

# Mackay Highlands

**Management Statement**

2013

*The Department of Environment, Science and Innovation acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. We recognise their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.*

*The department is committed to respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the Human Rights Act 2019.*

*This management statement does not intend to affect, diminish, or extinguish native title or associated rights.*

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All due diligence and care has been taken in the preparation of this document based on the information in the 2013 management statement. The department holds no responsibility for any errors or omissions within this document. Any decisions made by other parties based on this document are solely the responsibility of those parties.

The Mackay Highlands Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2024 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the statement's original management intent and direction.

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Throughout this document the term 'Mackay Highlands' is used to collectively refer to the included protected areas unless an individual reserve is specifically mentioned.

## Summary

The Mackay Highlands has outstanding nature conservation values and these values provide the strategic framework for opportunities and constraints for future nature-based recreation and tourism. This document outlines policies, actions and strategies for achieving a future vision for parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands.

A key recommendation in this document is that, should the Queensland Government determine that areas in the Mackay Highlands will not be required for timber harvesting in the long-term, then the conservation values of forests tenures in the Mackay Highlands should be investigated for transfer into protected area tenure. If native forests are transferred into protected areas in the future then the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service should investigate the possibility for the Mackay Highlands being included as a World Heritage Area. If this eventuates then Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service should make arrangements with individual lessees and permittees for a gradual phase out of cattle grazing on State lands.

This document also provides for special management considerations for the rainforest areas in the Mackay Highlands that contain critical conservation values and habitat for endangered frog species. Strategies for enhanced protection of natural values from the effects of use are included.

Where conservation and protection are not compromised the parks and forests will be managed as a central part of a network of nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities in the Mackay Highlands. Parks and forests will be presented through facility development at key destination sites that act as visitor drawcards to the area. Road and trail access to key destination sites will be managed for the purposes of presenting parks and forests. Natural and cultural heritage interpretation along these roads and trails and also at key destination sites will enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of their Mackay Highlands experience.

A development control plan is provided to guide the future direction of visitor facility development in parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands. Within these guidelines, detailed assessment of specific proposals and specific sites will be required to ensure that environmental impacts can be reasonably managed.

Key destination sites on parks and forests have opportunities to be linked with townships and attractions on adjacent lands. The involvement of local communities and Traditional Owners in planning for the future of the Mackay Highlands is recognised as important to ensuring that the future directions of parks and forests are relevant and integrated with the social and economic directions of surrounding communities.

## Introduction

### Regional context

The Mackay Highlands is a large area of natural and relatively undisturbed land in the Mackay-Whitsunday region of central Queensland. It covers a significant portion of the Connors and Clarke Range. This document focuses on the public land component of the Mackay Highlands which covers an area of 158 033 hectares.

Major towns in the vicinity include Mackay to the east, Proserpine to the north, Nebo to the south and Sarina to the south-east. Surrounding industries include sugar cane production, timber harvesting, mining, quarrying, dairying and beef cattle grazing.

This document provides a conservation planning framework for the future use and management of State land in the Mackay Highlands area. State lands include Eungella and Homevale National Parks, Crediton, Teemburra, Mia Mia and Cathu State Forests and Homevale Resources Reserve (see Figure 1).

The Mackay Highlands contains outstanding levels of biodiversity across a diverse range of ecosystems. Several thousand species of flora and fauna are known to occur in the area, many of which are threatened species and some of which are unique only to the Mackay Highlands. This document clearly focuses on a conservation perspective for managing future uses of parks and forests. The Whitsunday Hinterland and Mackay (WHAM) 2015 project supports the case that biodiversity conservation should be a priority planning focus for this area (Environment North, 2000).

This document defines conservation requirements as a basis for management so as to enable better-informed community decisions on how nature-based tourism might develop in the Mackay Highlands. It is anticipated that this document will provide a parks and forest framework to assist with other planning exercises such as regional tourism strategies, regional infrastructure strategies and regional marketing strategies.

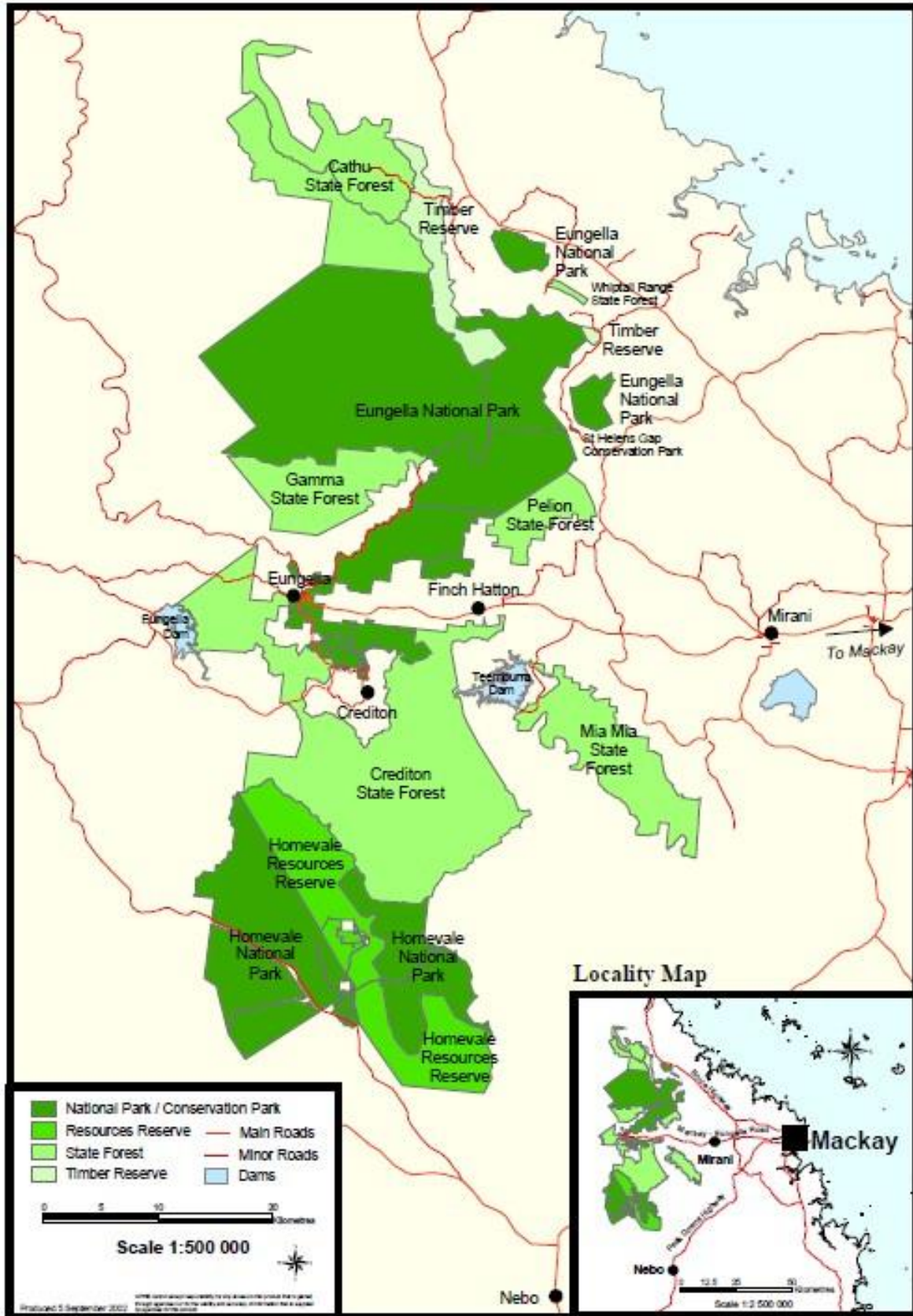
## **Scope and purpose**

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, managers of national parks, other protected areas and state forests (parks and forests) has compiled this document as the basis of a coordinated planning framework across the Mackay Highlands area. This document has been prepared as a direct response to regional community desires for a future based significantly on sustainable tourism.

The natural assets of the Mackay Highlands already attract a substantial number of visitors. The Mackay Highlands offers visitors a chance to experience an area of tropical Queensland which remains largely undeveloped. The Pioneer Valley Tourism Strategy (CAERA, 1994) identified the region's natural resources as the foundation for future tourism growth. However, tourism industry operators and local communities acknowledged that such growth must be planned and controlled in order to prevent degradation of the natural environment that attracts visitors to the area in the first place.

This document will ensure that the Mackay Highlands are able to benefit from appropriate tourism development while minimising conflicts arising between conservation values and other community interests.

Figure 1. Mackay Highlands - locality map



## Background to the planning process

In late 1988 the Department of Natural Resources, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Mackay City Council and Mirani and Nebo Shire Councils cooperatively developed a plan for State-owned land in the Connors and Clarke Ranges. Three years of data collection and community consultation culminated in the compilation of the *Draft Connors-Clarke Range Resource Report* (Department of Natural Resources and Department of Environment, 1999). The report outlined the best available information at the time pertaining to nature conservation values, resource availability and existing recreational opportunities in the Mackay Highlands area.

Communities in the Mackay Highlands area have been actively exploring new economic opportunities in tourism. Concerns stemming both from visible problems at popular visitor sites in Eungella National Park and also from uncoordinated proposals for tourism developments in the Mackay Highlands area, resulted in Queensland MP Tim Mulherin organising a stakeholder workshop on the 11 August 2000. This workshop focused on sustainable tourism in the Clarke-Connors Range and was a precursor to discussions at the Regional Community Forum held in Mackay on the 21 August 2000.

Recommendations that arose from the workshop included a frontline Department of Natural Resources/Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service planning exercise and the establishment of a Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee.

The Department of Natural Resources (Forestry) and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service have since been amalgamated as one agency responsible for managing State forest and protected area tenures in Queensland.

Hence, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service now manages most of the State land within the Mackay Highlands area.

The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee was formed to represent and coordinate community involvement in identifying and promoting environmentally sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities in the region. The coordinating committee is administered by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to improve linkages and communications between park and forest planning with that of planning for sustainable tourism development in the region.

The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee includes representatives from local and State governments as well as a broad range of community interests from Mackay, Mirani, Eungella, Finch Hatton, Nebo and Sarina. The area of interest extends further than the park and forest planning area covered in this document. The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee also serves to improve communication between the community representatives and government agencies with shared interests in sustainable tourism development for the region.

Technical reference groups for cultural heritage, conservation, grazing and recreation were formed to assist with information gathering in this planning process. These groups consisted of members of the community with significant local knowledge or recognised expertise in their field. The technical reference group reports have been a valuable source of information for preparing this document and will be of enormous assistance for further on ground planning.

The Cultural Heritage Technical Reference Group report provides an inventory of 83 non- indigenous cultural heritage sites as well as detailed site descriptions for 17 sites in the Mackay Highlands. The report also contains a timeline of major events in the Mackay Highlands area, which provides an interesting historical context.

The Conservation Technical Reference Group report utilises a variety of information on biodiversity to describe the conservation values of the Mackay Highlands. A zoning system was developed to illustrate the relative importance of different areas in terms of nature conservation. Detailed information on threatening process for each zone and for each threatened species is provided in the report. The report recognises that management considerations will differ from one location to the next. The report proposes management regimes for 45 different regional ecosystems in the Mackay Highlands area. This report will be invaluable when assessing detailed on-ground proposals.

The Grazing Technical Reference Group uses criteria such as water, mustering, declared pests and fencing to arrive at assessments of the grazing value of key areas in the Mackay Highlands. The report also contains views of the group members on issues such as recreation and conservation as they relate to grazing. The need for consultation with individual lessees on any proposals that might affect them is a key recommendation. Such proposals may include the Great Walks, managing the effects of grazing on specific regional ecosystems or tenure transfers.

The Recreation Technical Reference Group undertook individual site assessment reports for 46 locations in the Mackay Highlands. The site assessments used a landscape classification approach, which considered site

capability, suitable activities and management input required.

The adequacy of existing supply and inferred demand trends were used to assess the recreational potential of 13 different types of outdoor recreational activities. This report will be useful for more detailed site planning, especially in making comparative site assessments for recreational suitability. This '*Planning for the Future*' document provides broad-scale strategic direction for the future use and management of parks and forests with a clear conservation focus. This document addresses key issues of concern and does not attempt to deal with comprehensive analysis of site specific planning nor to reproduce sections of the technical reference group reports.

## Vision

**Protection** of the unique and irreplaceable natural and cultural assets of parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands will be an investment for the community now and for future generations.

**Presentation** opportunities will be provided in parks and forests via facility development at key destination sites. These sites will serve as a central part of a network of nature-based recreational and tourism attractions. Local communities will derive significant environmental, economic and social benefits from their linkages with parks and forests.

**Partnerships** between neighbours, local communities and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will ensure that the vision is achieved in a coordinated manner that is integrated with the future directions of surrounding communities. Responsibilities, interests and aspirations of Traditional Owners will be respected in relation to their lands, and their roles in park and forest management will be supported.

## Document outline

The protection, presentation and partnership aspects of achieving the vision are detailed in this document through exploration of key issues in section 2.0 *Achieving the vision*.

The protection component of the vision is referred to in section 2.1 *Safeguarding our natural and cultural heritage*, which addresses key issues relating to conservation values, timber harvesting in native forests, grazing in native forests and endangered frog habitat.

The presentation component of the vision is referred to in section 2.2 *Sustaining tourism and recreation opportunities*, which addresses key issues relating to visitor facility development and presenting our cultural heritage.

The partnership component of the vision is referred to in section 2.3 *Working with community partners*, which addresses the key issues associated with strategic partnerships with communities as well as working together with Traditional Owners.

Section 3.0 provides guidelines for the way in which visitor facilities could develop over time through the use of a visitor facility development control plan.

Appendix A provides background information on the natural heritage values of the Mackay Highlands including National Estate values, geology and landforms, plants, animals, regional ecosystems and protected area estates.

Appendix B outlines the criteria for listing as a natural world heritage site.

Appendix C outlines future guidelines for the assessment of renewal on grazing leases and permits on State forests.

Appendix D provides a compilation by topic matter of some of the key comments on this document, provided by members of the Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee.

Appendix E provides a summary of the documents policies, actions and strategies re-organised by implementation area. Each strategy can be easily cross-referenced back to its location in the main document.

The bibliography lists references, which provided information for this document, as well as some resources that may be of interest for further reading.

## Implementation, evaluation and review

The strategies in this document are intended to guide management. In many cases detailed action planning consistent with these guidelines will be required for visitor facilities development, fire management and feral animal

and weed control.

Implementation will aim to coordinate available funds and resources to achieve priority strategies. This document will guide the development of annual works programs for the parks and forest of the Mackay Highlands.

Implementing many strategies will be dependent on funding and resources made available, however this document will provide a good basis for seeking funding from a range of sources for priority strategies. Strategic partnerships between local government and QPWS will also assist in generating resources and funds from a variety of sources.

Evaluation and review will involve assessing outcomes from annual works programs against the outcomes and priorities in the document.

