

# Lake Gairdner National Park

Management Plan 2019



Government of South Australia  
Department for Environment  
and Water



# Minister's foreword



Lake Gairdner National Park is one of South Australia's most unique landscapes. The park protects the important Aboriginal cultural sites and stories,

stunning scenery, and special natural values of one of South Australia's largest salt lake systems.

The remote, vast expanse of Lake Gairdner, Lake Everard and Lake Harris are nestled in the striking red earth of the Gawler Ranges, creating a truly spectacular experience for visitors to the region.

This plan explains how the park's natural and cultural values will be conserved, whilst simultaneously allowing people to experience this remarkable landscape.

This management plan has been developed by the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board – a partnership between the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation and the South Australian Government. It sets out long term management strategies for Lake Gairdner National Park and ensures that the culture and aspirations of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people is communicated.

I wish to thank all those people who contributed to the plan's development. I commend the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board in overseeing the development of this plan and look forward to the continuation of the Government's partnership with Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people.

I now formally adopt the Lake Gairdner National Park Management Plan under section 38 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*.

**David Speirs MP**  
**Minister for Environment and Water**

## Cultural sensitivity warning

Aboriginal people are warned that this publication may contain culturally sensitive material.





# Developing this plan

In 2011, the Federal Court of Australia formally recognised a group of foundational families made up of some, but not all, of the Barngala, Kokatha and Wirangu people as the native title holders over land encompassing Lake Gairdner National Park. This prompted the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation and the South Australian Government to enter into a co-management agreement for the park, forming the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board.

One of the Board's initial priorities was to review the park management plan which had been in place since 2004. The Board concluded that it was necessary to develop a new management plan so that up to date strategies and new co-management arrangements could be properly communicated.

This plan has been developed by the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board. It draws on numerous comments, suggestions and feedback received during discussions with Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families, volunteers, park neighbours, stakeholders, scientific specialists and interested members of the public.

This plan is not intended to provide strategies to address all issues confronting the park or specify all strategies that will be undertaken. Rather, it seeks to provide an overview of management arrangements and outline key priorities for long term management. This approach ensures that the plan is flexible and able to guide a range of future management challenges.

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# Directions for management

Lake Gairdner (pronounced Gard-ner) National Park was proclaimed in 1991 to protect its important Aboriginal cultural sites and stories, stunning scenery and unique natural values. The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation and the South Australian Government manage the park cooperatively through the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board. This Board is comprised of Gawler Ranges Aboriginal family members and Government representatives. This co-operative approach is intended to help realise the aspirations of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families for their Country. It will bring together traditional knowledge of the land and contemporary conservation and land management practices.

