

**KOONADAN HISTORIC SITE  
PLAN OF MANAGEMENT**

**NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service**

**September 1996**

**Acknowledgements:** This plan of management was prepared by the Field Services Division of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in conjunction with staff of Griffith District. Much of the information on cultural resources and values comes from an internal report prepared by Howard Creamer of the Service.

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## **FOREWORD**

Koonadan Historic Site is located 9km northwest of Leeton in the Riverina area of southern NSW. It is of high cultural value to the Aboriginal community and has a complex of pre-European contact and more recent Aboriginal sites, notably burials.

The area will be managed to protect its cultural significance and provide opportunities for educational and appropriate recreational use. Interpretive signs and picnicking facilities have been provided.

Progressive planting of native tree and shrub species is being carried out to establish a vegetation cover over the site similar to that which existed when the area was used for hunting and food gathering by Aboriginal people.

The local Aboriginal community will be actively encouraged to become involved in management of the area.

This plan of management establishes the scheme of operations for Koonadan Historic Site. In accordance with the provisions of Sections 75 and 76 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, this plan of management is hereby adopted

PAM ALLAN

**Minister for  
the Environment**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, requires that a plan of management be prepared for each historic site. A plan of management is a legal document that outlines how the area will be managed in the years ahead.

The procedures for the adoption of a plan of management are specified in the Act and involve five stages:

- \* The Director-General gives notice that a plan of management has been prepared.
- \* The plan is placed on public exhibition for at least one month and any person may comment on it.
- \* The plan and copies of all representations are referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council for consideration.
- \* The Director-General submits the plan, together with the recommendations of the Advisory Council, to the Minister.
- \* The Minister may adopt the plan, with or without alteration, after considering the recommendations of the Advisory Council or may refer the plan back to the Director-General and Council for further consideration.

Once a plan has been adopted by the Minister, no operations may be undertaken within the historic site except in accordance with the plan.

A draft plan of management for Koonadan Historic Site was placed on public exhibition for three months from the 21st October 1994 to the 30th January 1995. Three representations were received during the period of public exhibition which raised six issues.

All comments received were referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council for its consideration and advice. The comments and suggestions of the Advisory Council were, in turn, considered by the Minister before adopting this plan.

Once a plan has been adopted by the Minister no operations may be undertaken within Koonadan Historic Site except in accordance with the plan.

The planning process leading to the development of this plan has involved the collection and use of information, which for reasons of document size, has not been included in the plan. For additional information or enquires on any aspect of the plan, contact the Service's Griffith District Office at 105 Banna Avenue, Griffith or by phone on (069) 62 7755.

## **2. MANAGEMENT CONTEXT**

### **2.1 HISTORIC SITES IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

The primary responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife Service is the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of New South Wales pursuant to the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, together with the provision of opportunities and facilities for appropriate use of areas for which it is responsible.

Historic sites are areas reserved under the Act as the sites of buildings, objects, monuments or events of national significance, or areas in which relics or Aboriginal places of special significance are situated. Such areas are vested in the Director-General of National Parks and Wildlife and are managed by the Service.

### **2.2 ICOMOS, THE BURRA CHARTER AND CONSERVATION PLANNING FOR SITES OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

ICOMOS or the International Council on Monuments and Sites is an international organisation concerned with the conservation and study of places of cultural heritage significance. ICOMOS is linked to UNESCO and has national committees established in some 60 countries.

The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance, otherwise known as the Burra Charter, was adopted in 1977 by the Australian National Committee of ICOMOS. Emphasis is placed in the Burra Charter on the processes of conserving cultural heritage and to this end establishes a procedure which involves:

- assessing the cultural significance of a place;
- developing conservation policies and a strategy appropriate to the place; and
- carrying out the conservation strategy.

