

Memorandum of Understanding

between the

**Queensland Federation of
Bushwalking Clubs**

and the

**Queensland Parks and
Wildlife Service**

Environmental Protection Agency

December 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to foster a co-operative approach to bushwalking and bush camping in Queensland's parks and forests by the Queensland Federation of Bushwalking Clubs (the Federation) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). The MOU:

- clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each organisation in relation to their common interests;
- promotes sustainable bushwalking and bush camping in Queensland's parks and forests;
- identifies opportunities to co-operate and liaise on matters of joint interest; and
- provides communication channels between the two organisations.

The MOU is a **formal agreement** between the two organisations but has no authority in law. It is a means of identifying co-operation and liaison mechanisms that will benefit both organisations and promote conservation and presentation of Queensland's natural and cultural heritage.

Ten areas of common interest are addressed:

- Communication
- Information and research
- Consultation
- Visitor codes
- Bushwalking
- Bush camping
- Track and campground closures
- Group Activity Permits for bushwalking
- Volunteer activities
- Dispute resolution procedure

The primary responsibility for the MOU will rest with the Federation/QPWS Collaborative Management Group (CMG). Daily management of the MOU will rest with nominated QPWS and Federation officers.

The CMG will be set up to oversee the overall implementation and review of the MOU. The CMG will consist of Senior Officers of both organisations. The CMG will meet six-monthly, or more frequently when required, to review progress of the MOU.

Each organisation takes responsibility to ensure internal communication of the MOU to staff and affiliated clubs and members.

SECTION 1 FOUNDATIONS OF THE AGREEMENT

1 BACKGROUND

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is between Queensland Federation of Bushwalking Clubs (the Federation) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). The MOU recognises the intent of the Federation and QPWS to foster sustainable bushwalking in Queensland's parks and forests.

The Federation is the peak recreation body for bushwalking in Queensland with around 25 affiliated clubs and a statewide membership of approximately 2350. The Federation promotes bushwalking as a self-reliant activity where members take responsibility for their safety and development of their bushwalking skills. The Federation provides assistance to State Emergency Services for search and rescue operations on and off the park estate. The Federation is committed to fostering bushwalking as a sustainable use of Queensland's parks and forests and promoting community support for national parks in Queensland. QPWS values the Federation's safety record and the voluntary work done by club bushwalkers in parks. The Federation subscribes to and promotes the view that QPWS should not be held legally liable for injuries resulting from natural hazards in national parks and similar areas.

QPWS is the Government's lead agency for managing the protected area and State forest estate in Queensland. Its key role is to manage and conserve special places and wildlife on behalf of the Government, for the use, benefit and enjoyment of all.

Under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988* and *Forestry Act 1959*, QPWS manages the State's parks and forests for conservation and sustainable use. Bushwalking and bush camping are compatible uses in such lands.

The Parks Master Plan 2001 guides the way QPWS manages parks and identifies 12 park management principles for protecting natural and cultural heritage, working with community partners, sustaining recreation and tourism opportunities and enhancing its management capabilities. The three key principles for park tourism and recreation are:

- *Presenting our parks* — provide opportunities for people to visit, participate in, learn about, respect, enjoy, preserve and protect the natural and cultural heritage of parks;
- *Sustainable use of our parks* — provide substantial and sustainable environmental, social and economic benefits to the Queensland community while maintaining the intrinsic values of all parks; and
- *Safe use of parks* — provide visitors with safe facilities and with information that will promote visitor awareness of the hazards present in parks and the levels of skill and competence required to cope with the risks they face.

2 SCOPE AND TERM

The Federation and QPWS agree that identifying mechanisms for co-operation and liaison will benefit members of the Federation's affiliated clubs. The MOU cannot restrict the relationship between the Federation and its affiliated clubs. The MOU cannot restrict QPWS in the performance of its statutory requirements and has no authority in law.

The MOU will remain in place from the date of signature by both parties until its replacement with a revised memorandum or cancellation. It will be distributed widely within both organisations, used as a basis for interactions and reviewed annually. Either party may cancel the memorandum by mutual agreement or by written notification.

3 PURPOSE

The purpose of the MOU is to foster a cooperative approach to sustainable bushwalking and bush camping in Queensland's parks and forests including:

- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each organisation in relation to their common interests;
- promoting sustainable bushwalking and bush camping in Queensland's parks and forests;
- identifying opportunities for co-operation and liaison on matters of joint interest; and
- providing communication channels between the two organisations.

