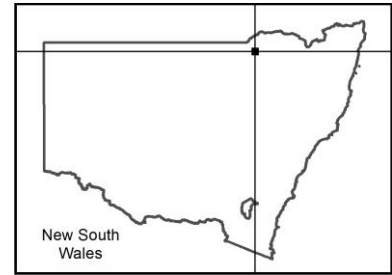


# Statement of Management Intent



## Gwydir Wetlands State Conservation Area

### 1. Introduction

This statement outlines the main values, issues, management directions and priorities of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for managing Gwydir Wetlands State Conservation Area (SCA) and any future additions. This statement, together with relevant NPWS policies, will guide the management of the SCA until a plan of management has been prepared in accordance with the [National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 \(NPW Act\)](#). The NPWS [Managing Parks Prior to Plan of Management Policy](#) states that parks and reserves without a plan of management are to be managed in a manner consistent with the intent of the NPW Act and the [‘precautionary principle’ \(see Principle 15\)](#).

### 2. Management principles

State conservation areas are reserved under the NPW Act to protect and conserve areas that:

- contain significant or representative ecosystems, landforms or natural phenomena or places of cultural significance
- are capable of providing opportunities for sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment, the sustainable use of buildings and structures, or research
- are capable of providing opportunities for uses permitted under other provisions of the NPW Act.

Under the NPW Act ([section 30G](#)), state conservation areas are managed to:

- conserve biodiversity, maintain ecosystem functions, protect natural phenomena and maintain natural landscapes
- conserve places, objects and features of cultural value
- provide for the undertaking of uses permitted under other provisions of the NPW Act (including uses permitted under section 47J such as mineral exploration and mining), having regard to the conservation of the natural and cultural values of the state conservation area
- provide for sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment that is compatible with conservation of the area’s natural and cultural values and with uses permitted in the area
- provide for sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to conservation of the area’s natural and cultural values and with other uses permitted in the area
- provide for appropriate research and monitoring.

Land is reserved as a state conservation area primarily where mineral values preclude reservation as another category. The NPW Act requires a review of the classification of state conservation areas every five years in consultation with the Minister administering the *Mining Act 1992*.

### 3. Context

**Reservation details:** Gwydir Wetlands SCA was reserved on 25 February 2011.

**Size:** 4292 hectares.

Future additions to the SCA include the property 'Bunnor' and part of the properties of 'Westholme' and 'Munwonga', being a total of 3065 hectares.



Gwydir Wetlands SCA is located on the north-west plains of New South Wales, approximately 60 kilometres north-west of Moree. It falls within the Darling Riverine Plains Bioregion. It also falls within the administrative areas of the Mungindi and Collarenebri local Aboriginal land councils, North West Local Land Services and Moree Plains Shire Council.

The Gwydir Wetlands formerly spanned over 200,000 hectares. However, since regulation of the Gwydir River in the 1970s and development of irrigated farming in the region, the size of the wetlands has been reduced to less than 15 per cent of the original area. The wetlands are one of only a few terminal inland wetlands found in New South Wales. The area plays an important role in

the biological and ecological functioning of the Murray–Darling Basin by providing important habitat when other major wetlands are dry. The Gwydir Wetlands was first proclaimed a bird and wildlife sanctuary in 1921 and listed as a Ramsar Wetland in 1999.

The Gwydir Wetlands SCA, comprising the former property ‘Old Dromana’, is located in the southern part of the Gwydir Wetlands where the Lower Gwydir River terminates and spreads (when in flood) to form a mosaic of wetland habitats and an interconnecting chain of water streams and channels that covers 20,000 hectares. A portion of the wetlands in the south of the SCA forms part of the Gwydir Wetlands Ramsar (Wetland of International Importance) site, one of the most important sites in Australia for the breeding of colonially nesting waterbirds. This portion of the SCA, known as the Lower Gwydir or Big Leather Watercourse wetland, is about 600 hectares and is one of four discrete parcels that make up the Ramsar site.

Future additions to the Gwydir Wetlands SCA are located along the Gingham watercourse in the northern section of the Gwydir Wetlands. The additions total 3065 hectares and comprise the former property ‘Bunnor’ and part of the properties ‘Westholme’ and ‘Muwonga’.

Surrounding the SCA, land use is dominated by grazing and dryland cropping activities. The location of the SCA supports environmental water delivery to the Lower Gwydir and Gingham wetlands and the protection of core wetland habitat not in conservation reserves and generally under-represented in the reserve system.