The Burra Charter sets out the principles of cultural heritage conservation and defines the processes involved and options available in protecting and managing the cultural heritage. Conservation practices outlined in the Burra Charter are firmly based on assessment and protection of the cultural significance of the site. Conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric and involves the least possible physical intervention. The conservation of a site also requires maintenance of the visual setting.

Much of the information on cultural resources and values in this plan of management is based on an internal report prepared by Howard Creamer of the Service.

### **2.3 KOONADAN HISTORIC SITE**

#### **2.3.1 Location and Regional Setting**

Koonadan Historic Site is located approximately 9km northwest of Leeton in the Riverina area of southern NSW (see inset; map centre pages). It consists of mainly level cleared land adjacent to Tuckerbil Swamp, with part of a low dune near the northern boundary. The Yanco-Griffith railway line and an unsealed road run adjacent to the eastern boundary. The surrounding land is low flat flood plain country dissected by drainage canals. It is used for grazing and cropping.

The Riverina is an important agricultural area with extensive cropping under irrigation and attracts a considerable number of tourists. The towns of Leeton, Griffith and Narrandera and a number of smaller settlements are close to the historic site.

Prior to its purchase by the Service and subsequent reservation in 1988 as a historic site, Koonadan was, in 1983, declared an Aboriginal place under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. This declaration was revoked by the reservation of the land as a historic site.

### **2.3.2 Importance of Koonadan Historic Site**

The major importance of Koonadan Historic Site lies in its value to the Aboriginal community. This value is based upon the following:

- Aboriginal skeletal material associated with two skeletons has been found in the dune. The local Aboriginal community believes that Koonadan is an ancestral Wiradjuri burial ground. The area therefore has very high significance to the community because of the deep respect of Aboriginal people for their dead.
- Koonadan is adjacent to Tuckerbil Swamp. The swamp and surrounding land was a traditional hunting/fishing area for the Wiradjuri people and was linked to a corroboree site at Yanco. Participants would go there to gather food after a corroboree. The swamp was originally extensive with abundant wildlife, in an area where water is a scarce resource. It was an important source of food for local Aboriginal families during the 1930's depression and was used until recent years by them when the swamp was drained and the area cleared.
- Local folklore maintains that a bora ground, used for ceremonial purposes, was located between the Koonadan dune and Tuckerbil Swamp.

The historic site has both traditional and contemporary significance with continuity of Aboriginal association from pre-European times to the present day. The site was instrumental in the cultural re-awakening of the local Aboriginal people following their return from missions earlier this century and has been the focus of heightened awareness of cultural tradition and unity within the community in the past decade.

The historic site has considerable educational value as it contains a number of significant Aboriginal sites which can be interpreted to explain the traditional and spiritual life of the Aboriginal people. Its location close to a number of towns in a popular tourist area and its easy access add to its educational value.

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF MANAGEMENT**

#### **3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVES FOR HISTORIC SITES**

The following general objectives relate to the management of historic sites in New South Wales:

- \* the conservation of features and areas of cultural significance;
- \* the provision of opportunities for public access and the interpretation of the site as an educational resource; and
- \* the provision of opportunities for historic and archaeological research.

Opportunities for use of an historic site will only be considered where they do not detract from its cultural significance.

#### **3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR KOONADAN HISTORIC SITE**

In addition to the above general objectives, the management of Koonadan Historic Site will be subject to the following specific objectives:

- \* protection of the value of the area to the Aboriginal community;
- \* involvement of the Aboriginal community in management of the area;
- \* encouragement of understanding in the general community of the value of the area and of Aboriginal culture;
- \* provision of recreation opportunities for the local community which are appropriate to Wiradjuri Aboriginal values and traditions; and
- \* improvement of the visual and natural values of the area.

#### **3.3 OVERALL STRATEGY**

Protection and enhancement of the site's cultural value will be the primary management concern. Close involvement of the Aboriginal community will be vital in ensuring that management reflects their values and aspirations for the area. Provision of basic visitor facilities and interpretation of the site to the general community will permit appropriate use and assist appreciation and protection of the site.

