

Operational policy

Community and other relations

Good Neighbour Policy

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing. Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Policy subject

This policy outlines the position of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) in regard to relationships with neighbours and local communities and also in relation to a variety of cross-boundary management issues.

Background

QPWS manages approximately 12 million hectares of land across the State on behalf of Queenslanders. This land includes national parks, regional parks, State forests and forest reserves. This policy refers to these collectively as “QPWS managed areas”.

The importance of communication and co-operation has been widely recognised in legislation and policies that guide park management. For example, the *Master Plan for Queensland’s Parks System (2001)* (Master Plan) provides strategic direction for the management of the State’s protected areas over the next 20 years. Working with community partners is explicitly recognised as one of the four key dimensions of park management. The Master Plan also emphasises the need for parks to be integrated with good land management across the landscape and the importance of ongoing involvement and co-operation with local communities and neighbours.

QPWS has a wide variety of neighbours, including rural landholders and primary producers, tourism resorts and guesthouses, industrial and commercial businesses, many different types of residential communities and various government lands. The number of neighbours adjoining QPWS managed areas can range from one or two to many hundreds.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- promote co-operation and exchange of information between landholders and QPWS;
- establish guidelines for positive relationships between QPWS, neighbours and local communities, based on mutual respect, understanding and recognition of the rights and responsibilities of all landholders, and
- clearly outline the approach of QPWS on a range of land management issues needing co-operative management, including fire management, control of pest plants and feral animals, management of native animals and the use of pesticides and other substances.

Good neighbour relations

QPWS managed areas are administered in accordance with principles set down in legislation. These principles provide for conservation and protection of natural and cultural values and in many cases also allow for a variety of uses including recreation, grazing and other commercial activities.

Land adjacent to QPWS managed areas is used for a wide range of purposes, including grazing, agricultural production, conservation, recreation, resource extraction and tourism and residential development. In recent years, many QPWS managed areas have become “islands” of remnant vegetation, with crops, houses or cleared grazing land adjacent to the boundary. This greatly increases the difficulty of managing natural systems and maintaining biodiversity.

The management of both QPWS managed areas and adjoining lands has the potential to cause positive and negative impacts on adjacent properties. Plants, animals, fire, air and water move across and affect the landscape without regard for tenure boundaries and fence lines. QPWS managers and neighbours must communicate and co-operate to ensure that positive impacts (such as the flow of clean water) are maximised and negative impacts (such as movement of pest plants and feral animals) are minimised.

The success of this policy depends on the development and maintenance of good relationships between QPWS staff, neighbours and communities at a local level. In their dealings with neighbours, QPWS staff will abide by the guidelines in this policy to the greatest possible extent, within the parameters of their statutory management obligations and practical constraints.

Definitions

QPWS managed areas means all lands managed by the QPWS, including national park and regional parks managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, State forests and forest reserves managed under the *Forestry Act 1959*.

Neighbour includes any person, corporation or association, as well as local, State and Commonwealth agencies that own, are responsible for, or live on land or waters adjacent or near to QPWS managed areas. Neighbours are not limited to the people who share common boundaries.

Local community is a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality.

Policy statement

General principles

- All landholders can benefit from maintaining a productive and sustainable environment. Greater understanding, information sharing and co-operation can help achieve this goal.
- Establishing and maintaining open, positive and respectful relationships with neighbours and local communities is a priority for QPWS staff.
- Land management practices are more effective if they are developed in consultation with neighbours and local communities, made available to neighbours and implemented co-operatively across the landscape.
- Issues and problems are generally best addressed at the local level, by local people working together.

Building relationships

Good relationships are the cornerstone of responsible and co-operative management. Development of these relationships requires trust, time and consistency from all parties and liaison with neighbours and local communities is recognised as an important component of QPWS staff duties. QPWS staff will take the initiative to establish and maintain open and positive relationships with neighbours and local communities and will support the involvement of staff in local community initiatives, groups and networks.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a special relationship with the lands that make up the QPWS estate, both as traditional owners and custodians of their cultural heritage and as neighbours and members of local communities. QPWS recognises the important relationship between traditional owners and the land and will recognise the rights and interests of traditional owners in developing park management arrangements.

