

Managing scent detector dogs in QPWS areas

Procedural guides further define complex decision-making processes or requirements of the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. Procedural guides provide guidance and information to assist staff in the completion of specific tasks or in making certain judgments.

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Purpose

The purpose of this procedural guide is to inform Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) staff, First Nations peoples and key stakeholders (government agencies, local government, researchers, applicants, contractors, Natural Resource Management and community groups) on the process for using scent detector dogs in QPWS managed areas.

This document provides standardised procedures for:

- departmental staff to determine suitability of detection dog services,
- considering and determining the appropriate authorisation process and delegate,
- outlining the standards for dog welfare, professional behaviour and safe effective dog-handler teams.

This procedural guide includes various references to provisions of various acts and regulations which describe legal requirements. These references are not exhaustive. The words 'must' or 'requires' indicate that a legal or departmental policy requirement exists and compliance is mandatory.

Definitions

Aligned means performing functions on behalf of the Chief Executive under legislation.

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 activity is identified or referenced in a management plan or management statement as appropriate for the area.

Controlling activity is an activity that the chief executive determines is reasonable and necessary to significantly reduce the population of, or eradicate, wildlife that is not native wildlife in a protected area.

Corresponding authority means a permit, licence or other authority issued under another law of the State, authorising entry to, the use of, or the doing of a thing in, an area within a recreation area for an activity or purpose for which a permit or other authority may be issued under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*.

Non-aligned means undertaking activities that include individuals, universities, education and scientific organisations that will be operating not on behalf of the chief executive.

Passively bail means dogs wearing muzzles used to corner and/or chase a target animal and keep it in one place until the handler arrives and calls the dog off. A dog engaged to passively bail a target species **must not** deliberately be used to chase, bite, attack, torment, injure or kill any animal.

QPWS areas includes 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*.

Target species means any species (pest or native wildlife, plant, pathogen) that is identified for detection activity, or that a detector dog has been specifically trained to detect and locate.

Background

Dogs are known for their well-developed sense of smell and they have long been used to assist with law enforcement and quarantine activities. The use of dogs for a broad range of conservation outcomes is now well

established in Australia and many other countries. They are especially useful when a target species occurs at low densities, are cryptic or other traditional methods for locating such species have yielded limited results.

Examples of where scent detection dogs have proven to increase the efficiency and success of conservation programs include:

- locating target (native or pest) animals, plants or pathogens, or signs of their presence, including their scats, dens or nests,
- indicating the presence or absence of a target species over a defined area,
- indicating the response of a native or pest species to management intervention,
- locating biological samples, such as carcasses, scats, fur or feathers.

The use of any scent detector dog on QPWS areas requires assessment and appropriate authorisation, and the delegate must have regard to land tenure type and the nature of the activity being undertaken. However, 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*.

This document applies to the use of detector dogs for work (relating to native wildlife and/or pest detection) which is either:

- “aligned”, means functions performed under legislation and on behalf of the Chief Executive, which are reasonably necessary to administer or achieve the object of an Act (such as those relating to pest or threatened species management programs); or
- “non-aligned”, means activities undertaken independent of the Chief Executive’s administration of an Act (such as providing data for independent scientific research under an authority).

The use of any scent detector dog in QPWS areas comes with inherent risks to native species and ecosystems, to the dogs and their handlers, to visitors to the area and to the department. Appropriate planning, approvals and management processes will ensure deployment activities achieve desired conservation outcomes while minimising risks.

Planning

Aligned activities

Choosing a supplier

Any use of detector dogs to undertake planned management activities must go through a procurement process to select and engage a contractor. This should involve the local regional staff documenting the planning and reasoning for the activity, assessing the applications through the procurement process and assessment and approvals process outlined below, and gaining approval from the Principal Ranger (either Technical Support or the relevant area) (PR) or Assistant Principal Ranger (APR) (or relevant financial delegate if the cost higher than APR financial delegation).