Management strategies in this document will be reviewed after five and within 10 years so as to reflect new and previously unidentified issues and to amend strategies as appropriate.

## **Achieving the vision**

### **Safeguarding our natural and cultural heritage**

Safeguarding the natural values of the Mackay Highlands landscape is achieved in part by protecting areas of critical conservation value from incompatible land uses and in part by minimising the impacts of other land uses.

Active management is also needed to maintain the plants, animals and landscapes, which form the ecosystem. The Master Plan for Queensland's Park System, states that the most important aim of nature conservation is for the maintenance of natural ecological processes and the protection of biodiversity (State of Queensland, Environmental Protection Agency, 2001).

The Mackay Highlands has numerous places of cultural importance. There is strong sense of community ownership of these heritage assets, which also include natural features such as Mt Dalrymple and the Armstrong and Flors tracks. Safeguarding the cultural values of the Mackay Highlands is achieved in part by the material protection of sites, structures and objects and in part by keeping alive the stories, beliefs and memories of communities and their association with a place. A strategy for the protection of cultural heritage is outlined in the Master Plan for Queensland's Park System (State of Queensland/ Environmental Protection Agency, 2001). Opportunities and constraints for presenting cultural heritage values are discussed in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

The planning and management of both parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands have recently come under the responsibility of the Environmental Protection Agency, which incorporates the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. This means that the Mackay Highlands can be managed as a single landscape entity, rather than separate parcels of park and forest tenure managed by separate agencies. Natural resource management (e.g. fire management, weed management, feral animal management, research and monitoring) can now more readily be coordinated across the park and forest landscape. The highest priority for the management of the Mackay Highlands will be the maintenance of natural integrity, cultural heritage values and natural landscapes.

A number of key issues with regard to safeguarding natural and cultural values of the Mackay Highlands have been identified through the planning process. The key issues are protecting nature conservation values, timber harvesting in native forests, grazing in native forests and protection of endangered frog habitat.

The current situations regarding these key issues are described below in section 2.1.1 through to section 2.1.4. Future directions have been identified for each key issue as a means of achieving the vision for the Mackay Highlands (see section 1.4). Policies, actions and strategies that specify how we will address the key issues are also provided.

### **Protecting nature conservation values**

#### **Current situation**

The Mackay Highlands supports outstanding levels of biodiversity. Several thousand species of plants and animals are known to occur in the area, many of which are rare, endemic or threatened. Many of the ecosystems found in the Mackay Highlands are also rare or threatened.

Further information on National Estate values, geology and landform, regional ecosystems, plants, animals and protected area estates are provided in Appendix A. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service believe that the values



of the Mackay Highlands are so high that they would most likely meet the criteria (see Appendix B) for inclusion in a World Heritage Area.

Knowledge and appreciation of the conservation values of the Mackay Highlands will enable better-informed community decisions about how nature-based tourism might develop.

The Conservation Technical Reference Group used mapping to describe the conservation values of the Mackay Highlands. The mapping of conservation values is only useful as a broad scale guide to where broad conservation values lie. For guidance on appropriate future use patterns of sustainable tourism and recreation activities it is best to refer to the visitor use facility development control plan in section 3.0.

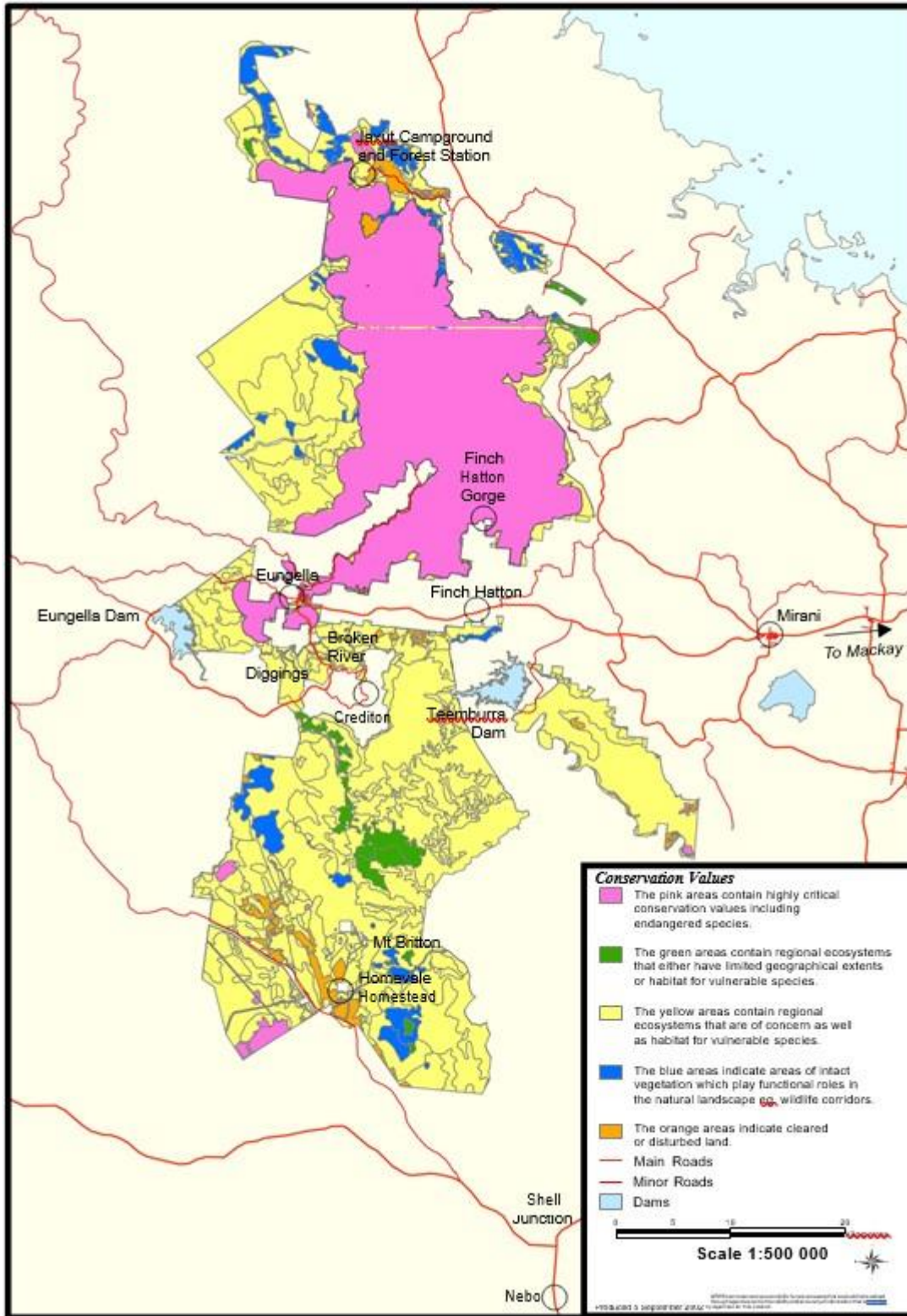
Conservation values comprise a suite of different concepts including:

- genetic, species, ecosystem and landscape biodiversity;
- the existence of vulnerable, rare or endangered species;
- the presence of habitat for vulnerable, rare or endangered species;
- the occurrence of indicator species that imply healthy ecosystems; and
- the presence of structural habitats that provide for ecosystem functions.

A significant volume of information has contributed to our knowledge of conservation values in the Mackay Highlands. As more knowledge on the Mackay Highlands is acquired, the conservation values of the area will be refined. The mapping of the above conservation concepts and consideration of values at a local, regional and national scale have been used to generate categories of broad conservation values (see Figure 2). Descriptions of categories for broad scale conservation values are provided below.

Further information on threats and proposed management regimes for specific regional ecosystems and specific threatened species are explored in the report compiled by the Conservation Technical Reference Group. This information will be a useful tool for assessing the potential impacts of specific developments at specific sites.

Figure 2. Conservation values map



**Pink areas** incorporate highly critical conservation values such as endangered regional ecosystems and habitat, critical for the survival of endangered species. Regional ecosystems are considered 'endangered' when there is less than 10% of pre-European extent of vegetation that remains in an intact condition. Such areas are found scattered throughout the Mackay Highlands, with notable areas in Homevale National Park and in the vicinity of

Finch Hatton Gorge. Regional ecosystems are considered 'of concern' when there is 10-30% of pre-European extent of vegetation that remains in an intact condition. Areas that contain both 'endangered' and 'of concern' ecosystems are found scattered in northern parts of the Mackay Highlands.

The endangered northern gastric brooding frog occurs nowhere else in the world except for rainforest streams between altitudes of 400- 1000m within Eungella National Park. The recovery plan for stream dwelling frogs of the Eungella region states that the species has not been positively sighted since 1985 (State of Queensland, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, 2001).

The Eungella dayfrog is unique to the Clarke Range and lives in rainforest streams occurring between altitudes of 200-1000m. Their habitat occurs throughout most of the pink areas in the northern part of the Mackay Highlands. Fungal disease is considered a significant threat to these species (see 2.1.4).

Pink areas particularly towards the south of the Mackay Highlands contain habitat suitable for the endangered yakka skink and also for the endangered red goshawk of which a number of sightings have been made in the area.

**Green areas** contain regional ecosystems that either have limited geographical extents or are not in a protected area, as well as critical habitat for vulnerable species. Thirty-seven types of regional ecosystems within the Central Queensland Coast Bioregion occur in the Mackay Highlands. Of these, 25 have inadequate representation in a protected area estate. An additional two ecosystems are naturally restricted in their geographical extents (less than 1000 ha). Most of these green areas are located within Crediton State Forest.

The green areas also contain critical habitat for vulnerable species such as the powerful owl. Extensive areas of previous powerful owl habitat in Queensland have been lost through widespread clearing and inappropriate land management practices. The presence of the powerful owl has only recently been confirmed within the Connors Range.

**Yellow areas** contain regional ecosystems that are of concern as well as habitat for vulnerable species. Yellow areas generally contain regional ecosystems that are of no concern at present but they include significant areas of regional ecosystem that are 'of concern'.

Regional ecosystems are considered 'of concern' when there is 10-30% of pre- European extent of vegetation that remains in an intact condition. The main conservation management concern in these areas is to manage impacts so that the systems do not become endangered.

Habitat for the vulnerable squatter pigeon occurs throughout yellow areas. The squatter pigeon nests on the ground in grassy woodlands and open forests. The sub-species has disappeared from much of its historical range probably due to impacts from fire, grazing and feral animals. The squatter pigeon is, however, relatively abundant within the western drier section of the Mackay Highlands.

Sensitive woodland habitats of the Dicks Tableland are also threatened by impacts of grazing, and feral animals such as horses.

**Blue areas** contain intact vegetation, which play functional roles in the natural landscape (for example wildlife corridors, landscape aesthetics). Blue areas may also include patches of vulnerable flora species. Four species of threatened plants are known to occur within the study area, namely the black iron-box, the Eungella hairy daisy and two species without a common name (*Trigonostemon inopinatus* and *Omphalea celata*).

**Orange areas** are cleared or disturbed land, which, depending on the surrounding context may be appropriate for either development or rehabilitation or possibly both.

### Future direction

The Mackay Highlands will be widely known as an area of outstanding natural values.

Protection of important conservation values will be a key component of sustaining a quality natural resource base for the benefit of now and future generations.

Nature conservation values will provide the strategic framework for opportunities and constraints for nature-based tourism and recreation on parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands.

### Policies, actions and strategies

- Through interpretation, visitors will have better understanding and appreciation of the conservation values of the Mackay Highlands. [2.1.1(a)]
- Common species (such as the platypus) will be promoted for visitor wildlife experiences. [2.1.1(b)]

- The pattern of future nature-based recreation and tourism development should be consistent with the guidelines in the visitor facility development control plan, which has been developed in conjunction with the conservation values (see section 3.1) and managed accordingly. [2.1.1(c)]
- Assessment for specific proposals at specific sites should take into consideration the management regimes that have been proposed by the Conservation Technical Reference Group. [2.1.1(d)]
- Proposals for specific developments should take into consideration the survival requirements of populations of threatened species. [2.1.1(e)]

## Timber harvesting in native forests

### Current situation

Logging began on the Clarke Range around 1904, followed by the first road up the range from the Pioneer Valley in 1908. Hardwood harvesting takes place today in Mia Mia, Teemburra and Cathu State Forests.

There is a national trend towards the redevelopment and restructuring of the hardwood timber industries and the conservation of public native forest estate. This involves long term planning for the cessation of logging of native forests on Crown land, development of plantation-based hardwood industries and the implementation of transitional wood supply arrangements for hardwood saw milling industries.

In southeast Queensland, significant changes are occurring with regard to the use of public forest estate. Areas that have important conservation values are being protected from timber harvesting operations and set aside for dedication as protected areas under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. Such actions are in line with the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity* (Commonwealth, 1996) which aims to protect high conservation values, including biological diversity and endangered species and where possible to provide vegetation corridors between protected areas.

Many areas in the Mackay Highlands have been long-standing acquisition interests for protected area estate, but this has been unable to proceed because of existing uses for the timber harvesting industry. An example of an area of interest for future protected area estate in the Mackay Highlands is regional ecosystem

8.12.9 (see Sattler and Williams, 1999). This ecosystem is characterised by grassy woodlands with blue gums on igneous rocks and occurs throughout much of the green areas in Figure 2. The regional ecosystem provides suitable habitat for threatened species such as the powerful owl and the endangered red goshawk and is used heavily by the Eungella honey-eater. It has been documented that this ecosystem exhibits poor regeneration from grazing, especially after logging (Williams and Sattler, 1999). There is currently no representation of this regional ecosystem in any protected area estate in Queensland. In the Mackay Highlands this ecosystem is targeted for timber harvesting and is also used for grazing.

### Future direction

The priorities for management of the Mackay Highlands will be the maintenance of natural integrity, cultural heritage values and natural landscapes.

Should the Queensland Government determine that any areas of State land in the Mackay Highlands will not be required for timber harvesting in the long-term, then the conservation values of that land should be investigated and considered for transfer into protected area tenure under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

### Policies, actions and strategies

- If native forests in the Mackay Highlands are investigated for future protected areas, then Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will prepare recommendations based substantially on this strategy. When preparing recommendations Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will consider any new information and will consult with community interests and individuals likely to be affected by proposed tenure changes. [2.1.2 (a)]
- Assessment for potential tenure re- allocation should take priority consideration of lands that contain ecosystems not adequately represented in protected area estate, lands that contain threatened species habitat and lands that provide functional links between protected areas. [2.1.2 (b)]
- If native forests are transferred to protected area tenure, then Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service should formally engage public comment for seeking inclusion of the Mackay Highlands as a World Heritage Area. [2.1.2 (c)]

## Grazing in native forests

### Current situation

Grazing to support beef cattle industries is part of the pioneering identity of the region. As a secondary activity to timber production, grazing has been permitted to occur on State Forests and Timber Reserves. Cattle grazing enterprises are typically family run businesses, and in the Mackay Highlands have been operating for up to four generations. By arrangement with State government, lessees have been the primary practitioners of on-ground natural resource management. The maintenance of the natural resource base is essential to sustaining grazing. Lessees typically have a wealth of on-ground knowledge of the leased land. Frequently, cattle graziers are neighbours to national parks and other protected areas and have joint interests in management initiatives such as planned burns and weed control.

