



**NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND INC.**

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**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY  
INTO RESOURCING OF NATIONAL PARKS  
AND PROTECTED AREAS**

**MARCH 2006**

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND

The National Parks Association of Queensland has been the leading community voice for National Parks and protected areas in Queensland since 1930.

We have approximately 1200 members and supporters including our affiliated organisations.

Our members and supporters have a strong interest in building and improving the National Parks system, both by expanding parks to greater protect our natural and cultural heritage and by providing the management attention needed to ensure park values are not harmed or diminished.

### PRINCIPAL ISSUES

- Queensland is building its National Park system. Over a million hectares are being added this year from former State Forests and the Cape York Tenure Resolution process. By end of 2006, broadscale land clearing will end, hopefully forever.
- Even at current rates of growth, however, Queensland will not reach international protected area targets by 2010.
- About 4% of Queensland's land area is in National Park.
- The proportion of the Great Barrier Reef in National Parks rose recently from 5% to 33% after a systematic bioregional planning approach was followed. The Great Sandy Marine Park was proposed in 2005 with less than 4% set aside in Marine National Parks while Moreton Bay has less than 1%.
- Protected areas in Queensland have a considerable distance to go before being considered comprehensive, adequate or representative. Only about 6.5% of the land area of all endangered regional ecosystems so far mapped in Queensland<sup>1</sup> are inside protected areas (including Resources Reserves and excluding Nature Refuges).
- Of Queensland's 19 bioregions, 11 are below 5% protected. Queensland ranks 7th among the eight states and territories in comprehensiveness and standard of management<sup>2</sup>
- 60% of Queensland is state land under leasehold tenure mostly for livestock production in western Queensland. Many leasehold areas of high conservation value could have been brought into the protected estate if current laws governing pastoral leases had been enforced.
- Only 23% or 96 of 417 EPA managed protected areas have management plans.<sup>3</sup>
- The principal threats to National Parks and protected areas in Queensland are: underfunding, climate change, lack of connectivity, pests, fishing, and visitor pressures.

### PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Shift** of Natural Heritage Trust spending priorities back to the core business of building the National Reserve System.
- **Commitment** by all jurisdictions to meet *Convention on Biological Diversity* targets.
- **A national conference** to develop parks management standards.
- **Recognition** that visitors are not the principal users of parks, and that parks deliver enormous ecosystem services to the entire community.
- **Development** of a Parks Trust built out of levies on activities such as motor vehicles, new suburban developments, mining and agriculture or green lotteries to secure long term funding for parks acquisition and management.

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<sup>1</sup> Large parts of western Queensland and the Cape have yet to be mapped.

<sup>2</sup> Sattler P. 2006. An evaluation of Queensland's protected area system in a national context for comprehensiveness, extent and standard of management. *Journal of the Royal Society of Queensland* (in press)

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Parliament, question on notice 864 26/5/2005.

- **A program for completion** of management plans for National Parks in Queensland.
- **A systematic, bioregional process** for all Marine Park planning in Queensland following the lead of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
- **Planning and natural resource management** at a coordinated landscape-scale to ensure National Parks and the values they protect are embedded in and well connected to a "nature-friendly" landscape.
- **Tighten** pest control to minimise side impacts. **Restore** predators to the landscape.
- **Ratification** of the Kyoto protocol and other prompt action to slow the onset of global climate change.
- **Phaseout** of fishing in terrestrial National Parks in Queensland.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

***The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's National Parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:***

***(a) the values and objectives of Australia's National Parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;***

- Protected areas have enormous value for protecting biodiversity, cultural heritage and ecosystem services such as clean water and air, and counteracting global warming.
- Protected area values cannot be reduced to simple dollar equivalents. They are irreplaceable, fundamental to our existence, and subject to legal and treaty obligations.
- The Queensland Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates total National Park related spending by visitors to National Parks in Queensland at approximately \$1,260M per annum.
- Net returns from ecosystem services of Queensland's protected areas are worth about \$7,000M per annum.<sup>4</sup>
- Contact with nature in protected areas is vital for human wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>
- National Parks are the most effective and secure mechanism to protect biodiversity under the *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*.
- Commonwealth and state governments are obliged by the *Convention* to meet some important targets such as:
  - "At least 10 per cent of each of the world's ecological regions effectively conserved" by 2010
  - "Protection of 50 per cent of the most important areas for plant diversity assured" by 2010
  - "60 per cent of the world's threatened species conserved in situ" by 2010
  - "By 2015, all protected areas and protected area systems are integrated into the wider land- and seascape, ... taking into account ecological connectivity..."
  - "All protected areas to have effective management in existence by 2012..."<sup>6</sup>
- Under the *Master Plan* for parks 2001, the Queensland Government committed to 80% of regional ecosystems represented in the Park system by 2021.
- The Queensland Government made an election commitment to establish border to border Marine parks.
- Under Queensland's *Marine Parks Act 2004*, the purpose of Marine parks is "conservation of the marine environment"

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<sup>4</sup> Asafu-Adjaye, John, Richard Brown, Anna Straton. 2005. On measuring wealth: a case study on the state of Queensland. *Journal of Environmental Management* 75, 145–155.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.deakin.edu.au/hbs/hsd/research/niche/current\\_projects.php](http://www.deakin.edu.au/hbs/hsd/research/niche/current_projects.php)

<sup>6</sup> Decision VII/28 <http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.aspx?m=COP-07&id=7765&lg=0>

