Wildlife Preservation
SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS.

Summary

While national parks and other conservation reserves permit multiple uses, the first and foremost functions of National Parks are to conserve biodiversity and permit ecological processes to continue uninterrupted. Secondly they provide appropriate passive recreational opportunities, spiritual and aesthetic opportunities for peoples' enjoyment. Other major uses include commercial ventures and tourism. The growing trend to exploit protected areas for commercial gain without adequate recompense is a concern.

Marine Parks are multiple use areas. Zoning for conservation purposes varies greatly within the various parks, adequate in places ,totally inadequate in other places. The marine park system is less representative and developed than the terrestrial system.

National Parks and other conservation reserves form part of the National Reserve System a means by which Australia and its various jurisdictions attempts to satisfy national and international obligations. Some progress has been made but the desirable targets have not been achieved.

The current model for selecting acquisition targets is deficient. A continental scale model embracing the principles of connectivity and resilience in addition to the CAR principles needs to be adopted. More emphasis is required on large, relatively intact systems across the landscape. This will undoubtedly trigger the necessity for some rehabilitation of fragmented areas to achieve a desirable outcome. Reliance on regional ecosystems as surrogates for biodiversity must be questioned particularly in less complex structural plant associations.

Currently insufficient resources are provided in most jurisdictions. Generally funds have declined for both acquisition and management. There is considerable variation among the jurisdictions. It is recommended that funding be increased significantly and a redistribution of funds among the components of NHT occurs. Consideration should be given to a levy on the income of all employees and businesses to raise the necessary funds for a representative ,adequate and well managed reserve system. Healthy Parks, Healthy People

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Threats to National parks, other conservation reserves and marine parks abound While highlighting a range of threats including feral animals and weeds, brief comment is provided on inappropriate fire regimes, climate change, lack of access to efficient scientific databases to support sound decision making and an apparent reluctance to use legislative powers to mitigate threats.

Governments at all levels have an obligation to create and manage national Parks, other conservation reserves and marine parks. There is a lack of long term commitment and required funding. A protected area trust needs to be established to provide more planning and management certainty."Parks in Peril" is not a tag Australia and its jurisdictions would want applied to its conservation reserves.

While progress in achieving a representative reserve system protecting our unique biodiversity has been made, overall targets have not been met.The performance of some States including Queensland has been below acceptable standards.

Australia must increase its effort to satisfy national and international obligations and protect our wildlife and its habitat.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ) is one of the longest established and most respected wildlife-focused conservation groups in Queensland. With over 3500 supporters spread across 20 branches throughout the State, WPSQ is a strong voice for our wildlife and its habitat. WPSQ is apolitical. Our aims include;

- **Preserve** the flora and fauna of Australia by all lawful means
- **Educate** the community in an understanding of the principles of conservation and preservation of the natural environment
- **Discourage** by all legal means, the possible destruction, exploitation and unnecessary development of any part of the natural environment.
- **Encourage** rational land use and proper land planning of existing and future development, and the use of the natural environment and its management.

1.2 WPSQ welcomes this inquiry and appreciates the opportunity to make a submission. Natural areas supporting remnant vegetation continue to be eroded by urban, industrial and agricultural development. In broad terms protected areas provide homes for wildlife to maintain our biodiversity and meet expanding appropriate passive outdoor recreation needs. While appreciating protected areas cannot afford complete protection to our unique biodiversity Australia enjoys, WPSQ is of the firm opinion that protected areas are the cornerstone of strategies to conserve our biodiversity for the benefits of today's generation and those of tomorrow.

1.3 This submission aims to assist the Senate Committee in its inquiry.

1.4 WPSQ notes that the scope of the inquiry includes Commonwealth, State and Territory owned Protected Areas. It is unclear if Local Authority Conservation areas are covered and it appears that privately owned conservation areas are not encompassed. WPSQ will provide input on these later categories and perhaps such comment may prove useful to the Committees deliberations.

1.5 Attached is WPSQ's policy on management of National Parks in Queensland (Attachment1). This attachment focuses on National parks and National Parks (recovery) and does not address the other 10 classes of protected areas classified under the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992.* This provides a background that underpins some of the views expressed.

2.0 General Comment

WPSQ acknowledges that a protected area does not exclude multiple uses in order to fulfill its purpose. Unquestionably by definition marine parks are multiple-use areas with specific zones afforded protection for conservation purposes.

