

**Queensland Indigenous
Land and Sea Rangers**

**Queensland Indigenous Land
and Sea Ranger Program**
Guidelines

Prepared by: Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships, Department of Environment Science and Innovation

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The Department of Environment and Science acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. We recognise their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Introduction

The Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program (QILSRP) supports First Nations communities to care for country.

The QILSRP provides grant funding to First Nations organisations to employ Indigenous Land and Sea rangers to deliver a program of on-country activities, documented in negotiated annual work plans. QILSRP also provides training, network opportunities and partnership support for ranger groups.

While no new funding is currently available, these guidelines outline the process through which eligible organisations applied for funding for ranger positions, explain how funding was allocated and provide detail of funding requirements.

What are the objectives of the program?

The QILSRP supports important services in caring for country across the state. Funded ranger groups care for cultural sites and land, waterway, and marine ecosystems and engage their communities in cultural practices on country.

Through providing employment and capacity building opportunities, the program aims to:

- promote the protection of Queensland's biodiversity and cultural heritage, drawing on First Nations peoples' knowledge in land and sea management
- strengthen and support stewardship of land and sea country by First Nations communities
- support continuous learning (both western and traditional) for Indigenous rangers
- increase conservation jobs and conservation economy opportunities for communities where rangers operate.

The work of Indigenous rangers to care for country and protect the environmental and cultural values it holds delivers strong economic and social co-benefits for First Nations communities. QILSRP funded rangers support communities to maintain cultural connections to country, fulfil traditional responsibilities and progress aspirations for its care. Rangers often play a key role in promoting inter-generational knowledge transfer and in highlighting the value of education and employment.

More information on the QILSRP can be found on the [QILSRP webpage](#).

What activities can be undertaken?

Successful applicants can use QILSRP funds to employ Indigenous rangers to undertake a wide range of conservation activities on country. The activities for each group will be negotiated with the successful applicant and will be outlined in annual work plans attached to the funding agreement.

Activities may include weed and feral animal control, cultural site management, fire management, fencing of wetlands, land restoration, wildlife management, conservation and recovery of threatened species, activities to support knowledge transfer between generations, community education and visitor management etc.

It is intended that the priorities and objectives for each ranger group reflect the aspirations of Traditional Owners and focus on the conservation of important cultural and environmental values on country.

Other guiding documents and inputs that will be important to determining each annual work plan include:

- country or other strategic management plans, such as Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) plans, Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs), pest management or fire management plans
- Queensland Government priorities (e.g., for threatened species protection)
- any agreed fee-for-service activities, consistent with program policy.

Ranger groups can operate over a range of tenures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-held land, private land held for conservation purposes, and country owned or managed by government. Funded rangers cannot, however, deliver activities:

- on private or leasehold land where the activities (e.g., weed and pest animal control) are the primary responsibility of the private landholder
- that are primarily for commercial benefit
- that do not have a cultural heritage or conservation benefit.

Who can apply?

When funding is available, organisations that operate in Queensland and meet the following requirements can apply:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander not-for-profit organisations incorporated under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*, *Corporations Act 2001*, *Associations Incorporations Act 1981* or other legislation.
- Incorporated not-for-profit organisations applying at the request of Traditional Owner groups, that can demonstrate that they have the authority of, and will work in partnership with, the Traditional Owners for areas on which it is intended the rangers work.
- Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) community councils or Aboriginal Shire Councils that are applying on behalf of Traditional Owner groups.

To be eligible to apply for funding, organisations must have also not had overdue acquittals or reports in relation to any other grant funding provided by the Department of Environment Science and Innovation (DESI).

Where an eligible organisation is applying as a sponsor or auspice for a Traditional Owner group, evidence of an agreement between the applicant organisation and a body representing the Traditional Owners will be required. This will be sought from applicant organisations who are short-listed for Stage 2 (see below) and will need to address matters including governance arrangements and extent of proposed establishment support.

What funding is provided?

The number of ranger positions offered to each successful applicant can vary, based on considerations including:

- the number and strength of other successful applications
- the management needs for country
- the potential to deliver cultural and conservation outcomes.

Successful applicants receive an overall amount equivalent to approximately \$110,000 for each ranger position. This is to cover all costs associated with managing a ranger team. A detailed budget is negotiated with the successful applicant, to support the agreed work plan.

