

## Operational policy

### Visitor management

#### Rock climbing on QPWS managed areas

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*Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) of the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (DNPRSR). Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly to all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.*

#### Purpose

To provide guidance to staff when managing rock climbing activities and advice to stakeholders on how QPWS will manage rock climbing activities on QPWS managed areas.

#### Definitions

**Rock climbing** is the process of ascending, descending or transversing natural cliffs using the hands and feet and other parts of the body. Associated activities include bouldering; single and multi pitch lead climbing, single pitch top rope climbing and aid climbing (use of mechanical aids instead of footholds etc)

**Abseiling** involves descending vertical or near vertical surfaces, using ropes and descending friction devices to manage descent. In the majority of situations, abseiling involves descending by stepping backwards down a near vertical surface. Forward facing descents are also possible.

**Anchor** means the fixed protection at the top of a climb or at the top of a section of a climb and is usually comprised of two bolts with attachments such as chain or carabiners.

**Belay** means to secure the climber or abseiler during their ascent or descent.

**Belay-point** means an anchor specifically intended for use when belaying rock climbers or abseilers.

**Bolt** in this context means a metallic pin with screw threads or other surface features for the purpose of attachment which are hammered, screwed and/or glued into pre-drilled holes in generally smooth rock faces to provide a safety feature in the event of an unexpected fall while rock climbing.

**Bouldering** is climbing where the lowest part of the body is typically no higher than a point at which adequate safety can be provided through the use of "spotting" and bouldering mats rather than with the aid of additional systems involving harnesses, belay mechanisms and ropes. Spotting is a support process provided by a person, or persons, who offer physical protection of the head and upper body of the climber should a fall occur during bouldering.

**Canyoning** is the activity of travelling in canyons using a variety of techniques that may include walking, scrambling, abseiling, swimming or climbing.

**Caving** is any rock climbing activity conducted under ground in caves.

**Climbing infrastructure** includes bolts (fixed protection) and anchors.

**Crag** is a rock-climbers' term for a cliff or group of cliffs, in any location, which is or may be suitable for climbing.

**Risk (from Civil Liabilities Act 2003)** - Obvious risks include risks that are patent or a matter of common knowledge. A risk of something occurring can be an obvious risk even though it has a low probability of occurring.

**Fixed protection** means permanently or temporarily attaching climbing safety devices to the rock face (such as bolts and, in some cases pitons) to provide protection in the event of a fall.

**Lead climbing** means climbing connected by rope to a climbing partner belaying on the ground, or from an anchor at the base of a pitch for a multi-pitch climb, with the rope hooked into carabiners and other forms of protection as the climber ascends.

**Pitch** is a steep section of a route that requires a rope between two belays, as part of a climbing system. Standard climbing ropes are between 50 and 80 metres long, so a pitch is always shorter, between two convenient ledges if possible; longer routes are multi-pitch, requiring the re-use of the rope each time.

**Pitons** are pointed metal spikes hammered into cracks and flaws in rock faces, usually for temporary fixed protection. Pitons may be inserted and removed later after the climb is completed, or may be permanently left in place.

**Protection** in this context means portable and removable anchor equipment (such as wires, nuts and camming devices) or fixed protection (bolts) that are part of the system used by climbers in arresting falls.

**QPWS managed areas** includes all protected areas, state forests, forests reserves, and recreation areas managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, the *Forestry Act 1959*, the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988*, and *Brisbane Forest Park Act 1977*.

**Shear** in this context means a force applied perpendicular to the axis of an anchor.

**Tension** in this context means a force tending to stretch or elongate something.

## **Background**

Rock climbing activities are recognised as a legitimate use of QPWS managed areas and the natural settings offered by parks are integral to the climbing experience. While climbing activities have some inherent risks, the challenge associated with undertaking these in the natural environment form an important part of the recreational opportunities provided in QPWS managed areas.

Some sites within QPWS managed areas have a long tradition of use and are highly valued by the rock climbing community as they provide unique experiences. However, the growth in popularity and diversification of these activities has placed increasing pressure on the limited number of available sites. Of particular issue is the trend from traditional climbing to sport climbing which requires the use of anchors or bolts.

It is illegal to interfere with QPWS managed areas (for example, drill holes or install climbing bolts in cliffs, cut down or damage trees, cement poles into the ground) unless such activities are carried out under, and in accordance with, an authority or permit from QPWS.

In some locations, climbers or abseilers have installed fixed protection and markings without permission or support from QPWS. Historically, an uncompromising stance on bolting by QPWS has alienated the climbing community and impacted on the ability to communicate with user groups regarding the management of critical conservation values.

Rock climbing activities can have a detrimental effect on cliff-dwelling wildlife such as peregrine falcons and may impact endangered, vulnerable or rare cliff flora.