## 4. POLICIES AND FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGEMENT

This chapter contains the policies and framework for the management of Koonadan Historic Site together with relevant background information. Policies are summarised under the following section headings:

- 4.1 Cultural Heritage.
- 4.2 Natural Resources.
- 4.3 Use of the Area.

The policies established in this plan of management will provide the framework for management consistent with anticipated resources available to the Service and with anticipated community trends, for the next five to ten years.

The actions identified are those to which priority will be given in the foreseeable future. Other management actions may be developed over the life span of this plan consistent with the policies set out in the plan.

### 4.1 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Koonadan area is part of the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri nation. Wiradjuri lands primarily embraced the catchments of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers and the upper catchment of the Macquarie River.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century a significant proportion of the Wiradjuri people were forcibly moved to Aboriginal reserves and missions throughout the Wiradjuri area such as at Warangesda and Euabalong and elsewhere in NSW such as at Kinchela. The progressive closure of these missions and reserves from the mid 1920's to the mid 1950's saw the return of some Wiradjuri people to the Koonadan area. During this time the Koonadan and adjacent Tuckerbil areas were used by these people as an important supplement to their food resources until drainage and clearing of the area began in the late 1950s. The word Koonadan means a 'dish' in the local language.

The historic site is within the Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council area of the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council.

In conjunction with the Tuckerbil Swamp area the historic site contains a range of significant Aboriginal sites. These are:

- **burials** in the dune;
- **a thin scatter of stone tools with pieces of grinding dishes** over the whole area;
- **ground ovens** located mainly on the historic site but also on adjacent land;
- **resource places** - the swamp and adjacent land was an important hunting, fishing and food gathering area prior to clearing and draining;
- **bora (ceremonial) grounds** are reported to have been located between the dune and the swamp but have been obliterated by ploughing; and
- many **scarred trees** are reported to have existed until the 1950s but have since been cleared.

Because of the loss of sites caused by agricultural use and quarrying, the area has little scientific value. Its cultural significance is high, however, as explained in section 2.2.2. of this plan.

Burials are commonly found in sand hills in the Riverina and archaeological evidence suggests that sandhills were preferred burial sites because of the soft nature of the soil. The Koonadan dune is one of only a few large dunes in the region and was associated with a significant source of food. Most of the dune lies on adjacent land to the north of the historic site and it is probable that this area also contains burials.

There is some evidence that suggests that the sand hill was a large pre-historical burial site. This is based primarily on a report in the Town and Country Journal dated 31st August 1872. The evidence is inconclusive and there is no recorded traditional knowledge of a burial ground at Koonadan but this in no way lessens the significance of Koonadan to the Wiradjuri people of today.

Aboriginal remains were first known to have been found in the area in about 1939. It was the uncovering by quarrying of the remains of two skeletons in 1982-1983 and subsequent uncovering of remains by erosion that precipitated strong Aboriginal interest in the area.

The quarried area was rehabilitated during the period 1987-1990 by covering with soil and the planting of grasses and trees to provide long term stability and protection to the burials. Trees and shrubs have also been planted in clumps over the whole historic site in a pattern similar to that which would have occurred naturally. This work was carried out in conjunction with the Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Soil Conservation Service with the assistance of a National Estate Grant.

The primary purpose of revegetation is to re-create a cultural setting; that is an environment similar to that which existed when the area was used by Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal sites were created. Progressive revegetation will also re-create a more natural environment and result in the site having some nature conservation values.

## **Policies**

- \* All Aboriginal sites will be protected from disturbance.
- \* The dune will be protected from erosion.
- \* A vegetation cover similar to that which existed prior to clearing will be established over the historic site.
- \* Only species which are endemic to the area will be used for revegetation of the site and as far as possible trees and shrubs used in planting will be propagated from locally occurring stock.
- \* All works and ground disturbance will be preceded by a survey for Aboriginal sites.
- \* Anthropological and/or historical research into past Aboriginal use of the area will be encouraged and supported.
- \* Protection of the cultural value of adjacent land will be encouraged.