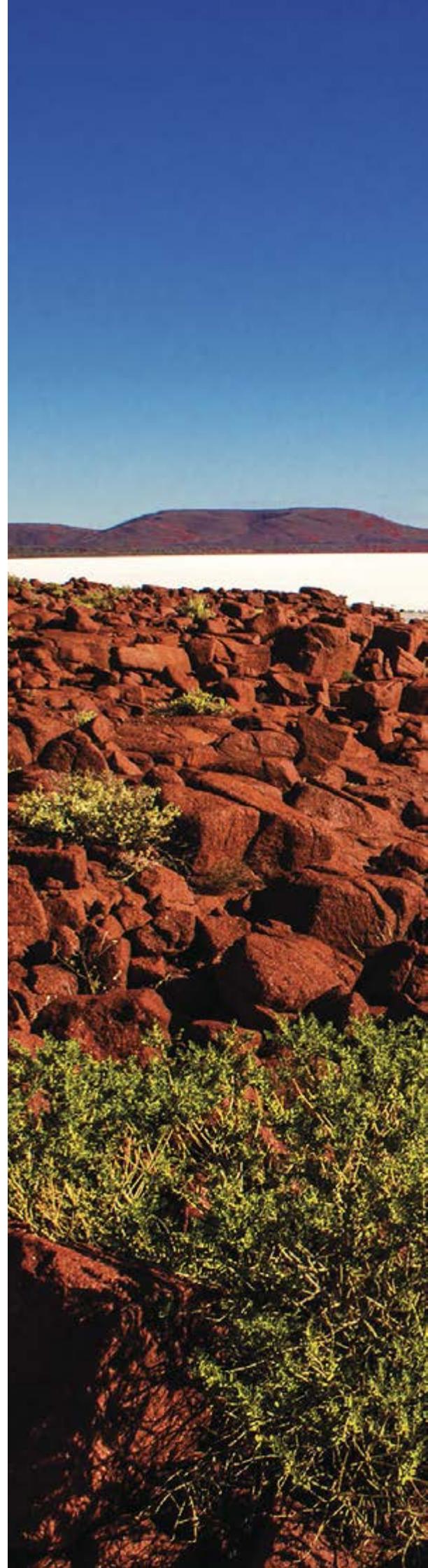
***The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal society, which consists of the those foundation families who have always lived in the region for thousands of generations, live by the cultural values that were gifted to them by their intimate reciprocal, respectful relationship with all animal and plant species that exist within the ecosystem of this spectacular environment. In particular, the waterways (such as rock-holes and natural springs) found throughout the parks are the source of all life and thus they are the foundations of the spiritual belief systems of Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families. The three core cultural values of respect, reciprocity and relationship are principles of life that inform the worldview of the families of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families. These values are now being used in contemporary times to build positive and harmonious relationships with all stakeholders who operate within this space.***

Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation, 2018.

Lake Gairdner National Park is constituted under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*. As a result, it is highly protected and is managed for conservation as well as appropriate use and enjoyment. Proclamation was made subject to section 43 of the Act. This enables approved resource exploration and development to occur within the park. Mineral exploration and production activities are managed through the *Mining Act 1971*. Petroleum exploration and production activities are managed under the *Petroleum and Geothermal Act 2000*. The Board will work in collaboration with the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation (GRAC), the SA Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board, park neighbours and stakeholders to determine priorities and coordinate the delivery of the strategies that are outlined in this plan.

Once adopted, the Lake Gairdner National Park Management Plan will guide management of the park, focusing on adopting a collaborative approach, looking after the land, and enhancing opportunities for people to understand and appreciate the park's significance.

The plan will remain subject to the native title rights and interests that continue to exist in relation to the land, and will be implemented in accordance with the relevant provisions of the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*.







## Park significance and purpose

Lake Gairdner National Park (553,713 ha) is located on the far northern Eyre Peninsula in the foothills of the Gawler Ranges, approximately 550 km north-west of Adelaide (Figure 1). It was proclaimed to protect the unique landscape, plants, animals and significant Aboriginal cultural heritage in and around one of South Australia's largest salt lake systems; comprising Lake Gairdner, Lake Everard and Lake Harris.

