



Want to know more about wetlands?

The *WetlandInfo* website has all the information you need to know about wetlands. *WetlandInfo* is Australia's only first-stop-shop for wetland information on education, location and management. *WetlandInfo* is the website of the Queensland Wetlands Program—a joint initiative of the Australian and Queensland governments.

Find all your wetlands management resources at *WetlandInfo*

www.wetlandinfo.ehp.qld.gov.au

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What is a wetland?

Swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, saltmarshes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, fens and peat bogs are wetlands. Queensland even has underground wetlands, for example a section of the Chillagoe caves, west of the Atherton Tableland. Almost anywhere that can be wet is a wetland, as long as it has plants, animals or soil types that are adapted to wet conditions.

Water in wetlands can be still or flowing; it can be fresh, salty or brackish. Inland rivers and coastal or marine areas with water up to six metres deep at low tide are also classified as wetlands.

Wetlands can be natural, artificial or a mixture of both. A farm dam for example can be a wetland – but a swimming pool with artificial sides and bottom can not.

Wetlands do not have to be continuously wet: Lake Yamma Yamma on Cooper Creek in south west Queensland is often dry for years at a time – during that time it is called a 'dry wetland'.



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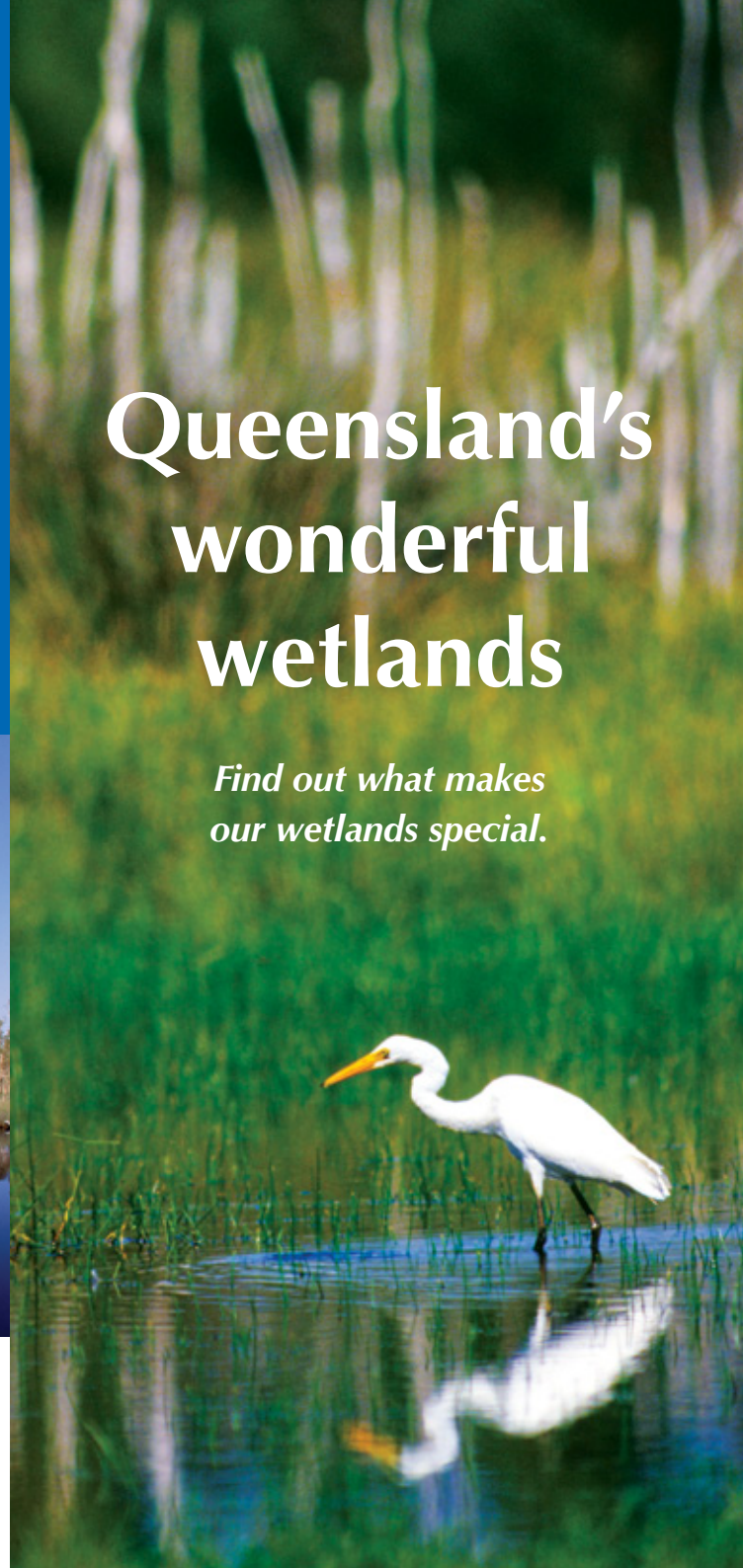


Queensland
Wetlands Program



Queensland's wonderful wetlands

*Find out what makes
our wetlands special.*



What's wonderful about wetlands?