2.1 From WPSQ's perspective the first and foremost function of a protected area must be to conserve biodiversity by protecting ecosystems, habitats, viable populations of species and permitting ecological processes to continue uninterrupted by anthropomorphous activities in places. Secondly they provide appropriate recreational, spiritual and aesthetic opportunities for people to enjoy. These functions, conserving biodiversity and the other uses, are rarely if ever valued in economic terms appropriately. The other major use in WPSQ's opinion is one of commercial ventures and tourism. There have been many studies placing a dollar value of the benefits to the community from these uses (Driml 1997). The distinction between management objectives and economic value of national parks are addressed by Suh and Harrison (2005). The relationship between national parks and tourist operations is often contentious. WPSQ is concerned with the apparent growing trend to exploit protected areas for commercial gain with little benefit flowing back to the basic resource. However WPSQ acknowledges that some benefits can accrue (refer Stubbs and Specht 2005) but the negative impacts from tourism can be readily viewed at Lamington National Park, Fraser Island World Heritage Area and areas of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area where appropriate management is not in place or not enforced.

2.2 Marine Parks are multi use areas to protect flora and fauna of the sea, the sea bed and related structures. Unlike terrestrial protected areas the multipurpose uses are the primary function. However the uses on occasions can confine the conservation purpose to have little significance. In the recent extensions to the Great Sandy Straits Marine Park less than 4 % of the area was zoned for total protection. Compare this with the Great Barrier Reef

Marine Park where 30 % of the area is largely protected. Preparing draft zoning plan, the relevant legislation, and management of marine parks is time consuming and costly. The lack of tenure when compared to terrestrial protected areas compounds the situation. These factors probably account for the fact that although progress has been made in recent years the marine park system is less representative and developed than the terrestrial system.

3.0 The values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas

3.1 In broad terms the values are outlined above. The objectives include but not necessarily limited to protecting the biodiversity and representative ecosystems of Australia and its component States and Territories. These reserves assist in forming a National Reserve System (NRS) for Australia and thereby satisfying obligations Australia has under various agreements both nationally and internationally. As the only developed nation that is described as megadiverse there is a significant obligation to protect our natural heritage. Establishing a national reserve system has not progressed as rapidly as desirable.

There have been targets, not numerical and not time bound, set within the NRS programme. Other programmes such as the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological diversity set timelines that impact on the NRS. International conventions such as the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity by which Australia has obligations as well as COP7 (2005) provide further numerical and time-bound targets. Although WPSQ does not necessarily support targets (interest wanes from both politicians and bureaucrats as targets are achieved even when totally inadequate and the real task is not complete) they provide a useful performance guideline but in this case not necessarily a measure of biodiversity protection. It is with regret that WPSQ notes that the current NRS will fail to achieve targets by which Australia is bound although some progress has been made.

WPSQ also views the current model as being deficient. The model focuses likely acquisitions on targets set for adequacy, comprehensiveness and representativeness (referred to as the CAR principles). This approach is inadequate and limiting. It must be remembered that many National Parks declared in the early days was based on scenic beauty and/or land for which no other useful purpose could be found. The National Reserve System started from a distorted base. In more recent times a more scientific approach has been adopted. Many States including Queensland are well behind what is accepted as desirable targets. A more encompassing model is now required to satisfy changing circumstances. With the threat and impact of climate change, there is need for the principle of resilience to be included along with the CAR principles. Furthermore connectivity must be added to the concepts and principles already listed to accommodate ongoing evolution, plant succession and natural changes in ecological processes.

WPSQ shares a concern about the reliance on Regional Ecosystems as a surrogate for biodiversity. Granted some research has shown that there is a strong correlation between forests /woodlands and biodiversity but such relationship has not been demonstrated for grasslands, forblands and low shrublands to the best of WPSQ's knowledge. Furthermore the presence or absence of threatened species alone should not be a driving force for acquisition.

There is a temptation to focus on poorly represented, unrepresented and threatened ecosystems. While there is merit in such an approach, if the outcome is isolated pockets of green in a broad fragmented landscape (view existing maps of protected areas on a State basis) the priority for acquisition must be reconsidered. Viability and appropriate network development is essential. More emphasis is required on large, relatively intact systems across the landscape. Unfortunately in places rehabilitation of some very fragmented corridors may be required to achieve this suggested focus.

It is recommended consideration be given to ensuring that more emphasis is placed on conservation models that use a continental scale in designing and coordinating conservation and compatible land use across millions of hectares. In addition the principles of resilience and connectivity be given appropriate consideration as well as the CAR principles.

