

Programs, Policy and Legislation

The Queensland Government has direct responsibility for the protection, conservation and management of wetlands in Queensland, a responsibility shared with local government and the Australian Government (for some wetlands of international significance). These responsibilities are found in laws passed by the Queensland parliament, laws of the Commonwealth, international obligations and in agreements between state, local and the federal governments.



Wetlands are integral to a wide range of landscapes. It is not surprising; therefore, that there are many different programs, policies and laws affecting wetlands, and that administration of wetland areas is shared with many government agencies, local authorities and the Australian Government.

The main policy document, which provides direction on how wetlands are to be managed in Queensland, is contained in the Cabinet endorsed [Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Queensland's wetlands](#).

The Wetlands Strategy outlines four objectives:

- to avoid further loss or degradation of natural wetlands, unless overriding public interest can be shown
- to ensure a comprehensive and adequate representation of wetlands in the conservation reserve system
- to base the management and use of natural wetlands on ecologically sustainable management and integrated catchment management practices
- to develop community awareness of, and respect for, the values and benefits of wetlands, and involvement in their management.

The [Queensland Wetlands Program](#) has many projects underway that either contribute directly to or support wetland policies and legislation. The [Reef Water Quality Protection Plan](#) (Reef Plan) also provides some major policy drivers and actions relating to wetlands.

As a Reef Plan initiative the [State Planning Policy 4/11: Protecting Wetlands of High Ecological Significance in Great Barrier Catchments \(SPP4/11\)](#) was released on 25 November 2011 to protect high value freshwater wetlands located in the upper Great Barrier Reef catchments.

SPP4/11 applies to wetlands of high ecological significance (HES wetlands) in reef catchments from the Wide Bay-Burnett catchment to the Daintree River, and includes Fraser Island. As a statutory instrument the SPP seeks to ensure that development involving high-impact earthworks in or near HES wetlands is appropriately planned, located, designed, constructed and operated. The policy requires that planning instruments and development proposed in wetland protection areas have regard to the policy as part of development planning and decision making. Wetland protection areas (WPAs) incorporate a HES wetland and a surrounding trigger area (being an area of hydrological influence), as identified in Annex 3 of SPP 4/11 and further defined on the Map of Referable Wetlands.

The *Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Act 2009* was passed by the Queensland Parliament on 8 October 2009 and is now an amendment to the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. The [Reef Wise Farming Website](#) provides a wealth of information and tools on the implementation of this Act.

Internationally, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance — sometimes called the Ramsar Convention — provides the main direction on the sustainable management of wetlands. The agreement was signed in 1971 and included Australia and 17 other countries. The [Ramsar](#) Convention aims to reduce global loss of wetlands and conserve and manage remaining wetlands. Queensland sites listed under the Ramsar Convention include [Bowling Green Bay](#), [Currawinya Lakes](#), [Moreton Bay](#), [Shoalwater Bay and Corio Bay](#) and [Great Sandy Strait](#).

The Australian Government administers the [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 \(EPBC Act\)](#). The EPBC Act protects the environment, particularly protected matters of National Environmental Significance (for example, Ramsar-listed wetlands and threatened species and communities). The EPBC Act streamlines national environmental assessment and approvals process, protects Australian biodiversity and integrates management of important natural and cultural places.

The Queensland Government has protected more than 100 important wetlands in [national parks](#) such as Hinchinbrook Island, Eubenangee Swamp, Lakefield, Diamantina and Currawinya National Parks and other protected areas such as Townsville Town Common. These areas are protected under the [Nature Conservation Act 1992](#).

Important marine wetlands such as Moreton Bay, Shoalwater Bay and Pumicestone Passage are protected in [marine parks](#) and in [fish habitat areas](#). These areas are protected under the [Marine Parks Act 2004](#) and the [Fisheries Act 1994](#).

Significant coastal wetlands are protected under the [Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995](#). Under this Act, the [State Coastal Management Plan](#) and [Regional Coastal Management Plans](#) have been made to establish policies so as to minimise further loss or degradation of coastal wetlands.

The introduction of the [Vegetation Management Act 1999](#) significantly reduced the clearing of remnant vegetation resulting in the protection of many freshwater wetlands.

The [Water Act 2000](#) regulates the extraction of water from wetlands within a water resource plan area. The [Environmental Protection \(Water\) Policy 1997 \(the Water EPP\)](#), made under the [Environmental Protection Act 1994](#), establishes environmental values for water, including wetlands. Many National Resource Management (NRM) bodies have established water quality improvement plans that set out management actions to protect the [water quality environmental values](#) that are scheduled in the Water EPP.

The [Sustainable Planning Act 2009](#) provides a number of mechanisms for policy directions and statutory protection of wetlands including regional plans such as the [Southeast Queensland Regional Plan](#) and Far North Queensland Regional Plan.

A Map of [Referable Wetlands](#) provides a trigger under Schedule 7 of the Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009 (SPR) that makes DERM a concurrence agency for specific [assessable development](#) in [wetland protection areas](#). DERM will remain as an advice agency for development in [wetland management areas](#). Local governments may also provide protection measures for wetlands through [planning schemes](#).

The Wetlands Planning and Legislation Support Tool assists users to identify wetlands legislation, policies and planning instruments that are relevant to their issue of interest based on selected criteria. A concise summary of search results links to the appropriate policies and legislation, responsible agencies and related information.

Version 3.0 November 2011

[WetlandInfo](#): Department of Environment and Resource Management

For further information contact wetlands@derm.qld.gov.au

