

# Guideline

SLM/2013/420  
Formerly PUX/952/096  
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## Allocating state land in coastal areas

### Purpose

This document provides guidance on the allocation of land and the environment in coastal areas, including the issue of public access to foreshores. The document is supported by the provisions of the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995* (Coastal Protection and Management Act) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*, and must be considered in any land planning evaluation carried out prior to allocating land in the coastal zone.

### Rationale

Section 16 of the *Land Act 1994* (Land Act) requires that before land is allocated, the Chief Executive must carry out an evaluation to assess the most appropriate tenure of land.

The special and unique characteristic of coastal areas means that a thorough assessment is also critical in supporting land allocation decisions.

It has been a long-held principle that land along the coast should not be allocated to private use, except in very limited circumstances - in order to preserve the public's access to the sea for transport and fishing purposes. As well, in a contemporary sense, many people in the community are desirous of access to foreshores, beaches and coastal lands for pursuits such as active and passive recreation, natural resource management, tourism and environmental protection activities.

However, with the rapid development of Queensland's urban areas, there have been many instances where tenure has been allocated for private use with a coastal boundary. In some instances public access has been restricted or denied as a result of allocating tenure near the coast. This practice is not generally supported by current government policy, such as the [State Coastal Management Plan](#).

As a general rule, it is in the wider public interest to retain land in coastal locations as public land unless there is an overriding need for the land to be allocated for another purpose. Accordingly, greater interest of the public should prevail.

### Guideline

#### Allocation of state-owned coastal land

The allocation of tenure and use over land in coastal areas should proceed upon the presumption that the preservation of the public's right of access should prevail over other interests. In both urban and rural coastal areas, unallocated state land (USL) should not be allocated to high-water mark (HWM)

for private use - specific consideration however may be given to allocating USL to HWM for projects of state significance<sup>1</sup>.

Before making a decision to allocate tenure to land in the coastal zone, a land planning evaluation must be carried out in accordance with section 16 of the Land Act to determine the most appropriate tenure for the land.

Depending on the issues identified for particular coastal land and the views of stakeholders, an allocation recommendation may support:

1. Dedication of USL as an esplanade (road) to provide for access by the general public;
2. Dedication of a community purpose reserve with the appointment of suitable trustees to oversee the management of the land;
3. Dedication of land as a protected area under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Nature Conservation Act);
4. Regulation of land as transferable land under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* (Aboriginal Land Act) or *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* (Torres Strait Islander Land Act) (excluding areas immediately adjacent to the HWM which may be allocated as esplanade, reserve for a community purpose under the Land Act, or dedication of land as a protected area under the Nature Conservation Act).

## Proposed dealings with state land in coastal areas

In urban coastal areas (e.g. Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Townsville and Cairns), there has been extensive allocation of coastal land to HWM for public and private purposes. Tenure has been granted abutting and below HWM for a variety of private uses. While many of these uses, by their very nature, require a coastal location, the effects of granting tenure to private interests in these locations can produce detrimental impacts upon natural processes (e.g. dune formation, littoral drift) and fragmentation of public access to the coast. In non-urban areas, though development pressures are lower, it is important to protect the coastal zone in order to maintain natural processes, biodiversity, special features and public access.

In both urban and non-urban coastal areas, USL should not be allocated to HWM for private use although consideration may be given to the allocation of USL to HWM for a project of state significance. That is, where a project is endorsed by Cabinet, or where a state-sponsored project has a particular requirement for facilities such as port, marine and essential infrastructure and private use is an essential component of a project to provide such facilities. Consideration is also to be given to existing commitments of the state as specified in section 16 of the Land Act.

In addition to satisfying the above criteria, a proponent must be able to demonstrate priority for a grant of tenure in terms of the Land Act.