#### 4. Values

- Gwydir Wetlands SCA supports floodplain woodland habitat dominated by coolibah (*Eucalyptus coolabah*) and ephemeral wetland habitat that contain one of the last stands of water couch (*Paspalum distichum*) remaining in New South Wales.
- The SCA contains a diversity of wetland habitats providing nesting, breeding and foraging habitats for a range of native fish and waterbirds, including habitat considered important on an international level and recognised by listing as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.
- Gwydir Wetlands SCA protects areas of listed endangered ecological communities including:
  - Brigalow – Gidgee Woodland/Shrubland in the Mulga Lands and Darling Riverine Plains Bioregions
  - Myall Woodland in the Darling Riverine Plains, Brigalow Belt South, Cobar Peneplain, Murray–Darling Depression, Riverina and NSW South Western Slopes Bioregions
  - Coolibah – Black Box Woodland in the Darling Riverine Plains, Brigalow Belt South, Cobar Peneplain and Mulga Lands Bioregions
  - Carbeen Open Forest community in the Darling Riverine Plains and Brigalow Belt South Bioregions

and the critically endangered ecological community Marsh Club-rush Sedgeland in the Darling Riverine Plains Bioregion. These communities have been substantially reduced and modified by clearing and grazing practices since European settlement.

- Gwydir Wetlands SCA protects habitat for a variety of threatened species, including the endangered black-necked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*), and the vulnerable grey-crowned babbler (eastern subspecies) (*Pomatostomus temporalis temporalis*), yellow-bellied sheath-tail-bat (*Saccolaimus flaviventris*), hooded robin (south-eastern form) (*Melanodryas cucullata cucullata*), brolga (*Grus rubicunda*) and suburb parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*).
- The Gwydir Wetlands provide breeding and feeding habitat for colonial waterbirds that are listed under international conservation treaties with China, Japan and the Republic of South

Korea. Bird species recorded within the SCA include the glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), Latham's snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) and rainbow bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*).

- Flooding in the Gwydir Wetlands is not always synchronous with flooding of other Murray–Darling Basin wetlands, such as the Macquarie Marshes or Narran Lake, so the Gwydir Wetlands play an important regional role in providing habitat when other wetlands are dry.
- Aboriginal sites including scarred trees and middens have been recorded on higher red country in close proximity to the SCA. It is predicted that Aboriginal sites are likely to also occur within Gwydir Wetlands SCA on stream and wetland margins.
- Non-Aboriginal heritage of significance includes the ‘Old Dromana’ shearing shed and timber grain storage silo, and buildings in the ‘Bunnor’ homestead precinct, dating to the first half of the 20th century.
- Facilities suitable for overnight visitor accommodation and day use exist on ‘Bunnor’.

## 5. Issues

- Altered flow regimes to the Gwydir River are one of the biggest threats impacting on biodiversity values within Gwydir Wetlands SCA. Water diversion and regulation on the Gwydir River causes a reduction in water availability and duration of flooding events within wetland habitats.
- There are heavy local infestations of lippia (*Phyla canescens*) within Gwydir Wetlands SCA. Other weeds recorded include Bathurst burr (*Xanthium spinosum*), Noogoora burr (*Xanthium occidentale*), prickly pear (*Opuntia* spp.) and water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) which is prevalent along the Gingham watercourse.
- Pest animal species occurring within Gwydir Wetlands SCA include feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and feral cats (*Felis catus*).
- In 2013 the ‘Bunnor’ and ‘Westholme’ portion of the SCA was placed under quarantine under the NSW *Stock Diseases Act 1923* by North West Local Land Services due to an outbreak of bovine anthrax. The SCA and proposed additions are located within the anthrax belt of New South Wales and present a high risk of contamination. The SCA must be managed in accordance with the quarantine order.
- The Curragundi pipeline scheme provides artesian water for stock and domestic purposes while the Lower Gingham pipeline scheme provides surface water for domestic purposes. Both schemes have infrastructure including bore heads, pump stations, pipelines and tanks located on the SCA and the additions to the SCA.
- The wetlands of the SCA naturally experience irregular flooding and drying patterns. After periods of inundation fire fuel levels can increase dramatically due to favourable conditions for growth of ephemeral grasses, sedges and reeds. For this reason strategic fire breaks are required in the wetlands to contain wildfire and to enhance management of fire for the protection of the wetlands.
- There is demand and opportunity to facilitate public access to the SCA for passive recreation and appreciation of wetland environments, while continuing to protect sensitive environments.

