



# Declared Fish Habitat Area Network Strategy

2015 - 2020



Fraser Island declared FHA, South East Queensland.



Pumicestone Channel declared FHA, South East Queensland.

Photo: Tourism and Events Queensland.

Prepared by: **Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.**

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All photos are courtesy of the Queensland Government, unless labelled otherwise.

Cover photo: Corio Bay declared FHA, Central Queensland.

## Respect for Traditional Owners

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) respects the rights, responsibilities, knowledge and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. Central to all QPWS work is the recognition of the critical roles of Indigenous people as custodians of their land and sea country and as skilled partners in management of wildlife and the protected area system. Respect is paid to the Elders past and present of Queensland's lands and waters.

## A network 46 years in the making

Declared Fish Habitat Areas (FHAs) are a type of marine protected area managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). Declared FHAs provide a management layer over existing land tenures and waters, and complement marine parks and other protected areas managed by QPWS. This strategy will guide the management of declared FHAs for the next 5 years.

The declared FHA network contributes to the Queensland Government's objectives of protecting the environment, including the Great Barrier Reef, ensuring sustainable use of natural resources and enabling responsible development.

QPWS FHA management will:

- support the sustainable management and use of fish habitats within declared FHAs for fishing, conservation and community access
- anticipate and respond to development related pressures and their impacts on the state's key fish habitats and dependent fish stocks
- recognise the links between the mosaics of fish habitats that support Queensland's fish stocks and fisheries by conserving and managing the declared FHA network.

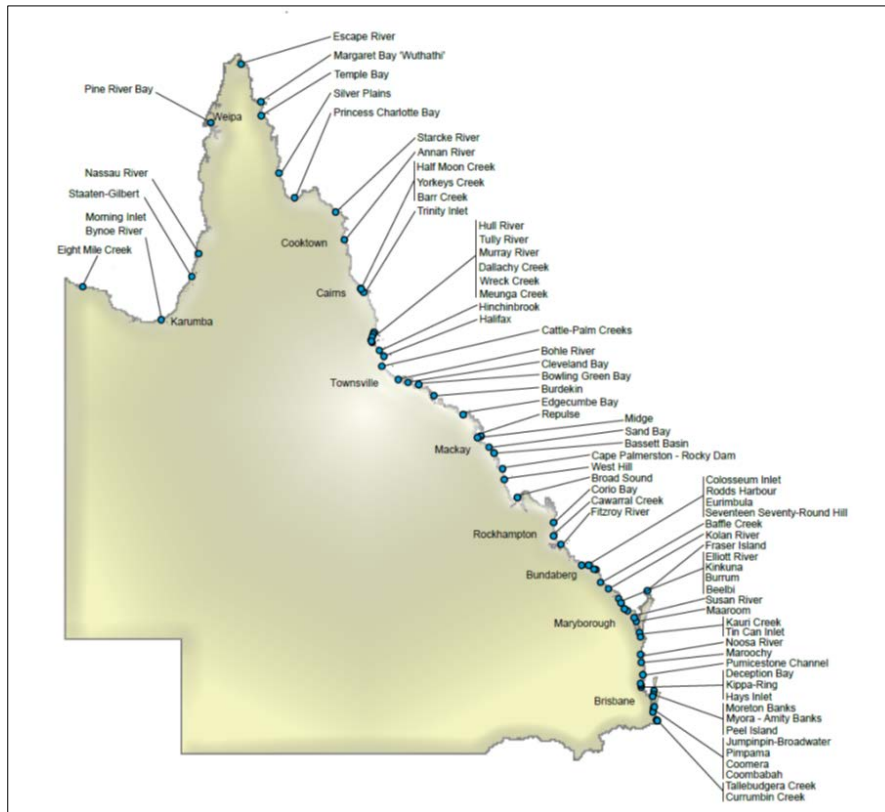


Above: Pumicestone Channel declared FHA, South East Queensland.

Left: Mud crab – an important recreational and commercial fisheries species.