Funded items

For successful applicants, key items funded through the budget include:

- Wages and on-costs for Indigenous rangers based on the following arrangements:
 - Wages will be funded at an amount equivalent to relevant salary schedules under the Queensland Government 'Conservation Parks and Wildlife Employees Award – State Government' and usually includes Ranger Coordinator, Senior Ranger and Ranger position levels
 - Organisations may recruit and train a team of rangers that can effectively deliver on all aspects of the workplan including on-ground practical works, engaging community and young people in caring for country and grant reporting
 - Organisations may appoint rangers on a full-time, part-time or other flexible working arrangement, providing total appointments equal the funded 'full time equivalent' positions
 - Alternative roles, such as a Project Manager or Project Officer, may be funded for a limited period during the initial establishment stage of the ranger team, subject to agreement
- operational costs – including vehicle operating costs, minor equipment, uniforms, personal protective equipment, office overheads and travel
- training – based on a documented training plan to meet core competencies for rangers to deliver the work-plan

- administration and audit of up to 15% of the wages and operating budget – for contract management, reporting, audit, and other administration
- assets – limited funding for priority assets may be available, to the extent that available program funding permits. Asset funding will need to have a clear link to the workplan and may need to be staggered across the initial years. Funded organisations will be encouraged to also pursue other funding or partnerships with other entities to support significant asset purchases
- planning – the development or update of country management plans that can inform future work plans for the ranger team may be funded in the initial years.

Period of funding

An initial term of funding of up to 2 years is offered. Further funding is dependent upon satisfactory performance of the requirements of the grant agreement including recruitment and retention of rangers, delivery of agreed workplan activities, management of expenditure in line with the agreed budget and reporting requirements.

What expenses are not funded?

Funding is not available for:

- international travel, unless this has been agreed with DES
- purchase or transfer costs of land or buildings, including housing and land rates
- major construction and infrastructure work
- expenses that are the responsibility of other organisations such as local, state and territory government agencies.

What is the application process?

The application process for the last QILSRP funding round (in 2023) involved two stages:

1. an initial Stage 1 application (about current organisational arrangements, experience and management of country and priorities for future management activities)
2. for those applicants successful in being short-listed by the assessment panel, a Stage 2 application (evidence and further explanation of the proposal for a ranger team).

Organisations interested in submitting a Stage 1 application for ranger funding were advised to undertake the following steps:

- Read these guidelines carefully to determine eligibility.
- Consider their organisation's readiness for managing an Indigenous ranger team. Establishing a new ranger group requires significant organisational responsibility, planning and work including community consultation, governance, operational planning, establishment of workplace health and safety procedures, administration (insurance, communications, permissions), human resource management (employment contracts, performance management and policy, payroll), asset management, financial management and reporting, and partner relations. A 'ranger ready' brochure available at [Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger program](#) provides more information about key considerations for organisations who wish to establish new ranger groups.
- Talk with established partners and with other organisations that can provide financial or in-kind support. Ranger groups that work alongside a range of people and/or organisations can often have broader benefits, and this can strengthen an application.

How are applications assessed?

In 2023 all applications from eligible organisations were assessed by a panel using the assessment criteria outlined below. The panel included members with skills and knowledge relevant to the management of land and sea grant projects. The panel consisted of a majority of First Nations members.

QILSRP staff at DESI who were involved in providing information to applicants about the funding opportunity were not involved in recommending applications.

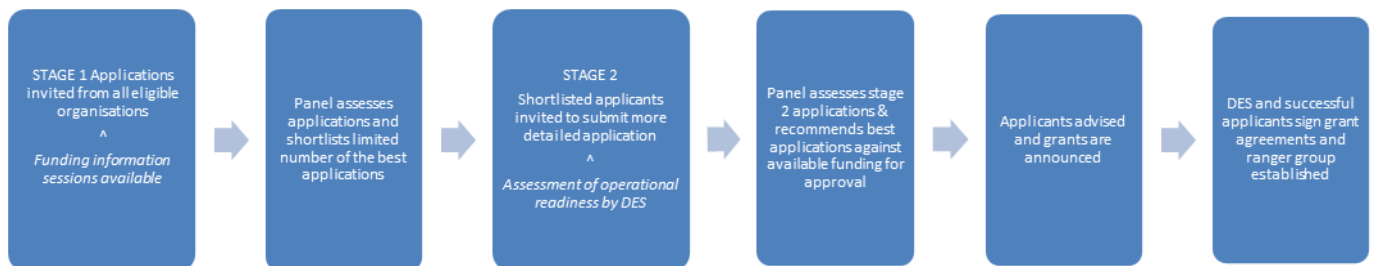
All application material provided to the panel was treated confidentially, although the panel or QILSRP staff contacted partners and funding referees where these were nominated by applicants.

The DES Director-General was the final decision maker for funding, informed by recommendations provided by the assessment panel.

All applicants were advised in writing of the outcome of their application. Applicants could email the QILSRP office (landandsea@des.qld.gov.au) to seek feedback on their application.

Ranger positions may also be allocated outside of the funding cycle (out-of-session) to be responsive to emerging environmental, cultural and First Nations partnership priorities, and in compliance with the department's grants administration requirements.

Figure 1: Flow chart of assessment process



What are the assessment criteria?

Stage 1

In 2023, all correctly submitted funding applications from eligible applicants were assessed against the following criteria.