## 6. Key management directions

- Fire is managed in accordance with the Gwydir Wetlands State Conservation Area [Fire Management Strategy](#).
- A plan for the construction of a strategic network of fire breaks in the Lower Gwydir and Gingham wetlands of the SCA will be prepared and implemented, and their ongoing

maintenance ensured. The SCA fire management strategy will be updated to reflect these changes.

- Pest management programs will be implemented in accordance with the [NPWS Regional Pest Management Strategy](#): Northern Plains Region.
- A feral pig control program will be undertaken within the SCA in cooperation with North West Local Land Services. The focus of the program will be protecting the biodiversity values of the Ramsar-listed wetlands and protecting neighbouring crops from damage.
- NPWS will participate in a cooperative control program for water hyacinth in conjunction with Moree Plains Shire Council.
- NPWS will continue to work and liaise with relevant water agencies and stakeholders as a member of the Gwydir Environmental Contingency Allowance Operations Advisory Committee (ECAOAC), managing and advocating for environmental flows to and within the SCA to maintain the SCA's ecological values and its key wetland assets.
- Monitoring and research to better understand the biodiversity of the SCA wetlands will be supported, including waterbird species and populations after flood events.
- A visitation plan for the SCA (including additions to the SCA) will be prepared, to facilitate passive recreational activities such as walking, cycling and birdwatching. The strategy will seek to enhance and optimise existing facilities on 'Bunbor' and consider the establishment of a visitor area on 'Munwonga'. Visitor facilities will be confined to areas north of Watercourse Road.
- In addition to the upgrade of existing facilities, the visitation plan will consider:
  - visitor facilities in the Eco Lodge Area (to be renamed Birraa Lodge and Picnic Area) to provide for overnight and day use including picnic shelters, interpretive signs and walking trails
  - day-use facilities such as picnic shelters, interpretive signs, walking trails, toilets and a raised viewing platform or bird hide at the Environmental Centre Area (to be re-named Gingham Wetlands Day Use Area)
  - upgrading and maintenance of the Bunbor Loop Road to provide for public use, and the installation of lockable gates to allow for access closures as a result of wet weather
  - development of a limited visitor area on 'Munwonga'
  - implementation of a booking system for use of Birraa Lodge and the shed at Gingham Wetlands (with fees applicable for use of these facilities).
- An environmental impact assessment will be required before construction of any new visitor facilities in the SCA.
- The 'Old Dromana' shearers' quarters and two outbuildings will be demolished, and appropriately disposed of, to minimise the threat posed by asbestos.
- A waters management plan will be prepared, to identify management actions for the Curragundi and Lower Gingham water supplies (the capped and piped bore system) in the SCA.
- The SCA will continue to be managed according to the quarantine order from Local Land Services, and cattle will be excluded from the entire SCA due to the ongoing risk of bovine anthrax.
- All management activities will be preceded by the preparation of an environmental assessment or heritage assessment where this is a requirement of NPWS policy or legislation.

- Environmental repair and threat management programs, such as erosion mitigation measures, pest management, and activities arising from threatened species requirements may be implemented in accordance with NPWS policies and procedures.
- Non-intrusive works may be undertaken where necessary to protect cultural heritage items from further deterioration, to ensure the safety of visitors, to protect wildlife or to prevent damage to park assets.
- A plan of management will be prepared to set out the ongoing management objectives for the SCA. The plan of management is a statutory document under the NPW Act which will be available for public comment. NPWS will also encourage the community to contribute to the ongoing conservation of the SCA by promoting and raising public awareness of its special values.

For additional information or enquiries about any aspect of this SCA or this statement, contact the NPWS Narrabri Office on (02) 6792 7300 or 1/100 Maitland Street (PO Box 72), Narrabri NSW.

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**Disclaimer:** This is a statement of intent to guide the management of the SCA prior to the development of a plan of management. Any statements made in this publication are made in good faith and do not render the Office of Environment and Heritage liable for any loss or damage. Provisions in the final plan of management may vary from those identified in this document as a result of new information and community consultation. The maps in this statement are intended to show the SCA's location and basic features only, and are not suitable for use when navigating to or exploring within parks.

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