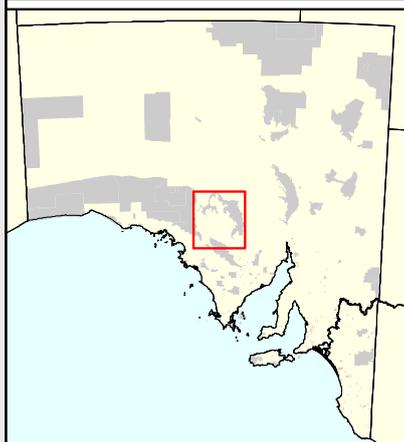
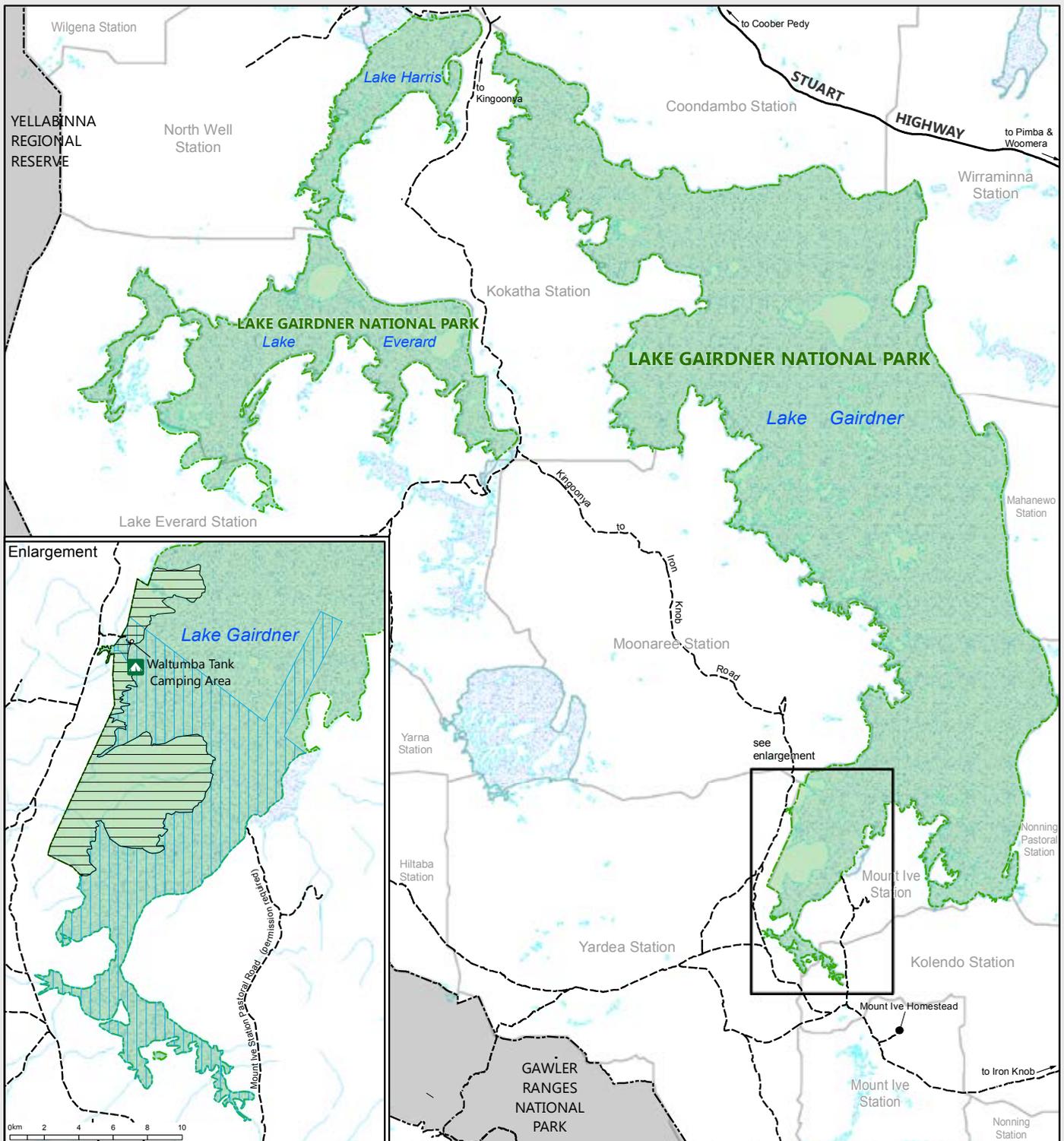
The spectacular natural features and important plants and animals found within the park are considered to be of national significance. Whilst the lake beds themselves do not support vegetation, 226 islands are scattered throughout the lake system, supporting a diverse range of vegetation associations, rare or threatened plant species, endemic invertebrates and habitat for a number of rare or threatened birds and reptiles.

The park protects many ancient sites, objects and places of great cultural significance to the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families.