4.0 Are governments providing sufficient resources.

4.1 The short answer is no.

4.2 Considering initially the acquisition funding, the decline in funding from the mid nineties until now is a major concern. Even if the funding was re-established, that level of funding would be totally inadequate to achieve an appropriate continental model to establish a natural reserve system to protect our biodiversity. The current model is not protecting our biodiversity. A declining trend is apparent.

WPSQ appreciates that it was the intention of the Government that the National Reserve System programme would work in partnership with other funding programmes under the NHT to assist in delivering the aims of NRS. This is simply not occurring. It has been noted on many occasions that it is far more cost effective to conserve intact native ecosystems than to attempt to rehabilitate significantly degraded vegetation. Yet significant funding is allocated to Landcare, Bushcare and other rehabilitation programmes at the expense of NRS. Under the NHT about only 5% of available funds have been directed to the NRS in the last 7 to 8 years. Granted the States and Territories have not been providing significant funding to cooperate with the Commonwealth. In Queensland in the early 1990's the land acquisition budget was $15 M per annum for three consecutive years. This effectively doubled the National Park Estate in Queensland. In 2005-06 the budget was $5 M with most of the funds tied to the Daintree and Cape York regions. These are areas where protected areas are required but Queensland has extensive

regional ecosystems not represented in the protected area estate. This budget is an increase over the early 2000s but falls well short of funding available in the early 1990s.

In 2004, ACF in a submission on NRS Future Directions suggested that $ 360 M was required over a six year period with the Commonwealth contributing $ 40 M per annum on a 2:1 funding formulae with the States and Territories. This was to rectify the then performance of NRS and assist in the effective delivery of this important task. WPSQ has no reason to dispute those figures but adds that these figures may be too conservative.

It is strongly recommended that a significant percentage of NHT funds be redirected to the NRS programme so that at least $40 M per annum over the next 6 years is available to be matched in part by the States and Territories. Allocation of these funds should be on a triennial basis to allow for planning certainty

4.3 . Acquisition may establish an appropriate national reserve system but on going management to ensure the reserve system satisfies its objectives is extremely costly. While acknowledging the current programme may allow for some set up and initial infrastructure costs, the expansion of financial assistance in this area of assisting management requires further investigation. It would be undesirable if the “Parks in Peril” label was applied to a National Reserve System in a developed country like Australia.

It is acknowledged that States have a major role but the crude figures available indicate a considerable variation in dollars per hectare allocated per State or Territory. In 1998/99 expenditure varied from $0.8 to $ 43.8 over the various jurisdictions with Queensland expending $4.74. That figure has increased significantly in recent years to $6.50 in 2004. The expenditure spent per hectare per jurisdiction is very difficult to determine that you are comparing “apples” with “apples”. However the States and Territories fall broadly into two categories- ACT, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria all spending at least about twice the expenditure of the leader in the also rans “Queensland” that shares the honour with Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia. In fairness to Queensland the 2005-06 budget delivered significant funding increases to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This increase still has Queensland’s expenditure well behind that of New South Wales. In broad terms the Parks division of the Queensland EPA received $154 M in the 2005-06 budget for the care and maintenance of about 4% of Queensland. At the same time Queensland Government committed about $548 M to the building of the Tugan Bypass motorway about 7 kms in length that will undoubtedly cause environmental harm. It is obvious that the environment and conservation does not enjoy the same level of support as other activities.

4.4 To address the short fall in funding, the Commonwealth Government can directly increase the funding available. This could be achieved by new additional funding from budget surpluses or redistribution of funding from

other programmes. The Commonwealth Government may offer incentive joint funding packages for the States and Territories to consider. The Commonwealth Government is already offering taxation concessions that have seen an escalation in nonprofit companies becoming involved in using private lands for conservation purposes. The major players such as Bush Heritage and the Australian Wildlife Conservacy are contributing significantly to conservation in Australia. Even the Wildlife Land Fund Limited (WLFL), small as it is with about 2000 ha under management, makes a contribution. WLFL is the sole trustee of Bukkulla Conservation Park in Queensland and with the assistance of the Queensland Naturalists has produced a booklet on that reserve and spent more of its money on fencing and weed control than the Queensland Government spent on many of its conservation parks. Active involvement and incentives for non-profit public companies needs further exploration.

“Healthy Parks, Healthy People” the Victorian Government study in 2002 stated that parks are a fundamental health resource in terms of disease prevention. WPSQ is of the opinion that like the medi-care levy, it is not unreasonable to place a levy on all income earners and or businesses to raise the necessary funding to establish a well management and truly representative national reserve system that is viable for today’s generation those of tomorrow to enjoy. In doing so the declining trend in biodiversity loss may be arrested or at least slowed down.

