of different animals that dingoes eat.

Threatened species

Dingoes kill or eat at least 39 native species that are classed as threatened or near-threatened on the IUCN Red List. These include the northern quoll, golden bandicoot and bridled nailtail wallaby.

This tally is higher than the number of threatened species in feral cat diets (based on a previous study that used similar methods), even though cats eat almost twice as many different species overall as dingoes (400 and 229, respectively).

Today's threatened native species co-existed with dingoes for a long time before European colonisation, which means they were able to withstand dingo predation without going extinct.

But now a combination of small population sizes of some threatened species and exacerbating factors such as habitat loss, foxes and cats means some threatened species could be vulnerable to even low levels of dingo predation. Predation by dingoes should therefore be a key consideration when attempting to conserve or restore threatened species.

Dietary studies are one way we can understand how dingoes interact with other species. Our study also highlights that we still have much to learn about our native top predator. In many parts of Australia, the favourite foods of dingoes are still a mystery.

THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

Personal reflection on why our parks must be valued

Julia Bartrim
NPAQ Member

All images in this article supplied by author.

It's a tiny pocket of woodland squeezed to the west by the Bruce Highway, to the south by Deception Bay Rd, and on its other flanks by residential developments.

At 156 hectares, Freshwater National Park may be tiny but it's home to some 29 species of birds, represents core koala habitat and preserves a remnant of open sclerophyll woodland, a community which once grew widely in the region.

It's also a great little getaway from the modern world for Deception Bay residents.

I ventured into the park, early on a Sunday morning, from Priest's Road, which runs along its eastern border.

Cicadas were already buzzing though the grass was still wet underfoot on the open, sandy track.

There was not a human soul in sight.

Dragonflies floated above young casuarinas and a peaceful dove called relentlessly while lorikeets rocketed between the trees.

their ubiquitous squawking accompanied by occasional cries from a channel-billed cuckoo and the chirpy notes of a butcher bird.

The park features grandfather scribbly gums replete with hollows, but it's dominated by younger, thinner trees, mostly gums, casuarinas, and paperbarks. These are surrounded by armies of small grass trees and a variety of grasses and sedges.

Gazetted in 1973, Freshwater National Park was formerly used as grazing land for cattle.

The department states that little is known of the Indigenous history of the area although the Gubbi Gubbi people, (of the Sunshine Coast, Moreton Bay and Burnett Mary Regions) once registered a native title claim over Freshwater National Park, which has since passed.

It's a park unlikely to attract throngs of tourists, given its small size and lack of spectacular views or topography. The park is basically a small, roughly square, flat pocket of land intersected by Little Burpengary Creek at its northern corner.

In fact one tourist, commenting on a popular review website, dismissed the park as 'laughable' and deplored its lack of photographic opportunities.

But its low tourism status could be considered a bonus for the park's wildlife.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service says it has no plans to develop the park beyond its currently cleared dirt walking tracks.

And lower visitor numbers of course, offers respite to native wildlife - although the park is used by locals for bird watching or for a quiet stroll.

And it must be said; its proximity to the Bruce Highway means even in the early hours of a Sunday morning the roar of traffic can easily be heard.

Despite this, I enjoyed my walk through the park.

On my way out I encountered two beautiful Pacific black ducks ambling along the track ahead of me, with not a care in the world, undisturbed, except by me joining in on their morning stroll.

RANGER OF THE MONTH

Insights into the diverse backgrounds and day-to-day activities of Queensland's park rangers

Boyd Blackman
Park Ranger - Great Sandy National Park

Banner: Lake McKenzie, K'Gari (Fraser Island) Recreation Area, Great Sandy National Park ©TEQ

Boyd Blackman is a Park Ranger in Great Sandy National Park. Boyd is a Butchulla man—the Butchulla people are the Aboriginal Traditional Owners of K'gari (Fraser Island). Boyd holds an identified Indigenous Ranger position and his passion is for his culture. Boyd's aim is to bring cultural awareness and understanding into QPWS and to look after our natural landscapes and sea country in his dual role of Park Ranger and Traditional Custodian. Boyd strongly believes that 'what is good for the land must come first'.

How long have you worked in national parks?

I was first given the opportunity to work as a Cultural Heritage Ranger about 27 years ago in Mount Isa. It was a proud moment for me, as an Aboriginal person, to be given the trust of the Elders of the area. From there, I moved into a Park Ranger position with Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. My aim was to bring to the organisation a better understanding of Aboriginal cultural practices and perspectives for the protection of cultural sites, and to work as part of a dedicated team of QPWS Rangers.

Which parks have you worked in?

Firstly, I worked in the north-west of the state at Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill Gorge) National Park, and around the Mount Isa region. Then I moved to the south-east and worked at K'gari (Fraser Island) in Great Sandy National Park. I've also been based at Bribie Island National Park, and around the Moreton Bay region. I have now moved back to work at K'gari (Fraser Island), in the Coastal and Islands region. This is my traditional country.

