

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

by Australian Environment International Pty Ltd¹
in collaboration with Collins Brothers² on

“INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC GOOD CONSERVATION – IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES IMPOSED ON LANDHOLDERS”

The Collins Family has served continuously as lessees of a significant portion of the McBride Plateau of northern Queensland for 140 years.

Their maintenance of this land by way of a pastoral regimen (on over a total of 2,186 square kilometres of three adjoining large leasehold holding properties “Rosella”, “Spring Creek” and “Yaramulla” – covering 44% of the McBride Plateau Province) has been so successful as nowadays to place the Family under constant threat of resumption by the Crown of substantial areas for national park.

Some 50% of the total area in more recent times has thus been lost to grazing productivity. Most significantly, this land has been lost to the control measures (over weeds, feral animals, wildfires and people) that cost-effectively accompany such day-to-day management activity and sustain its natural productivity.

The Family’s economic viability in the region has been compromised to the extent that it has had to resort to operating tourism business on part of the land resumed - under an 817-hectare Special Lease issued periodically by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. This is also of uncertain future, despite again being successful to the extent of establishing tropical Australia’s principal private sector environmental guiding system (“*The Savannah Guides*”) and winning major Regional and State Ecotourism Awards (“*The Undara Experience*”).

The failure to be allowed to plan, pursue and promote these successful land management paths on a more predictable long-term and cost-effective path continues to discourage the Family – *especially in the face of obvious failure by the alternative courses of action.*

¹ Australian Environment International Pty Ltd, P.O. Box 1308, Milton, Q. 4064, Australia (telephone [07] 3368 1478).

² Collins Brothers, P.O. Box 35, Thuringowa Central, Q. 4817, Australia (telephone [0747] 239 922).

The decline in funding of relevant government agencies and their remoteness from - and inexperience of - local land management has been accompanied by a demonstrable and alarming spread of weeds (particularly rubber vine [*Cryptostegia grandiflora*]), feral animals (particularly wild pigs [*Sus scrofa*]), accidental bushfires, and itinerant visitors (capable of introducing and spreading Parthenium weed [*Parthenium hysterophorus*]) from adjacent regions.

Under the present course of management, such destructive factors will undoubtedly dominate and overwhelm park land in time – to the detriment not only of the unusual landscapes and their associated habitats but also of the reputation of a national park system that does have an essential conservation and education function to perform Statewide.

While totally embracing the ideal projected by national parks in preserving core areas of biodiversity, and welcoming the opportunity for suitably-guided visitors to access such lands, Collins Brothers submits that the realistic land management issues have reached a crucial stage in respect of Australia's conservation and sustainable development.

In essence, *ownership* in the past has been allowed to override the more critical issue of *management*. This outlook and approach must change. Collins Brothers has long recognized, by way of its lease-holding status, that successful land maintenance lies in a sympathetic long-term use of land that also provides the economic ways and means to ensure its sound condition under appropriate terms imposed by the broader (Crown) ownership.

Collins Brothers acknowledge that this serious responsibility depends on an intimate knowledge of the resources involved and on the modern techniques by which these can be regularly monitored. In recent years, Collins Brothers has been committed to obtaining this scientific knowledge. They are now proposing to collaborate with the appropriate arms of State Government to model a way by which good stewardship on behalf of the community can be guaranteed. They seek to do this in a necessarily long-term constructive fashion, in reasonable expectation that its substantial proven contributions will no longer be penalized along with the land itself.

A series of constructive meetings have recently been held with senior staff of the Queensland Departments of the Premier & Cabinet, State Development, Natural Resources, and Environment Protection Agency (including Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service). Australian Environment International – Principal Adviser to other major Australian landholders (such as Stanbroke Pastoral Company) - is now well situated to implement an official 'case study area' on McBride Plateau, with the subject of land management clearly distinguished from the subject of land ownership.

Collins Brothers submits that the private sector opportunity to do such work is timely, vital, and justifiable – with government holding all the authority to require and to assist in the production of environmentally- and economically-viable results from specifically-permitted experimental case studies. These then have real potential to resolve questions of sustainability, and may well give rise by the most cost-effective ways to practicable management legislation in the broader common good.

References

Atkinson, A. and Atkinson, V. (1995).- *Undara Volcano and its Lava Tubes*. (Privately published : Brisbane).

Godwin, M.D. (1994).- Undara and associated lavafields of McBride Plateau – A speleological field guide, North Queensland, Australia. Confidential technical report of the Chillagoe Caving Club, Inc., 357+ pp.

Lavery, H.J. (ed.) (1978).- *Exploration North – A Natural History of Queensland* Currey O'Neill : Melbourne.

Lavery, H.J. (1996).- Wildlife management : Some realities and practicalities. In : *National Parks – Private Sector's Role* (T. Charters, M. Gabriel & S. Prasser, eds.), University of Southern Queensland Press, pp. 108-113.

Lavery, H.J., Kirkpatrick, T.H., Foote, D.M., Gatenby, A.W.M. and Ritchie, M.W. (1997).- On the process of extending conservation beyond nature reserves. In : *Conservation Outside Nature Reserves* (P. Hale & D. Lamb, eds.), Centre for Conservation Biology, The University of Queensland, pp. 89-92.

Lavery, H.J. and Gatenby, A.W.M. (1999).- A systematic approach to sustainable land-use over large areas. Abstract to *People & Rangelands : Building the Future*. VI International Rangelands Conference, Townsville, Australia, June 1999.

Dr H.J. Lavery, MSc. PhD, MEd, FIBiol, JP
CHAIRMAN & PRINCIPAL ADVISER

19 May 2000