5.0 Threats to the management of our national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

5.1 Threats abound to national parks viability and sound management. Many of the issues may be able to be addressed by funding and many threats are interwoven with one another.

5.2 Not in any priority order, threats include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Weeds and feral animals
- Inappropriate fire regimes
- Climate change
- Pollution and land degradation
- Increased population pressures and over use-overexploitation
- Lack of management plans and or inappropriate implementation
- Lack of access to efficient scientifically based databases to support decision making
- An apparent reluctance by the current Government to use its power under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act)

It is not the intention of WPSQ to comment on each of the above issues. Brief comment will be offered only a selected few, namely inappropriate fire

regimes, climate change, lack of efficient scientifically based databases and the apparent reluctance to use the EPBC Act.

5.3 Inappropriate fire regimes. The fire issue is a contentious issue. Debates are still raging between interested parties as to the merit of prescribed burns, the desirable frequency and outcomes of such events.

WPSQ believes that while people safety and protection of infrastructure is paramount consideration has to be given to the habitat of wildlife. WPSQ is of the opinion especially in Queensland that too much fire is not good for the environment. Fire may create havoc on the landscape, plant communities, fauna and soils. WPSQ does not support the statement that Australian vegetation is fire dependant. WPSQ acknowledges that the vegetation has adapted to fire and plants are either fire tolerant or fire sensitive. The main elements of plant life have existed since the Eocene(40-60M years ago) when the climate was different and fires rare. Plants adapted in the Miocene(20 M years ago) but there is debate if it was fire or the influence of drier climate and poorer soils. With Aboriginal occupation fires increased but fires escalated dramatically with European settlement. Modification of the landscape is still occurring due to fire. Fires too frequent and at the wrong time may cause loss of composition and structural change and in the extreme diminish the ability of communities to recover. The loss of habitat is catastrophic for fauna. Fire intensity can be detrimental to some communities. Some national parks in western Queensland set aside for the conservation of Gidgee (*Acacia cambagei)* communities are at risk from fire. These parks, previously cattle properties, have an abundance of the introduced buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris)* that produces significantly more biomass than the native pastures. While the gidgee communities can tolerate cool fires the intensity of fires carried by buffel puts these communities at risk. This illustrates the complexity in selecting properties for acquisition and the need for careful and appropriate management planning to address threats prior to acquisition. WPSQ is not advocating that such properties are not acquired but perhaps different conservation tenures may need to be applied in places that would permit management strategies to protect the high value conservation areas that would be gazetted as National Park.

The ecological consequences of prescribed burns must be given appropriate consideration. The use of fire may be beneficial in certain circumstances such as the control of some weeds.

There is a need to foster more research into prescribed burning, its role in protecting the biodiversity and its use in protected areas and conservation reserves.

5.4 Climate Change. One serious concern held by the WPSQ lies with the effect of global climate change upon our nation's protected areas. All forecasts for Australia are that almost all of Australia will get hotter and drier. This will happen at a speed far too great for species to genetically adapt, therefore their only recourse is to migrate southward or upward to areas more

climatically hospitable for them as their traditional areas become intolerable. This is recorded in the literature as having already happened for a great many species world-wide. Unfortunately, in Australia migrating upward is a dead-end street, so the only wildlife which will survive climate change in the long term will be those able to migrate southward when temperatures rise beyond their tolerance threshold.

In the case of many of Australia's protected areas, there exists no suitable habitat or safe wildlife corridor to the south of the protected area, in which case much of the wildlife of that protected area is doomed to die as temperatures and aridity rise. Without positive management action to protect them, species extinctions will become commonplace.

In some cases, they may be able to be saved by purchasing suitable alternative habitat for them to the south of existing protected areas, or by protecting an existing wildlife corridor that will enable them to reach suitable alternative habitat that is already protected. In some instances it may even be justifiable to physically relocate certain wildlife to new habitat, to save them from the consequences of climate change and preserve the existence of the species. And in some instances it may even be possible to purchase marginal habitat and re-vegetate it to make it suitable in time for when the wildlife are forced to migrate out of the protected area where they are currently resident.

There are options for saving species - but saving them will require significant funding. Much thought will have to go into the most effective way to achieve the best outcome.

