

Botanic Gardens History



The lagoons site has a long and significant history, intrinsically tied to the life and development of Mackay city and the surrounding region. The Gardens have deep cultural and historical associations with First Nations Aboriginal people, Australian South Sea Islanders, Torres Strait Islander and European communities. Without the contributions from multiple community groups and individual volunteers over time, Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens would not be where it is today.

Prior to colonisation

First Nations Australians used the lagoons as a fresh water source and for hunting the abundant waterfowl.

1860

European settlement commenced with the establishment of grazing and cane farming. Captain John Mackay camped beside the Lagoons in 1860 during exploration of the region. The sugar cane industry was established around the Lagoons with mills near Alexandra Street and on Nebo Road adjacent to the site.

Mid 1870

The lagoons were proposed as a “place of recreation and a source of water supply”. In 1877, this area was earmarked as a site for a botanic garden.

1889

Establishment of the first state nursery on-site trialling crops including oranges, mulberries, coffee, tea, rubber, mangoes, arrowroot, wheat, rye, grasses, sisal hemp, rice and varieties of sugar cane.

1892

First water supply works were established at the lagoons. A series of wells and bores were later established on the opposite side of the lagoons, which still operate today in periods of high demand.

1900s

Continued use of the site as a recreation reserve, water source for the city and horticultural experimental station.

1959

The Nebo Road Water Treatment Plant opened and progressively expanded in years following.

1975

Arne Fink commissioned to develop concept plans for a botanic park.

1985

Proposals to the Mackay City Council by the Mackay Branch of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP) to establish a botanic garden featuring local native species at the Lagoons site.

1990

New railway line announced, splitting the site but initiating development.

1991

Catherine Brouwer developed plans for what was then known as the Lagoons Reserve.

1993

Establishment of the southern section of the Gardens began with the construction of the Australian South Sea Islander Hut.

1996

Initial plantings of the Regional Forests with local native plants donated by SGAP and their members.

1998 - 2000

Landscape architect Lawrie Smith engaged to expand the master plan to include the entire site.

2001 - 2003

Construction of Stage 1 of the Botanic Gardens. Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens Stage 1 officially opened on May 24, 2003.

Incorporation of the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens Friends Association.

2004 - 2006

Construction of Stage 2 of the Botanic Gardens.

2010

An amended master plan was formally adopted by Mackay Regional Council on July 7, 2010.

2012

The Meadowlands Amphitheatre was completed, providing a venue with a stunning backdrop for a range of community events and festivals.

2014

Torres Strait Islander Precinct, which interprets the flora of the Torres Strait Islands, was completed in consultation with the Mackay Torres Strait Islander community.

2018

Operations Centre and Nursery construction completed allowing for long-term plant propagation for the ongoing development of the Living Collection.