There are conservation concerns that high grazing pressures in some areas of the Mackay Highlands are not sustainable for ecological or biodiversity purposes. The grassy ground layers of woodland and forest ecosystems that provide for cattle grazing are also vital habitats for native fauna and flora.

The squatter pigeon (southern sub species) is a good example of a threatened species in the Mackay Highlands whose habitat requirements are in competition with grazing. The species has disappeared from much of its historical range but still occurs in patches through eastern Queensland. Squatter pigeons nest and lay their eggs on the ground and are typically found in grassy woodlands in drier western areas of the Mackay Highlands. Over-grazing, particularly in association with drought and land clearing, has been identified as a major threat to this species (Garnett and Crowley, 2000).

The grassy ground layers of woodland and forest ecosystems provide the primary source of fuel that supports fire management. Ground layers also support seedlings of the tree species that form the major structural component of woodlands and forests. Heavy grazing can prevent seed dropping and germination and other grasses that are less palatable and nutritious to cattle become dominant in the pastures. In addition, ground layers are a primary wall of defence against erosion and subsequent run-off into adjacent aquatic ecosystems.

Whilst areas subjected to grazing can still maintain environmental functions, the activity unavoidably alters the natural ecosystems and has impacts on conservation values. The fact that some grazing properties in Queensland have now become protected areas lies in the long-term restoration potential of the country to be rehabilitated to pre-grazing conditions. The transition of country from one that is managed primarily for cattle grazing purposes to one that is managed primarily for conservation purposes is a process with long-term outcomes.

Homevale National Park is a good example of the conservation legacy of cattle grazing.

Homevale was previously a grazing property that was declared a protected area in 1995. The introduction of pastoral grasses and the trampling by cattle has altered vegetation communities over time. The survival of fire sensitive native plant communities in the park is under threat because of the difficulty in controlling the surrounding buffel grass, which is an introduced pasture. Parthenium, remains a major introduced weed management problem on the park. To prevent the spread of parthenium, all vehicles should be washed down prior to entering Homevale National Park. This is a very difficult issue to manage and places significant constraints on future visitor use of the park.

### Future direction

The priorities for management of the Mackay Highlands will be the maintenance of natural integrity, cultural heritage values and natural landscapes.

Critical conservation values and threatened species survival will not be impacted on through grazing pressures. Wherever possible, voluntary protocols will be adopted in grazing operations to minimise impacts on conservation values.

### Policies, actions and strategies

- A three-phased approach will be adopted for the management of grazing permits and leases on public lands in the Mackay Highlands, as described below. [2.1.3 (a)]
- Phase one applies to the new assessment processes for lease and permit renewals. Future requests for renewals or extensions to existing grazing leases and permits will be subject to assessment through conservation criteria. The assessment process will take place through existing legislative mechanisms. Where it is demonstrated that a specific operation meets the conservation criteria, then protocols will be negotiated with the applicant to ensure that renewal of permits and leases will result in minimal

conservation impact. Guidelines for the development of assessment criteria are provided in Appendix C. [2.1.3 (b)]

- Phase two would occur, if at some time in the future, areas of State forests are transferred into protected area estate. (see section 2.1.2). The long-term compatibility or incompatibility of grazing operations on public land will depend on the specific tenure in which it occurs and the uses permitted under that tenure. It may be feasible for some grazing permits or leases to be permitted to continue. [2.1.3 (c)]
- Phase three would occur, if at some time in the future, areas of State forests are transferred into protected area estate and parts of the Mackay Highlands is accepted for inclusion as a World Heritage Area. The long-term compatibility or incompatibility of grazing operations on public land will depend on the specific tenure in which it occurs, the uses permitted under that tenure and the exact boundaries for a World Heritage Area. It may be feasible for some grazing permits or leases to be permitted to continue. [2.1.3 (d)]
- In some situations individual grazing operations on public lands in the Mackay Highlands may be assessed to have long-term incompatibility with the conservation values and future management directions of the land. This may occur in phase one, phase two, or phase three. In such situations negotiations will take place on an individual basis to customise a phase out arrangement that is appropriate to individual circumstances. [2.1.3 (e)]

## Endangered frog habitat

### Current Situation

A large part of the rainforests in the north-eastern section of the Mackay Highlands contains highly critical conservation values because it supports habitat for endangered frog species. This area of concern includes large parts of parks and forests covered in the pink area in Figure 2 (and is shown as the special management area in Figure 5). This area is only accessible to bushwalkers via Dalrymple Heights or Finch Hatton Gorge at the base of the range. The area covers parts of Eungella National Park, Eungella State Forest to the south-west of the national park and Pelion State Forest to the south-east. There is currently no formal management of bushwalking or camping activities in this area.

The northern gastric brooding frog (also known as the northern platypus frog) and the Eungella dayfrog (also known as the Eungella torrent frog) have both been recorded in the area.

Both species have undergone dramatic population declines and contractions in their range and are listed as endangered species under State and Commonwealth legislation.

The northern gastric brooding frog, *Rheobatrachus vitellinus* occurs only in rainforest streams between altitudes of 400- 1000m within Eungella National Park and Pelion State Forest. The species has not been sighted since March 1985. The frog inhabits shallow, rocky, broken water areas in fast flowing perennial rainforest streams and prefers cascades and riffles.

The Eungella dayfrog, *Taudactylus eungellensis* occurs in parts of Eungella National Park, Eungella State Forest and Cathu State Forest and is confined to altitudes of 200-1000m. It inhabits waterfalls, riffles and cascades in rainforest streams, and may be found under rocks, crevices or in more exposed positions.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has developed a recovery plan for these frogs to provide a framework to better understand the status, the threats and the conservation requirements of both species. Potentially threatening processes for these species include the disruption of habitat and the introduction of the chytrid fungus disease which has been identified in sick, dying and dead frogs in the Wet Tropics to the north.

Anecdotal evidence from scientists suggests that symptoms of the chytrid fungus disease have been observed in samples of the Eungella dayfrog population. The recovery plan identifies further monitoring requirements that are required to gain a better understanding of the chytrid fungus disease status and the implications for frog populations in the Mackay Highlands area.

One of the most likely impacts to this sensitive frog habitat is through bushwalkers introducing the chytrid fungus into any catchment, which contains frog populations via their shoes and equipment. There is no formal visitor monitoring but it is considered that bushwalking does occur throughout most of catchments in this area. Visitation to Mt Dalrymple has been estimated at up to 5000 per annum.

There are significant ecological concerns about permitting remote informal bushwalking within this sensitive habitat. Additionally, the country is relatively difficult to access and has no facilities, no maintained walking tracks, signs or

markers and no management presence.

The track to Dooloomai Falls has numerous safety concerns and has been effectively closed for many years as a result of several fatalities. The informal bushtrack to Mt Dalrymple from Dalrymple Heights is no longer maintained as a formal walking track although avid bushwalkers still use it and the offshoots to Mt David and Mt William. The bushwalkers are typically experienced and self-reliant.

Some of the bushwalkers are from the local area whilst others travel from Mackay and surrounds with organised bushwalking clubs.

### **Future direction**

Whilst the management of the Mackay Highlands will be for the maintenance of natural integrity, cultural heritage values and natural landscapes, special management attention will be applied to this area to ensure that threatening processes to the northern gastric brooding frog and the Eungella dayfrog are minimised as far as possible.

There is no expansion of remote bushwalking activities through sensitive frog habitat in the Mackay Highlands. The impacts of bushwalking, including the risks to endangered frogs species from habitat disturbance and chytrid fungus disease transmission, are minimised in this area as far as possible through a variety of management strategies.

### **Policies, actions and strategies**

- While bushwalkers usually act in an environmentally responsible manner, there are inevitable impacts of their activity within catchments that contain sensitive frog habitats. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in consultation with tourist facility providers, local bushwalkers, organised bushwalking clubs and local councils will develop a code of practice to manage remote bushwalking activities in the Mt Dalrymple-Finch Hatton area. [2.1.4 (a)]
- The code of practice will be developed to ensure that all bushwalkers to the area:
  - are fully aware of issues associated with frog population decline; and
  - undertake voluntary protocols for minimal impact bushwalking, which would include actions to minimise the risk of transmission of the chytrid fungus into catchments with sensitive frog habitats. [2.1.4 (b)]
- In developing the code of practice, consideration should be given to management of track markings, collection of visitor statistics and monitoring impacts. [2.1.4 (c)]
- Management of the area will be consistent with the purpose of the zone and management practices intention of zone 1 in the Mackay Highlands development control plan (see section 3.1). [2.1.4 (d)]
- The use of impact controlling structures could be considered as a management practice providing it is consistent with the purpose of the zone and management practices intention of zone 1 in the Mackay Highlands development control plan (see section 3.1). [2.1.4 (e)]
- The informal remote bushwalking track to Mt Dalrymple should not be upgraded for presentation purposes due to concerns of conservation impacts. Bushwalkers choosing to continue using the area should not expect the tracks to be maintained and should assume the inherent risks associated with the activity in a remote natural area, including personal injury and death. [2.1.4 (f)]
- Consideration should be given to formal closures or restrictions along tracks that are identified as having high ecological importance or are a serious safety threat to bushwalkers. [2.1.4 (g)]
- Walking opportunities in other locations in the Mackay Highlands will be promoted as a means of reducing the volume of bushwalking traffic in the sensitive frog habitat. [2.1.4 (h)]
- Local government assessments of development approval applications should ensure that the viability of future tourism- related facilities on adjacent lands are not dependent on their guests accessing this area for informal bushwalking. [2.1.4 (i)]
- The conservation benefits of any proposed research or monitoring activity in the sensitive frog habitat should far out weight the impacts of the activity. Strict conditions should apply to research permits in this area to ensure that the conservation- impacts of the research activity are minimised to the greatest extent possible. [2.1.4 (j)]
- While it is recognised that in some circumstances, commercial activities can assist with monitoring and management of visitor behaviour in remote areas, this will not be a strategy that will be encouraged in within

the endangered frog habitat. The overriding management objective in this special management area is to discourage the expansion of remote bushwalking activities while implementing strategies to minimise the risk to endangered frog species. [2.1.4 (k)]

- There have been proposals in the past for public utilities telecommunications and radar towers on top of Mt Dalrymple. The construction and access required to maintain such facilities would have significant conservation impacts. Such facilities will not be permitted in this area. [2.1.4 (l)]
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will consider declaring a 'restricted access area' under the Nature Conservation Regulation 1994, if it is determined that there is:
  - significant increase in the number of visitors undertaking remote bushwalking in the Mt Dalrymple/ Finch Hatton area; and/or
  - persistent non-compliance with remote bushwalking guidelines; and/or
  - future scientific evidence that demonstrates a direct relationship between the impact of bushwalking and the survival of endangered frog species in similar habitats. [2.1.4 (m)]
- If a restricted access area were declared then, entry would be subject to strict conditions of permit. Such a strategy would demand an intensive management effort with respect to monitoring, permitting and enforcement. [2.1.4 (n)]
- Actions proposed in the Recovery plan for stream dwelling rainforest frogs of the Eungella region of mid eastern Queensland 2000-2004 that relate to public education should be integrated with future interpretation programs for the Mackay Highlands as far as practical. [2.1.4 (o)]

## Sustaining recreation and tourism opportunities

As tourism grows, pressures and demands are being placed on the natural values of the Mackay Highlands. Much of the Mackay region including the hills, ranges and uplands of the Eungella area has a long history of clearing for settlement and primary industry. This places increased value and importance on the remaining natural areas in the Mackay Highlands to support biodiversity and natural processes, and to offer visitors the chance to experience a large stretch of nature that is relatively undeveloped. The challenge for park and forest management is to balance conservation with the growing visitor pressures placed on the area as well as other land uses.

In planning for nature-based recreational opportunities, it is relevant to consider providing for a range of styles of visitation. Some visitors seek an easy, safe, comfortable and brief experience of nature, perhaps in a large group with a guide, while other people prefer wild places away from any sign of development where access requires significant personal effort and commitment. Crowding at popular sites soon disrupts the peaceful and natural atmosphere, and can affect the environment, the plants and animals. Well- designed walking tracks, camping areas, car park and toilets can reduce these impacts but can also attract more visitors to these sites, leading incrementally to overcrowding.

A future increase in visitation to the Mackay Highlands requires appropriate infrastructure both on and adjacent to parks and forests. Infrastructure provided on parks and forests needs to be designed to attract visitors to key destination sites that:

- are specifically designed as visitor nodes for often high levels of access and use;
- are designed to minimise impacts on adjacent environments;
- present the natural and cultural values of the area through interpretation; and
- where possible provide effective integration between public and private visitor infrastructure and services including opportunities on local government managed lands.

In some circumstances, works and infrastructure can be an appropriate way to protect conservation values.

The highest priority for the management of the Mackay Highlands will be the maintenance of natural integrity, cultural heritage values and natural landscapes. However, where conservation and protection are not compromised, the parks and forest system will be managed as a central part of a network of nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities in the Mackay Highlands.

A number of issues with regard to sustaining recreation and tourism opportunities have been identified through the planning process. These are discussed in the following key issues - visitor facility development, presenting our cultural heritage and Homevale homestead complex.



The current situations regarding these key issues are described below in section 2.2.1 through to 2.2.3. Future directions have been identified for each key issue as a means of achieving the vision for the Mackay Highlands (see section 1.4). Policies, actions and strategies that specify how we will address the key issues are also provided.

## **Visitor facility development**

### **Current situation**

Visitor facilities in parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands have been an important recreational resource for the local community for many years. The traditional patterns of use have changed in recent years and future aspirations for developing nature-based tourism are likely to see future changes in use patterns.

The increasing international recognition of platypus viewing opportunities at Broken River has also changed the usage patterns of the site. This in turn has most likely displaced other visitors to facilities at Finch Hatton Gorge, which is limited by carpark capacity.

Visitation at local swimming locations has changed largely because of concerns about water quality, especially at Broken River.

In the past provision of park infrastructure in parks and forest in the Mackay Highlands has not been well planned, with car parks and related facilities often provided to suit immediate demands and existing resources. The legacy of this approach is that some existing visitor usage is in conflict with conservation values, and facilities at some sites have now reached the limits of their physical site constraints.

For example, Finch Hatton Gorge contains a day use area with car park, toilet and picnic facilities and access to formal walking trails. The design of the arrival point is such that access to the walking track is not immediately clear and this contributes to people wandering across to the creek on the eastern side of the picnic area. This creek is considered to be important habitat for endangered frog species and the area encroaches on an endangered regional ecosystem. The development of this site for increased day use visitation is incompatible with its conservation values. Expansion of the existing public car park capacity is not possible within the current tenure constraints.