These assertions are supported by some direct quotes from some recognised authorities on climate change; (References cited in the quotes are not listed in the reference section of this submission but can be accessed from the original documents quoted)

(1) INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE: Climate Change and Biodiversity

Networks of reserves with connecting corridors provide dispersal and migration routes for plants and animals. The placement and management of reserves (including marine and coastal reserves) and protected areas will need to take into account potential climate change if the reserve system is to continue to achieve its full potential. Options include corridors, or habitat matrices, that link currently fragmented reserves and landscapes by providing potential for migration. [WGII TAR Section 5.4.4] (PAGE 41)

• *There are several other design opportunities to increase the resilience of nature reserves.* These measures include maintaining intact natural vegetation along environmental gradients (e.g., latitude and altitude gradients, soil moisture gradients), providing buffer zones around reserves, minimizing habitat fragmentation and road-building, and conserving genetic diversity within and among populations of native species. (PAGE 41)

(2) CLIMATE CHANGE 2001: IMPACTS, ADAPTATION, AND VULNERABILITY (*A Report of Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)*

*"Vegetation distribution models since the SAR suggest that mass ecosystem or biome movement is most unlikely to occur because of different climatic tolerance of the species involved, different migration abilities, and the effects of invading specie*s. Species composition and dominance will change, resulting in ecosystem types that may be quite different from those we see today. These changes will lag the changes in climate by years to decades to centuries (high confidence). The effects of changes in disturbances such as fire, blowdown, or pest attacks on vegetation have not been included in these studies. [5.2] (PAGE 33)

"As habitat becomes more fragmented, barriers to dispersal or expansions of species' ranges could occur. This could force individuals to remain in inhospitable areas, decreasing the range and population size of species and ultimately leading to extinction (Rabinowitz, 1981). Fragmentation also may facilitate movement of invasive species into an area, leading to potential population declines through predation, competition, or transmission of disease (e.g., May and Norton, 1996). Increasing urbanization also could lead to increasing exposure to contaminants, which may make species less fit to survive changes in environmental conditions or weaken their immune systems (Pounds and Crump, 1987; Berger *et al.,* 1998). Human responses to climate change also may contribute to synergistic effects; for example, if new pest outbreaks are countered with increased pesticide use, nontarget species might have to endure climate- and contaminant-linked stressors. (PAGE 273)

5.4.3. Responses of Wildlife and Impacts on Goods and Services
"Findings indicate that many animals already may be responding to local climatic changes. Types of changes already observed include poleward and elevational movement of ranges, changes in animal abundance, changes in body size, and shifts in the timing of events such as breeding to earlier in the spring. These responses have been identified by a group of studies from around the world in a variety of different species (see Table 5-3). Far more information is available than can be summarized here. More detail on these changes is available in Hughes (2000) and Price *et al.* (2000). (PAGE 273)

5.4.3.1.1. Shifts in animal ranges and abundances
"Ranges and abundances of prehistoric animals are known to have changed significantly over time (Goodfriend and Mitterer,1988; Baroni and Orombelli, 1994; Coope, 1995). Currently, many species are undergoing range changes because of habitat conversion, land degradation (e.g., grazing, changes in fire regime), climate change, or a combination of factors. Possible climatically associated shifts in animal ranges and densities have been noted on three continents (Antarctica, Europe, and North America) and within each major taxonomic group of animals (see Table 5-3). (PAGE 273)

"Invertebrates: Insect dispersal to favorable areas to make effective use of microclimatic differences is a common response to changing climate (e.g., Fielding *et al*., 1999). The ranges of butterflies in Europe and North America have been found to shift poleward and upward in elevation as temperatures have increased (Pollard, 1979; Parmesan, 1996; Ellis *et al.,*1997; Parmesan *et al.,* 1999). Warming and changed rainfall patterns also may alter host plant-insect relations, through community or physiological responses (e.g., host plant food quality) (Masters *et al.,* 1998). (PAGE 273)

"Amphibians and Reptiles: Amphibians may be especially susceptible to climatic change because they have moist, permeable skin and eggs and often use more than one habitat type and food type in their lifetimes (Lips, 1998). Many amphibious species appear to be declining, although the exact causes (e.g., climate change, fungus, UV radiation, or other stresses) are difficult to determine (Laurance, 1996; Berger *et al.,* 1998; Houlahan *et al.,* 2000). Disappearance of the golden toad *(Bufo periglene*s) and the harlequin frog *(Atelopus variu*s) from Costa Rica's Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve appear to be linked to extremely dry weather associated with the 1986–1987 ENSO event (Pounds and Crump, 1994). Correlation between warming, reduced frequency of dry-season mist, and the timing of population crashes of four other frog species and two lizard species from the same cloud forest also has been found (Pounds *et al*., 1999). (PAGE 273)