1. **Further empowers First Nations communities in looking after and protecting country:**
 - a. Clear arrangements are in place for engaging Traditional Owners in making decisions about caring for country priorities.
 - b. Priorities for managing the environmental and cultural values on country are well understood and have been agreed with relevant Traditional Owners and community members.
2. **Represents value for money:**
 - a. The establishment, or extension, of a ranger team would address a clear gap in current arrangements and resources for the management of country and would contribute to additional benefits for country.

Note: This criterion will have double weighting.
3. **Strong partnerships and community benefit:**
 - a. Partnerships to support country management are established and there is potential for strong local community benefit including for women and young people, from the establishment of a ranger team.

4. Sound organisational capacity:

- a. The applicant has a demonstrated ability to deliver and acquit government grants such as conservation and/or cultural heritage grant projects.
- b. The applicant has a sound financial position and established governance and administration arrangements (including for membership involvement, financial, workforce, and data management systems).
- c. There is sufficient infrastructure and local workforce available to support the establishment or extension of the proposed ranger team.

Stage 2

In 2023 Stage 2 applications, from short-listed applicants, were assessed against the following additional criteria:

1. Demonstrates access to country:

- a. There is evidence of support from the recognised Traditional Owners and from key landholders for the proposed ranger group to access country.
- b. The availability of essential infrastructure (access, storage, workplace, worker accommodation) to support ranger team operations is confirmed.

2. Represents value for money:

- a. The investment in a ranger team has the potential to deliver strong and additional conservation outcomes for biodiversity and cultural heritage on country.

Note: this criterion will have double weighting.

- b. There is evidence of ongoing financial or in-kind contributions (such as infrastructure, management oversight, equipment) from the applicant and partners that can contribute to a sustainable ranger program.

3. Governance and sound establishment plans:

- a. Established governance is in place to oversee and guide the management of the proposed ranger team. The applicant can demonstrate arrangements to encourage a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- b. The proposal for establishing or extending the ranger team over the first one to two years demonstrates a sound implementation approach.

Where relevant, an applicant's past performance under the QILSRP or other grant program managed by the department was taken into consideration.

What are the responsibilities of successful applicants?

Successful applicants are required to enter into a grant agreement with DESI. An example template of the current grant agreement is available by contacting the grants officer on email landandsea@des.qld.gov.au or telephone (07) 3330 5553.

Successful applicants work closely with DESI in negotiating a budget and work plan (including establishment activities) for the period of the grant. Relevant community stakeholders may be consulted in the negotiation of the workplan, to ensure that the workplan is tailored to meet the needs of country and the local community.

Successful applicants are encouraged to build in an appropriate establishment phase for a new ranger group. This can include a focus on developing or refining management plans for country, establishing key partnership agreements, assessing staffing, and training needs, and establishing operational arrangements; before employment of appointing the full ranger team.

To successfully administer this grant deed, the successful applicant is expected to:

- hold appropriate public liability (for at least \$20 million) and work cover insurance

- ensure that relevant industrial and Workplace Health and Safety legislative requirements are met and that training, administrative and other supports are in place for employed rangers
- report satisfactorily on progress against budget, wages payments and work plan every six months and communicate with QILSRP contact officers about ranger team achievements and challenges
- provide an annual audited financial statement which includes the organisation's overall financial position and separately identified income and expenditure for the ranger program
- not commence any work until a grant agreement has been signed
- comply with all other aspects of the grant agreement.

What support does QILSRP provide?

Officers from QILSRP are available to assist funded organisations to establish and deliver a successful Indigenous Land and Sea ranger program. A nominated Senior Program Officer (SPO) is available for each funded organisation and will usually meet with each ranger group a few times each year and communicate regularly. SPOs can support ranger groups in a range of ways including assisting with:

- identifying options for the development of management plans that guide the work of the Indigenous ranger team
- developing the annual work plan and budget (included in the grant agreement), assessing training needs, and development of a training plan
- providing development opportunities such as leadership events with other ranger groups
- accessing training and identifying any other funds (e.g. grants and subsidies) that may be available for ranger training
- accessing other potential funding sources for the group including to support the establishment of infrastructure
- accessing 'technical' advice from Queensland Government agencies
- advice on limiting contract management risks
- discussions with other agencies and partners about management priorities for country
- direct mentoring where appropriate
- information sharing between ranger groups through exchanges and ranger meetings and events
- general advice or referral to other partners about ranger development and operations.

Additional support

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring equal access to opportunities, including economic opportunities, for women and girls (The Queensland Women's Strategy 2022-27). The QILSRP supports the participation of First Nations women in ranger employment, including through the Queensland Indigenous Women Rangers Network, delivered in partnership with Yuku-Baja-Muliku Landowner and Reserves. The Network meets for twice-yearly workshops to support and encourage women rangers.

The QILSRP also offers the support of a dedicated youth engagement officer to assist ranger groups to undertake activities aimed at engaging young people in caring for country activities.

Further information

If you have any questions about the ranger program, please contact the grants officer on email LandandSea@des.qld.gov.au or phone (07) 3330 5553.