A visitor facility development control plan has been developed to guide the future provision of visitor facilities in the Mackay Highlands (see section 3.1). The plan identifies areas where it may be acceptable to develop key destination sites for the presentation of parks and forests. Within this framework, more detailed feasibility, environmental assessment and site planning are required when considering particular sites for development.

Formal walking trail opportunities exist in the area ranging from 200m to 8.5km in distance with trails heading out from Broken River picnic ground, Sky Window and near Eungella Chalet. Walking trails include Pine Grove, Cedar Grove, Sky Window, Palm Walk, Clarke Range Track, Rainforest Discovery Walk, Granite Bend Circuit, Crediton Creek Trail and the Wishing Pool Circuit. It is recognised however that it would be desirable to provide for a range of walking track settings in the Mackay Highlands.

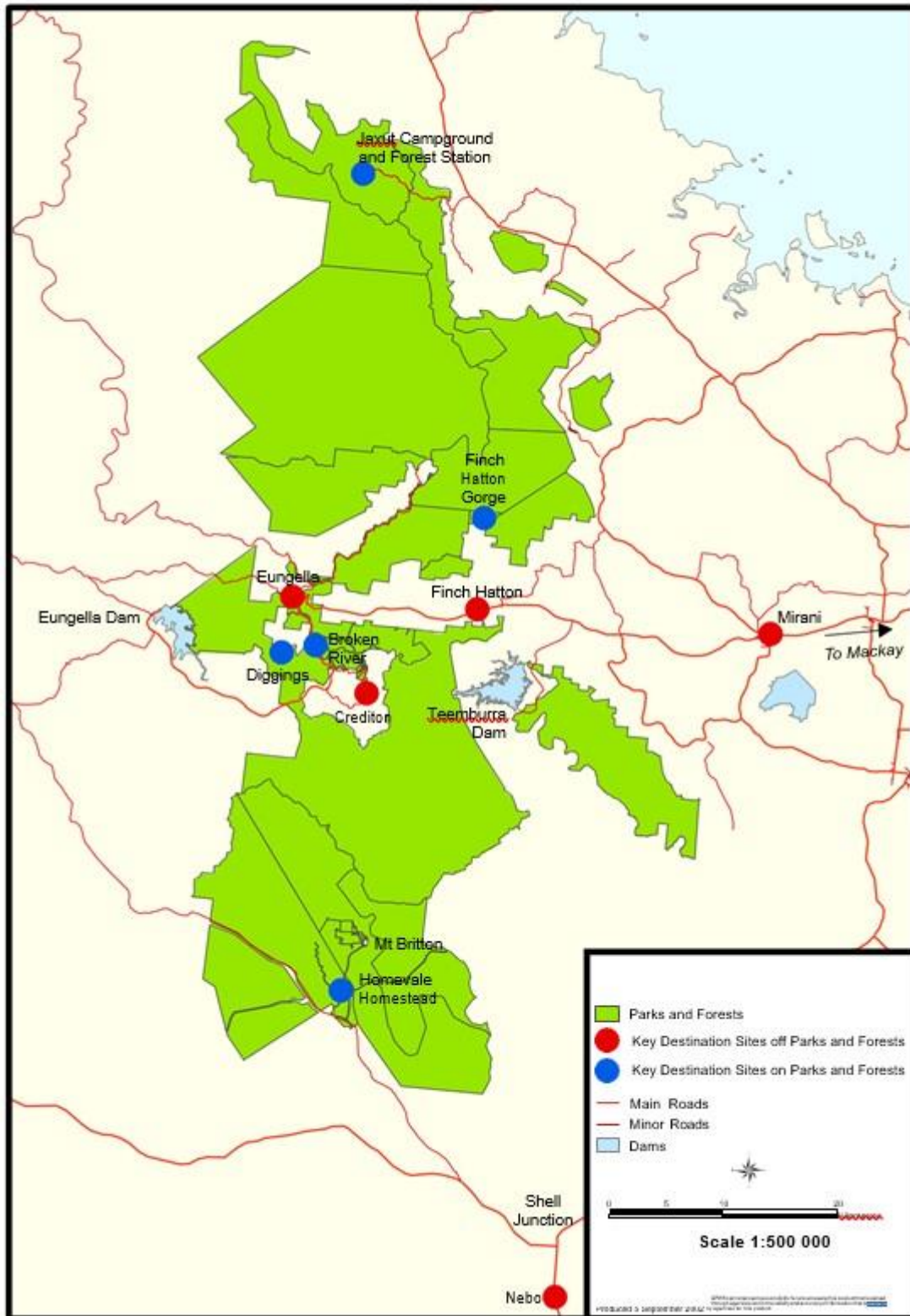
Visitor facilities in Eungella National Park have received significant negative media coverage in recent years. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service recently commissioned a master planning study to rationalise future visitor infrastructure at four sites within Eungella National Park, namely Broken River (including Fern Flat camp ground), Finch Hatton Gorge, Sky Window and Peases Lookout.

Recently the Queensland Government announced the development of a Great Walks of Queensland project for the Mackay Highlands. Great Walks are middle to long distance iconic walking tracks and facilities that promote the astounding natural and cultural values of Queensland's protected areas. Over the next five years the Great Walks will be planned and developed with staged implementation and community consultation.

The development control plan (see section 3.1) can be used as a broad scale framework to guide potential routes for the Great Walks.

There are several areas of existing recreational activity in the Mackay Highlands where further facility development is not desirable. These are low-key sites that are predominantly used by locals for specific recreational pursuits. The best way to safeguard such sites from crowding is by limiting infrastructure and controlling tourist information. These sites are not discussed in this document.

Figure 3. Key Destination Sites



## Future direction

Where conservation and protection are not compromised, the parks and forests system will be managed as a central part of a network of nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities in the Mackay Highlands.

Presentation of parks and forests will occur through the development of minimal impact key destination sites that act as visitor drawcards to the area. Interpretation of natural and cultural values will enhance the visitor experience of the Mackay Highlands.

## Policies, actions and strategies

- Key destination sites have been identified in Figure 3. These are sites that have been identified through this planning process as having opportunities for promotion and development as nature-based recreation and tourism attractions. [2.2.1 (a)]
- The location of key destination sites provides spatial constraints for where linkages between key destination sites might take place. [2.2.1 (b)]
- Road and trail access to key destination sites and also along promoted linkages between key destination sites will be managed for the purposes of presenting parks and forests. [2.2.1 (c)]
- Road and trail access in parks and forests not directly related to the presentation of key destination sites will be maintained for park and forest management purposes. [2.2.1 (d)]
- A visitor facility development control plan is provided in Section 3 to guide ways in which nature-based tourism and recreation in the Mackay Highlands should develop in the future. Within this framework, detailed assessment of specific proposals and specific sites will be required to ensure that benefits to the community are balanced by environmental impacts that can be reasonably managed. [2.2.1 (e)]
- Suitable impact assessments should be conducted before construction of any additional infrastructure and simple cost effective monitoring programs should be undertaken to track impacts over time. Detailed site planning should ensure that proposed developments are not in conflict with the management regime for that area as proposed in the report by Conservation Technical Reference Group. [2.2.1 (f)]
- The implementation, site planning and construction of future visitor facility development on parks and forests are subject to resources. The sequencing for developing key destination sites on parks and forests will be assessed over time by district management who are in the best position to reconcile limited resources with community preferences for access and facility development. [2.2.1 (g)]
- Future development at Broken River should focus the site towards a key destination site with platypus viewing, interpretation and day use facilities that can cater for large numbers of visitors. [2.2.1 (h)]
- Sustaining the platypus population in Broken River is critical to maintaining visitor opportunities for platypus viewing. Research is needed to better understand the ecological requirements of the platypus and its relationship with high nutrient levels. [2.2.1 (i)]
- Should the current kiosk lease at Broken River become no longer viable, consideration should be given towards re- use of the structure for other activities such as for an office or for interpretation. [2.2.1 (j)]
- The camp ground at Fern Flat is not environmentally sustainable in the long- term due to soil types and its situation within the landscape. Alternative camping and accommodation options for visitors should be encouraged on nearby and adjacent lands. [2.2.1 (k)]
- Future development at Finch Hatton Gorge should rationalise the site back to a walking trail entrance as day use opportunities at alternative sites become available. The community requires alternatives that are similar to current facilities at Finch Hatton Gorge for day use picnicking and swimming. Investigations could take place into the viability of providing day use facilities on local council managed lands at Gargett Bridge, Pioneer River Bridge, Wesche's Crossing, Pinevale Crossing and Badger Park. [2.2.1 (l)]
- Whilst swimming in watercourses in parks and forests will not be prohibited, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will not formally designate swimming areas or provide facilities for swimmers in any national park or forest. Any visitor wishing to swim should assume the inherent risks associated with the activity. [2.2.1 (m)]
- Existing walking trail links from Broken River to Eungella Township and Broken River to Crediton have further potential to be marketed and promoted to visitors through improved information dissemination. Maintenance and improvement to visitor facilities along these trails should occur as opportunities arise.

Interpretation of cultural heritage values along these trails would enhance the visitor experience (see the report by the Cultural Heritage Technical Reference Group). [2.2.1 (n)]

- Investigations into the viability of a formal link between Sky Window and Palm Grove walking tracks should take place. [2.2.1 (o)]
- Future commercial activity permits on parks and forests should be consistent with the guidelines in the visitor facility development control plan (see section 3.1) [2.2.1(p)]
- Commercial nature based recreation and tourist activities on parks and forests must have interpretation of natural and cultural values of the Mackay Highlands as a feature of the visitor experience. Other tourism activities should be conducted outside of parks and forests. [2.2.1(q)]
- Teemburra Dam is not within a park or forest but was identified during this planning process as an important site for nature-based recreation activity in the area. Whilst the local community uses the recreational facilities at Teemburra Dam there is enormous potential to further develop facilities for a range of day use activities for both locals and tourists.
- Mirani Shire Council has recently assumed responsibility for the management of the recreational area. The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee, local fish stocking groups, SunWater and regional tourism initiatives should all be involved and supportive of Mirani Shire Council's endeavours to develop future recreational facilities at Teemburra Dam. [2.2.1 (r)]
- Investigations should take place into improving all year two-wheel drive access to 'The Diggings'. There are good opportunities to further develop the site for recreation and camping for both local use and large tourist groups. The site has a strong sense of historic heritage and there are many opportunities for interpretation. [2.2.1 (s)] See also 2.2.2 (h).
- Jaxut camp ground and Cathu Forest Station complex could be investigated in the future for large group commercial and educational activities. These activities could occur alongside existing opportunities for camping and walking trails. [2.2.1 (t)]
- Strategies for the future of Homevale homestead should be in accordance with key strategy 2.2.3. [2.2.1 (u)]
- Shell Junction and Nebo townships are conveniently located as a good site for an overnight stop over as part of a two-wheel forest heritage drive. Shell Junction is not within a park or forest but was identified by the Recreation, Technical Reference Group as a place with good potential to provide camping facilities. [2.2.1 (v)]
- The future route of the Great Walks should be developed and promoted as a key destination site. [2.2.1 (w)]

## Presenting our cultural heritage

### Current situation

The report compiled by the Cultural Heritage (non-Indigenous) Technical Reference Group provides an inventory of a number of cultural heritage sites in the Mackay Highlands. Some heritage places that have been identified as having tourism potential are discussed in this strategy including Mt Britton, Crediton Hall, mining leases at Homevale, Homevale homestead complex and possibly some Indigenous cultural sites.

Mt Britton was a famous gold mining town during the 1880s and early 1890s, which provided an important boost to the pastoral development of the district. At its peak in 1882- 1883 the Mt Britton goldfield produced roughly 60kg of gold per annum and the town was home to five hotels, four butcher shops, four bakers, a public hall and a progress association. The Mt Britton township site has no buildings remaining today, however gold is still mined on a few small mining claims and leases in the vicinity. Gravesites and mining remains are standing evidence of the past township. The area is associated with special importance to the Nebo community and the Friends of Mt Britton Cemetery Group.

The Crediton Hall built in 1943 was identified in this planning process as a place associated with special social importance to the Crediton community. The local community is applying to have the hall listed on the Queensland Heritage Register.

Homevale homestead has been standing since at least 1884. It has played an important role in the grazing history of the Nebo area, and was a popular gathering place for horse races and social functions throughout the 1900s. The complex has local importance, especially with respect to the stories it tells about the past and the community,

which has developed around it. The future of Homevale homestead complex is discussed as a key issue in section 2.2.3.

Homevale Resource Reserve was declared in 1996 because of its outstanding geological values (see Appendix A). The resource reserve recognises that while natural and cultural heritage values need protection the land is subject to continuing interests of pre-existing mining operations that must be provided for in a controlled way. A trustee arrangement for the management of the reserve exists between Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the Environmental Protection Agency/Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. The use of mining leases for low scale/low key tourism currently provides visitors with an experience of the area's gold mining heritage.

There are numerous sites of cultural heritage interest that could be developed as interesting features along links to key destination sites. Mt Roberts is located within Homevale National Park and is a fine example of a sawn timber outstation hut with windmill, stockyards and dip, exotic vegetation and a grave. Plevna homestead was used for stockyards and oil shale prospecting in the late 1930s. Plevna was an old wagon track from Mt Britton to Crediton diggings.

The Mackay Highlands lies in a region that falls under the Indigenous Birri Gubba language group, which extends from Townsville to Rockhampton. Birri Gubba has many sub- groups and the Gia, Yuibera and Wiri people all claim traditional ownership to various sections of the Mackay Highlands area. In the 1860s a native mounted police detachment operated from a camp at Tongawarry on Cattle Creek (30km south-west of Homevale homestead). The Birri Gubba population was reduced by as much as 80 per cent by the early 1870s. By the late 1890s those not working for pastoralists or others in the district were rounded up and sent off to various missions and reserves away from their homelands.

In dry forests, Aboriginal relics, rock art and scarred trees are evidence of Aboriginal association with the country. In the rainforest, physical evidence of Aboriginal association is less obvious. Moist air and efficient natural recycling processes work together to quickly degrade artefacts and sites. Traditional Owners have a heritage association with the Mackay Highlands. Sites of cultural and spiritual significance exist throughout the Mackay Highlands but have not been publicly documented.

#### **Future direction**

Opportunities to interpret cultural heritage on parks and forests will add value to the visitor experience of the Mackay Highlands. Cultural heritage presentation opportunities on parks and forests as well as in neighbouring communities will be linked to strategies for promoting key destination sites.

The rights of Indigenous people to conserve and manage their heritage and where appropriate to present their cultural heritage to visitors are respected.