### What are declared Fish Habitat Areas?

- High productivity estuarine and coastal fish habitats that are declared and mapped as a management layer;
- Protect all fish habitats within– such as mangroves, saltmarsh, seagrass, sand bars, mud banks, rocky outcrops, etc.;
- Allow legal commercial, recreational and indigenous fishing;
- Restrict development using two management levels – 82% of the network is management A; strictest management) and 18% of the network is management B);
- Declared under the *Fisheries Act 1994*;
- Part of a global marine protected area initiative –Category VI International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected area.



Queensland's declared FHAs network in 2015, covering 1.16 M hectares.

## Growth of the network

The first FHAs were declared in Moreton Bay in 1969 in response to increasing development impacts on fish habitats and their dependent fisheries in south-east Queensland. Now there are 70 declared FHAs in coastal Queensland, protecting over 1.16 million hectares of critical fish habitats.

## Development in declared FHAs

In management A areas, development is limited to activities like constructing public fishing infrastructure, ensuring public health and safety, maintenance of existing structures, constructing temporary structures, installing underground public infrastructure, managing fisheries resources or fish habitats (e.g. installing a boardwalk for access), research and education, and environmental restoration. In management B areas construction of some private structures (e.g. pontoons, boat ramps, revetments, buoy moorings) and beach replenishment may also be allowed.



Fishing platforms may be approved in declared FHAs.



Jumpinpin-Broadwater declared FHA, South East Queensland.

## Our vision

The declared Fish Habitat Area network will protect the critical fish habitats that sustain Queensland's fisheries from development impacts, now and into the future.

The vision recognises:

Healthy fisheries rely on healthy fish habitats to provide places for fish to feed, spawn and grow. By protecting fish habitats from development impacts we are helping sustain fisheries in Queensland.

The declared FHA network contributes to the lifestyles of Queenslanders by providing opportunities for fishing, outdoor recreation and cultural activities. It also supports our livelihoods by providing important ecosystem services, such as nutrient recycling, storm and erosion protection and food production, contributing to the economy.

## Declared FHAs support our fisheries

75% of Queensland's commercial seafood catch<sup>1</sup>, and most of the fish targeted in recreational and indigenous fishing rely on estuarine and coastal fish habitats at some stage of their life.

### Recreational fishing in Queensland<sup>2</sup>

- 700,000 people fish each year
- 8,500 tonnes of fin fish, crabs and prawns caught each year

### Indigenous fishing in Queensland<sup>3</sup>

- 10,600 people fish each year
- 90% of effort in estuarine and marine waters

### Commercial fishing in Queensland<sup>4</sup>

- 1,500 licensed commercial fishing boats
- 10% of Australia's seafood production

<sup>1</sup> Quinn, RH 1992, *Fisheries resources of the Moreton Bay region*, Queensland Fish Management Authority, Brisbane.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2012, *Recreational fishing*, <https://www.daff.qld.gov.au/fisheries/recreational> accessed 19 December 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Data from north Queensland only. Commonwealth of Australia 2003, *The National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey*, Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, July 2003.