***The park and its surrounding Country are fundamental to the ongoing cultural beliefs and value systems of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families. The values and beliefs practiced by the Aboriginal families of the region come from their intimate cultural knowledge and relationships with the plants and animals found within the eco-system of the park.***

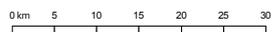
Elliot McNamara, Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation, 2018

While quite remote, people are attracted to the park to see the stunning landscape of Lake Gairdner. It is a popular location for photographers and cinematographers, appearing in numerous advertisements, television commercials, and films. The dry salt crust of Lake Gairdner's bed is also used for motor sport speed trials, and is now established as one of the world's premier sites for land speed trials.



**Figure 1**

Lake Gairdner National Park



**LEGEND**

-  Lake Gairdner National Park
-  Visitor Use Zone
-  Traditional Use Zone
-  Other Park Boundary
-  Sealed Road
-  Pastoral and Public Roads
-  Pastoral Station Boundary
-  Non-Perennial Waterbody



Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board 2018

## What are we looking after?

Lake Gairdner National Park protects:

- A cultural landscape with registered sites, objects, and stories that have been passed down through generations and are of profound cultural, spiritual, and archaeological significance to the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people.
- Opportunities to pass on knowledge of the land and its resources such as bush medicine.
- A spectacular outback setting for sightseeing, photography and camping.
- 226 islands that support remarkably diverse plant associations of which modern science knows very little, providing research opportunities and potential for discovering new species.
- Species of invertebrates such as spiders and a number of beetles which live on the salt crust of the lake. Many of these species were first found at Lake Gairdner and are thought to occur nowhere else.
- Geologically significant features including lunettes (crescent shaped dunes), and lithified sediments that may contain fossils of microbial mats (oldest known fossil forms of life on earth).
- The third largest salt lake in Australia.
- Ten plants that are listed as rare or threatened under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*, including wild violet (*Swainsonia microcalyx*), needle-leaf honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca armillaris ssp akineta*), and Ooldea guinea flower (*Hibbertia crispula*). The Ooldea guinea flower is also listed as nationally vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- Two bird species that are listed as rare or threatened under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* - Major Mitchell's cockatoo (*Lophochroa leadbeateri*), which listed as vulnerable, and the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) which is listed as rare.
- A number of plants that are found nowhere else, including the Gawler Ranges hop-bush (*Dodonaea intricata*).
- One of the world's premier locations for land speed trials.



## What are the challenges and opportunities?

Looking after the park presents many challenges and opportunities. These include:

- Streamlining the authorisation and management of events and commercial activities.
- Ensuring that any future mineral or petroleum exploration and production activities are managed to minimise impacts on the park's values.
- Protecting the many culturally significant sites throughout and adjacent to the park.
- Ensuring that there are no barriers preventing the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people from exercising their traditional rights and caring for their Country.
- Reconnecting Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people to the land and culture and getting young Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people back on Country.
- Offering more experiences for visitors including opportunities to learn about Aboriginal culture and co-management.
- Managing threatened species to ensure their long-term conservation, particularly in response to climate change.
- Working with neighbours and other key stakeholders to improve access and support visitor activities in the park, whilst maintaining the remote and natural character.
- Providing a platform for Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people to share their stories, knowledge and culture. This may include the opportunity to develop business ventures, creating jobs.
- Increasing Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people's input into managing park values. This may include adopting traditional management practices.
- Increasing understanding of the natural values of the park through scientific research and the sharing of Aboriginal knowledge.
- Harnessing opportunities for Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people, local businesses, schools, and sporting clubs from the surrounding communities to benefit from events and commercial activities on the lake, such as filming, photography, and land speed trials.



## Theme 1: Looking after Country

Over thousands of years, rain, flood, heat and evaporation have created something truly spectacular. The shimmering white expanse of the dry salt lakes of Lake Gairdner National Park contrast with the deep red earth of the Gawler Ranges to create a striking and unique desert landscape.

The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people have a relationship with their Country that spans over 55,000 years (O'Connell et. al 2018). The land and waters within the park have many interconnected and complex stories, meanings and values that remain relevant today. The formation of the landscape, plants and animals of the park and surrounding Country are passed down through creation stories.