Careful consideration must therefore be given to applications for tenure and whether they may lead to environmental harm, incremental reduction of public land adjoining the coast and consequent

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<sup>1</sup> State significance means: a project is endorsed by cabinet, or where a state-sponsored project has a particular requirement for facilities such as port, marine and essential infrastructure and private use is an essential component of a project to provide such facilities.

exclusion of the public e.g. privately enclosed developments and building encroachments. The requirements of the State Coastal Management Plan and associated regional coastal management plans (approved under the Coastal Protection and Management Act), must be taken into account. If land below HWM is to be leased it must be tied with adjoining land which is above HWM (refer to guideline – [Land allocation and specific requirements \(SLM/2018/4386 = PUX/901/315\)](#)) or held under the one lease (one lot for land above HWM and one for land below HWM).

## Tenure options for coastal land

An assessment may indicate that an area of coastal land requires ongoing government oversight to ensure that the area is managed appropriately. The state has a variety of tenure, legislative and policy tools to achieve this, including:

1. Reserving the land for a community purpose (in terms of the Land Act) or for other purposes under other Acts such as the Nature Conservation Act or *Forestry Act 1959*);
2. Regulatory controls under legislation such as the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* and the *Planning Act 2016*;
3. Agreements (for example, under the Nature Conservation Act);
4. Statutory covenants (for example, under the Land Act and *Land Title Act 1994*);
5. Management plans (for example, under the Land Act or Nature Conservation Act).

A beach and foreshore area may be dedicated as esplanade or road to preserve and ensure public access. In cases where native title rights and interests may exist, such dedication will not extinguish native title if the dedication occurs in terms of section 24KA of the NTA and native title parties will, along with other members of the community, be able to use the dedicated road to access and use adjoining areas and exercise their native title rights and interests in these areas.

Alternatively, a reserve for a community purpose, such as conservation, scenic and land management purposes, with a local government, a state government agency or suitable other incorporated body as trustee, may be considered.

Native title must be addressed in accordance with the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)* (NTA), following a recommendation as to most appropriate tenure and prior to any allocation decision, such as retention of coastal areas under state ownership e.g. a reserve or national park. Where native title has not been extinguished, it will need to be addressed in accordance with the provisions of the NTA and may include an Indigenous land use agreement providing for exchange of native title (refer to guideline - [Exchange of state land for native title interests \(SLM/2013/361 = PUX/952/091\)](#)).

## Definitions

**Coastal land/ coastal area:** Land in the coastal zone - see s 15, *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*. Also see State Coastal Management Plan.

## Legislation

*Aboriginal Land Act 1991*

*Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*

*Environmental Protection Act 1994*

*Forestry Act 1959*

*Land Act 1994*

*Land Title Act 1994*

*Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*

*Nature Conservation Act 1992*

*Planning Act 2016*

*Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991*

## Related documents

Guideline – [Land allocation and specific requirements \(SLM/2018/4386 = PUX/901/315\)](#)

Guideline - [Exchange of state land for native title interests \(SLM/2013/361 = PUX/952/091\)](#)

[State Coastal Management Plan](#)

## Human Rights

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## Approval

Position	Name	Effective Date
A/Director, Land Services	Roslyn Hooper	11 Sep 2019

## Version history

Version	Date	Comments
1	01/11/2004	Endorsed
1.1	04/07/2005	Conversion Project – New WORD/XML template
2	08/09/2008	Updated to reflect Land Act amendments
2.1	11/02/2009	Amended status of Notification from “NRW only” to “Public access”
2.2	11/02/2011	Updated to DERM
2.3	03/12/2013	Updated to new DNRM template
2.04	22/06/2016	Updated to new DNRM template

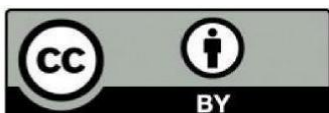
2.05	11/09/2019	Updated for corporate branding only
2.06	14/06/2022	Updated template and department name to Department of Resources
2.07	02/05/2024	Amended to support LOLA No 2 2023 changes

## Further information

- Contact your nearest business centre ([https://www.resources.qld.gov.au/?contact=state\\_land](https://www.resources.qld.gov.au/?contact=state_land)), or
- Refer to <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/state>, or
- Call 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

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