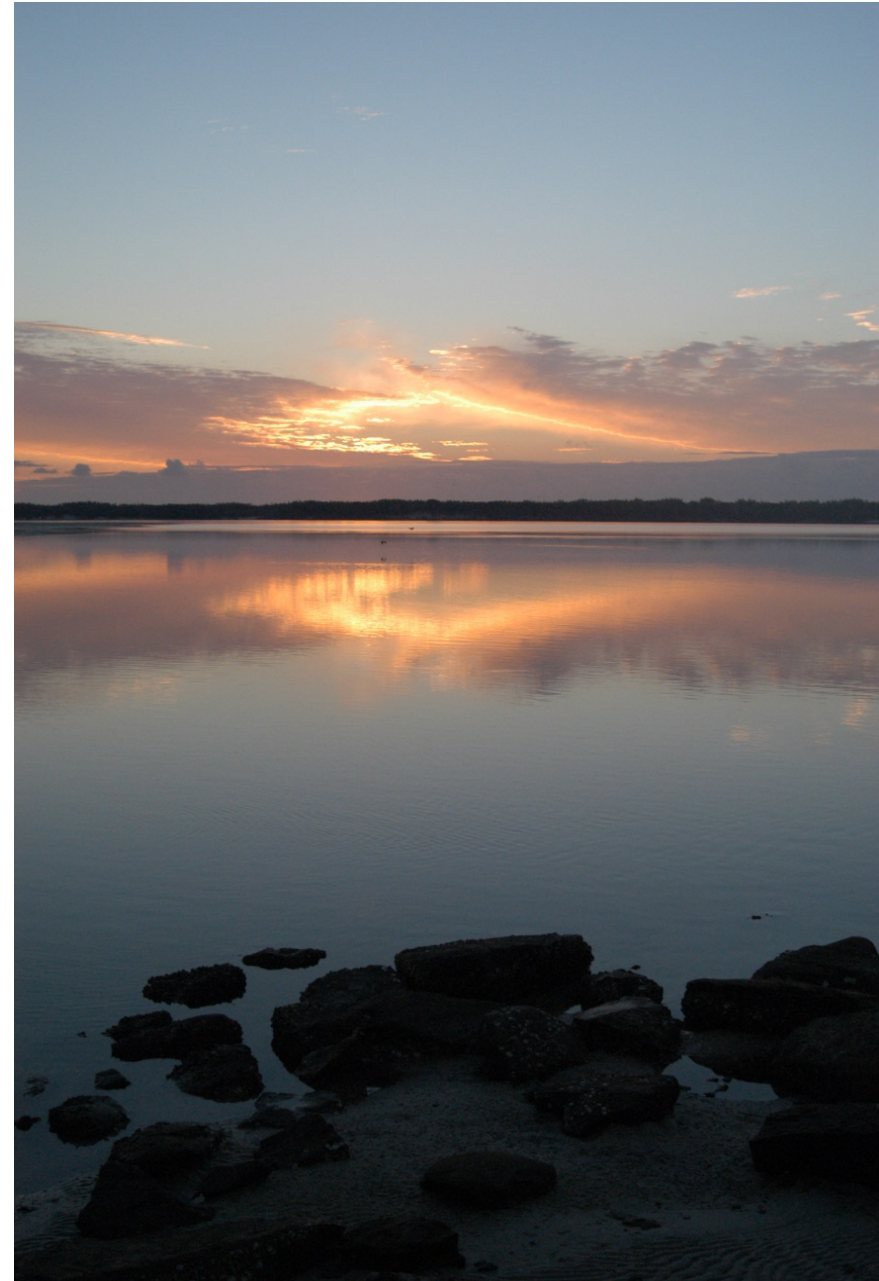
<sup>4</sup> Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2013, *Queensland's commercial fisheries*, <https://www.daff.qld.gov.au/fisheries/commercial-fisheries/queenslands-commercial-fisheries>, accessed 19 December 2014.

## The declared FHA network will:

- represent and maintain Queensland's fish habitats within each coastal bioregion to ensure that critical fish habitats are protected from current and future development pressures;
- be kept intact and enhanced through our management measures;
- use environmental offsets, where the opportunity arises, to maintain the integrity of the declared FHA network;
- provide community access (particularly to fishing grounds), and undisturbed locations for recreation, nature-based enjoyment, education and research about fish and fish habitats.



Large-leafed orange mangrove.



Hays Inlet declared FHA, South East Queensland.

# Challenges and opportunities

## Challenges

Maintenance of the integrity of the declared FHA network and individual declared FHAs, in particular with increased population growth and associated development pressure and response to natural disasters.

Ensuring the fish habitats under most threat (e.g. saltmarsh) are adequately represented in the network.

Climate change impacts on the distribution of fish habitats. Adjoining land use may constrain landward migration of fish habitats with sea level rise.

Integration of declared FHA management with QPWS protected area management, particularly marine park management; and with other existing marine and coastal management programs (e.g. Ramsar areas).

Increasing community and stakeholder expectations, awareness and engagement.

Ensuring declared FHA interests are reflected in legislation and planning instruments.

Awareness of offences in declared FHAs and maintaining and enhancing legal, judicial, and compliance performance.

## Opportunities

Greater involvement in strategic planning, from state-wide planning to local waterway management plans.

Exploring opportunities to enhance the network to add fish habitats that are at risk or underrepresented, for example through the use of offsets.  
Forming new partnerships and using scientific information to enhance declared FHA management to address issues affecting threatened habitats in declared FHAs.