#### **Policies, actions and strategies**

- The tenure of the Mt Britton township site is not within parks and forests, however it is recognised that there may be some opportunities for a community-based project to develop interpretation at the site. [2.2.2 (a)]
- The tenure of the Crediton Hall site is not within parks or forests, however the planning process has identified that there are opportunities for the Hall to be linked in with marketing of a forest heritage drive or even walking trails. The local community should give consideration to developing interpretation of the area's rich cultural heritage. [2.2.2 (b)]
- Any proposal to further develop tourism opportunities on mining leases within Homevale Resources Reserve to a scale higher than existing uses would be inconsistent with the fundamental reason for which the reserve was declared. Any requests for changes to environmental authorities or access rights through the resource reserve will be assessed, based on the primary purpose of the tenure and not tourism industry development purposes. [2.2.2 (c)]
- If in the future, the Mt Roberts outstation complex were to be linked with key destination sites promoted for visitation, then a Heritage Conservation Plan should be developed to determine its cultural heritage values and management requirements. A fire strategy for Homevale National Park should consider the fire protection needs of the Mt Roberts complex. [2.2.2 (d)]
- If in the future, sites of cultural heritage importance are to be linked in with key destination sites and promoted for visitation then interpretation should be a key feature of presentation. [2.2.2 (e)]
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will work in partnership with Traditional Owners (see section 2.3.1) to formalise intellectual property rights to traditional knowledge and to develop protocols with regard to the

provision of visitor information. [2.2.2 (f)]

- Opportunities for Aboriginal involvement in presenting the natural and cultural values of parks and forests will be encouraged. [2.2.2 (g)]
- The Diggings is located on a former Eungella gold field (c1889-1910s) and has remains of several mines, batteries, a water wheel and sluiceway. The site evokes a very strong sense of historical value and social value in the local community. Local recreational use should not be displaced from this site. There is potential to also develop the site for visitor use with a heritage interpretation theme. The open mine shafts would require capping so as to maximise public safety. [2.2.2 (h)] See also 2.2.1 (s).

## Homevale homestead complex

### Current situation

The original red cedar slab dwelling at Homevale is at least 117 years old and still stands at the rear of the homestead. The main homestead that currently stands at Homevale was brought from Brisbane Downs approximately 83 years ago. The homestead consists of a veranda on three sides, a private kitchen and dining room, a lounge room, four bedrooms and two toilets. At the back of the main homestead a landing leads to an external kitchen and dining room that catered for the stockmen. Separate quarters were later supplied for the stockmen. The complex of buildings, including the fencing, serves a visual reminder of the layers of history associated with different European ownership of the property and of community development in the local area. The site, known as the Homevale homestead complex, was gazetted as part of the Homevale National Park in 1995.

The Homevale homestead complex attracts a high level of local interest and holds special meaning to the Nebo community. The Homevale homestead complex has played an important role in the grazing history of the Nebo area and was a popular gathering place for horse races and social functions throughout the 1900s. The complex has local importance, especially with respect to the stories it tells about the past and the community that has developed around it. From a cultural heritage perspective, deliberately leaving the Homevale homestead complex in its current deteriorating state is a viable option for maintaining the cultural integrity of the structures while at the same time providing a context for the interpretation of the social history and stories associated with the place.

A number of community proposals for re-using the buildings have recently been mooted, including an environmental education centre, a training centre, a research centre and tourism accommodation. However, most of the buildings in the complex are in a state of deterioration. Treatment to arrest active termite activity has been undertaken, with follow up required, and remedial works are required to stabilise the homestead. Actions that do not pose a workplace health and safety risk to park staff (for example, ground maintenance) are routinely undertaken as part of the regular operational program. Additional actions needed to address immediate health and safety concerns include a complete overhaul of the septic system, grey water system and general plumbing as well as removal of the corroding water tower.

A heritage conservation plan, or alternatively formal advice from a qualified heritage architect, would be desirable prior to the commencement of any significant restoration or redevelopment work. Complete restoration or re-development of the homestead to a condition suitable for re-use would require a very large injection of capital funds as well as resources for ongoing maintenance.

An initial appraisal of the Homevale homestead complex has been conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency. It was preliminarily described as unlikely to meet the criteria for Heritage Register status, based on its level of State significance. However it was recognised that the complex is of regional importance. Members of the public can nominate places to the Queensland Heritage Register for assessment against *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* criteria (see Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, 2001).

The Master Plan for Queensland's Park System (State of Queensland, Environmental Protection Agency, 2001) has activated the development of a strategy to outline the priorities for conserving heritage within the Queensland parks system. It is unlikely that such a comprehensive assessment of cultural heritage values on Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service estate would view the Homevale homestead complex as a high priority for protection and restoration funding because it is unlikely to meet criteria of State significance. This is supported by the fact that the Homevale National Park acquisition was based on its representation of regional ecosystems including its outstanding geological values rather than on its cultural heritage values.

### Future direction

The preferred outcome is for community memories and stories associated with the Homevale homestead complex

to be translated through interpretation, so as to inspire visitors with a sense of special meaning. As part of an interpretive package, the exteriors of particular buildings in the complex are presented to visitors in their current condition so as to maintain cultural integrity and to allow the complex to live out its lifespan gracefully.

Given the high level of community interest for the re-development or re-use of the Homevale homestead complex, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will respond by canvassing options from local government, community groups or private interests for viable projects.

### **Policies, actions and strategies**

- An interpretive strategy for the Homevale homestead complex be developed and implemented in partnership with the local community. The interpretative strategy should aim to provide visitors to the area with an appreciation of the community values and stories associated with the place. The interpretative strategy should consider adopting a range of interpretative techniques including on-site signage and off site displays. [2.2.3 (a)]
- A heritage conservation plan or advice from a qualified heritage architect would be desirable to gain an understanding of the conservation priorities for the structures within the Homevale homestead complex. [2.2.3 (b)]
- Subject to the proposed heritage conservation plan and its recommendations, the exteriors of the buildings including the homestead fences be presented in their current deteriorating state, as part of the cultural heritage interpretation package. The benefits of allowing the structures to live out their lifespan gracefully will be communicated to the public through interpretation. [2.2.3 (c)]
- The grounds within the Homevale homestead complex will continue to be maintained in sympathy with their cultural and social context, as part of the presentation package. [2.2.3 (d)]
- Given that it would not be a priority for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to provide the large capital input that would be required to restore and maintain the building complex, public comment will be sought on the merits of proceeding with an 'expression of interest' process. This would involve seeking interested parties to develop and submit viable, practical and costed concepts for alternative use of the complex. From that process, decisions would be made whether to proceed with any proposals submitted, with an additional phase of public consultation. [2.2.3 (e)]

## **Working with community partners**

The involvement of local communities in the planning for the Mackay Highlands is important to ensure that the future directions of parks and forests are relevant and integrated with the social and economic directions of surrounding communities. Key issues identified in this planning process are the need to enhance strategic partnerships with communities and also to improve working relationships with Traditional Owners to ensure that their roles in park and forest management are supported. The current situations regarding the key issues are described below. Future directions have been identified for each key issue as a means of achieving the vision for the Mackay Highlands (see section 1.4). Policies, actions and strategies that specify how we will address the key issues are also provided.

## **Strategic partnerships with communities**

### **Current Situation**

It is recognised that parks and state forests of the Mackay Highlands will be the focus for the marketing of nature-based tourism, which can deliver significant economic benefits to local communities. Key destination sites on parks and forests have opportunities to be linked with townships and attractions on adjacent lands. The regional and local community will largely determine the extent to which this is further capitalised.

The community plays an important role in the promotion and marketing of key destination sites. A mixture of public and private sites in the Mackay Highlands could be linked together and presented to visitors through interpretive themes. Themes can be presented through a combination of signage, construction design and marketing. Themes can bring together a number of seemingly unrelated visitor sites into a marketable tourism package.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service encourages the development of sympathetic, well-planned, gateway communities at or near the entrances to parks and forests, where private enterprise and local government may provide facilities and services to visitors.

Local governments, through their land use management and planning, are well placed to play an important strategic role in encouraging a complementary approach to protecting and presenting the values of the Mackay Highlands. The development of future visitor facilities on parks and forests will be in accordance with key strategy 2.2.1. Local councils, neighbours and relevant land managers are encouraged to coordinate planning of visitor facilities and services between parks and forests and privately owned lands.

Development of the region's potential may require substantial investment in infrastructure across a range of areas, including road works, regional signage, water supply enhancement and visitor infrastructure both in or adjacent to national parks and State forest.

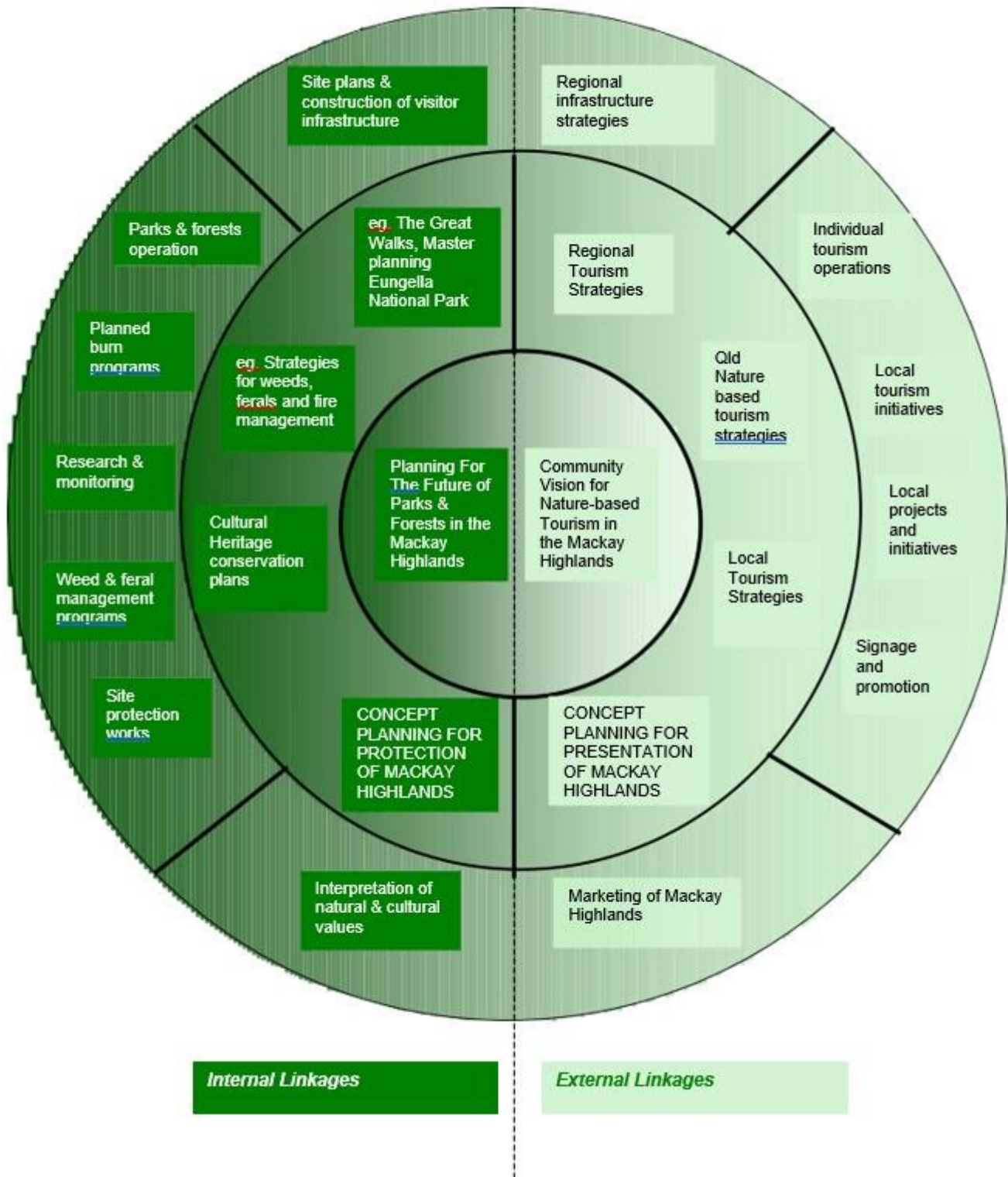
The vision in this strategy (see section 1.4) together with a community vision for nature-based tourism in the Mackay Highlands is at the core of a co-ordinated planning framework. It provides broad scale direction and guidance to more specific strategic plans. These in turn provide direction and guidance to on-ground actions and outcomes.

The nature-based recreational planning framework outlined in Figure 4 is split into two halves, with one half representing the core business of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service as land managers. The other half represents external linkages that are the business of other government agencies, local governments and the community. Areas of overlap are unavoidable and best results in terms of effective land management conservation and community aspirations can only be achieved by cooperative efforts. The protection and presentation of the Mackay Highlands requires both internal and external commitments.

The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee has been working with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to improve linkages and communication between parks and forests planning and that of other planning for sustainable tourism development in the region.



**Figure 4. Nature-based recreational planning framework**



## Future direction

Local communities derive significant benefits from their proximity to parks and forests. Private investment in the provision of visitor facilities and services has marketing linkages with key destination sites on parks and forests.

The partnership between local government and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to co-ordinate planning between State-owned and privately owned lands, benefits local communities through enhanced economic activity, while concurrently supporting long- term ecological sustainability of the Mackay Highlands.

## Policies, actions and strategies

- Local government should encourage development on lands adjacent to parks and forests that is complementary with future directions outlined in this strategy. [2.3.1 (a)]
- The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee adopts a leading role in:
  - the development of a community vision for the future of sustainable tourism in the Mackay Highlands;
  - identification and development of complementary visitor opportunities on adjacent and nearby non-State lands;
  - promotion of complementary strategies to ensure that development and promotion of key destination sites are supported by appropriate regional infrastructure planning for roads, bridges, signage etc;
  - exploration of a Mackay Highlands tourism identity that can be utilised for interpretation themes and marketed into tourism packages; and
  - acting as a key community representative reference point to provide feedback to future government planning initiatives. [2.3.1 (b)].

## Working together with Traditional Owners

### Current Situation

The Government recognises that Native Title interests exist over many of Queensland's parks and forests. Clearly parks and forests management must recognise the rights and interests of Traditional Owners. A significant change in the future will be the increasing role of Indigenous people in parks and forests management. This is a very positive opportunity for management of the natural and cultural values of parks and forests and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will seek agreements with Traditional Owners.

In the interim, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service the land manager and regulatory body is responsible for ensuring that its day-to-day management actions on parks and forests do not adversely affect Native Title rights.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service actively encourages and supports park-level initiatives to involve Traditional Owners in park management and to renew Indigenous ties with the land.

In the long-term, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service supports the development of active partnerships with Traditional Owners to provide for the management, protection and presentation of the parks and forests.

Management arrangements will foster direct participation in the future management of individual parks and forests by Traditional Owners who have an interest in those parks. Negotiated agreements for participation in the management of individual parks with Traditional Owners are required to ensure security for all parties. The scope of matters to be addressed is subject to individual agreements.

Preliminary discussions between Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Traditional Owners have affirmed their responsibilities, interests and aspirations in planning for the future of the Mackay Highlands. Recent initiatives by claimant groups to rationalise and re-structure Native Title claims over the Mackay Highlands area will assist greatly in the formation of effective working partnerships with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and others.

### Future direction

Partnerships between Indigenous people and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will ensure that parks and forests in the Mackay Highlands are managed for the appropriate protection and presentation of natural and cultural heritage values.