These issues of user safety, difficulty in managing unauthorised infrastructure, user conflict and environmental impacts are addressed in this policy.

## **Policy statements**

### **1. Climbing Opportunities**

- 1.1 QPWS will allow rock climbing in appropriate areas, consistent with the protection of park values.
- 1.2 QPWS will accommodate a diversity and range of settings and opportunities for rock climbing activities at appropriate sites across the State.
- 1.3 QPWS adopts a whole of landscape solution to recreational rock climbing opportunities and will actively work with user groups, stakeholder representatives, landholders and other land management agencies to appropriately locate the activity on QPWS managed areas or other tenures. QPWS will support the diversification of rock climbing opportunities wherever possible in consultation with stakeholder groups such as the Australian Climbing Association of Queensland (ACAQ) and its regional representatives.
- 1.4 When considering the appropriateness of rock climbing activity in an area, QPWS will take into account previous use of the area and apply the policies and procedures outlined in this document to formalise management of the activity. Any changes to existing activities other than those outlined in this policy will either be for short term management such as temporary closures or come from a management plan or other QPWS planning documents such as a Visitor Management Strategy.
- 1.5 Wherever practicable, all variations to existing activities will be developed through a consultative approach with rock climbing organisations such as the ACAQ and its regional representatives.
- 1.6 New cliff activity areas (i.e. those identified by either QPWS, climbing organisations or individuals) will only be approved by QPWS where:
  - the site(s) diversify, and/or provide additional, climbing opportunities to those not already provided for elsewhere on QPWS managed estate;
  - proposed use of the site(s) will not adversely impact on the use of an area by other visitors;
  - natural and cultural values of the site(s) are protected.

### **2. Adventure Activity Standards**

QPWS endorses recommendations for guided climbing contained in the *Queensland Adventure Activity Standard for Rock climbing*. (refer Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation website - [www.qorf.org.au](http://www.qorf.org.au)).

This provides guidance for outdoor activity providers (commercial, educational, not-for-profit) who are taking organised groups on outdoor recreation adventures by:

- promoting safety for both participants and providers;
- protecting providers against legal liability claims and criminal penalties;
- assisting providers to obtain insurance cover.

### **3. Access**

- 3.1 QPWS staff will determine and manage access to existing climbing sites in various ways including:
  - Allowing general, unregulated access to the site;
  - Issuing a permit or approval as required (e.g. Special activity Permit on Regulatory Notice);

- Declaring a Restricted Access Area and allow only authorised access through signs, written approval or permit;
  - Entering into an agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with groups to manage activities at a particular site.
- 3.2** QPWS may implement seasonal closures, restrict climbing times or climbing numbers and may temporarily or permanently suspend the activity to protect or manage impacts on cultural and natural values or other users.
- 3.3** QPWS may permanently or temporarily close climbing site(s) due to visitor impacts, for routine operational land management practices or to manage safety due to adverse weather or natural disasters.

Examples of permanent or temporary closure of climbing sites may include, but are not limited to:

- fire and pest management programs;
  - safety issues such as rock/tree fall or adverse weather;
  - seasonal site stabilisation and vegetation growth (e.g. 'resting', rotational site use periods);
  - site impacts due to visitor use such as waste management;
  - observed and reported disruptions or direct damage to fauna breeding patterns or habitat (e.g. Peregrine falcons, small mammals);
  - incremental or direct damage to cliff flora (e.g. photo evidence);
  - observed damage to flora and fauna through unauthorised access routes
- 3.4** Any closures based on visitor impacts must be supported by a documented QPWS assessment of the impacts on natural, cultural or social values.
- 3.5** When QPWS is considering temporary site closures QPWS officers will, wherever practicable:
- place Park Alert notification on the QPWS website for routine short-term closures due to operational management, such as fire and pest programs and adverse weather events
  - consult with local climbers, the ACAQ and/or it's regional representatives as appropriate for any longer-term temporary closures (e.g. seasonal) to develop the most effective means for access and impact management, including the intended closure period.
- 3.6** When QPWS is considering either regulating access to, or permanently closing, a climbing site(s) QPWS officers will liaise and consult with local climbers, the ACAQ and/or it's regional representatives as appropriate to develop the most effective means for access and impact management.

#### **4. Notification of climbing sites and areas**

- 4.1** QPWS will consult with the climbing community to identify existing sites and places used by climbers, the clubs or groups utilising sites, any site impacts, and management requirements to provide sustainable climbing opportunities
- 4.2** Climbers may be required to notify QPWS before climbing at specific sites for purposes such as managing the level of use in sensitive areas, or to manage visitor access during management activities (e.g. annual burn programs) and will be notified of any such requirement by on-site signs, through the Departments website or the conditions of a permit or letter of authority.