Enhancing partnerships with local government and state land managers to provide buffers for climate change.

Enhancing relationships within QPWS and with stakeholders to ensure integrated and effective management throughout Queensland, including within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Promoting the benefits of declared FHAs to the community.  
Harnessing the enthusiasm of the community and stakeholders about fish habitat management to increase community ownership of the network.

Continuing to work with government agencies and local governments to recognise and protect declared FHA interests.

Improved communication about declared FHA protection to prevent offences from being committed.  
Continuing to work collaboratively with government enforcement and management agencies and local governments to reduce the number of offences committed and ensuring timely responses to offences, including appropriate fines and penalties and effective restoration outcomes.

## Our approach

The strategic objectives for management of the declared FHA network to 2020 fall into three broad initiatives:

Consolidate the declared FHA network

Reinforce declared FHA management

Strengthen declared FHA policy



Fishing at Elliott River declared FHA, Wide Bay Burnett.  
Photo: Tourism and Events Queensland.

## Alignment with the Master Plan for Queensland's parks and forests

The **Master Plan for Queensland's Parks and Forests** provides direction on focusing our efforts and describes a future protected area network and management to strive towards. The Declared FHA Network

Strategy's three broad initiatives contribute to the Master Plan for Queensland's Parks and Forests as shown below.

**Master Plan for Queensland Parks and Forests Target 2** – By 2020, all parks and forests have appropriate folios, planning documents and management plans or management statements completed according to their level of service.

**Master Plan for Queensland Parks and Forests Target 3** – By 2018, a comprehensive evaluation is completed that evaluates the effectiveness of QPWS in park and forest management.

**Consolidate the declared FHA Network** – QPWS will ensure a comprehensive, adequate and representative declared FHA network that effectively supports the state's fisheries through the protection of critical fish habitats.



Children fishing, Far North Queensland.  
Photo: Tourism and Events Queensland.



**Master Plan for Queensland Parks and Forests Target 6** - By 2020, Queensland's parks and forests are recognised as world-class in their management and the visitor services and experiences they offer.

**Master Plan for Queensland Parks and Forests Target 9** – By 2025, the number of effective partnerships between QPWS and Traditional Owners is increased to enable Traditional Owners to meet their cultural obligations while contributing to effective parks and forests management.

**Reinforce declared FHA management** – QPWS will utilise strategic partnerships, effective communication strategies and appropriate and effective responses to unlawful activities to manage declared FHAs.

**Master Plan for Queensland Parks and Forests Target 12** – By 2015, a risk-based permissions management framework is developed, effectively coordinating the sustainable use of natural resources on parks and forests.

**Master Plan for Queensland Parks and Forests Target 13** – By 2020, a risk-based permissions management model is implemented and 100% of parks and forests permissions are managed in accordance with this model.

**Strengthen declared FHA policy** – QPWS will ensure legislation, policies and planning processes are effective to manage the declared FHA network.



Healthy fish habitats support fish and fisheries.

Photo: Tourism and Events Queensland.

## Consolidate the declared FHA network

### Our goal

➔ **Manage the declared FHA network so that it remains comprehensive, adequate and representative and sustains the state's fisheries through the protection of critical fish habitats**

FHAs are declared as part of the ongoing identification, management and protection of critical fish habitats in Queensland. The declared FHA concept focuses on the inclusion, linkage and management of all available fish habitat types within an area as a connected ecosystem, rather than simply protecting individual specific habitat types. This approach has been developed in response to our better understanding of the manner in which aquatic ecosystems function. The maintenance of diverse and abundant fish, mollusc and crustacean communities depends on an equally diverse, extensive and connected suite of relatively undisturbed fish habitats. The long-term sustainability of Queensland's fisheries depends on both management of the fish stocks and management and protection of the habitats upon which fish depend.

The declared FHA network is part of a global Marine Protected Area (MPA) initiative, with corresponding national and state MPA programs, and regional and local linkages:

- global – International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) goals and categories
- national – for example the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA), Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- state – Queensland Government goals, NPSR Strategic Plan; Master Plan for Queensland's Parks and Forests to 2025; Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, Queensland marine parks; the State Planning Policy and other planning Instruments

- regional – regional plans
- local – planning schemes; master planned areas; development assessment.