Agreements between Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Traditional Owners will ensure that Native Title rights and interests are recognised. Where it is within resource availability, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will support capacity building within Indigenous communities to help care for country.

The aspirations of Indigenous communities to be involved in tourism development is explored and appropriately

built into regional tourism planning initiatives.

### **Policies, actions and strategies**

- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to continue discussions and negotiations with Traditional Owners on ways to achieve shared desired future outcomes. [2.3.2 (a)]
- Traditional Owner representatives continue to be encouraged to participate in the Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee so as to become involved in regional tourism planning strategies. [2.3.2 (b)]

### **Guidelines for visitor facility development**

A visitor facility development control plan has been prepared to guide the future directions of visitor facility development in the Mackay Highlands. The plan describes the purpose and management practices intended for each zone. The zones are displayed in Figure 5.

All development and any significant redevelopment of visitor facilities and support infrastructure will be subject to the completion of a detailed assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposed works and the future use and management of the facility.

Regardless of the visitor facility zoning, the protection of the conservation values detailed in section 2.1.1 will take precedence over the provision of visitor facilities.

### **Visitor facility development control plan**

#### **Zone 1 Special Management Area**

*The purpose of this zone is to:*

Protect an area of the Mackay Highlands with special natural and/or cultural heritage values and/or remote natural setting values to the greatest extent possible. As far as possible only natural processes will make long-term changes to the natural condition. Special consideration shall be given towards providing for the survival needs of endangered frog species.

*Extent of visitor facilities:*

- Recreational infrastructure will only be considered where it is consistent with the purpose of the zone, where it will provide a net environmental benefit and where no other reasonable or practicable alternative exists.
- If appropriate, provide visitor opportunities that are self-reliant and without obvious management presence.

Management practices intended for this zone are to:

- Protect critical habitat for endangered frog species.
- Protect to the greatest extent possible, conservation values and natural integrity.
- Ensure that any infrastructure is consistent with the purpose of the zone.
- If appropriate, provide visitor opportunities that are self-reliant and without obvious management presence.
- Consider, if appropriate, establishing a 'restricted access areas' where access is conditional and requires permission.
- Public comment should be sought for any proposed changes to the area's zone status.

#### **Zone 2a Park Zone**

*The purpose of this zone is to:*

Protect and maintain the area's natural condition while providing for limited access and use.

*Extent of visitor facilities:*

- Provide nature-based recreation facilities for appreciation of the natural areas and cultural heritage values.
- The setting will determine the level of infrastructure development with infrastructure focused primarily on provision of access (tracks). Visitors can expect natural areas where they assume inherent risks of use and access.
- Picnic and toilet facilities and other support infrastructure will not generally be provided unless they are required to manage environmental impacts.

- Facilities will provide linkages between recreation facilities and support infrastructure in key destination zones.

*Management practices intended for this zone are to:*

- Manage primarily for conservation of natural and cultural heritage values.
- Maintain park infrastructure primarily for management purposes, for example management signage and indicative markings on roads and tracks.
- Present, where appropriate, roads and trails as linkages to key destination sites, for example themed construction works, interpretative signage, basic facilities and minimal management presence.
- Public comment should be sought for proposed changes to the area's zone status.

## **Zone 2b Forest and Resource Zone**

*The purpose of this zone is to:*

Protect and maintain the area's natural condition while recognising the economic use of natural resources for timber harvesting, cattle grazing, bee keeping, mining and quarrying. Limited visitor access and use is permitted.

*Extent of visitor facilities:*

- Provide nature-based recreation facilities for appreciation of the area's natural and cultural heritage values.
- The setting will determine the level of infrastructure development with infrastructure focused primarily on the provision of access (tracks). Visitors can expect natural areas where they assume risks of use and access.
- Picnic and toilet facilities will provide linkages between recreation facilities and support infrastructure in the key destination sites zones.

*Management practices intended for this zone are to:*

- Acknowledge that the existing values of the land are for the economic use of natural resources for timber harvesting, cattle grazing, bee keeping, mining and quarrying.
- Acknowledge that the future values of substantial parts of the land are likely to be primarily for natural and cultural heritage conservation.
- Integrate existing uses of the land with future uses as far as possible while recognising that existing uses cannot compromise critical habitat and threatened species requirements.
- Maintain park and forest infrastructure primarily for management purposes, for example management signage and indicative markings on roads and tracks.
- Present, where appropriate, roads and trails as linkages to key destination sites, for example themed construction works, interpretative signage, basic facilities and minimal management presence.
- If timber harvesting on forests or mining on resource reserves is no longer required then the subjected area should be considered as a Park Zone.

## **Zone 3 Key Destination Site Zone**

The purpose of this zone is to:

Provide and present opportunities for large numbers of people to recreate in the Mackay Highlands while minimising as far as possible conservation impacts on the surrounding environment. Key destination sites will be promoted as visitor attractions and interpretation will enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural values of the Mackay Highlands.

*Extent of visitor facilities:*

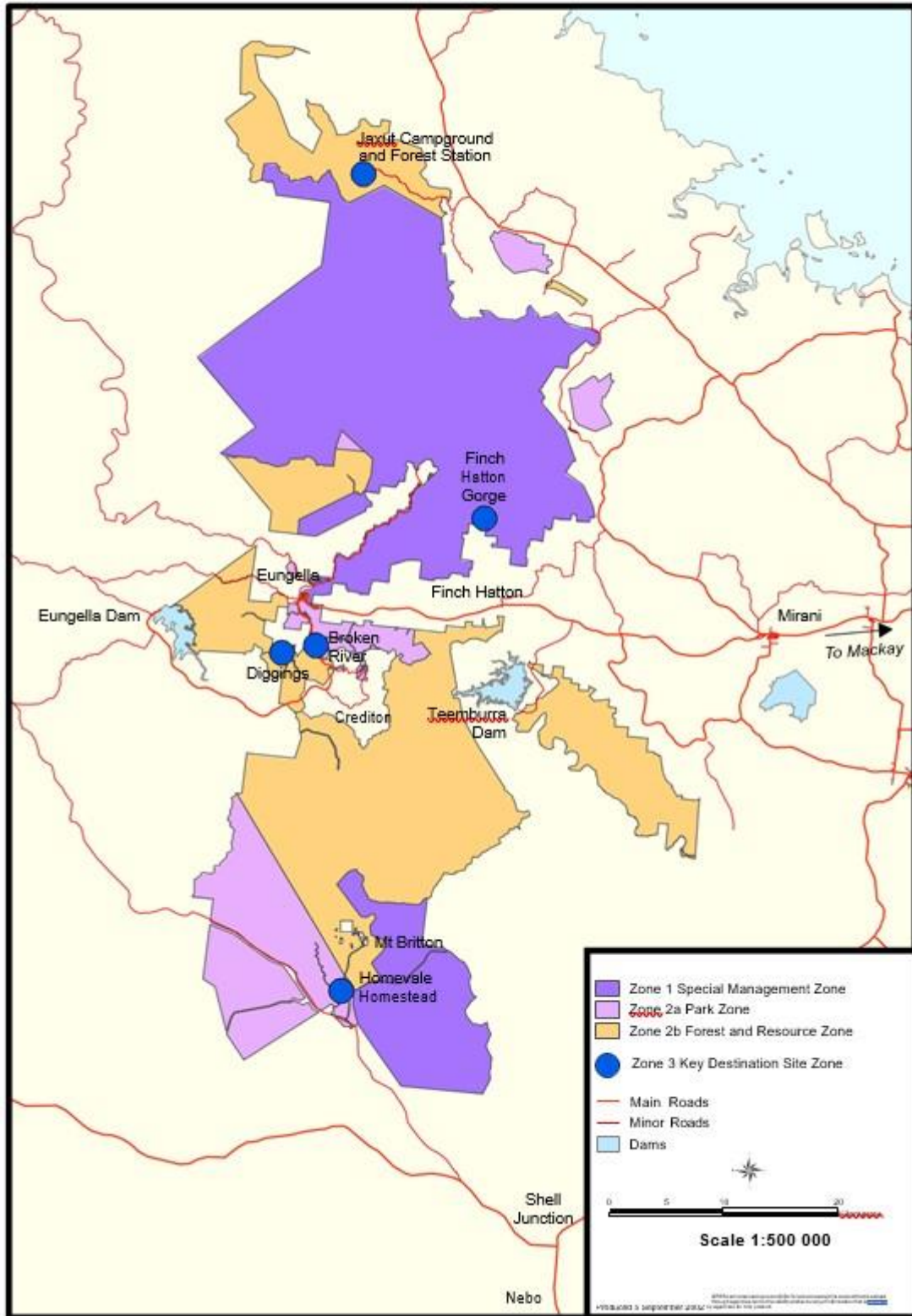
- Provide nature-based recreational facilities for large numbers of visitor with the key focus being for the presentation and interpretation of the areas natural and cultural heritage values.
- Infrastructure development will determine the setting; visitors can expect well maintained 2WD access, easy access to the natural attractions and picnic and toilet facilities catering for people with disabilities.
- Provide key access, linkages and support infrastructure for recreation facilities and opportunities in other facilities zones.

*Management practices intended for this zone are to:*

- Monitor and manage impacts of visitor use.
- Minimise impacts on surrounding and receiving environments.

- Provide for an obvious and regular management presence.
- Manage, where appropriate, for competing and conflicting visitor use.
- Ensure that use is ecologically sustainable.

**Figure 5. Visitor facility development control plan - zones**



## Appendix A:

### Natural heritage values

#### *National Estate*

The Mackay Highlands is an area of rugged and mountainous terrain some 150km in length and lies 80km west of Mackay in Central Queensland. The area is listed on the 'Register of the National Estate' under the Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975-1990 because: it contains the fourth largest wilderness area in Queensland;

- it contains the largest contiguous rainforest area in central Queensland (73 000ha);
- it has spectacular geological features such as the Broken River Gorge, Diamond Cliffs and the Marling Spikes; and
- it contains the sole habitat for several species, including two frog species, some reptile species and the Eungella honeyeater.

#### *Geology and landform*

The Mackay Highlands includes a section of the Clarke Range, west of Mackay and the Connors Range, south of Mackay. The topography varies from steep eastern escarpments and deeply carved upland valleys to high altitude broad ridges and relatively flat tablelands (eg. Dicks Tableland). On the western side of the ranges are more gentle slopes with rugged gorge country which grades into areas of flat and undulating land on Homevale National Park in the south-west.

The Clarke and Connors Ranges are composed mainly of ancient igneous rocks, which were laid down in the Upper Carboniferous, Lower Permian and Lower Cretaceous times, some 135-300 million years ago. This volcanic series is composed of a granite-diorite/granodiorite complex rocks, which were laid down in the Upper Carboniferous, Lower Permian known as the Urannah complex. These granitic rocks are overlain with younger lava flows and other volcanic rocks near Crediton, Diamond Cliffs and Marling Spikes. Permian sedimentary deposits largely underlie western sections of the area, which form the northern part of the Bowen Basin.

There are at least two fossil fields found in the Mackay Highlands area. The majority of fossils found are marine invertebrates, ranging from various bivalve molluscs to corals and crustaceans. Fossilised ferns have also been found in some of the rocks.

The area covers a wide range of altitudes ranging from about 200m on the eastern side to 1267m at the top of Mt Dalrymple.

Spectacular scenery such as deep gorges and precipitous escarpments are features of the terrain. As a consequence of the wide range in elevation, rainfall patterns in the Mackay Highlands are complex resulting in a high diversity of plant communities.

The Mackay Highlands is an important water catchment area. Water flows from the area into a number of major river systems, the Pioneer River and O'Connell River to the east, the Fitzroy River to the south and the Burdekin River to the north. The Mackay Highlands contains two major dams, Teemburra Dam on the eastern side of the ranges and Eungella Dam on the western side.

#### *Plants*

The Mackay Highlands contains plants, which are representative of both tropical and subtropical regions. In addition there are many plant species, which are rare or threatened and/or endemic to the area. At an ecosystem level the Mackay Highlands contains a significant diversity of regional ecosystems representative of the Clarke-Connors Province and a smaller section of the Proserpine to Sarina Lowlands Province in the Central Queensland Coast Bioregion, as well as part of the Northern Bowen Basin Province in the Brigalow Belt Bioregion. Significantly, the Mackay Highlands covers sections of both the Central Queensland Coast and the Brigalow Belt Bioregions which means that, not only is there a gradient of plant species from north to south, but also from east to west. A number of regional ecosystems within the Mackay Highlands area are 'endangered' or 'of concern'.

More than 40 rare or threatened plant species have been recorded within the Mackay Highlands area.





### Regional Ecosystems

The *Nature Conservation Act 1992* recognises the protection of ecosystem diversity as a major technique for achieving conservation of nature in Queensland. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service divides the State into 13 different bioregions. Bioregions represent the primary level of ecosystem classification in Queensland and are a valuable tool for conservation planning. It is important to protect representative samples of ecosystems across all bioregions in Queensland. The Mackay Highlands contains excellent samples of two bioregions - the Central Queensland Coast and the Brigalow Belt.

Each bioregion is divided into regional ecosystems, which are made up of unique vegetation communities on a particular combination of geology, landform and soil within that bioregion. Land clearing for human settlement or primary industry has resulted in many regional ecosystems disappearing or becoming endangered. The Mackay Highlands contains regional ecosystems that require protection because they are unique or endangered within Queensland.

Vegetation communities found in the Mackay Highlands range from:

- montane mossy thicket/forest at high altitudes; eucalypt open forest on the north and western slopes;
- tall shrubland, heathland or mallee in small scattered locations at high altitudes eg. Diamond Cliffs;
- subtropical rainforest at higher elevations eg. Broken River;
- hoop pine dry rainforest on the slopes of Dicks Tableland;
- wet sclerophyll tall open forests dominated by various eucalypts in narrow bands adjacent to rainforest areas;
- wet vine forest or lowland rainforest at mid to low altitudes eg. Finch Hatton Gorge;
- ironbark, poplar box or coolabah woodlands cover much of the lower rainfall areas; and
- small patches of dry rainforest with bottle tree and crow's ash, or brigalow/belah/softwood scrubs in low country to the west.



## Animals

Associated with the diverse topography, climate and plant communities is a diverse array of native animals found within the Mackay Highlands area. Many native animal species found in the area are rare or threatened, endemic or at their northern or southern limit of distribution. This includes:

- over 120 bird species of which 15 are rare or threatened including the endemic Eungella honeyeater;
- over 30 native mammal species of which five are rare or threatened;
- over 35 reptile species of which five are rare or threatened;
- over 20 amphibian species of which four are threatened including the northern gastric brooding frog and the Eungella dayfrog;
- endemic invertebrates such as the Eungella spiny crayfish.



Azure kingfisher  
Eungella National Park

Fish species recorded in the area include the purple spotted gudgeon, the orange-fingered yabby, the long finned eel, the pacific blue eye, the spangled perch, the bony herring and the fly specked hardyhead.