"Birds: Bird ranges reportedly have moved poleward in Antarctica (Emslie *et al.,* 1998), North America (Price, 2000), Europe (Prop *et al.,* 1998), and Australia (Severnty, 1977). For example, the spring range of Barnacle Geese *(Branta leucopsi*s) has moved north along the Norwegian coast, correlated with a significant increase in the number of April and May days with temperatures above 6°C (Prop *et al.,* 1998). The elevational range of some Costa Rican tropical cloud forest birds also apparently are shifting (Pounds *et al.,* 1999)." (PAGE 273)

(3) Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability - Promoting an efficient adaptation response in Australia. Final Report March 2005. Report to the Australian Greenhouse Office, Department of the Environment and Heritage

"It is important to note that some existing species may be advantaged by climate change. However *a priori* one would expect a reduction in biodiversity due to the large number of species adapted to 'narrow' climate or topography niches. Current studies appear to have only 'scratched the surface' in building our knowledge of the climate dependency of important Australian species and how these are likely to respond to variations in climate conditions. (PAGE 70)

"However, options for adaptation by natural systems — to match the events and time scale dictated by climate change — are expected to be limited. Plants and animals confronted by a changing environment tend to be replaced by better suited species as an outcome of natural selection, rather than re–invent themselves and their behaviours on a decadal timescale. There is

scope for species migration, but species in isolated and unique habitats could come under intense pressure from climate change. (PAGE 75)

"There is a clear need for human intervention to facilitate the adaptation of response of natural systems — which have no inherent capacity to anticipate and plan for growing climate pressures — over the coming years. Work is currently under way in this area under the auspices of the National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/nbccap/index.html)." (PAGE 71)

(4) National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council 2004 –2007

"The actions proposed in this document are aimed at reducing the impacts of climate change on each of these ecosystems,and promote in situ conservation of species and ecological communities to facilitate their natural adaptation,rather than the use of high-cost interventions such as translocation and captive breeding.Key strategies include promoting ecological connectivity to aid migration and dispersal of species, protecting refuges and creating specific management zones around important habitats. (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PAGE 7)

"Strategy 5.2 Reviewing reserve acquisitions to strengthen the capacity of the reserve system to act as refuges for vulnerable terrestrial species and integrate reserve planning and management with broader landscape protected area networks to allow the movement of species across bioclimatic gradients.
"Actions 5.2.1Review current reserve system plans and guidelines to include consideration of identified 2007 priority areas that could be used to assist migration or provide natural refuges for vulnerable terrestrial species under future climate regimes (all jurisdictions*).
"5.2.2 Incorporate consideration of climate change into programs to voluntarily acquire new land for reserves for conservation purposes (all jurisdictions*).
"5.2.3 Build on the national programs to retain and restore native vegetation and protect habitat by promoting voluntary partnerships between government and land-holders to develop strategic protected area networks at landscape and larger scales to provide linkages and stepping-stones to assist biodiversity adaptations (all jurisdictions*)." (PAGE 27)

5.5 Lack of efficient scientifically databases. To maximize our ability to conserve natural resources and use them sustainably, management interventions must be based on high quality scientific evidence (Pullin and Knight 2005). As indicated in their paper, the volume of information on conservation has increased enormously over the last 10 to 20 years but it is questioned if the information is in fact supporting decision making. The conversion of scientific input into sound decision making on a broad scale is generally simply not occurring. Access to the data in a usable form is a major challenge. Inappropriate decision making is a major threat to protected areas

and when this is combined with the lack of management plans, the future of many gazetted areas is at risk. One of the objectives of the National Reserve System programme is to develop and implement best practice standards. The use of funds from the National Reserve System programme.

WPSQ recommends that more consideration be given to the establishment of relevant databases and ensuring access by managers to enhance sound decision making based on scientific data. It is appreciated that establishment costs would not be insignificant but the investment would be prudent and management of our natural heritage enhanced.

5.6 Reluctance to use the powers available under the EPBC Act. Without doubt the EPBC Act has far reaching powers to minimize threats and protect endangered species and their habitats. The Commonwealth Government has a responsibility to ensure the values of the World Heritage Listed Properties and RAMSAR sites are not diminished. Many of these sites encompass national parks and other conservation reserves. On a number of occasions WPSQ has urged the various Ministers to use the powers of the act to deem a development is a controlled action. Whether it be developments impacting or the potential to impact on RAMSAR sites or World Heritage Areas such as CERRA there appears to be a reluctance to impede what is considered good development but will cause environmental harm..