4 FOUNDATIONS OF THE AGREEMENT

Each organisation recognises that a co-operative approach to bushwalking and camping will benefit conservation and nature-based recreation.

The foundations of the MOU are to encourage:

- Greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both organisations;
- A co-ordinated approach to managing bushwalking and bush camping in Queensland's parks and forests consistent with protecting biodiversity while facilitating park and forest access and appreciation; and
- Resolution of issues of concern between the organisations.

The MOU will assist each organisation to achieve its goals and provide guidance to Federation affiliated club members and QPWS staff to work effectively together.

Both organisations recognise that the legislative basis of park and forest management is to protect natural and cultural heritage and ensure visitor use is appropriate and sustainable. The *Nature Conservation Act 1992* defines the principles for managing national parks:

17 Management principles of national parks

- 1) A national park is to be managed to —
 - a) provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values; and
 - b) present the area's cultural and natural resources and their values; and
 - c) ensure that the only use of the area is nature-based and ecologically sustainable.
- 2) The management principle mentioned in subsection (1)(a) is the cardinal principle for the management of national parks.

Similar management principles, particularly sustainable use, apply to other protected areas and to forests.

5 DEFINITIONS

- Bushwalking group** The total number of people participating in a bushwalking activity organised by a club on a particular day at a park or forest.
- Bushwalking party** The number of people walking together on a bushwalk.
- Bush camping area** An area more than 25ha nominated by QPWS for the purpose of dispersed bush camping.
- Bush camping site** A small site less than 3ha nominated by QPWS for bush camping purposes.

SECTION 2 APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

This MOU covers the following areas:

- Communication
- Information and Research
- Consultation
- Visitor Codes
- Landscape Classification System For Visitor Management
- Bushwalking
- Bush camping
- Group activity permits
- Track and campground closures
- Volunteer activities
- Dispute resolution procedure

1 COMMUNICATION

Collaborative Management Group

A Collaborative Management Group (CMG) will be established to oversee the MOU and collaborate on projects and policies where appropriate. The CMG will consist of the President of the Federation, the Director of Tourism and Visitor Management, QPWS and other nominated personnel from both organisations.

The CMG will promote the MOU to staff in their organisations and be the contact point for any queries regarding the MOU.

The Collaborative Management Group will meet six-monthly or as required to review the effectiveness of the MOU and resolve disputes.

The CMG does not preclude Regional or District liaison (as currently occurs). The CMG should receive minutes of those meetings (where they are taken), and may request representatives of other committees to attend CMG meetings, if desired by either party.

Liaison Officers within key QPWS districts will be established for the regular exchange of information and ideas about bushwalking and camping within those districts. A Central Office Liaison Officer will also be appointed to handle general enquiries about policies and procedures on bushwalking and bush camping.

2 INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

QPWS will provide advice on track and campground closures via the EPA website, www.epa.qld.gov.au.

The Federation will encourage its member clubs to provide lists of their outings to QPWS at regular intervals, particularly where outings are not published on a public website.

Where a member club seeks access to a park in a way which is not available to the general public, the club will be asked to provide QPWS with details of the date, likely route, overall group size, proposed walking party size, and emergency contact details.

The Federation will ask member clubs to give timely notice to QPWS of all proposed outings that seek access to parks under special conditions. QPWS will advise the Federation if proposed bushwalking activities are not acceptable at least eight weeks prior to the proposed start date.

QPWS monitors the condition of bush campsites where possible and bases camper numbers and party sizes on that monitoring. The Federation and QPWS agree to co-operatively monitor the condition of bush campsites at parks nominated by the Federation. The Federation agrees to conduct such monitoring to a plan devised by QPWS and to have its members trained and accredited to perform such monitoring.

The Federation or its affiliated clubs will inform QPWS of any changes or incidents that could adversely affect the integrity, amenity or safety of Queensland's parks and forests.

3 CONSULTATION

QPWS recognises that the Federation is a key stakeholder in park management and will consult the Federation on reviews of the Parks Master Plan 2001 and individual park plans.

To facilitate Federation input to QPWS management plans, QPWS will provide an advance program of parks and forests where management plans are proposed and early advice when the consultation process on a management plan is about to commence. This advice will be provided in the EPA Bulletin, the EPA website and by e-mail to the Federation where possible.

QPWS will hold discussions with the Federation prior to the issue of draft management plans where bushwalking is an identified issue.

4 VISITOR CODES

The guiding document for the MOU is the Parks Master Plan 2001. Both parties recognise the need to balance visitor use with protection, to ensure parks and forests are enjoyed and protected.