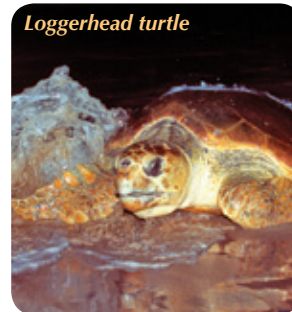
Wetlands are valuable for our environment, our food, our fun and our culture – these habitats even protect against floods.

A healthy wetland is a lively place with a rich natural diversity of wildlife and environments. Chemical changes and the life cycles of wetland plants and animals combine to create a system that removes sediments and stops chemicals getting into healthy rivers, the sea and the reef.

Wetlands support Queensland's primary industries – saltmarsh, mangrove and seagrass wetlands are the nurseries of our fish and seafood, and some wetlands provide water for irrigation and farm animals.

Wetlands can protect people and property from the effects of extreme climate events such as storm surges and floods; they even store carbon that has been released as greenhouse gas.

wetlands

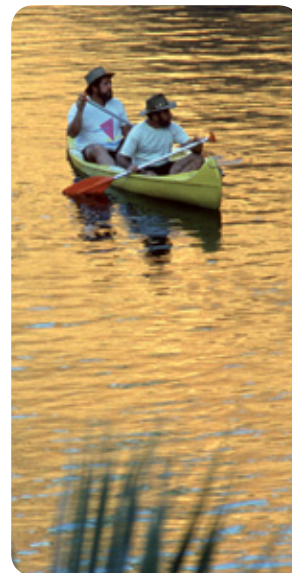


Wetlands are also diversity hotspots for plants and animals, including threatened animals such as the dugong, little tern, wallum sedgefrog and loggerhead turtle. Rare plants such as the feather palm and the blue tassel fern are only found in Queensland's wetlands. Waterbirds visit Queensland's wetlands every year from as far away as China and Alaska.



Queensland's wetlands are home to **130** species of freshwater fish, around **210** species of waterbirds and **3000** plant species.

Mangroves are wetland forests and vital nurseries of fish and shellfish.



Wetlands connect sections of the landscape so that animal and plant species can spread from place to place and maintain their populations.

Healthy wetlands are also places to relax and enjoy some of Queensland's natural wonders.

Some wetlands are recognised as internationally and nationally important, but even a local lake can be an important ecosystem that provides habitat for animals and plants, connects land and water ecosystems and is part of local healthy rivers and creeks.

Wetlands and you

So everyone can enjoy wetlands, let's keep them healthy. Here are some things we can all do:

- Don't dump rubbish, weeds or invasive species such as aquarium fish in wetlands; keep pets under control.
- Find out about wetlands and what makes them special by looking on the *WetlandInfo* website.
- Make the most of wetlands by walking, boating, bird watching and fishing.
- Find a local wetland on a map and see how it fits in with the landscape.
- Join a local conservation group that cares for wetlands.

Most Queensland freshwater wetlands are on private land so landholders can play a role in protecting wetlands. If you are a private wetland landholder, you can:

- Learn how the wetland works and how to manage it sustainably.
- Establish a Nature Refuge.



At Currawinya Lakes, Lake Wyara contains salt water and its sister lake, Numulla, contains fresh water.



Photo courtesy Alun Hoggett

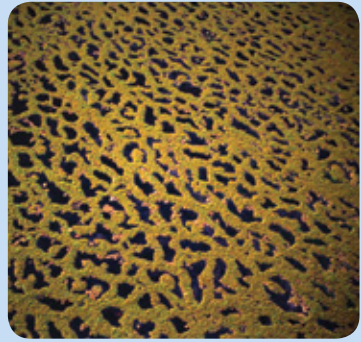
The Combo Waterhole is probably Australia's most famous wetland, thanks to Banjo Paterson.

Where are our wetlands?

Queensland wetlands are found from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Gold Coast, and from the coast to the semi-arid south west corner of the state.

