

Scent detector dogs in QPWS areas

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Policy subject

The use of scent detector dogs for park management, conservation and research purposes on Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) areas.

Definitions

Conservation outcome means a program designed to enhance or maintain the natural values of the area; improve, enhance or maintain the habitat of threatened species; or an activity identified or referenced in a management plan or management statement as appropriate for the area.

Detector team is an operational dog-handler and scent detector dog that work together.

Passively bail means dogs who display passive alerts and are wearing muzzles that are used to find a target animal and keep it in one place until the handler arrives and calls the dog off.

QPWS areas includes, but is not limited to, the following areas:

- Protected areas (excluding privately managed nature refuges and special wildlife reserves) managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*,
- Forestry areas (State forests and timber reserves) managed under the *Forestry Act 1959*,
- Recreation areas managed under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*,
- Marine parks managed under the *Marine Parks Act 2004*.

Scent detector dog (detector dog, conservation detector dog) is a dog trained to detect and respond to a specific scent, often but not limited to, native wildlife or pest species (plants, animals, or pathogens).

Purpose

This document provides guidance to departmental staff when planning for or approving the use of scent detector dogs on QPWS areas. This policy should be read and implemented in conjunction with the associated *Procedural guide - Management of conservation detector dogs in QPWS areas*.

This document does not apply to the use of dogs for the purposes of mustering stock.

Background

Dogs are generally excluded from QPWS areas. However, dogs have long been used to assist with law enforcement and quarantine activities due to their well-developed sense of smell, and for the same reason are now increasingly being used in conservation and pest management programs. Dogs are especially useful when

a target species occurs at low densities, is cryptic, and/or other traditional methods for locating such species are more labour intensive, costly and/or have yielded limited results. Examples of ways in which detector dogs have been used in QPWS areas for a conservation outcome include the detection of *Phytophthora* species, red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) dens, Koorombit tinkler frogs (*Taudactylus pleione*) and red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) in protected areas in the Southeast Queensland Region.

While every dog is born with a well-developed sense of smell, not all dogs are suitable for use as scent detector dogs. Individual dogs have their own personalities and exhibit their own temperament, learning ability and aptitude for work. The ability of a detector dog to concentrate on a particular smell, and to respond in a reliable and measured way, is typically the product of extensive training. Generally, individual dogs are limited by the number of scents to which they can be trained to respond reliably and as a result many dogs and their handlers target specific species or groups of similar species (e.g. rats). Because dogs develop such strong bonds with their handlers, dogs involved with scent detection activities generally operate as a dog-and-handler combination.

Currently there is no standard or accreditation under which detector dogs may operate for conservation, research or pest management activities. Poorly trained scent detector dogs pose a potential risk to native wildlife, their own welfare and the reputation of the agency. The QPWS must be reasonably satisfied that the handler and their dog have the right attributes to be an effective team, that they can meet any conditions under which they are authorised, and that standards of efficacy and behaviour are met consistently (see Appendix A of *Procedural guide – scent detector dogs in QPWS areas*).

Departmental authorisation of the use of dogs on QPWS areas for emergency or law enforcement purposes, for example, when dogs are used in search and rescue operations or in any other specialised agency service (e.g. police dogs or cadaver dogs), is not required as outlined in the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000*, *Criminal Code Act 1899* and *State Emergency Service Act 2024*.

Policy statements

- QPWS will allow for the use of scent detector dogs where their use can be justified and where appropriate authorisations and controls can be put in place to minimise known and foreseeable risks. For example, a research permit (Permit to Take, Use, Keep or Interfere) may be required for a researcher seeking to use a detector dog in a protected area.
- Scent detector dog handlers must be able to always demonstrate a high level of control (particularly behavioural control) over their dogs.
- Scent detector dogs used in QPWS areas must be formally trained and accredited, in good health and condition, and proof of current vaccination and other preventative treatments (including internal and external parasites) must be supplied prior to deployment.
- Where a management benefit can be demonstrated, QPWS may permit the training of detector dogs in QPWS areas. Any training must only be undertaken under specified conditions and for dogs that have undergone extensive controlled environment training in dedicated facilities, can demonstrate the necessary level of behavioural control and that only need in-field experience to complete their training.
- QPWS will implement controls to protect native wildlife, the wellbeing of the dogs themselves and the reputation of the agency. Where scent detector dogs represent a potential and/or significant risk to native wildlife, or typically work beyond the sight of the handler, the dog should be muzzled and tracked.
- QPWS will where possible, seek to engage detector teams that meet standards of efficacy, training and have previously been used successfully.

- Scent detector dogs working on the QPWS areas must be readily identifiable as working conservation or research dogs.
- The use of detector dogs for research purposes can be authorised through a research permit.
- Scent detector dogs (including those engaged to passively bail up an animal) must not deliberately be used to chase, bite, attack, torment, injure or kill any animal.
- The First Nations peoples of the land on which detector dogs are proposed for deployment should be consulted for their views or concerns consistent with any established agreements and/or procedures for that land, and any cultural values.

Legislative context

The legislative context relating to approvals is tenure specific. The *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, *Forestry Act 1959*, *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006* and the *Marine Parks Act 2004* variously apply depending on tenure type of the land on which the use of detector dogs is proposed (refer to the *Procedural Guide – Management of conservation detector dogs on QPWS areas*).

Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 applies to responsible care and treatment of animals. The use of scent detector dogs on QPWS areas must comply with the Act and relevant codes of practice.

The *Biosecurity Act 2014* imposes a general biosecurity obligation on all persons and requires the use of reasonable and practical measures to prevent or minimise biosecurity risks. The Act applies to activities associated with the use of detector dogs for any purpose, and includes any dealings with ancillary items such as animals, vehicles, machinery and equipment.

Reference materials

Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8th Edition)

Procedural Guide – Management of conservation detector dogs in QPWS areas

QPWS&P Pest Management Strategy 2022-2027

Gurra Gurra Framework 2020-2026

Authorities

Nature Conservation Act 1992 and Regulations

Forestry Act 1959 and Regulations

Recreation Areas Management Act 2006 and Regulations

Marine Parks Act 2004 and Regulations

Biosecurity Act 2014

Animal Care and Protection Act 2001

Further Information

For further information, email the Pest services team – pest.advice@detsi.qld.gov.au.

Human Rights Act 2019 compatibility

The department is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the [Human Rights Act 2019](#), the department has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When acting or making a decision under this Operational policy, officers must comply with that obligation (refer to [Comply with Human Rights Act](#)).

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care, it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved By

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Signature

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