Both parties agree that the level and style of bush camping and bushwalking in parks and forests should be appropriate to the setting (as defined in the QPWS Operational Policy on the Landscape Classification System for visitor management) and consistent with the legitimate needs and aspirations of the Traditional Owners and native title holders of a particular park/forest and others with a strong cultural attachment to the land.

QPWS recognises that Federation and affiliated club members aspire to access and stay overnight in places where visitors rarely go in parks and forests, and will not unduly limit Federation access to these areas. The Federation will encourage affiliated clubs to ensure activities are sustainable and consistent with conservation values when visiting these special places.

The Federation recognises that there may be specific locations where visitor access and bush camping are inappropriate due to sensitive ecological or cultural values.

When camping and walking in remote and relatively natural parts of parks and forests, Federation members will comply with QPWS minimal impact codes appropriate to the activity and setting. Attachment 1 contains the current relevant parts of the codes.

5 LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR VISITOR MANAGEMENT

The Federation supports the principle of QPWS using Landscape Classification Settings (LCS) for visitor planning and management. The Federation will participate in deciding setting-appropriate bushwalking and bush camping activities on the QPWS estate and will provide feedback on the effectiveness of the LCS application to bushwalking and bush camping. The Federation will encourage affiliated clubs to support the use of LCS for visitor management and to conduct activities according to those settings.

For example, settings for a national park will be published by QPWS in a management plan for that park. Where a management plan for a particular QPWS-managed area does not exist, Landscape Classification Settings for that area may be published in a separate document or applied as part of operational policies.

6 BUSHWALKING

QPWS applies group size limits on organised activities in remote, more natural areas within parks and forests to protect the environment and social experience of visitors who would expect to encounter few other visitors in such places. QPWS and the Federation agree that bushwalking may cause environmental impacts and that interactions with other parties affects the social experience of other park/forest visitors positively or negatively.

7 BUSH CAMPING

QPWS identifies bush camping sites on a case-by-case basis by considering use levels, visitor safety, the fragility of the park landscape and/or wildlife, sensitive cultural values, traditional owner views and the availability of suitable campsites.

The Federation respects that QPWS has the right to decide where and under what circumstances bush camping will be permitted. Management plans identify and approve areas where dispersed bush camping is allowed. In bush camping areas, dispersed use is encouraged in settings 1–3. The Federation will encourage affiliated clubs to use defined bush camping sites where possible. Where camping occurs outside defined sites, Federation affiliated clubs will avoid camping in areas of environmental concern or degraded sites. Federation requests to camp within sensitive bush camping areas, instead of defined bush camping sites, will be considered in consultation with regional staff.

Except where special access is granted under 2.9, QPWS will not permit bush camping when a park or park section is closed for safety or sustainability reasons or where camping is prohibited by management plan or advice from Traditional Owners or native title holders.

QPWS agrees that the maximum party size for dispersed bush camping areas will be 12 in settings 3–9 except where a management plan, direction or operational policy defines a higher limit. In areas with defined bush camping sites, the Federation will encourage affiliated clubs to comply with any specified bush camping site limits. This Memorandum of Understanding does not necessarily preclude party sizes of up to 12 in settings 1 and 2.

The Federation acknowledges that while online bookings will be available for most sites and areas, camping outside defined bush camping sites may require bookings through QPWS offices. The QPWS camping refund policy entitles the Federation to a credit on unused camping fees in most circumstances. QPWS acknowledges the convenience of self-registration for bush camping and will provide this option where circumstances permit.

Number restrictions apply at bush campsites based on ecological, social and cultural grounds. QPWS agrees that bush camping site capacity limits will normally be fully available. However, the number of camping parties may also be restricted at specific sites to ensure sustainability and protect the social experience. In the first instance, the Federation or affiliated clubs will refer any concerns about bush camping site limits or bookings to the District Liaison Officers appointed under this MOU.

8 GROUP ACTIVITY PERMITS

This MOU will ensure that most Federation activities do not require a Group Activity Permit (GAP). The annual pilgrimage that involves about 100 walkers may be an exception. Group activity permits are not required for party sizes fewer than 12.

QPWS and the Federation recognise that party size can adversely affect the environment and the social experience of other park and forest visitors. The Federation will consider this when conducting outings. In places where QPWS requests the public to limit walking party sizes, the Federation will encourage affiliated clubs to split larger groups and stagger departure times to maintain the specified party sizes party size or to seek QPWS approval for larger party sizes.

Where either the Federation or an affiliated club plans activities other than bushwalking and bush camping, standard site rules and permit requirements will apply.