## **5. Strategic Recreational Opportunities Planning**

- 5.1** QPWS will collect spatial information on cliff based activities, including counters and qualitative data regarding visitor use wherever possible to help develop visitor management strategies and management plans to provide a range of rock climbing opportunities in QPWS managed areas

## **6. Climbing Aids and Infrastructure**

- 6.1** QPWS acknowledges that permanent fixed protection and other permanent climb aids (including anchors and chains) already exist at many sites within QPWS managed areas and that these are necessary for maintaining a range of climbing opportunities.
- 6.2** Any new permanent fixed protection and other permanent climb aids (including anchors and chains) must be installed in accordance with the QPWS Bolting Code (Appendix 1).
- 6.3** Any replacement of existing fixed protection and other permanent climb aids must be done in accordance with the QPWS Bolting Code, facilitating a long-term transition to standardised bolting in QPWS-managed areas
- 6.4** Before any new fixed protection, anchor and other permanent climb aids can be installed on QPWS managed areas user groups or individuals must obtain written authority from the local Senior Ranger or Ranger-In Charge.
- 6.5** Any climber found installing new infrastructure without written authority will be in breach of the Nature Conservation Act 1992.
- 6.6** Any new infrastructure installed without authority will be removed wherever necessary and as determined by regional QPWS staff.
- 6.7** While acknowledging the existence of fixed protection or permanent climb aids in various QPWS managed parks and forests, QPWS takes no responsibility for maintenance or safety of such infrastructure except where such fixtures have been installed and/or managed by QPWS.
- 6.8** QPWS will only consider installing and maintaining fixed protection or permanent climb aids, including new anchor points upon written request to the Regional Manager.
- 6.9** Where fixed protection or permanent climb aids have been installed by QPWS, staff must implement a maintenance and inspection regime in accordance with any required standards including engineering inspections. Inspection reports must be recorded in the Department's Strategic Asset Management System (SAMS).

## **7. User Conflict**

- 7.1** Where conflict between climbing and abseiling participants and other park user groups is occurring, appropriate mitigation measures will be undertaken. This may include community awareness, separation of climbing and non-climbing user groups or exclusion of one or more user groups as necessary.

## **8. Liability**

- 8.1** Under the Civil Liability Act 2003 there is limited liability for personal injury suffered from risks of dangerous recreation activities. Notwithstanding QPWS duty of care to visitors, climbers should assume self-reliance and full responsibility for any risk associated with activities they undertake.

## 9. Minimal Impact Climbing

- 9.1** Wherever possible QPWS will work with rock climbers, the ACAQ and/or its regional representatives to develop, refine and promote information through signs, websites and printed publications to promote minimal impact climbing in QPWS managed areas (*see Appendix 2- QPWS Code of Practice – Rock Climbing & Abseiling*).

## 10. Activity Monitoring

- 10.1** Wherever possible QPWS will monitor any impacts from cliff-based activities. Monitoring may include natural, cultural and social factors and may be done in conjunction with local climbers, clubs and ACAQ members wherever possible.

### Reference materials

*Permits or written approval for special activities – operational policy*

*Group activity permits – operational policy*

*Restricted access area permits – operational policy*

*Civil Liability Act 2003*

### 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 and Resource Management 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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Date

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## **Appendix 1 - QPWS Bolting Code**

The QPWS Bolting Code is based on the Climbers Association of Western Australia Bolting Ethics, which was also adopted by the South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage. The Code was developed and adapted in consultation with the ACAQ.

QPWS requires any new bolt placement in QPWS managed areas to occur in accordance with this code and any other site requirements specified by QPWS staff.

Where there is any inconsistency may exist between the Bolting Code and climbing code of practice the Bolting Code provision shall hold.

- Bolting should only be carried out by persons who have sufficient experience relevant to the particular situation and place being bolted.
- All bolts must be UIAA123<sup>1</sup> and EN959<sup>2</sup> compliant
- All bolts must be installed according to manufacturer's instructions or local "best practice" for that crag.
- Where UIAA123/EN959 mechanical compliance is known to be inadequate for the crag conditions, e.g. soft sandstone cliffs requiring longer bolt shafts, local "best practice" will be followed in dimensioning of bolts.
- All anchors to be comprised of at least two UIAA123/EN959 compliant bolts.
- Any chain and carabiner accessories that might be employed in the anchor's construction to be stainless steel.
- The use of certified commercial chain-sets designed expressly for the purpose of climbing anchors is to be encouraged.
- Any carabiners that are to be used in anchor construction are to be EN12275<sup>3</sup> certified.
- Bolts should not be added to existing climbs or boulder problems which have already been bolted except where there are safety issues associated with the bolt spacing.
- Fixed protection may only be used on new routes where there is no possibility of arranging protection by common traditional means.
- New routes must not be bolted within reach of established routes.
- Bolts must be visually unobtrusive, especially in areas visited by the non-climbing public. The installer must strive to use low visibility bolting as is consistent with best practice.
- Only battery operated equipment can be used to install bolts in QPWS managed areas. The use of fuel driven generators or externally-powered devices is not permitted unless special circumstances exist and are specifically approved by the local Ranger-in-Charge.
- Bolting should be carried out so as to have no adverse impact on cliff fauna (eg. roosting Peregrine falcons or flora).