The park holds a wealth of archaeological and anthropological sites of profound cultural significance, including the lakes, islands, artefact sites, rock holes, quarry sites and stone arrangements. While many have been protected by virtue of their remoteness, many have not been properly surveyed or recorded. Under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*, all sites are protected whether registered, recorded or unrecorded.

Senior Elders want to use the park to share their stories and cultural knowledge with young Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people. This information is the intellectual property of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people and its communication to the broader community is subject to cultural protocols.



## The Story of the Sturt Pea

A young and beautiful Aboriginal maiden was given a cloak of red feathers by her warrior lover whom she idolised. During a time of drought, the warrior wandered far looking for food, while the maiden kept a lonely vigil. The tribe soon moved on and their last view of the girl was of her red cloak as she knelt in prayer awaiting her lover's return. When the tribe returned, there was no sign of the girl, but a lovely red and black flower blossomed where she had last been seen.

Cultural beliefs and stories such as this are oral history, passed down through generations.

With the consent of the appropriate Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people, knowledge about plants, animals and important cultural sites may be shared with visitors in the future. Should this occur, it will provide opportunities for Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people to develop business enterprise and will help visitors to gain a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal culture.

The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people maintain their connections to their Country through stories, songs, hunting, cooking, teaching and learning within the park. The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal People are entitled to undertake cultural activities throughout the park. A Traditional Use Zone will be designated as a focus area for these activities (see enlargement Figure 1). Working on Country rangers and others within the community are actively protecting and managing cultural sites. This work is guided by a cultural and ecological management system.

The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation must be notified before activities are undertaken that could cause disturbance to cultural sites. These could include activities such as fencing, construction of visitor facilities, scientific research or commercial activities. Notification and management arrangements for events and commercial interests including land speed racing events, filming, and photography are addressed in Theme 2.

The semi-arid environment of the northern Gawler Ranges is characterised by hot, dry summers and mild and occasionally wet winters. Rainfall may fall at any time during the year. Heavy rainfall occasionally floods the lake, providing valuable food resources for large numbers of waterbirds such as the banded stilt. These periodic occurrences of banded stilts in the park are currently being studied to assist the survival of the species over the broader South Australian lakes system landscape.

The park is predominantly made up of salt pans and playa lakes with fringing samphire (*Tecticornia* spp.), cotton bush (*Maireana aphylla*), bladder saltbush (*Atriplex vesicaria*), slender glasswort (*Tecticornia tenuis*), and blue bush (*Maireana sedifolia*). Dunes occur on some of the islands, with Mallee associations and saltbush shrub lands.

At certain times of the year, the spectacular Sturt's desert pea (*Swainsona formosa*) occurs on the sand dunes and lake edges.

Within the park 333 native plant species have been recorded, including ten plants of conservation significance listed under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*, and the *Ooldea Guinea-flower*, listed as nationally vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. 58 fauna species have been recorded in the park including fat tailed dunnarts (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*), the southern hairy-nosed wombat (*Lasiorhinus latifrons*), and 40 species of birds such as wedge-tailed eagles (*Aquila audax*) and the state rare peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

While the vast expanse of the salt-layered lake surface appears lifeless, it supports many extraordinary life forms. Some of these species are newly found to science, with a number endemic to the park. Researchers from the South Australian Museum have discovered a particularly interesting diversity of invertebrates living on the lake bed, including species of beetles and spiders, as well as scorpions, ants and crickets. Some of these species live out their entire life cycle on the lake, sealing off their burrows in larger flood events. In flood events of longer than a few days, they must float to the edge of the lake and compete with the many thousands of other invertebrates that have survived the journey.

The Board recognises the importance of scientific research to increase the understanding of the high conservation values within the park. Further research is needed to determine the extent of species supported by the park in order to inform future management goals. The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal People aim to work with researchers on future surveys in order to strengthen knowledge and increase two-way learning of scientific and traditional management processes.