This reluctance to use relevant legislation to ensure the values of such areas, not only of national significance but international significance, are protected is a concern.

6.0 The responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine parks with particular reference to long term.

6.1 Without doubt governments at all levels have obligations under various national and international protocols, treaties and agreements. Several of these agreements have already been cited.

6.2 What appears to be lacking is a real commitment to a long term strategic approach with matching resources to achieve desired, well defined outcomes in a timely fashion. It is WPSQ's view that this applies to governments at both the State and Commonwealth level. Long term views are also required to address management strategies such as rehabilitation or threats such as climate change. The use of natural processes, perhaps with some intervention for weed control, is the most cost effective means of restoring habitat. Time and a long term commitment are critical factors in this approach to rehabilitation.

6.3 The reliance on acquisition funding from consolidated revenue even if it is subject to carry-over does not assist long term planning. The establishment of a protected area trust to which funds could be directed from a range of sources, not only government, over time to address the needs of establishing

a national reserve system, its appropriate management and to satisfy the necessary research requirements would assist in ensuring a commitment to long-term planning.

7.0 The records of Governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine parks

7.1 WPSQ acknowledges that progress has been made with considerable variation among the various jurisdictions. It is noted with regret that overall targets have not been met.

7.2 WPSQ appreciates that if a continental scale conservation model is adopted to achieve a national reserve system reserves other than National parks will be involved. Queensland appears to be putting considerable effort into nature refugees under the *Nature Conservation Act* 1992. On the surface this appears to be a relatively low cost strategy to afford protection to wildlife habitat and complement the much more expensive protected area estate. For this to be effective the nature refugee program needs to be strategic in direction. The results to date do not reflect this. Some local authorities such as the Caloundra City Council appear to be far more strategic and are committing appropriate resources to enhance conservation and protect biodiversity in their area of responsibility.

8.0 Conclusion

Progress has been achieved with the establishment and management of protected areas in Australia. However much more has to be done to achieve desirable international standards. The terrestrial conservation reserves, although totally inadequate, are more comprehensive and representative than the marine protected area system.

There is need to adopt a conservation model that uses a continental scale in designing and coordinating conservation and compatible land use across millions of hectares. Connectivity and resilience need to be criteria for future acquisitions along with the CAR principles. The continued use of regional ecosystems as surrogates for biodiversity needs to be questioned.

Management of the protected area estate needs to be enhanced and the ever escalating threats addressed. Ready access to scientifically based databases to enhance management decisions is required.

Funding has to be increased. Sources of funding need not be from government sources alone but overexploitation for the tourist dollar must be avoided at all costs. Entrance fees to National Parks are not the answer and are strongly opposed by WPSQ.

More co-operation between the various jurisdictions is highly desirable.

Australia must increase its effort to satisfy national and international obligations. As a nation we cannot afford to have the tag “Parks in Peril” applied to our national reserve system.

Des Boyland, Policies & Campaigns Manager, WPSQ
8 March 2006

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ATTACHMENT 1

WPSQ POLICY: NATIONAL PARKS

Scope:

This document presents WPSQ's view on the major issues associated with National Park and National Park (recovery) management in Queensland. It encompasses goals and actions recommended to ensure Queensland's National Parks system meets the Vision outlined by the Queensland Government / Environmental Protection Agency *Master Plan for Queensland's Parks System* (Appendix A). WPSQ supports the concept of the use of a Master Plan as a tool for National Park management. While WPSQ is supportive of many of the initiatives contained in the Master Plan, there is opposition of varying degrees to some commercial and tourist innovations.

This policy statement does not address any of the other 10 classes of protected area classified under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and described in the Master Plan – these shall be the subject of other policy documents.

Context:

National Parks may be declared over unallocated state land and are primarily aimed at protecting our natural and cultural heritage. National parks are to be preserved for their intrinsic worth and for the benefit, appropriate use and enjoyment of the public. They provide people with opportunities for relaxation, education, recreation, spiritual connection, and afford economic benefit to the state of Queensland and vested interests (e.g. tour guides).