Hinchinbrook declared FHA, North Queensland.

In 2012 the first assessment of the declared FHA network was undertaken. The assessment considered the status of each declared FHA

against criteria such as fish habitat diversity, importance of the declared FHA to fishing, management partnerships in the area, research and monitoring undertaken, traditional owner involvement, unlawful activities in the area and integration into planning processes. Overall the declared FHA network was assessed to be in good condition. The areas that received the lowest rankings have been the focus of targeted management actions through implementation of the Declared FHA Network Assessment Report<sup>1</sup>.

Review of declared FHA boundaries is scheduled every 10 years or earlier if required. In some cases boundary amendments may be requested to facilitate development proposals, due to the strong nature of declared FHA management which precludes many development types. Such proposals are subject to careful assessment, must be adequately justified and must not affect the integrity of the declared FHA, the declared FHA network or the ability to provide comprehensive, adequate and representative protection of fish habitats in Queensland. Compensation may also be required.

### What we will do

#### Maintain integrity of the network

- Maintain representation of declared FHAs in each coastal meso-scale Integrated Marine and Coastal Regionalisation of Australia (IMCRA4) bioregion.
- Maintain good representation of all fish habitat types within each coastal bioregion.
- Maintain alignment of the declared FHA Network with the United Nations Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries<sup>2</sup>.
- Maintain declared FHA core management (prescribed development purposes) and objectives.

<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/managing/habitat-areas/assessment-report.html>

<sup>2</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization 1995, *Code of conduct for responsible fisheries*, United Nations, Rome.

### Case study: Central Queensland FHA investigation program

The Central Queensland declared FHA investigations program is an initiative funded by the Gladstone Ports Corporation as part of its Marine Fish Habitat Offsets Program, and delivers on the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. The three year program (2013-2016) is dedicated to the investigation and possible declaration of two new FHAs (Calliope River, Gladstone and Leekes Creek at Great Keppel Island), possible expansion of the Fitzroy River declared FHA and reassessment of the Cawarral Creek FHA.

The investigation program is an example of where external funding has provided an opportunity to advance the objectives of the Declared FHA Network Strategy to benefit the network.



Leekes Creek, Great Keppel Island, an area nominated by the community for FHA investigation.

## Assess the network

- The Declared FHA Network Assessment Reporting framework will be used to determine effectiveness of the network.
- Declared FHA Network Assessment Report findings will inform policy and management changes.

## Carefully consider changes to the network

- Consider stakeholder and community driven FHA nominations and expansions as resources allow.
- Follow QPWS policy and legislative requirements for FHA investigations, declarations and amendments.
- Ensure that declared FHA boundary amendments that lower the level of fish habitat protection will benefit the community overall and will be appropriately compensated.
- Consulting with key stakeholders on any changes or additions to the network.



Legal fishing is allowed in declared FHAs – Burrum declared FHA, Wide Bay Burnett.



Unvegetated fish habitats are protected in declared FHAs.



Ecological and fisheries research is allowed and encouraged in declared FHAs.

## Reinforce declared FHA management

### Our goals

- ➔ **Form and enhance strategic partnerships within QPWS, other protected area / natural resource managers and key stakeholders for declared FHA management**
- ➔ **Maintain and implement an effective declared FHA communications strategy**
- ➔ **Ensure effective on-ground management and response to unlawful activities to prevent degradation of individual declared FHAs and the declared FHA Network**

Management of declared FHAs is undertaken by limiting the impacts of development on critical fish habitats.

Many declared FHAs adjoin or overlap other QPWS protected areas such as marine parks, national parks and regional parks. This overlap provides an opportunity for integrated management of protected areas by QPWS.

There is also overlap with protected areas managed by other entities, such as environmental reserves managed by local government or other State agencies, World Heritage Areas and Ramsar sites. These areas of overlap provide further opportunity for cooperative and complementary management.

A number of other government agencies play a role in management of the coastal zone and wetlands, which may include fish habitats. For example, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries manages marine plants such as mangroves, seagrass and saltmarsh, aquaculture and fish passage; and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection manages wetlands, water quality and coastal management. Local

government also plays an important role in planning, development, environmental protection and compliance.