Queensland has more types of wetlands than any other state in Australia, including more seagrass meadows, mangrove forests and tea tree swamps.

Most freshwater wetlands in Queensland are on private property and you will need the landholder's permission before you can visit. However, many small wetlands that are managed by a local council or catchment group are open to the public.



The unique pattern fen wetlands of Fraser Island are best appreciated from the air.

Queensland contains over 140 000 individual wetlands covering 66 000 square kilometres – an area slightly smaller than Tasmania.

Ramsar wetlands

In 1971, representatives from 18 nations (including Australia) met in the Iranian city of Ramsar to sign the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (known as the Ramsar Convention) to stop wetlands being lost across the world, and to conserve and manage remaining wetlands. The convention also lists wetlands that are so valuable they are considered international treasures because they support large numbers of waterbirds or rare species or have unusual and precious landscapes.



Australia has five Queensland wetlands listed by the Ramsar Convention: Bowling Green Bay near Ayr; Shoalwater and Corio Bays, north of Rockhampton; Great Sandy Strait, which includes parts of Fraser Island; Moreton Bay near Brisbane; and Currawinya Lakes in south-west Queensland. All of these wetlands can be visited, except parts of Shoalwater Bay that is managed by the Department of Defence.

Wetlands and culture

Wetlands supply resources for Aboriginal people such as food, medicine and tools. Big river red gums or coolabahs scarred by shield and bowl makers of the past still stand along the edges of some Queensland wetlands.

Wetlands are also story places and centres for cultural activity. The wetlands of Corio Bay, for example, are part of the traditional lands of the Darumbal people: shell middens, scatters of stone tools and dinner camp sites are found in the dune fields there.

Did you know that the billabong in the song 'Waltzing Matilda' is a Queensland wetland? The Combo Waterhole on the Diamantina River north of Winton is generally accepted as the setting for the jolly swagman's defiant last stand.

A well known wetland bird, the bush stone-curlew, is also known as the 'messenger bird' – Bulligan – because its eerie cries were thought to be a message from the spirits.



Latham's snipe migrate to Australia in summer from their breeding grounds in North East Asia.



Cane toads threaten native wildlife, so they are a threat to our wetlands.



A local wetland is a fascinating place to study.

Wetlands, waders and waterbirds

Queensland's wetlands provide habitat for waterbirds including waders and shorebirds. Some birds live here all year round; others migrate thousands of kilometres to this destination for a few months of the year.

Migratory birds fly along routes known as 'flyways'. There are eight flyways around the world which link chains of wetlands where travelling birds stop to eat and rest on their long migrations. Some birds' journeys last as long as two months. Australia lies at the southern end of the East Asian–Australasian flyway which originates in Alaska and Russia and crosses 22 countries.

Moreton Bay is an important destination on the East Asian–Australasian flyway. More than 40 000 shorebirds from about 32 species migrate to Moreton Bay every year.

During its flight from Siberia to Australia, the eastern curlew will burn off 40 per cent of its weight to fuel its 13 000 km journey. This is like an 80 kg person running 16 million kilometres almost non-stop and losing 32 kg – twice a year.

Should we be worried about our wetlands?

Some wetlands are less healthy than they once were because they are losing their animals or plants. Other wetland systems are no longer working naturally because human activity has changed the way water flows in or out of them.

A damaged wetland can become a healthy system again with careful rehabilitation. However, once a wetland is drained or built on, it is lost forever. Some river catchments or basins in Queensland have lost most of their wetlands, particularly their bogs and swamps.



Brolgas live in Australia all year round in coastal and inland lakes.

What can threaten a wetland? Development, earthworks, draining and water extraction can all harm or destroy a wetland; so can the impacts of climate change or poor agricultural practices. Feral animals such as cane toads and invasive plants spreading into a wetland can kill or overwhelm local species and upset the wetland's natural balance. Uncontrolled fires can damage wetland plants; wetland peat soils can continue to burn long after the fire is extinguished on the surface.

Who's looking after our wetlands?

Many groups take responsibility for looking after wetlands. The Australian and the Queensland governments create laws to protect vegetation and some special regions of wetlands. Local government planning controls help protect local wetlands.

Catchment and conservation groups and natural resource groups restore and maintain local wetlands. Landholders, farmers and land managers can manage wetlands wisely.

Local wetlands centres tell visitors about the values of wetlands and encourage us to enjoy the recreational benefits of wetlands, such as bird watching or walking. Many tourism operators promote wetlands to local and overseas tourists.