Pest animals including goats, rabbits and camels impact on the island vegetation. Pest plants compete with native plant species and can progressively change the frequency of fire (Biosecurity SA 2012). Ability to access the islands to manage threats is limited, but efforts will aim to ensure pest plants do not invade the park's island communities. The management of pest animals and pest plants is most effective when undertaken on a large scale, as part of cooperative programs with neighbouring properties.

The park is surrounded by pastoral properties. As such, there is a risk of stock straying into the park and impacting on the salt lake surface and island vegetation. Where practical, park boundary fences should be maintained to discourage movement of stock. Boundary fences are monitored and maintained by neighbouring properties.

As a jointly proclaimed park under Section 43 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*, resource exploration and development rights may be acquired and exercised in the park under the *Mining Act 1971* or the *Petroleum and Geothermal Energy Act 2000*. Exploration and development activities in parks are carefully assessed and regulated to ensure that impacts are minimised, managed, and remediated to the greatest extent possible. All proposals are carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis and involve liaison with the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation.

## Regulation of mineral and petroleum activities in South Australia

Processes for the assessment, approval and regulation of mineral and petroleum activities are directed by the *Mining Act 1971* and the *Petroleum and Geothermal Energy Act 2000*. The Department for Energy and Mining works with petroleum and mining companies to implement leases, prepare environmental impact reports, consult with relevant stakeholders, and undertake licensing processes in a safe and sustainable manner.

Companies are also required to comply with other legislation, including the *Native Title Act 1993*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and the *National Parks and Wildlife (National Parks) Regulations 2016*.

These steps are in place to minimise impacts to the natural and cultural values of the park, and the experience that the park offers to visitors.

## Objectives and strategies

Conserve the natural and Aboriginal cultural heritage values of the park whilst building knowledge of Lake Gairdner and its surrounding landscape.

Respect, recognise, promote and protect cultural values through partnerships between the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people, the broader community and Government.

- Encourage research opportunities to determine management priorities for the lake bed fauna and island vegetation communities across the park. Ensure that the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people have the opportunity to contribute their skills and knowledge to research, monitoring and management activities.
- Record cultural stories, map sites and develop specific actions for each site after instruction from the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation. This exercise will involve Elders sharing their knowledge with younger generations – communication and storytelling between young and old.
- Promote collaboration between traditional custodians and resource development companies to increase awareness of the natural and Aboriginal cultural values of the park.
- Work with the Department for Energy and Mining to ensure that environmental impacts associated with mineral and petroleum exploration and production activities are minimised, managed, and remediated to the greatest extent possible.
- Facilitate business and employment opportunities for traditional custodians that enable them to maintain connections with, and to work on Country.
- Contribute to control programs for pest plants and pest animals in collaboration with the SA Arid Lands NRM Board.





## Theme 2: Enhancing the visitor experience and enabling appropriate access

People visiting Lake Gairdner National Park are immersed in a magnificent outback landscape. Some visit briefly as part of an outback journey while others enjoy the solitude of self-sufficient camping at the Waltumba Tank Camping Area.

The park provides outstanding opportunities for photography and has frequently been used for commercial filming and photography projects including print advertisements, television advertisements, and motion pictures. The park is also one of the world's premier locations for land speed trials.

The park is surrounded by pastoral leases. Waltumba Tank Camping Area is the only visitor node in the park and can be accessed by four-wheel drive. With approval, the park can also be accessed via a private road through Mount Ive Station. Visitor facilities at the Waltumba Tank Camping Area are minimal. There is a short walking trail and some information for visitors. The collection of firewood is prohibited within the park.

***“This is a significant place. Please think about how you impact on the environment. Leave it how you found it, or help clean it up if you found it messy”***

Clifford Woodford, Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people

The park is occasionally incorporated in the itineraries of commercial tour operators. Tour companies that wish to conduct commercial tours on the park must obtain a permit from the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board. The Board undertakes consultation with the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation early in this process. The Gawler Ranges Aboriginal People aim to establish their own commercial enterprises such as cultural heritage tours in the future.