The Mackay Highlands offers great viewing opportunities for some common but spectacular species of Australian wildlife such as the square-tailed kite, the black chin honeyeater and the platypus.

### *Threatened Species and Wildlife Class*

**All native wildlife on all lands in Queensland are protected and managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. Each native species is prescribed a wildlife class of - common, rare, vulnerable, endangered or presumed extinct.**

**Each wildlife class reflects a conservation status and specific management intent. The term ‘threatened species’ is used to refer to wildlife classed as either vulnerable, endangered or presumed extinct.**

**There are also Commonwealth and International systems for the classification of wildlife conservation status.**

### *Protected Area Estate*

**Eungella National Park** lies 80km west of Mackay and is one of the oldest national parks in Queensland. In the 1930s the National Parks Association campaigned for a park in the Mackay hinterland. In 1936, 405ha at Broken River was declared national park reserve. In 1941, 48 195ha was declared as Eungella National Park, which at that time made it the largest national park in Queensland. In 1986 the national park was extended to include parcels of land at Mt Beatrice and a small area of former State forest near Finch Hatton. Eungella National Park now encompasses 52 900 ha protecting a significant sample of Queensland rainforest and is one of the best locations in world to view a platypus in the wild.



Central Queensland Coast Rainforest

**Homevale National Park** is approximately 21 800ha in size and was declared in 1995. Homevale lies 70km south-west of Mackay and 32 km north-west of Nebo. The park protects a unique ecological gradient between the Central Queensland Coast bioregion and the Brigalow Belt bioregion, which is responsible for the park's outstanding geological features and spectacular landscape values. The park also contains many sites of cultural heritage importance. Recently significant but degraded conservation values have been identified in the lowland area of the park.



Diamond Cliffs, Homevale National Park

**Homevale Resource Reserve** is approximately 13 300ha in size and is located between two segments of Homevale National Park. It was gazetted in 1996. The reserve is situated over a complex geological feature where the Lizzie Creek Volcanics formed a belt alongside the base of the Bowen Basin creating gold mineralisation. The Homevale Resource Reserve has high conservation value but could not be reserved as a national or conservation park because of the pre-existing and continuing interests in mining.

**St Helens Gap Conservation Park** is an 8.4 ha strip of land, separated from the eastern boundary of Eungella National Park by a freehold property. It was gazetted in 1992 for general conservation values, which includes vine thicket and its function as vegetative corridor.

### *Protected Areas*

**Protected areas are tenures that include national parks, national parks scientific, conservation parks and resource reserves. They are the cornerstones to safeguarding biological diversity and are declared so as to protect the full range of samples of Queensland's regional ecosystems. Protected areas are not just about conserving rainforests and barrier reef islands but also about retaining adequate areas of all ecosystems including those in brigalow, mulga and desert country.**

**Currently 4.2% of land in Queensland is within protected area, which protects samples of approximately 65% of regional ecosystems. Deficiencies in representativeness still occur in many areas.**

**Protected areas conserve outstanding examples of natural heritage, scenic landscapes and cultural values, which contribute significantly to the Australia's identity and generate substantial economic benefits for Queenslanders.**

**National parks are one of Queensland's biggest tourist attractions, hosting more than 12.5 million visits each year. Spending by park visitors contributes more than \$1.2 billion each year to the Queensland economy and supports more than 6000 jobs directly and many more indirectly. For every \$1 of government funding invested in their management, national parks generate more than \$40 worth of economic activity in the Queensland economy.**

## Appendix B:

### World heritage criteria

There are four criteria - at least one of which must be met - for a property to be successfully listed as a natural World Heritage Area. To qualify, the proposed site must:

- 1) be an outstanding example representing the major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, and significant ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features; or
- 2) be an outstanding example representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals; or
- 3) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; or
- 4) contain the most important significant habitats for in situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.



Connors-Clarke Range

## Appendix C:

### Future guidelines for grazing

These guidelines are some suggestions for the development of conservation assessment criteria for Phase One of the grazing strategy (see 2.1.3).

#### **Guidelines for assessment criteria**

The assessment of renewal or extension for grazing leases or permits should ideally take place at least two years prior to expiry.

Assessment criteria could include the following matters:

Consideration should be given to any feasible alternatives for grazing on public land.

Consideration should be given to situations where there are no other feasible land management alternatives.

Consideration should be given to stocking rates and whether it is consistent with the capacity of the land.

Consideration should be given to the applicant's previous compliance with the conditions of their lease or permit conditions.

Serious consideration should be given to investigating strategies for removing/excluding stock from the following regional ecosystems. 8.3.3a, 8.3.5, 8.12.9.

Serious consideration should be given to investigating strategies for long term monitoring and reduction of conservation impacts of grazing in the following regional ecosystems. 8.12.6a, 8.12.7a, 8.12.12a, 8.12.15c, 8.12.23.

Consideration should be given to any significant cultural heritage values that are likely to suffer irreversible harm if grazing continued.

Consideration should be given to any legal issues associated with leases under the *Land Act*.

#### **Guidelines for the development of protocols**

Individual grazing operations that meet the assessment criteria for renewal or extension will require the negotiation of protocols to ensure that renewal of permits and leases will result in minimal conservation impact.

There are numerous strategies that can be adopted by grazing practitioners to detect and avoid pasture degradation - for example:

- weather forecasting to trigger dry season practices;
- the adoption of reserve paddocks;
- the provision of water points and fencing that is distributed to ensure even grazing, ecologically appropriate fire regimes;
- determination of ecologically suitable stocking rates for the particular country; and
- impact monitoring programs.

#### **If a phase out is required**

In some situations individual grazing operations on public lands in the Mackay Highlands may be assessed to have long-term incompatibility with the conservation values and future management directions of the land. In such situations negotiations will take place on an individual basis to customise a phase out arrangement that is appropriate to individual circumstances.

## Appendix D:

### Summary of issues raised in stakeholder submissions

Members of the Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee and some of the key stakeholders in whom they represent have provided comments on the previous draft version of this document. A compilation of some of the key comments by topic is provided below.

#### ***National Parks and potential tenure transfers to protected areas***

- I would dearly love to see the area north of Diamond Cliff between Homevale and Eungella road declared National Park. In time to come, the Australians employed there and income received will far outweigh the income from cattle.
- National parks should acquire the adjoining dairying farm to prevent continued pollution. Opportunities exist for a type of sell back arrangement with private enterprise to provide visitor facilities with specific controls.
- Unless adequate staffing levels are implemented and maintained, the whole planning exercise will be wasted and the values of the area will continue to be threatened.

#### ***Potential world heritage listing***

- World Heritage rainforest values do extend into Taroom State Forests, which is near Sarina. We need to keep Sarina in the picture.
- Would World Heritage listing preclude any further development of any kind?

#### ***Endangered frog habitat***

- Chytrid fungus has more of a chance of being spread by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and researchers.
- All foreign material should be excluded from the endangered frog area including rangers and researchers.

#### ***Resources for National Parks***

- The cost and effort of managing these future protected areas will be substantially greater than they are currently.
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service should give serious effort to the training and employment of people from the local community.
- QPWS urgently need more rangers and more resources now. There is a total lack of funds on the ground to implement the actions even simple things like erecting safety signs.
- More physical presence from rangers is needed at Broken River and Finch Hatton during the peak season and commercial operators should have a role in policing.
- The presence of rangers and volunteer rangers makes people more aware of dangers, safety and environmental issues.

#### ***Changing the local economic base***

- Loss of grazing on State forests will mean loss of production to business loss of jobs to immediate family, loss of income and loss of production and jobs to the Eungella community.
- The government needs to preserve the lifestyle of local communities.
- The threats to the natural environment in the National Park by the adjacent dairy operation has largely developed as a result of the commercial pressures placed on the operator because of dairy deregulation legislation.
- Some stakeholders will be seriously affected by elements of the strategy, and the question of monetary costs needs to be addressed quickly.
- The loss of the cattle industry would be a blow to the local economy.

- The loss of the regional forest industry will be another blow to a region still reeling from dairy deregulation.
- Loss of production to the cattle industry will have flow-on effects for transport providers, earth moving contractors, local produce depot, the local mobile mechanic and the local abattoir.
- The deregulation of the dairy industry has seen the start up of stock and produce cartage, which is a business that allows people to continue living in the small community of Eungella.

### ***Grazing on State Forests***

- Insulted to read in the report that grazing is going to be phased out.
- Land management concerns (e.g. fire and weed control) as future neighbour.
- We have been operating for the last 80 years, if our activities were dangerous then there would be no endangered species left.
- Why was there no mention of wildlife and endangered species issues in the TRG process?
- Conservationists only want the lands because we have put improved access to it.
- Leaseholders should be paid compensation for improvements they have done to the land and loss of income.
- There should be a user pay system whereby recreational users of the forest should contribute to the cost of weed control, erosion control and road maintenance. Grazing lessees frequently pick up the costs associated with recreational use of forests.
- The individual costs of losing the State forest leases would be enormous in our particular circumstance.
- There is already too much existing national park.
- The government can't manage the existing national park that it has got.
- Local government rely on the revenue collected from leaseholders.

### ***Local council issues***

- Mackay City Council provides most of the visitor facilities for tourists but the main tourist attractions are in two other Shires.
- The loss of rate base from grazing leaseholds on State forests is a big issue for local Councils.
- The framework appears to be locking up the region and not opening it up to multiple land use.
- The loss of grazing leases will result in a loss of rates, which frankly we cannot afford.
- What are the experiences of other local governments where World Heritage Listing has taken place?

### ***Water quality and natural integrity***

- Environmental issues need to be addressed immediately if we are to encourage sustainable ecotourism.
- The main issue of concern is water quality at Broken River.
- The main reason for the decline in swimming activity in Broken River is the decline in water quality and it should not be confused with community desires.
- The apparent acceptance of the EPA to allow for degradation of the National Park by industry is sending the wrong message and will not improve public perception of protected area management.
- The Pioneer River and Cattle Creek are suffering massive environmental problems. Massive problems have occurred in the river since the local council, Telstra and the River Trust tried to straighten the river to relieve flooding of cane field.
- Cattle and farming must be taken away from riverbank to a distance of 30-100m.
- Nutrient, fertilizers, poisons and 1,000,000s tones of saltation come down the river during the wet season, heavy rains and floods and outpour into the ocean and the reef, which I think is criminal.

### ***Visitor facilities***

- The Strategy encourages the development of visitor facilities on land adjacent to key destination sites - but private enterprise relies on the presentation of the natural environment and the extreme visual contamination of the main water course at Broken River puts everything in jeopardy.
- Building a new platypus-viewing platform is not supported. It will take the focus and urgency away from the water quality problem.

- Private investment tourism ventures on adjacent land are unattractive whilst the EPA allows for extreme visual contamination of the main waterway.
- The erection of a second viewing platform in the old swimming hole at Broken River and moving the existing car park will NOT fix the pollution problem from runoff from the adjacent overstocked dairy.
- The purchase of the dairy property is vital in the further infrastructure at Broken River.
- Big conflict continues between platypus viewing and the continuing water pollution. Does not support building another platypus viewing platform until water quality is resolved.
- Do not believe that there needs to be a total exclusion of visitors at Finch Hatton but safety remains a big issue.
- Homevale homestead should be restored and preserved at all costs.

### ***The Great Walks***

- There are serious conservation concerns about the Great Walks track following the rim top of Diamond Cliffs
- If the Great Walks trailhead is located at Homevale, than serious resources will need to go towards the presentation of the area.
- It would be wonderful if the Great Walks could go through Finch Hatton through to Calen but this might not be ideal due to the sensitivity of the area.
- The proposed Great Walks is of serious concern to grazing lessees. Liability and interference with grazing operations are issues.

## Appendix E:

### Summary of strategies by implementation area

#### *Tenure review*

- If native forests in the Mackay Highlands are investigated for future protected areas, then Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will prepare recommendations based substantially on this strategy. When preparing recommendations Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will consider any new information and will consult with community interests and individuals likely to be affected by proposed tenure changes. [see 2.1.2 (a)].
- Assessment for potential tenure re- allocation should take priority consideration of lands that contain ecosystems not adequately represented in protected area estate, lands that contain threatened species habitat and lands that provide functional links between protected areas. [see 2.1.2 (b)].
- If at some time in the future, native forests are transferred into protected area tenure (see section 2.1.2) then arrangements will be made with individual lessees and permittees for a gradual phase out of their grazing operations. Conservation assessment criteria and impact minimisation protocols would apply to the life of existing leases or permit. [see 2.1.3 (c)].
- If native forests are transferred to protected area tenure, then Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service should formally engage public comment for seeking inclusion of the Mackay Highlands as a World Heritage Area. [see 2.1.2 (c)].

#### *Grazing leases/permits on public land*

- Phase one applies to the new assessment processes for lease and permit renewals. Future requests for renewals or extensions to existing grazing leases and permits will be subject to assessment through conservation criteria. The assessment process will take place through existing legislative mechanisms. Where it is demonstrated that a specific operation meets the conservation criteria, then protocols will be negotiated with the applicant to ensure that renewal of permits and leases will result in minimal conservation impact. Guidelines for the development of assessment criteria are provided in Appendix C. [2.1.3 (b)].
- Phase two would occur, if at some time in the future, areas of State forests are transferred into protected area estate. (see section 2.1.2). The long-term compatibility or incompatibility of grazing operations on public land will depend on the specific tenure in which it occurs and the uses permitted under that tenure. It may be feasible for some grazing permits or leases to be permitted to continue. [see 2.1.3 (c)].
- Phase three would occur, if at some time in the future, areas of State forests are transferred into protected area estate and parts of the Mackay Highlands is accepted for inclusion as a World Heritage Area. The long-term compatibility or incompatibility of grazing operations on public land will depend on the specific tenure in which it occurs, the uses permitted under that tenure and the exact boundaries for a World Heritage Area. It may be feasible for some grazing permits or leases to be permitted to continue. [see 2.1.3 (d)].
- In some situations individual grazing operations on public lands in the Mackay Highlands may be assessed to have long- term incompatibility with the conservation values and future management directions of the land. This may occur in phase one, phase two, or phase three. In such situations negotiations will take place on an individual basis to customise a phase out arrangement that is appropriate to individual circumstances. [see 2.1.3 (e)].

#### *Visitor information*

- Common species (such as the platypus) will be promoted for visitor wildlife experiences. [see 2.1.1(b)].
- Walking opportunities in other locations in the Mackay Highlands will be promoted as a means of reducing the volume of bushwalking traffic in the sensitive frog habitat. [see 2.1.4 (h)]
- Key destination sites have been identified in Figure 3. These are sites that have been identified through this planning process as having opportunities for promotion and development as nature-based recreation and tourism attractions. [see 2.2.1 (a)].
- Whilst swimming in watercourses in parks and forests will not be prohibited, Queensland Parks and Wildlife



Service will not formally designate swimming areas or provide facilities for swimmers in any national park or forest. Any visitor wishing to swim should assume the inherent risks associated with the activity. [2.2.1 (m)].