WPSQ recommends that in selecting Queensland's National Parks and enhancing the estate, planning authorities move away from using percentage of state land area as a measure for nomination and inclusion. Selection should instead be based on the use of scientific data to define comprehensive, adequate and representative areas of all our regional ecosystems for inclusion in the park estate (see JANIS 1997 for definitions). In addition to meet the challenges of climate change the principles of connectivity and resilience must be included in the selection criteria. The percentage of the State protected is not an appropriate measurement or any real test of effectiveness of the program. The establishment of specified percentages of regional ecosystems also is not an effective measurement. Areas of cultural value should also be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Goals:

- Comprehensive, representative and adequate areas of all Queensland's regional ecosystems are protected in National Parks using a continental scale model engaging the principles of connectivity and resilience.
- Queensland's cultural values are protected in National Parks.
- Government policy, planning and resourcing promotes and facilitates National Park nomination and inclusion.
- Land uses adjacent to protected estate do not detrimentally impact on the values of the park.
- National Park boundaries encompass complete landscape units and are appropriate for efficient management.
- Management of our National Parks will ensure preservation of their natural integrity, or in the case of Recovery Parks, are recovered to a level where natural integrity can be maintained and they can be dedicated as National Park.
- The economic values of National Parks are not allowed to take precedence over the biological, scientific, aesthetic, recreational and other values and human interference will be minimal.
- National Parks will be accessible to the community, their value promoted through education, and public participation in park management incorporated/encouraged so that people will gain an understanding of the importance of these areas, and an affinity for their continued protection.
- Governments will provide adequate resources for nature-based activities in parks that do not adversely impact on the natural integrity of these areas.
- Native title is recognised and traditional owners of National Parks are able to maintain traditional lifestyles (in accordance with management plans) and are involved in all aspects of park management.

Actions:

WPSQ supports and advocates the following actions:

- Government funding should be directed toward locating and acquiring comprehensive, adequate and representative regional ecosystems and areas of cultural value, and these areas should be immediately nominated for inclusion as National Park.
- The Queensland State government, government departments, interest groups and individuals should be included in identification of these areas.
- Nominated areas should acquire immediate protection from degrading influences so that the condition of the area remains the same throughout the entire process from nomination to inclusion.
- Funding should be provided to review all present National Parks to ensure they do not devalue the currency of National Parks and recommend remedial action where necessary and appropriate.
- Scientific studies should be conducted in order to understand the ecological processes occurring within parks and transfer this knowledge to management.
- 'Open-system' management of Parks should be promoted, whereby ecological flows (e.g. pest species movements) between parks and surrounding lands is considered in management.

- Park management should consider the knowledge of surrounding landowners, the community, and traditional owners for informed decision making.
- Specific management and monitoring programs should be applied to endangered, threatened and vulnerable species.
- Removal of species exotic to the Protected Area Estate in accordance with an approved management plans.
- Recovery Parks should be recovered to a state of natural integrity that is determined by scientific research and revegetation should use plants of local genetic stock.
- Fees should not be charged for Park admission, but may be charged at minimal rates for provision of services within parks (e.g. camping and associated costs, brochures, guided walks other interpretative services, etc) and monies collected go toward park management.
- Community 'stewardship' should be promoted whereby the public is provided with the opportunity to become voluntarily involved in park maintenance and management programmes.
- Park infrastructure should only include facilities considered necessary to the Park itself and be subject to EIS. Visitor facilities should be safe, functional and blend in with the natural environment.
- National parks should demonstrate environmentally sensitive or 'green' practices and infrastructure (e.g. solar power, composting toilets).
- Traditional owners should be granted hunting and gathering rights within parks provided species collected are not threatened, practices are in accord with traditional owner cultural pursuits, in line with management plans and do not pose risk to adjacent landholders and/or other park users.

Approved by Council Date 31/05/2005

1 APPENDIX

1.1 'The Future of our Parks – our Vision'

"To contribute to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage in Queensland by establishing and managing a comprehensive and fully representative system of protected areas, managed in partnership with Indigenous people, and with the involvement of an informed and participating community."

(Environmental Protection Agency, *'Master Plan for Queensland's Parks System,* 2001)

DEFINITIONS

Biodiversity — The natural diversity of wildlife (including plants and animals), together with the environmental conditions for their survival.

Regional ecosystem — Vegetation communities, occurring within bioregions, consistently associated with a particular combination of geology, landform and soil.[1]

Natural Integrity — The condition of an ecosystem where biological diversity and ecosystem processes are optimal and are likely to persist.[2]

Cultural Value — Places or objects that have anthropological, archaeological, historical, scientific, spiritual or sociological significance or value, including such significance or value under Aboriginal tradition or Island custom.[3]

[1] E.P.A. *Master Plan for Queensland's Parks System*, 2001.
[2] E.P.A. *Master Plan for Queensland's Parks System*, 2001.
[3] Nature Conservation Act, 1992.