Scenic flight tours over the lake have been conducted in the past and could become a popular way for people to take in the park's expansive landscape. The landing of aircraft on the lake bed is not allowed without a permit. To ensure that scenic flights are culturally appropriate, do not disturb wildlife, or affect the quality of land-based visitor experiences, it may be necessary in the future to establish a fly neighbourly agreement with tour operators.

The park contains numerous sites that are culturally sensitive and should not be filmed or photographed. People may film or photograph areas of the park that are within the Visitor Use Zone. All commercial filming and photography in parks requires a permit. An information pack for commercial filming and photography in Lake Gairdner National Park

(Government of South Australia and Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation 2017) has been developed to guide interested commercial photographers and film-makers in understanding more about the park, the management framework, the application process, and the requirements for undertaking commercial filming and photography in the park.

Visitors may walk on the lake bed, but will be encouraged to stay within the Visitor Use Zone. Visitors are not permitted to drive on the lake bed unless approved via a permit. Further information for visitors about access to the lake bed is needed at Waltumba Tank Campground and Mount Ive Station. This will explain how to access the park in an appropriate way, and the restrictions that apply to filming and photography.

The park is well-known for its flat, compact salt lake bed, which creates ideal conditions for land speed trials. The depth of salt (up to 1.2 metres), its stability and lack of surface irregularities over considerable distances has made Lake Gairdner National Park one of the world's most sought-after locations for this specialised activity. The Dry Lakes Racers Australia (DLRA) vehicle speed trial event has an international profile and is held annually pending suitable conditions and approvals.

The preservation of the visual amenity of the visitor use zone is a key focus for management. The noise and visual impact of this event are confined to a small number of days each year and speed trials are confined to the Visitor Use Zone where the salt crust is sufficiently thick to withstand the repeated passing of vehicles. Permit conditions are established to ensure that the park is not polluted by fuel, oil, rubbish or other debris. Any visual impact generally disappears after rain and the natural redistribution of salt, however strategies including the placement of matting at the lakes' edge will continue to be required to minimise any damage.

The South Australian Government, the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation, Mt Ive Station and DLRA work together to ensure this event is managed sustainably, that participants are educated about caring for the lake, and that participants form an appreciation of the culture of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal People. The permit process will continue to be managed through the South Australian Government and the Lake Gairdner National Park Co-management Board. Over time it is hoped that the event continues to create opportunities for Gawler Ranges Aboriginal People and the wider community.

Prior to any commercial photography, filming, dry lake racing events or other activity authorised via a permit, the Board provides notice of the proposed activity to the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation and seeks their views regarding the impact of the proposed activities on the lake. The Board may set permit conditions or require Aboriginal heritage monitors on site to ensure that the values of the site are protected and respected.

## Objective and strategies

**Enhance visitor experiences and ensure that activities are environmentally sustainable and culturally sensitive.**

- Work with the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation to develop permit conditions for events such as land speed trials, commercial filming and commercial photography. Ensure that vehicle use is confined to the Visitor Use Zone.
- Monitor the impact of events such as land speed trials, commercial filming and commercial photography on the lake and adapt permit conditions as necessary.
- Beginning with the development of an interpretation plan, provide information to visitors that helps them to enjoy the park and gain a deeper appreciation of the park and the culture of the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal people.
- Facilitate opportunities for the greater involvement of Gawler Ranges Aboriginal families and the local community in events, including increasing cultural understanding of participants and other visitors.
- Ensure that public access within the park is safe, sustainable, culturally appropriate and properly authorised.





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## Recognition of Aboriginal Culture

Aboriginal Australians have rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

Please contact the Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation to understand these rights in relation to the Lake Gairdner National Park Management Plan 2019

## For further information please contact

Department for Environment and Water phone information line (08) 8204 1910, or see SA White Pages for your local Department for Environment and Water.

## Photography

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