QPWS Boyd Blackman Park Ranger - Great Sandy National Park (above).

PHOTOS: BOYD BLACKMAN & QLD GOVERNMENT

What is your most memorable moment?

My most memorable moment was receiving an Excellence Award from the Minister at the time, MP Dr. Steven Miles. My award was in the category, Excellence in Leadership, in recognition of my work towards 'closing the gap'.

Can you describe your favourite national parks experience?

One of my favorite national park experiences is walking through the lush rainforest on K'gari (Fraser Island). I especially enjoy The Valley of Giants where huge turpentine trees tower above you—but this is a remote part of the island and can be hard to access. I also love all the freshwater lakes. Fraser Island is the world's largest sand island and has incredible freshwater lakes, like Lake Boomanjin, the largest perched lake in the world, and Lake Wabby, the island's deepest lake.

My other favourite spots are at Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill Gorge) where Lawn Hill Creek flows through a steep lush gorge that cuts through the dry savannah landscape.

What is the best part about working in a National Park?

The thing I like best about working in a national park is being able to show my fellow Park Rangers, first-hand, that having spiritual connection to land and country helps in being the 'cultural custodians' of our protected areas. Working as a Park Ranger on K'gari allows me to keep in touch with my culture and connection to land and country.

What is your top tip for visitors to parks for bushwalking?

I always say, 'Take only photos and leave only footprints behind', and of course, 'take time and connect to the country!'

What is your top tip for campers?

My advice to visitors who are considering camping in national parks is that 'your backyard does not end at your mailbox. All of Australia, including our national parks, is our backyard and it's up to all of us to look after our country'.

NPAQ thanks Boyd for taking time to answer our questions. We appreciate the work all QPWS rangers undertake in protecting Queensland's national parks.

WHAT'S ON

For more details and activities, visit our website:
www.npaq.org.au/events

NPAQ activities

More details npaq.org.au/events

Mt Hobwee Circuit

Date: Saturday, 8 December 2018

Meet: 7.45am, Binna Burra Carpark near the teahouse.

Cost: $5 per person

Leader: Frank Freeman: 07 3824 3954, 0427 655 514, frank_fr@bigpond.net.au

Notes: Beat the summer heat of Brisbane by taking a walk in the rainforest to the top of Mt Hobwee which, at 1164 metres, is the highest peak in this section of lamington National Park. While there are limited views from the top, there are a couple of lookouts on the way and some of the flora should be at its blooming best.The route follows the Border Track from Binna Burra for 5.5km before branching left for the circuitous climb to the top of Mt Hobwee for lunch. Bring a light jacket as it is normally quite cool. Remnants of the old survey marker might still be seen although it is slowly disintegrating.After turning left on the way down, we'll join the Border Track at the escarpment, turning right for the 8km trek back to Binna Burra and coffee.

Bring: Morning Tea, Lunch, Afternoon Tea, Insect repellent (leeches), 2+ litres water, raincoat, cardigan, torch, $5.00 NPAQ fee, sense of adventure.

New Year Twilight Celebration

Date: Sunday, 6 January 2018

Meet: 3:30 pm at Teralba Park, opposite 87 Pullen Road, Everton Park

Cost: Pay $14 per person to NPAQ Office by cheque with the Activity Nomination Form or alternatively, you can pay by Direct Transfer to BSB: 124-001 Account: 1201 8942 and - "Your surname Twilight" - as the reference on the bank deposit form.

Leader: Len & Laurelle Lowry: 0428 335 572, onthewallaby@live.com.au

Notes: Based on the successful 2018 "Picnic in the Park" at Jindalee, we have decided to run this activity again, this time on the north side. Teralba Park is a pleasant park with plenty of shade and facilities. Although it can be popular on weekends, there is plenty of space to spread out. It has toilets and shelter sheds and is close to an easy level walk along Kedron Brook. If you do not wish to do the walk, you are most welcome to come along and join the group staying at the park for a chat. We have a contingency plan if it decides to "rain on our party". The program will follow the tried and tested format of a walk, nibbles and bubbly/juice and a hearty snack with dessert. Nominations close Thursday, 3rd January 2019.

Bring: Folding chair, water bottle, sun screen, hat, walk shoes, walking pole and torch.

NPAQ events

Upcoming Members Meetings

February members meeting will be on the 20th of February. Click here for more information.

May members meeting will be on the 15th of May.

Further details at www.npaq.org.au

Office

Christmas Closure
The NPAQ Office closes from the 19 December 2018 and reopens 7th of January 2019.

Sign the petition - stop national park sell off.

Help us get 10,000 signatures on the petition - make parliament debate the future of Qld national parks.

Sign the petition: www.npaq.org.au/not-for-sale

OUR NATIONAL PARKS

NOT FOR SALE

Help us get 10,000 signatures on the petition - make parliament debate the future of Qld national parks.

The Qld government is seeking to privatise large sections of our national parks.

WWW.NPAQ.ORG.AU

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Find out how you can help: visit www.npaq.org.au/not-for-sale