## Actions

- \* The historic site will be progressively revegetated with native tree and shrub species.

## 4.2 NATURAL RESOURCES

Koonadan Historic Site lies on the eastern edge of the Southern Riverine Plain, 15 km north of the Murrumbidgee River. The plain is bounded by the Narrandera Range 10km further to the north east.

The historic site comprises a nearly level area of red earth soil with a low sand dune rising near the northern boundary. The western part dips gently towards the adjacent Tuckerbil Swamp and has heavy clay soil. The complex of swamps and lagoons was part of a former river channel and was a semi-permanent wetland prior to being drained.

The general area was completely cleared over the past 40 years and now has little habitat value. Prior to clearing, the dominant vegetation is likely to have consisted of black box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*) adjacent to the swamp with belah (*Casuarina cristata*), saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) and boree (*Acacia pendula*) woodland on the higher areas.

In addition to the rehabilitation described in section 4.1, fencing and rabbit control have been carried out on the site. Protection from fire and rabbit grazing are essential for establishment of trees and shrubs.

The Noxious Weeds Act 1993 took effect from 1 July 1993. The Act places an obligation upon public authorities to control noxious weeds on land that it occupies to the extent necessary to prevent such weeds spreading to adjoining lands.

## Policies

- \* Native plants and animals on the historic site will be protected.
- \* Introduced plants and animals which are agricultural pests or threaten the establishment of a native vegetation cover will be controlled.
- \* Where possible pest control will be carried out in cooperation with Narrandera Rural Lands Protection Board and neighbouring property owners
- \* Grazing of stock will not be permitted.
- \* All wildfire will be extinguished as quickly as possible.
- \* Fire suppression will avoid use of heavy equipment on the dune.
- \* Fire breaks may be constructed along the boundaries if necessary, where they can be constructed without disturbing the burial dune and Aboriginal relics and values.

## Actions

- \* Rabbits will continue to be controlled with the aim of eradicating them from the historic site.
- \* A fire management plan will be prepared for the area detailing fire management objectives, programs, cooperative arrangements and resource and neighbouring lands protection considerations.

### **4.3 USE OF THE AREA**

It is an important aspect of the management of the historic site to ensure that its use, whether by the general public, special interest groups, Service managers or other authorities, is appropriate; that is, in conformity with the Act and the management objectives and management strategy of this plan of management.

The major categories of use that can be appropriate, to varying degrees, on Service areas are:

- education and promotion of the area, the Service and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of NSW;
- certain types of recreation;
- research; and
- management operations by the Service and other authorities with statutory responsibilities in the area.

The extent to which these categories of use are appropriate to Koonadan Historic Site is indicated below.

#### **4.3.1 Promotion of the Historic Site**

The major value of Koonadan Historic Site is its cultural significance to the local Aboriginal community. This will be the primary theme of promotion of the area and will determine which uses are appropriate.

Because of the lack of surface features which would make the value and purpose of the area apparent, interpretation is essential to assist visitors to understand the site. It will also be of major importance in encouraging appropriate visitor behaviour.

The site is suitable for providing an increased understanding of Aboriginal culture generally in the community. Local Aboriginal people also wish to use the site for the education of their children in traditional Aboriginal culture.

Interpretive signs, including art work by local Aborigines, have been placed in a picnic shelter on the site.

#### **Policies**

- \* Koonadan Historic Site will be promoted as a place of Aboriginal cultural significance.

- \* The inter-related nature of the Aboriginal sites will be emphasised in interpretation and they will be placed in both pre-European contact and post-mission settings.
- \* Traditional and contemporary use and value of the area will be interpreted.
- \* Interpretation programs will include facilities and information for:
  - the disabled; and
  - for people from a cultural background other than Australian.
- \* The local Aboriginal community will be encouraged to participate in, or undertake, interpretation programs including talks, demonstrations and guided walks.
- \* Use of the area by school and community groups for educational purposes will be encouraged.