When hiring detector dog teams, QPWS will, where reasonable and practical, engage detector teams that have previously been used successfully. Consultation with QPWS staff (including the pest services team) or conservation organisations who have previously utilised the detector team should be undertaken as part of the assessment process. QPWS staff may also choose to consult with detector dog organisations and networks (and their resource material) for guidance in the use, competency and training/evaluation of new detector dogs and detector teams.

Non-aligned activities

Any third parties who are not working under a contract with QPWS to undertake activities on their behalf, must apply to QPWS for a research permit to utilise detector dogs for their proposed activity. Applicants will be required to supply QPWS with all wildlife sightings and notifiable pest sightings (and Biosecurity Queensland for notifiable pest sightings within relevant timeframes). The conditions imposed on authorities for non-aligned activities may include additional requirements beyond those specified in this procedural guide.

Assessment and approvals process

When assessing either an aligned or non-aligned detector dog team, the following points will be considered:

- any negative incidents or interactions involving the dog (such as injuries to other animals or damage to park values) as reported to the pest services team during previous deployments,
- if the detector dog displays a high level of ability in the detection of the target scent (it is recommended that this be demonstrated prior to their use),
- certified accredited courses specifically designed for detecting pest or threatened species are currently unavailable in Australia. However, if nationally accredited courses, or Australian Standards Australia become available, it will be expected that utilised applicant detector teams will attain obtain the relevant qualifications accreditation/s and/or comply with applicable standards,
- if the dog handler demonstrates a high level of behavioural control over the detector dog, particularly around interactions with both target and non-target native animals (Appendix A),
- if the detection dog and dog handler display confidence in working closely together to achieve desired outcomes,
- if the detector dog is up to date with all required vaccinations and worming (Appendix A),
- any other relevant approvals, accreditations, licences, insurances etc are current for the period of the proposed deployment,
- if the proposed activities are consistent with relevant policy including the *Operational policy - Scent detector dogs in QPWS areas* and this procedural guide,
- if there is clear justification based on achieving park management, conservation or research outcomes,
- consistency with the relevant QPWS managed area management objectives in the relevant legislation,
- the benefits and limitations of the activities,
- there is no significant or unacceptable risk to any individual species, biodiversity, the detector dogs themselves and their handlers, visitors to the area or the department's reputation,
- where operations will be occurring in known habitat for ground-dwelling or ground-nesting threatened species, if the Threatened Species Unit and/or Ecological Assessment Unit have provided written advice that risks to these species are considered not significant or are manageable,
- that the timing of the detection program is suitable for detecting the target species and will have minimal impact on non-target species,
- 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 will be muzzled and tracked,
- any entry into areas closed to public access (i.e. Restricted Access Areas, seasonal shorebird closure areas etc) is clearly justified,

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- that the handler is made aware of any previous poison baiting activities, and any other known of foreseeable hazards in the deployment area, noting that vertebrate poisons such as 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) may remain active for prolonged periods following placement in the field,
- any potential for interaction with dingoes (especially in areas with high dingo populations, for example K'gari section of Great Sandy National Park) or with wild dogs,
- if the First Nations peoples of the land on which detector dogs are proposed for deployment have been consulted for their views consistent with any established agreements and/or procedures for that land,
- if any animal ethics considerations have been addressed,
- if any detector dog required to passively bait a target species, is conditioned to wear a muzzle at all times while it is on the QPWS managed area and can demonstrate that the baiting will be passive (e.g. through the use of video evidence or other evidence to the satisfaction of the delegate),
- if the *Zoonotic Diseases* has been applied,
- if the draft authority includes conditions which require the dog handler to collect and provide relevant data (particularly search area, all target detections and any other significant sightings/findings) to QPWS.

Aligned activities

Once approval of the completed procurement and assessments processes has been received, local staff can provide the successful company with written authority (in the form of the contract for the activity) to undertake the activities. Appropriate conditions should be included in the contract (examples of these can be found on the pest services SharePoint site).

The use of detector dogs for any pest management activities should be documented on FLAME.