QPWS will also continue to consult with neighbours about the protection of cultural sites on the QPWS estate and other issues involving the interests of indigenous people.

Integrated planning arrangements

QPWS supports a whole of landscape approach to planning and management. QPWS will continue to involve neighbours in the development of management plans and strategies for QPWS managed areas, to ensure that the interests and rights of landholders are considered and that QPWS plans are co-ordinated as far as possible with planning and management activities on other lands. QPWS will invite community and local government involvement when preparing management plans for QPWS managed areas and in promoting awareness and understanding of natural and cultural heritage.

Local government activities, controls and land use plans are of great importance in supporting and complementing the roles of QPWS managed areas. QPWS staff will provide advice to local government when planning schemes are being prepared, to ensure that QPWS land management objectives are recognised in all aspects of planning schemes.

Local governments and developers of land adjacent to QPWS managed areas are urged to consider QPWS interests in their planning and to be mindful of potential interactions between new residents, natural systems and native wildlife. For example, construction of housing or tourist facilities directly adjacent to park boundaries can be a challenge for fire management on the park and may expose inhabitants to wildlife that they may find threatening or a nuisance (such as flying foxes). Impacts of domestic animals on native wildlife in these circumstances can also be very severe.

To help promote strong linkages between QPWS land management activities and “whole of landscape” management, QPWS staff will participate in joint management programs and initiatives, such as Landcare, regional NRM activities and catchment management planning exercises, where possible.

Fire management

QPWS will co-operate with neighbours in the management of fire across boundaries to protect life, community assets, other property and the natural and cultural values of both QPWS managed areas and adjacent lands. This will include co-ordination, co-operation and active participation with fire authorities and other land managers in matters such as the location, construction and maintenance of fire control lines, notification of intention to burn (required under the *Fires and Rescue Services Act 1990*), access to property, training in fire management, undertaking fuel reduction burns, developing wildfire contingency plans and wildfire responses.

Neighbours of QPWS managed areas are urged to consult with QPWS staff before undertaking any building or other works that will alter the options for fire management in the area.

QPWS gives the protection of life and property the highest priority in all its fire management activities, including pre-emptive hazard reduction burning and wildfire suppression activities, such as the construction and maintenance of fire control lines. The protection of biodiversity and other natural and cultural values are also considered by QPWS in managing fire on the estate.

Neighbours also need to take responsibility for keeping dwellings and other infrastructure near QPWS managed areas in a condition that minimises fire risk.

Controlling pest plants and animals

QPWS recognises the impact of pest plants and animals on the productive capacity of rural lands and acknowledges its responsibility for controlling pest species on QPWS managed areas. In conducting or participating in pest control activities, QPWS will also take account of biodiversity protection and sustainability objectives.

QPWS has a state-wide pest management plan and will also develop local pest management plans for particular areas or pest species. QPWS staff will contribute to the development and review of local government pest management plans. This includes providing support in the identification of environmentally sensitive areas and fostering linkages between regional pest management planning and local government pest management plans.

QPWS will seek to co-operate in joint pest control programs with surrounding landholders, other government departments and local governments and will give priority to co-operating with neighbours in the prevention and/or eradication of new outbreaks of pest species.

Where a need has been identified, QPWS will also consider approval of 1080 baiting on its lands by lessees, permittees and neighbours, subject to conditions. For more information, refer to the operational policies '*Wild dog management*' and '*Use of sodium fluoroacetate (compound 1080) for poison baiting*'.

QPWS will notify neighbours prior to undertaking any herbicide or pesticide program along an area boundary and will encourage neighbours to do likewise.

QPWS will proactively manage its operations to minimise weed seed spread and comply with any related protocols that exist across relevant government agencies.

To prevent garden plants becoming pests, neighbours are urged to be aware of plants that have the potential for becoming environmental weeds and to avoid planting these species in gardens where seeds or other propagules could be spread into natural areas.