**Eurimbula declared FHA, Central Queensland.**

Communication is a key tool available to raise stakeholder awareness about declared FHAs and their role in supporting Queensland's fisheries.

It is also an important way to help reduce the number of offences, such as unauthorised structures (e.g. jetties and pontoons) and disturbances (e.g. filling of tidal land), and increase the reporting of offences.

The Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol undertakes declared FHA compliance. Challenges when undertaking declared FHA compliance investigations include establishing whether the activity occurred within a declared FHA by locating boundaries 'on the ground', identifying the person/s responsible for offences and achieving successful restoration outcomes.



Hinchinbrook declared FHA, North Queensland.

### What we will do

#### Integrate FHAs into QPWS management

- Integrate and coordinate declared FHA and state marine park strategies, policies and planning.

- Engage marine park, national park and regional park planners and managers to address existing and potential on-ground management issues in the State's protected areas particularly where there is spatial overlap.

#### Form partnerships for management

- Form / enhance strategic partnerships with other protected area and natural resource managers and with key stakeholders.
- Involve Traditional Owners in declared FHA management.

#### Communicate effectively

- Develop and implement an annual communications strategy.
- Identify target audiences and messages and develop effective communication techniques to suit.
- Coordinate declared FHA communication activities with key stakeholders including other Queensland Government and QPWS communication initiatives.
- Evaluate the communication strategy annually to inform subsequent strategies.

#### Traditional Owner involvement

QPWS recognises the importance and rights of Traditional Owner involvement in declared FHA management. Current partnerships include the Girringun Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement and Indigenous Protected Area, which involves co-management with QPWS and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority over 10 declared FHAs, the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and terrestrial protected areas in the Cardwell / Hinchinbrook area.



Currumbin Creek declared FHA, South East Queensland.

### Respond to unlawful activities to maintain network integrity

- Develop annual declared FHA implementation plans to direct on-ground management, rehabilitation efforts, partnership opportunities and environmental offset projects.
- Collaborate with Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol to ensure declared FHAs are maintained as a compliance priority for example through implementation of the MOU with DAF.
- Provide mapping support to Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol in responding to possible offences in declared FHAs.
- Facilitate information sharing between QPWS Rangers and Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol on possible offences in declared FHAs.
- Include partnerships with other government agencies and stakeholders in management responses.
- Encourage use of self-assessable codes to facilitate rehabilitation and restoration activities.

### Case study: Cawarral Creek declared FHA, central Queensland

The Cawarral Creek declared FHA, near Emu Park, received a low rating in the 2012 Declared FHA Network Assessment Report due to its relatively low habitat diversity and no management partnerships.

Ongoing management actions undertaken to address this low score included:

- an improved assessment of the fish habitat diversity of the area;
- improved partnerships with government and stakeholders;
- ongoing compliance of unauthorised works;
- increased communication activities.

Due to these actions the Cawarral Creek declared FHA is now one of the most well-researched declared FHAs, and will likely achieve a greater rating in the next assessment report.



Cawarral Creek declared FHA, Central Queensland.

## Strengthen declared FHA policy

### Our goals

- ➔ Prepare and implement legislation to ensure it is appropriate to achieve the declared FHA Network Strategy aim
- ➔ Prepare and implement policies that clearly reflect the declared FHA program objectives
- ➔ Integrate the declared FHA network into planning processes



Cattle-Palm Creeks declared FHA, North Queensland.

The management of the declared FHA network focuses on statutory roles and approvals in a strong legislative setting.

The resources used to manage the network include:

- policies to assist in the interpretation of legislation— assessment of suitability for declaration, consultation procedures and

ongoing management

- self-assessable codes for minimal impact development
- development applications for works in declared FHAs
- the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol for on-ground compliance
- partnerships with local government, state government agencies, Traditional Owners and natural resource management groups on specific issues
- the Declared FHA Network Assessment Report and annual implementation plan
- annual declared FHA communications strategies.

Operational and building work in a declared FHA is assessed under Queensland's planning legislation, and may be approved with conditions or refused. A resource allocation authority is also required under the Fisheries Act prior to development starting in a declared FHA. Resource allocation authorities may only be issued for 'prescribed development purposes', which are listed in the Fisheries Regulation and outlined in NPSR policy. This limited and prescriptive list of development purposes



forms the core of the strong and consistent management of the declared FHA network.