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<sup>1</sup> The Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme (UIAA) (also known as the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation) has developed a standard for testing the tensile and shear strength of rock anchors (*UIAA-123*) that aligns with EEC Standard *EN 959:2007* (see below).

<sup>2</sup> The European Economic Community (EEC) has established standards for various types of Personal Protective Equipment related to mountaineering and rock climbing, including a Standard (*EN 959:2007*) for the testing of rock anchors.

<sup>3</sup> UIAA Standard *EN 12275:98 "Mountaineering equipment – Connectors – Safety requirements and test methods*.

## **Appendix 2**

### **QPWS Code of Practice – Rock Climbing & Abseiling**

The Code of Practice comprises the **Australian Climbing Association (QLD) Code of Conduct** (below) coupled with the following additions:

- Where anchors have been installed these must be used rather than any vegetation or natural feature that may be damaged.
- Climbers are asked to use the minimal amount of chalk.
- Climbers must minimise cleaning practices on cliff faces.
- Climbers should keep noise levels to a minimum particularly near residential areas or other park visitors.

### **Australian Climbing Association (QLD) Code of Conduct**

#### **The Environment**

- Climbers must remove all rubbish from the crag including, but not limited to finger tape, cigarette butts and food scraps.
- Climbers should stay to existing tracks where available to minimise damage to the natural environment.
- Climbers should exercise care and restraint in the installation of fixed hardware. It should only be installed in line with best practice and local ethics. All fixed hardware should be visually unobtrusive and made of corrosion resistant materials.
- Climbers should take care to minimise disturbance to native fauna and flora. Many climbing areas are also the habitat of native animals, such as large birds of prey. Extensive 'gardening' of climbs or surrounding areas is inappropriate.
- Climbers must observe best practice toileting. Supplied toilet facilities should be used as a first preference. Where these are not available then at very least climbers should bury their waste in a sufficiently deep (15cm or greater) hole at least 100 metres away from paths or watercourses. In many areas this will be inappropriate and/or impractical and climbers then must be prepared to carry their waste out.
- Climbers must not mark routes; most land managers view it as graffiti. If a route is difficult to locate, rather than reaching for the paint tin, create a better description or consider creating a photo-topo.

### **Land Managers**

- Climbers must respect the rights of land-managers and behave in a manner consistent with best practice low impact recreational user groups.
- Climbers should respect directions and regulations put in place by land managers, if other users (climbing or non-climbing) are in breach of such regulations, climbers should be pro-active in remedying the situation. Don't let the actions of the few combine with the inaction of the many to undermine access for climbers.
- Climbers must not damage or destroy infrastructure (e.g. fences, signs etc) put in place by land managers. Gates should be left as they're found and livestock treated with care and respect.

### **Other Climbers**

- Climbers should be courteous and considerate to other climbers, as a community we need to share the finite resources available.
- Climbers should take appropriate proactive steps to defuse a situation which is unsafe or otherwise inappropriate. Accidents can have serious ramifications for the community as a whole. Often polite suggestions can be an excellent and successful approach.
- Conflicts between individual climbers should not be allowed to develop such that they harm the wider climbing community.
- Climbers must treat other climber's personal property with respect.
- Climbers should treat all forms of climbing with respect. The climbing community must be broad and inclusive, there are many forms of climbing from aiding to bouldering and they are and should be treated as equally valid activities.
- Climbers' motivation and reasons for climbing are personal and varied and should be treated with respect.

### **Non-Climbing Land Users**

- Climbers must respect the right of other land users to share the outdoor space.
- Climbers should be polite and courteous towards other outdoor users and take reasonable steps to ensure fair and equitable access for all users.
- Climbers should take care where there is the potential for their actions to affect other outdoor users, such as when pulling ropes or where there is potential for rock fall.
- Climbers should recognise the legitimacy and rights of other user groups. Climbers have no greater rights than other users of outdoor space.
- Climbers should be considerate of the fact that other users will interpret actions of individual climbers as representative of the broader climbing community.