### **Actions**

- \* Interpretive/promotional material including leaflets will be prepared and distributed to schools, tourist information centres and other appropriate locations.

### **4.3.2 Recreation Opportunities**

While the major uses of Koonadan Historic Site will be cultural and educative, it will also provide for some recreation use consistent with protection of its cultural value.

At present the area has little recreation value but progressive revegetation and tree growth will make it attractive for picnicking and walking. A picnic shelter, drinking water tank, barbecues and a car park have been constructed near the entrance. Public vehicles are not permitted within the site to prevent damage to the dune and vegetation.

### **Policies**

- \* Opportunities will be provided for picnicking and walking consistent with protection of the cultural values of the historic site.
- \* Facilities will be concentrated adjacent to the entrance to the site.
- \* Facilities will be low key and designed and landscaped to minimise their visual intrusion.
- \* Public vehicle use on the site will not be permitted apart from access to the carpark.
- \* Visitors will be discouraged from walking on the sand dune because of its particular value as a burial ground.
- \* Lighting of fires by the public will be permitted only in designated fireplaces.

### **Actions**

- \* Public use and its impact on the site will be monitored.

### 4.3.3 Management Operations

The historic site is managed by the Griffith District of the Service. There are no management facilities on site.

Rehabilitation, tree planting and interpretation works have been carried out in conjunction with the local Aboriginal community and they will continue to be closely involved in all aspects of management. Management of the site under lease arrangement to the Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council, or to another Aboriginal organisation who a majority of the members of the Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council agree is appropriate, will be considered if requested by the Land Council.

In accordance with the Council of Australian Governments **National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders** (1992), the terms of such a lease may provide that the Service contract day to day management of the historic site to the Aboriginal community and contribute resources to the Land Council to ensure that it can effectively undertake the management of the site.

### Policy

- \* The Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council will be consulted and, as far as possible, actively involved in all aspects of management of the area.
- \* Leasing of the historic site by the Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council or another Aboriginal organisation will be considered if formally requested by the Council, provided that:
  - general public access is not restricted except when appropriate for ceremonial or other authorised purposes;
  - management and use conform with this plan of management and Service policy; and
  - the Council has demonstrated that it has adequate resources, expertise and commitment to satisfactorily manage the area.

## 5. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This plan of management is part of a system of management developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The system includes the National Parks and Wildlife Act, management policies, established conservation and recreation philosophies, and strategic planning at corporate, regional and district levels.

The implementation of this plan will be undertaken within the annual programmes of the Service's Griffith District. Priorities, determined in the context of district and regional strategic planning, will be subject to the availability of necessary staff and funds and to any special requirements of the Director-General or Minister.

District programmes are subject to ongoing review, within which, works and other activities carried out at Koonadan Historic Site are evaluated in relation to the objectives laid out in this plan.

The environmental impact of all development proposals will continue to be assessed at all stages of their development and any necessary investigations undertaken in accordance with established environmental assessment procedures.

Section 81 of the Act requires that this plan shall be carried out and given affect to, and that no operations shall be undertaken in relation to the historic site unless they are in accordance with the plan. However, if after adequate investigation, operations not included in the plan are found to be justified, this plan may be amended in accordance with section 76(6) of the Act.

As a guide to the implementation of this plan, relative priorities for identified activities are summarised below:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Plan ref</b>
Leasing of the historic site by the Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council or other Aboriginal organisation.	High	4.3.3
Preparation and distribution of leaflets	High	4.3.1
. Progressive tree and shrub planting	High	4.1
. Rabbit control	High	4.2
. Weed control	High	4.2
. Preparation of fire management plan	Medium	4.2
. Monitoring of public use	Low	4.3.2