Many activities can affect the fish habitat, productivity and ecosystem values of declared FHAs. Some of these activities occur inside the declared FHA, and some occur outside (or adjacent to the declared FHAs). Activities inside declared FHA boundaries that may have an impact include:

- recreational vehicle use and illegal rubbish dumping that damages saltmarsh habitats
- development of individual structures (e.g. jetties, revetment walls)
- cumulative impacts of approved development.

Activities outside declared FHA boundaries or activities outside the scope of direct FHA management include:

- erosion from human activities such as vessel wash
- impacts of offsite development
- modified flow regimes and reduced connectivity due to barriers upstream of declared FHAs.

Recognising the impacts that occur both within and outside of declared FHAs will allow future planning to address the issues through state and local planning instruments, and incorporation into catchment or local area management programs.

### **What we will do**

#### **Review declared FHA legislation and policy to meet program objectives**

- Review the declared FHA legislative provisions to ensure that legislation is efficient and effective.
- Review the process for revoking declared FHAs, including compensation to benefit the network.

- Contribute to the review of other legislation that affects declared FHA management.
- Review existing declared FHA policies *Management of declared Fish Habitat Areas* and *Fish Habitat Area selection, assessment declaration and review* at least every five years.
- Assess the need for and develop new policies where required.
- Incorporate new information from the Declared FHA Network Assessment Reports, planning, partnerships, state planning initiatives, research and restoration projects into policy.
- Reflect current government initiatives and policies.



Soldier crabs in Leekes Creek, Central Queensland, an area under FHA investigation.



Seagrass meadows, like all fish habitats in declared FHAs, are protected.

### Using planning to protect declared FHAs

- Maintain the declared FHA network as a matter of State environmental significance in the State Planning Policy and other state planning instruments such as regional plans, local government planning schemes and master planned areas; and in specific issue planning processes, natural resource management group plans, water quality improvement plans, etc.
- Develop complementary planning measures and avoid duplication.
- Provide the declared FHA network as a digital mapping layer to inform development and planning.
- Contribute to planning processes (provide technical expert input to assist with decision making) to address and avoid external, cumulative and future impacts on declared FHAs.
- Use planning processes, and land acquisition/ purchase processes, to alert adjacent property holders of declared FHA locations and management.

- Recognise in planning that declared FHAs are subject to natural processes and external and upstream influences.
- Educate and inform proponents of adjacent development about the potential impacts of those developments on FHAs.



Healthy fish habitats = healthy fisheries. Photo: R Jupp.

### Declared FHAs in legislation and planning

FHAs are declared and managed under the *Fisheries Act 1994* and *Fisheries Regulation 2008*.

Development activities in declared FHAs are authorised under the *Fisheries Act* and the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*.

Declared FHAs are matters of state environmental significance under the *State Planning Policy*, and are therefore afforded additional consideration through the state's planning framework.

## Our targets

FHA initiatives	Targets
<b>Consolidate the FHA network</b>	1. By 2017, a new Declared FHA Network Assessment Report is completed and published online.
	2. Annual declared FHA implementation plans are prepared to address recommendations of the Declared FHA Network Assessment Report.
	3. Annual reports on the actions taken to address the findings of the Assessment Report are published online.
<b>Reinforce declared FHA management</b>	4. Annual communication plans are developed and implemented.
	5. By 2020, the number of effective partnerships with Traditional Owners for declared FHA management is increased.
	6. Annual reviews of declared FHA compliance priorities are completed.
<b>Strengthen declared FHA policy</b>	7. By 2016, a review of the operational policy for the management of declared FHAs is completed.
	8. By 2017, a policy on compensation for declared FHA revocation is developed.

9. By 2017, a review of the operational policy for FHA selection, assessment, declaration and review is completed.

10. By 2018, the self-assessable codes for development in declared FHAs, and the declared FHA code of practice are reviewed.

Implementation of this strategy will occur over the next five years within the existing QPWS budget and resources available, and using external funding as it becomes available.



Kippa-Ring declared FHA, South East Queensland.