Managing native animals

Where native animals are causing demonstrable impact on vegetation, stock, fences, crops or pastures, QPWS staff will consult with relevant landholders about available management options, including the option of issuing damage mitigation permits for use outside QPWS managed areas.

Stock management and fencing

Stock grazing may occur on certain classes of land (primarily State forests and timber reserves), under a permit, lease or other authority. However, the presence of stray and unmanaged stock can cause serious impacts on QPWS managed areas, especially in cases where grazing is not compatible with the tenure's primary purpose of management (for example, national park).

To minimise these impacts, QPWS staff will work with neighbours who graze stock to identify and develop strategies that aim to prevent unauthorised stock from straying onto QPWS managed lands.

Where boundary fences are required between QPWS managed areas and neighbouring lands, appropriate arrangements will be developed through consultation. These arrangements will be recorded in a written agreement between the QPWS and the relevant landholder. Although the *Neighbourhood Disputes Resolution Act 2011* does not bind the State in relation to the construction and repair of dividing fences, costs of construction and maintenance will be negotiated between parties in the spirit of co-operation.

When stock stray onto QPWS managed areas, QPWS staff will make reasonable efforts to determine the owner/s of the animals. Neighbours will be requested to remove their stock from the area as soon as possible. If

this is not feasible, QPWS may arrange for mustering of the stock. Mustered stock may be handed over to local government pounds in some circumstances.

When determining if non-native animals on QPWS managed lands are stray stock or feral animals, in the spirit of positive community relations the QPWS will not rely solely on the legal definitions of stock in the Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2006 and *Forestry Act 1959*. Other species will generally be regarded as stock if they have identification markers or are rural production animals in the local area. QPWS will also consider the practicality of mustering and its obligations for managing biodiversity, conserving ecological integrity and controlling pests when making such determinations.

Managing domestic animals

Domestic animals are only allowed on QPWS managed lands in particular circumstances governed by various legislative provisions. With some exceptions, dogs other than guide dogs are not allowed on protected areas managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. Exceptions include working dogs authorised by a stock grazing permit or stock mustering permit, dogs kept by staff under the *Operational Policy - Domestic animals kept by staff in protected areas* and dogs authorised by the Chief Executive under special circumstances. Dogs on leads are allowed in the majority of State forests during the day but are prohibited from many picnic areas and camping grounds by use of regulatory notices. Recreational horse-riding is allowed on some regional parks by regulatory permit, but not on other types of protected areas. Recreational horse-riding may be allowed on some State forests.

Domestic animals can have serious impacts on native wildlife and neighbours are urged to prevent domestic animals from straying onto QPWS managed lands. When unauthorised domestic animals are found on QPWS managed areas, QPWS staff may notify local authorities to remove the animal or may seize the animal in accordance with legislative provisions.

Tourism and visitor management

QPWS will consider the potential for local communities to benefit from tourism to QPWS managed lands, depending upon the values of the area and the interests of all stakeholders. QPWS staff will also work with landholders to develop strategies to minimise any adverse impacts on neighbours and local communities resulting from visitors to its estate.

Habitat extension and wildlife corridors

Habitat on private lands is vital for the long-term protection and maintenance of biodiversity and other natural values and also helps maintain the natural processes that underpin both production and conservation. QPWS staff will encourage neighbours to maintain or restore natural vegetation to provide additional habitat and wildlife corridors (for example, to link parks to areas of remnant vegetation).

Where private land contains areas of significant conservation value, the participation of landowners in nature refuge agreements will be encouraged.

Lease and permit holders

On certain classes of reserves, land uses such as stock grazing and beekeeping may be authorised. Authorisations will include conditions to establish the responsibilities of lessees and permittees with regard to co-operative management and dealings with other landholders.

Access

QPWS staff seeking access to a neighbouring property will request permission from the relevant landholder prior to accessing the property, or develop an agreed understanding of access requirements. Similarly,

neighbours who require access to QPWS managed lands other than via public access routes should discuss their requirements with relevant QPWS staff.

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care, it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved By

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Signature

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Date

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