Non-aligned activities

For jointly managed areas, QPWS may need to receive the consent of the relevant First Nations people before authorising the use of a scent detector dog. Refer to the conditions in the relevant Indigenous Land Use Agreement and/or Indigenous Management Agreement for detail about the involvement of the local First Nations people for the issuing of this authorisation type. For other areas, QPWS should seek the input of relevant First Nations groups into the decision-making process. Specific conditions may need to be added to the authorisation to protect the cultural values of the area.

For non-aligned detector dog activities, the authority type will be consistent with the tenure-specific approval process (see Table 1 below) and a written record of the approval by the PR, APR (or protected, forestry and recreation areas) or equivalent delegate in Permissions Management and Ecotourism (for Marine Parks) will be required.

Appropriate conditions should be included in any authorisation (examples of these can be found on the pest services SharePoint site).

Table 1. Authorisation required¹

Head of Power	Authority type required	Responsible team
Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2024	Section 47 Resources permit (scientific purposes)	Regional staff (assessment) Terrestrial permits (approval)
	Section 73 authority to conduct a controlling activity (e.g. if the dog is being used as part of a controlling activity – e.g. detecting fox dens before fumigation)	Regional staff (assessment and approval) (approved by at least PR level ²)
<i>Forestry Act 1959</i>	Permit to collect (Section 56 permit ³)	Regional staff (assessment) Terrestrial permits (approval)
<i>Recreation Areas Management Act 2006</i>	Section 121 written approval ⁴ where not already approved	Regional staff (approved by at least PR level ¹)
Marine Parks Regulation 2017	As per the Marine Parks Regulation or marine park zoning plan provisions, see below	Marine permits team

Marine Parks

As they relate to the use of detector dogs, the *Marine Parks Act 2014*, Regulations and marine park zoning plans generally apply to intertidal areas below the high-water mark in the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park and below the level of the highest astronomical tide in Moreton Bay Marine Park (MBMP) and Great Sandy Marine Park (GSMP).

The management arrangements for each marine park are outlined in a zoning plan which prescribes which activities can occur without permission and those that require permission in each zone type. Special management provisions for the various designated areas within each marine park are also outlined, some of which restrict access either permanently or seasonally. For aligned activities section 145A of the *Marine Parks Act 2014* provides the Chief Executive the power to undertake activities which are necessary to achieve the objectives of the Act regardless of zoning or designated area, including the use of detector dogs (requires written authority). Non-aligned activities will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, as they could be

¹ For examples of conditions to be added to these authorisations, contact the pest services team.

² This delegation is recommended at a higher level than the portfolio delegations for these sections of legislation due to the additional considerations for use of detection dogs.

³ Note that section 12 of the Forestry Regulation 2024 (dog to be under control) does not apply if working off-leash is specifically authorised under a section 56 permit.

⁴ This is only necessary for applications that only cover a recreation area, and not also an adjacent protected or forestry area as in these cases, the authority for the recreation area will be included in the permit for the protected or forestry area as a corresponding authority.

considered either a low-risk activity or a prohibited purpose under section 134 of the Regulations. Location specific restrictions may also apply.

Conditions

Indemnity and public liability insurance

All detector dog teams will be required to indemnify QPWS against any claim in relation to the death or injury of person(s) or loss of or damage to property (including the detector dog) caused by their act or default. The issue of a permission or authority by the department includes indemnity clauses and may also be subject to the applicant holding appropriate public liability insurance. All aligned and non-aligned activities must have the standard public liability insurance and Workers' compensation insurance under the *Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003* (for non-sole operator companies). There may be some ability to reduce or waive the need for public liability insurance for aligned activities - refer to *Operational Policy – Insurance and indemnity requirements for QPWS authorities* for further details.

Requirement that dog be “under control”

A detector dog working under authorisation and on a leash (or subject to any kind of physical control such as enclosed within the confines of a vehicle) on any tenure of land is legally deemed to be under control and requires no further consideration.