- Existing walking trail links from Broken River to Eungella Township and Broken River to Crediton have further potential to be marketed and promoted to visitors through improved information dissemination. Maintenance and improvement to visitor facilities along these trails should occur as opportunities arise. Interpretation of cultural heritage values along these trails would enhance the visitor experience (see the report by the Cultural Heritage Technical Reference Group). [see 2.2.1 (n)].

### **Interpretation**

- Through interpretation, visitors will have better understanding and appreciation of the conservation values of the Mackay Highlands. [see 2.1.1(a)].
- Common species (such as the platypus) will be promoted for visitor wildlife experiences. [see 2.1.1(b)].
- Actions proposed in the *Recovery plan for stream dwelling rainforest frogs of the Eungella region of mid eastern Queensland 2000-2004* that relate to public education should be integrated with future interpretation programs for the Mackay Highlands as far as practical. [see 2.1.4 (o)].
- Investigations should take place into improving all year two-wheel drive access to 'The Diggings'. There are good opportunities to further develop the site for recreation and camping for both local use and large tourist groups. The site has a strong sense of historic heritage and there are many opportunities for interpretation. [see 2.2.1 (s)].
- Commercial nature based recreation and tourist activities on parks and forests must have interpretation of natural and cultural values of the Mackay Highlands as feature of the visitor experience. Other tourism activities should be conducted outside of parks and forests. [see 2.2.1(q)].
- If in the future, sites of cultural heritage importance are to be linked in with key destination sites and promoted for visitation then interpretation should be a key feature of presentation. [see 2.2.1 (e)].
- The Diggings is located on a former Eungella gold field (c1889-1910s) and has remains of several mines, batteries, a water wheel and sluiceway. The site evokes a very strong sense of historical value and social value in the local community. Local recreational use should not be displaced from this site. There is potential to also develop the site for visitor use with a heritage interpretation theme. The open mine shafts would require capping so as to maximise public safety. [see 2.2.2 (h) and 2.2.1 (s)].
- An interpretive strategy for the Homevale homestead complex be developed and implemented in partnership with the local community. The interpretative strategy should aim to provide visitors to the area with an appreciation of the community values and stories associated with the place. The interpretative strategy should consider adopting a range of interpretative techniques including on-site signage and off site displays. [see 2.2.3 (a)].
- Subject to the proposed heritage conservation plan and its recommendations, the exteriors of the buildings including the homestead fences be presented in their current deteriorating state, as part of the cultural heritage interpretation package. The benefits of allowing the structures to live out their lifespan gracefully will be communicated to the public through interpretation. [see 2.2.3 (c)].

### **Code of practice for bushwalking**

- While bushwalkers usually act in an environmentally responsible manner, there are inevitable impacts of their activity within catchments that contain sensitive frog habitats. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in consultation with tourist facility providers, local bushwalkers, organised bushwalking clubs and local councils will develop a code of practice to manage remote bushwalking activities in the Mt Dalrymple-Finch Hatton area. [see 2.1.4 (a)].
- The code of practice will be developed to ensure that all bushwalkers to the area:
  - are fully aware of issues associated with frog population decline; and
  - undertake voluntary protocols for minimal impact bushwalking, which would include actions to minimise the risk of transmission of the chytrid fungus into catchments with sensitive frog habitats. [see 2.1.4 (b)].
- In developing the Code of Practice, consideration should be given to management of track markings, collection of visitor statistics and monitoring impacts. [see 2.1.4 (c)].

## Critical frog habitat

- Management of the area will be consistent with the purpose of the zone and management practices intention of zone 1 in the Mackay Highlands development control plan in section 3.1. [see 2.1.4 (d)].
- The use of impact controlling structures could be considered as a management practice providing it is consistent with the purpose of the zone and management practices intention of zone 1 in the Mackay Highlands development control plan (see section 3.1). [see 2.1.4 (e)].
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will consider declaring a 'restricted access area' under the *Nature Conservation Regulation 1994*, if it is determined that there is:
  - significant increase in the number of visitors undertaking remote bushwalking in the Mt Dalrymple/ Finch Hatton area; and/or
  - persistent non-compliance with remote bushwalking guidelines; and/or
  - future scientific evidence that demonstrates a direct relationship between the impact of bushwalking and the survival of endangered frog species in similar habitats. [see 2.1.4 (m)]
- If a restricted access area were declared, then entry would be subject to strict conditions of permit. Such a strategy would demand an intensive management effort with respect to monitoring, permitting and enforcement. [see 2.1.4 (n)].

## Research

- The conservation benefits of any proposed research or monitoring activity in the sensitive frog habitat should far out-weight the impacts of the activity. Strict conditions should apply to research permits in this area to ensure that the conservation impacts of the research activity are minimised to the greatest extent possible. [see 2.1.4 (j)].
- Sustaining the platypus population Broken River is critical to maintaining visitor opportunities for platypus viewing. Research is needed to better understand the ecological requirements of the platypus and its relationship with high nutrient levels. [see 2.2.1 (i)].

## Commercial activities on parks & forests

- Assessment for specific proposals at specific sites should take into consideration the management regimes that have been proposed by the Conservation Technical Reference Group. [see 2.1.1(d)].
- Proposals for specific developments at specific sites should take into consideration the survival requirements of populations of threatened species. [see 2.1.1(e)].
- While it is recognised that in some circumstances, commercial activities can assist with monitoring and management of visitor behaviour in remote areas, this will not be a strategy that will be encouraged in this circumstance within the endangered frog habitat. The overriding management objective in this special management area is to discourage the expansion of remote bushwalking activities whilst implementing strategies to minimise the risk to endangered frog species. [see 2.1.4 (k)].
- Any proposal to further develop tourism opportunities on mining leases within Homevale Resources Reserve to a scale higher than existing uses would be inconsistent with the fundamental reason for which the reserve was declared. Any requests for changes to environmental authorities or access rights through the resource reserve will be assessed, based on the primary purpose of the tenure and not tourism industry development purposes. [see 2.2.1 (c)].
- Future commercial activity permits on parks and forests should be consistent with the guidelines in the visitor facility development control plan (see section 3.1) [see 2.2.1(p)].
- Commercial nature-based recreation and tourist activities on parks and forests must have interpretation of natural and cultural values of the Mackay Highlands as feature of the visitor experience. Other tourism activities should be conducted outside of parks and forests. [see 2.2.1(q)].

## Public utilities

- There have been proposals in the past for public utilities telecommunications and radar towers on top of Mt Dalrymple. The construction and access required to maintain such facilities would have significant conservation impacts. Such facilities will not be permitted in this area. [see 2.1.4 (l)].

### ***Heritage conservation plans***

- If in the future, the Mt Roberts outstation complex were to be linked with key destination sites promoted for visitation, then a Heritage Conservation Plan should be developed to determine its cultural heritage values and management requirements. A fire strategy for Homevale National Park should consider the fire protection needs of the Mt Roberts complex. [see 2.2.2 (d)].
- A heritage conservation plan or advice from a qualified heritage architect would be desirable to gain an understanding of the conservation priorities for the structures within the Homevale homestead complex. [see 2.2.3 (b)].

### ***Traditional Owner involvement***

- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will work in partnership with Traditional Owners (see section 2.3.1) to formalise intellectual property rights to traditional knowledge and to develop protocols with regard to the provision of visitor information. [see 2.2.2 (f)].
- Opportunities for Aboriginal involvement in presenting the natural and cultural values of parks and forests will be encouraged. [see 2.2.2 (g)].
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to continue discussions and negotiations with Traditional Owners on ways to achieve shared desired future outcomes. [see 2.3.2 (a)].

### ***Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee***

- The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee adopts a leading role in:
  - the development of a community vision for the future of sustainable tourism in the Mackay Highlands;
  - identification and development of complementary visitor opportunities on adjacent and nearby non-State lands;
  - promotion of complementary strategies to ensure that development and promotion of key destination sites are supported by appropriate regional infrastructure planning for roads, bridges, signage etc;
  - exploration of a Mackay Highlands tourism identity that can be utilised for interpretation themes and marketed into tourism packages; and
  - acting as a key community representative reference point to provide feedback to future government planning initiatives. [see 2.3.1 (b)].
- Tourism planners and tourism marketing should ensure that strategies are consistent and complementary with future directions outlined in this strategy. [see 2.3.1 (c)].
- Traditional Owner representatives continue to be encouraged to participate in the Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee so as to become involved in regional tourism planning strategies. [see 2.3.2 (b)].

### ***Local government***

- Local government assessments of development approval applications should ensure that the viability of future tourism-related facilities on adjacent lands are not dependent on their guests accessing this area for informal bushwalking. [see 2.1.4 (i)].
- Future development at Finch Hatton Gorge should rationalise the site back to a walking trail entrance as day use opportunities at alternative sites become available. The community requires alternatives that are similar to current facilities at Finch Hatton Gorge for day use picnicking and swimming. Investigations could take place into the viability of providing day use facilities on local council managed lands at Gargett Bridge, Pioneer River Bridge, Wesches's Crossing, Pinevale Crossing and Badger Park. [see 2.2.1 (l)].
- Teemburra Dam is not within a park or forest but was identified during this planning process as an important site for nature-based recreation activity in the area. While the local community uses the recreational facilities at Teemburra Dam there is enormous potential to further develop facilities for a range of day use activities for both locals and tourists. Mirani Shire Council has recently assumed responsibility for the management of the recreational area. The Mackay Highlands Coordinating Committee, local fish stocking groups, SunWater and regional tourism initiatives should all be involved and supportive of Mirani Shire Council's endeavours to develop future recreational facilities at Teemburra Dam. [see 2.2.1 (r)].

- Shell Junction and Nebo townships are conveniently located as a good site for and overnight stop over as part of a two-wheel forest heritage drive. Shell Junction is not within a park or forest but was identified by the Recreation Technical Reference Group as a place with good potential to provide camping facilities. [see 2.2.1 (v)].
- The tenure of the Mt Britton township site is not within parks and forests, however it is recognised that there may be some opportunities for a community-based project to develop interpretation at the site. [see 2.2.2 (a)].
- The tenure of the Crediton Hall site is not within parks or forests, however the planning process has identified that there are opportunities for the Hall to be linked in with marketing of a forest heritage drive or even walking trails. The local community should give consideration to developing interpretation of the area's rich cultural heritage. [see 2.2.2 (b)].
- Local government should encourage development on lands adjacent to parks and forests that is complementary with future directions outlined in this strategy. [see 2.3.1 (a)].

### ***Maintenance and capital works planning, parks and forests***

- The pattern of future nature-based recreation and tourism development should be consistent with the guidelines in the visitor facility development control plan, which has been developed in conjunction with the conservation values (see section 3.1) and managed accordingly. [2.1.1(c)].
- Assessment for specific proposals at specific sites should take into consideration the management regimes that have been proposed by the Conservation Technical Reference Group [see 2.1.1(d)].
- Proposals for specific developments should take into consideration the survival requirements of populations of threatened species. [see 2.1.1(e)].
- The informal remote bushwalking track to Mt Dalrymple should not be upgraded for presentation purposes due to concerns of conservation impacts. Bushwalkers choosing to continue using the area should not expect the tracks to be maintained and should assume the inherent risks associated with the activity in a remote natural area, including personal injury and death. [see 2.1.4 (f)].
- Consideration should be given to formal closures or restrictions along tracks that are identified as having high ecological importance or are a serious safety threat to bushwalkers [see 2.1.4 (g)].
- Key destination sites have been identified in Figure 3. These are sites that have been identified through this planning process as having opportunities for promotion and development as nature-based recreation and tourism attractions. [see 2.2.1 (a)].
- The location of key destination sites provides spatial constraints for where linkages between key destination sites might take place. [see 2.2.1 (b)].
- Road and trail access to key destination sites and also along promoted linkages between key destination sites will be managed for the purposes of presenting parks and forests. [see 2.2.1 (c)].
- Road and trail access in parks and forests not directly related to the presentation of key destination sites will be maintained for park and forest management purposes. [see 2.2.1 (d)].
- A visitor facility development control plan is provided in Section 3 to guide ways in which nature-based tourism and recreation in the Mackay Highlands should develop in the future. Within this framework, detailed assessment of specific proposals and specific sites will be required to ensure that benefits to the community are balanced by environmental impacts that can be reasonably managed. [see 2.2.1 (e)].
- Suitable impact assessments should be conducted before construction of any additional infrastructure and simple cost effective monitoring programs should be undertaken to track impacts over time. Detailed site planning should ensure that proposed developments are not in conflict with the management regime for that area as proposed in the report by Conservation Technical Reference Group. [see 2.2.1 (f)].
- The implementation, site planning and construction of future visitor facility development on parks and forests are subject to resources. The sequencing for developing key destination sites on parks and forests will be assessed over time by district management who are in the best position to reconcile limited resources with community preferences for access and facility development. [see 2.2.1 (g)].
- Future development at Broken River should focus the site towards a key destination site with platypus viewing, interpretation and day use facilities that can cater for large numbers of visitors. [see 2.2.1 (h)].
- Should the current kiosk lease at Broken River become no longer viable, consideration should be given towards re- use of the structure for other activities such as for an office or for interpretation. [see 2.2.1 (i)].

- The camp ground at Fern Flat is not environmentally sustainable in the long- term due to soil types and its situation within the landscape. Alternative camping and accommodation options for visitors should be encouraged on nearby and adjacent lands. [see 2.2.1 (k)].
- Future development at Finch Hatton Gorge should rationalise the site back to a walking trail entrance as day use opportunities at alternative sites become available. The community requires alternatives that are similar to current facilities at Finch Hatton Gorge for day use picnicking and swimming. Investigations could take place into the viability of providing day use facilities on local council managed lands at Gargett Bridge, Pioneer River Bridge, Wesches's Crossing, Pinevale Crossing and Badger Park. [see 2.2.1 (l)].
- Investigations into the viability of a formal link between Sky Window and Palm Grove walking tracks should take place. [see 2.2.1 (o)].
- Investigations should take place into improving all year two-wheel drive access to 'The Diggings'. There are good opportunities to further develop the site for recreation and camping for both local use and large tourist groups. The site has a strong sense of historic heritage and there are many opportunities for interpretation. [see 2.2.1 (s) and 2.2.2 (h)].
- Jaxut camp ground and Cathu Forest Station complex could be investigated in the future for large group commercial and educational activities. These activities could occur alongside existing opportunities for camping and walking trails. [see 2.2.1 (t)].
- The future route of the Great Walks should be developed and promoted as a key destination site. [see 2.2.1 (w)].
- The grounds within the Homevale homestead complex will continue to be maintained in sympathy with their cultural and social context, as part of the presentation package. [see 2.2.3 (d)].
- Given that it would not be a priority for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to provide the large capital input that would be required to restore and maintain the Homevale homestead building complex, public comment will be sought on the merits of proceeding with an 'expression of interest' process. This would involve seeking interested parties to develop and submit viable, practical and costed concepts for alternative use of the complex. From that process, decisions would be made whether to proceed with any proposals submitted, with an additional phase of public consultation. [see 2.2.3 (e)].

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