9 TRACK AND CAMPGROUND CLOSURES

QPWS has a strict protocol for making a decision to close a park/forest walking track or campground, either permanently or temporarily. Closures are based on achieving sound environmental, cultural, safety and financial outcomes. QPWS will seek to re-open closed tracks promptly, having regard for prevailing conditions and resources.

The Central Office and District Liaison Officers appointed under this MOU will explain the reasons for closures to the Federation upon request. The Federation or an affiliated club will raise concerns about a closure or the time taken to re-open a track or campground with the Central Office or District Liaison Officers. QPWS will provide a response to the Federation within 14 days to any concern raised by the Federation or its affiliated clubs. Ongoing concerns will be addressed by the CMG.

Federation members can assist with track re-opening provided they are registered volunteers with QPWS and supervised by a QPWS officer.

QPWS maintains a strict policy on employee and client safety, known as NONE, *Not One Not Ever*. Litigation arising from visitor incidents is a major expense for the Queensland Government. The Federation agrees that its affiliated club members will obey signed closures related to potential hazards and visitor safety, unless special access permission has been obtained.

QPWS will grant any reasonable request from the Federation to access tracks closed for non-safety reasons. Where a track or area is closed to walking or bush camping for safety reasons but there is a reasonable expectation that experienced bushwalkers could access that track or area safely, QPWS will consider any Federation request for special access. Requests should be made by the nominated Federation representative through the Central Office or District Liaison Officers.

10 VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

QPWS is strongly committed to improving community awareness, appreciation and understanding of the environment and promoting community participation in nature conservation. Being part of a volunteer program is a mutually beneficial way of achieving these goals.

QPWS acknowledges the volunteer work carried out by the Federation over many years.

The Federation will encourage its affiliated club members to register with QPWS as volunteers. Volunteer activities include (but are not limited to) campsite monitoring and track maintenance and repair depending on local needs and resources. Registering as volunteers will cover Federation affiliated club members for personal accident and public liability insurance. Before undertaking any works, all volunteers would be required to complete the QPWS volunteer induction training that includes workplace health and safety training suited to the complexity of the activities.

SECTION 3 RESOLUTION OF ISSUES OF CONCERN

RESOLUTION OF ISSUES OF CONCERN

The Federation recognises that QPWS has statutory and corporate obligations relating to park and forest management and conservation.

Most issues of concern will be resolved at the local level. Where there is continuing disagreement or the issue extends beyond park boundaries, the affiliated club will seek a response from the District Liaison Officer. The District Liaison Officer may consult with the Federation and/or the Central Office Liaison Officer to achieve resolution. Where the issue remains unresolved, it will be referred to the CMG.

Both organisations are committed to resolving outstanding issues via the CMG where possible. On complex matters, the CMG may seek expert third party advice to inform CMG decision-making.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

between the

Queensland Federation of Bushwalking Clubs

and the

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
Environmental Protection Agency

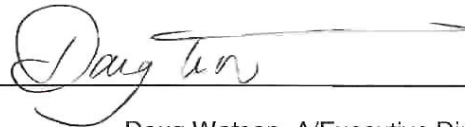
Signed for and on behalf of the
Queensland Federation of Bushwalking Clubs



John, Campbell, President

Date 12 December 2006

Signed for and on behalf of the
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service



Doug Watson, A/Executive Director, Parks

Date 12 December 2006

QPWS VISITOR CODES**Walk softly**

- Never blaze or mark trees or remove branches from trees.
- When walking off-track, follow existing trails rather than making new ones.
- Spread out where necessary to avoid trampling plants.
- Use a fuel stove for cooking.
- Remove your rubbish from the park for proper disposal. Never bury rubbish.
- Camp and bury human wastes 50m from creeks, lakes and walking tracks. Use no toothpaste, soap, sunscreen or detergent in creeks or lakes.

Camp softly

- Dig no trenches around your tent.
- In bush camping sites, camp on previously used campsites rather than creating new ones.
- In bush camping areas, avoid using any campsite showing evidence of degradation.
- Be considerate of any other walking and camping parties you encounter. Keep your noise down.

Walk and camp safely

- Plan your walk to suit the least experienced walkers in your group.
- Ensure a responsible family member or friend knows your plans before you go.
- Use a checklist to ensure the group takes appropriate equipment and gear.
- Let a responsible Federation member know your planned route and schedule in case you get lost.
- Don't rely on fresh water sources en route. Take your own supply. Boil or treat fresh water before drinking.
- Observe any warning signs or track closures.