Most detector dogs typically work off-leash (including under behavioural control) and in these instances provision must be made to ensure that this is specifically authorised. Any such authority should include conditions of operation, including how the dog is to be controlled.

Signage

Dogs are generally not permitted on QPWS areas, so it is important to make it very clear to the public that special arrangements are in place.

To make this clear, the following will be required:

- the dog must be readily identifiable as a working conservation detector dog (details below),
- temporary signs must be placed at, or as close as possible to, the entrances of the operational area when the activity is occurring,
- signs must clearly state that detector dog activity is occurring and that persons must not interact with the dog,
- any interaction with the public should result in the provision of education relating to this as an authorised use and that (depending on the tenure of the area), it may be an offence to bring dogs into the area and/or use them for the activity,
- signs are to be removed upon completion of the activity.

Work health and safety

Scent detection dog health and welfare:

- Dog handlers must ensure that all the appropriate animal husbandry requirements for their detector dogs are met, including maintenance of their health, welfare, safety and operational capability.
- Detector dog annual veterinary check records (including proof of current vaccination and preventative treatment such as internal and external parasite control, plus relevant medical records) must be provided to QPWS officers prior to supplier engagement and deployment (see Appendix A).

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- It is the responsibility of the dog handlers to risk-assess the designated program areas, to identify potential hazards that may adversely impact the detector dogs activities or welfare, and to put measures in place to mitigate risks.
- The dog handler should discuss any concerns with the QPWS officer engaging the detector dog team prior to deployment.

Incident reporting:

- Any incidents or near misses relating to safety must be managed consistent with the QPWS *Work Health and Safety Incident Reporting, Recording and Investigations Procedure*.
- Any incidents involving a break in discipline by a detector dog (such as injurious interactions with wildlife) must also be documented and reported to the relevant QPWS contact officer as soon as reasonably practicable and in accordance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*. If there is any break in discipline, the activity will immediately be ceased until further notice. The QPWS officer must pass this information onto their Regional Director and inform the pest services team.
- Any incidents involving the mistreatment of detector dogs by dog handlers must also be documented and reported. The department will not engage the services of such a detector team in future if animal cruelty is observed.

Deployment of detector team

A QPWS officer should be assigned to each detection program, to act as a single point of contact with the detector team, and to ensure compliance or negotiate exemptions (which must become part of the conditions of the authority and therefore approved by the delegate) to this procedural guide and policy. The officer will ensure that all relevant operational staff are notified about the proposed detector dog deployment activity and timing in advance of the activity occurring.

All relevant permit authorities and approvals must be completed, prior to deployment commencing.

Detector team field operations

- A scent detector dog must wear a vest with "Detector dog" (or similar) in clearly visible lettering, so that it is readily identifiable as a working detection dog. This applies in all circumstances apart from extenuating circumstances, where the QPWS officer may authorise that a vest is not required (for example, if potential exists for a vest to become entangled in dense/thorny undergrowth or hot climatic condition which would adversely impact on the ability of the dog to operate effectively).
- The dog handler must have any relevant permits and/or written approval documentation available when working in a QPWS managed area.
- As per the *Operational policy: Pest plant and pathogen spread prevention in QPWS managed areas*, all equipment, items of clothing (including footwear) and vehicles must be free of biosecurity matter before entering and leaving QPWS areas. Dogs must also be clean (free of mud and biosecurity matter) and up to date with all necessary vaccinations and treatments for internal and external parasites. Additional quarantine requirements may be imposed when travelling to island protected areas as well as some other specific sites.
- Where feasible, dogs working off lead should be fitted with either radio or GPS tracking devices to monitor their location and activities. The resulting search tracklog should be included in the data provided to QPWS.

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- Dog faeces should be removed from public walking tracks and recreation facilities areas (as required under section 207 (3) of the Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2024, and all other areas, where practicable.
- When dogs are not actively working, they must be in the immediate company of their handler or secured in a vehicle, purpose-built crate or on a lead.

Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement

The detector dog handler must provide the following information to QPWS after completion of the activities:

- all targeted detections and any other significant sightings, including all native animal sightings, should be recorded in appropriate returns suitable for WildNet entry,
- for resources permits or permits to collect, the permit returns must also be submitted,
- all information about the activity – maps of where the dog went, any interactions with people or wildlife (positive, negative or neutral), how the dog performed and any public feedback received).
- For non-aligned activities, confirmation that any notifiable pests have been reported to Biosecurity Queensland within relevant timeframes, along with the reference number (where applicable).

All this information should be provided to the relevant region (if not already) and the pest services team for storage and to provide information for later deployments.

Where feasible, the following monitoring/evaluation/reporting should be conducted by the QPWS officer:

- any negative impacts attributed to detector dogs recorded, including what factors were involved (for example, adverse public interaction, non-target species disruption, injuries to any species or significant command failure by the detector dog),
- whether the detector activity was effective and desired outcomes were achieved or not achieved,
- whether improvements to the conservation outcomes have occurred, confirmed by surveys or implementation of monitoring and research strategies and health checks (where relevant),
- for aligned activities, completion of FLAME pest plans and treatment methods, which must include any pest species found and, if necessary, subsequently treated,
- if any native threatened species are detected, sighting locations must be forwarded to WildNet.

A written report should be considered (following a deployment) to capture above points and sent to the Pest Services team (pest.advice@detsi.qld.gov.au) to progress continuous improvement and learnings. The permit returns for resources permits or permits to collect can also be used to evaluate findings and inform improvements and learnings.

All pest species detection and any subsequent treatment of the pest must be recorded in FLAME.

Reference materials

Operational policy - Conservation detector dogs in QPWS areas

Operational policy - Approval to take a live animal into a protected area

Operational policy - Insurance and indemnity requirements for QPWS authorities

Operational policy - Pest plant and pathogen spread prevention in QPWS managed areas

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

Work Health and Safety Incident Reporting, Recording and Investigations Procedure

Zoonotic Diseases Procedure

Australasian Conservation Dog Network – Conservation Detection Dog Team Evaluation Guidelines

Authorities

Nature Conservation Act 1992 and its Regulations

Forestry Act 1959 and its Regulation

Recreation Areas Management Act 2006 and its Regulation

Biosecurity Act 2014

Animal Care and Protection Act 2001

Medicines and Poisons Act 2019

Weapons Act 1990

Work Health and Safety Act 2011

Marine Parks Act 2004 and its Regulation

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 Procedural guide, 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

Ben Klaassen

Signature

18/03/2026

Date

Deputy Director-General
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Appendix A: Behavioural, vaccination and worming requirements

Behavioural

The detector dog must be able to show evidence of the following:

- Inhibitory control: the dog does not display impulsive actions and can resist distractions even when tempted by a reward or other stimulus.
- Immediate response to commands given by the handler – essential responses to commands are:
 - Recall: Handler gives cue, and dog must change gait immediately, return to handler and remain with handler until cued otherwise, and
 - Emergency stop: Handler gives cue, and dog must change gait immediately, stop moving (stand/sit/drop) until rewarded or next cue given *.

* Taken from the Australasian Conservation Dog Network – Conservation Detection Dog Team Evaluation Guidelines.

- Training and experience in detecting the target species.
- Sociability: mixes well with other people.
- Lack of aggressive behaviour towards people and other animals.
- Display passive alert behaviours (e.g. sit and stare) when the dog has detected the target species, and not active ones (e.g. barking, pawing or digging).

These behaviours can be proven through video evidence and/or a statutory declaration from the handler.

Vaccination

All dogs must be up to date with the following vaccinations (dog handlers must have certificates to prove this):

- Canine distemper virus
- Hepatitis
- Canine parvovirus
- C5 vaccination – includes C3 and kennel cough

Worming

All dogs must be up to date with worming for roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms, whipworms and heartworm.