**(b) whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;**

- The mid-term review of the National Reserve System found that:

"The NRS as a whole, including those areas acquired through the NRSP [National Reserve System program], constitutes an asset of substantial biological and economic value. The value of this asset is not currently reflected in funding for the management of parks and reserves, or in funding for their acquisition and creation. The NHT has provided a substantial boost to the level of funding available to the Program, nevertheless, the current level of funding is inadequate to achieve the goals of the Program." (emphasis added)
- The *Setting Biodiversity Priorities* (SBP) submission to the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council in 2002 estimated that \$300-400m would be enough to bring 22 million ha into the National Reserve system, achieve 80% comprehensiveness in protection of regional ecosystems, save 14,700 native species and return other economic benefits such as tourism of the order of \$2,000M a year.<sup>7</sup>
- Of the ~\$2110M spent by the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) from 1997 to 2005 only ~5% or \$105 million (less than 1/3 of the SBP recommended level) went to progress the NRS. Of that only ~10% was spent in Queensland.<sup>8</sup>
- Queensland has the highest percentage of bioregional area with high priorities for inclusion in the protected estate but has received only 0.5% of NHT money for building the National Reserve.
- Queensland ranks 7th among the eight states and territories in comprehensiveness, extent and standard of management of the protected estate.<sup>9</sup>
- The Queensland government has a small budget for acquisition of less than \$15M a year. The Qld Govt established the Trust for Nature in 2004 with \$5M seed money. The Trust for Nature does not however acquire National Parks but follows the revolving trust model of buying properties, putting conservation covenants on the title and reselling.
- Management of National Parks in Queensland is underfunded. Whilst there was an increase in baseline funding in the 2005 budget, this was only enough to fund park rangers for new park additions. Funding for support functions such as planning, monitoring and research has declined in real terms.
- Local governments in Queensland employ conservation levies on property rates to fund programs of acquisition and management of conservation parks. Local governments are building a significant conservation estate but management and allowable uses follows no uniform standard. These levies provide a model for Queensland to follow in securing long term funding for parks.

**c any threats to the objectives and management of our National Parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;**

**Underfunding**

- Underfunding for both acquisition and management of National Parks in Queensland is a significant threat.
- Management problems often derive from the small size and large boundaries of National Parks. Increasing the size of National Parks to reduce complex boundaries and eliminate inholdings can greatly reduce ongoing costs and management problems. Such targeted acquisitions can help reduce management costs in the long run.

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<sup>7</sup> Possingham, H., Ryan, S., Baxter, J. and Morton, S. 2002. *Setting Biodiversity Priorities*. A paper prepared as part of the activities of the working group producing the report: Sustaining our Natural Systems and Biodiversity for the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council in 2002. DEST: Canberra. P 9.

<sup>8</sup> Figures taken from Annual Reports of the Natural Heritage Trust and EPA data

<sup>9</sup> Sattler P. 2006. An evaluation of Queensland's protected area system in a national context for comprehensiveness, extent and standard of management. *Journal of the Royal Society of Queensland* (in press)

- Management costs usually increase significantly once access is provided. Ill-considered provision of access can dramatically increase management problems and costs and lower the money Treasury is willing to provide to the acquisition program.
- A major stumbling block to acquisition of National Parks is the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing management costs of acquired lands. Treasury officials balk at acquisitions which entail poorly-estimated future management costs. The states differ dramatically in level of spending per hectare, due to differences in management demands, showing that this is not a reasonable yardstick to use.
- Systematic, science-driven planning can help reduce management costs in the long run and give Treasury some assurance that management costs will not "blow-out".
- Only 23% of protected areas in Queensland have management plans.
- The Queensland Government committed to "border-to-border" marine parks in 2004. However plan development has been slowed by controversy over the planning process, since the Queensland Government is not using a systematic, bioregional approach like that used on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 2004.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Shift of Natural Heritage Trust funding priorities to the core business of building the National Reserve System.
- A national conference specifically to develop national standards for categorising parks by management cost so that jurisdictions can build reliable, consistent estimates of ongoing costs into acquisition proposals.
- A program for completion of management plans for National Parks in Queensland.
- A systematic, bioregional process for all Marine Park planning in Queensland following the lead of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

#### **Climate change**

- Climate change will place enormous stress on native animal and plant communities.
- Rainforest species adapted to a narrow temperature range and high rainfall are perhaps most at risk.
- The lack of connectivity and wildlife corridors linking National Parks means that communities will be unable to move and adapt to change.
- Coral bleaching is threatening the Great Barrier Reef.
- The National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan calls for strategic acquisitions to create refuges for vulnerable species and integration of planning and to allow movement across bioclimatic gradients.

#### **SOLUTIONS:**

- Federal government must ratify and implement the Kyoto Protocol for binding greenhouse pollution reduction targets.
- Queensland has an aggressive coal export business. Levies on coal royalties and other greenhouse polluting sources could go to acquisition of natural areas into the protected estate.
- All jurisdictions should commit to CBD targets for connectivity.

#### **Lack of connectivity**

Most protected areas are small islands in a sea of extractive uses, roads and sprawling urban areas. Studies have shown that most extant mammals suffer considerable range reduction and genetically-detectable fragmentation even though they may not be listed as endangered yet.

#### **SOLUTIONS:**

- Targeted acquisition, private land conservation, reform of agriculture, revegetation, zoning and urban growth boundaries are all key mechanisms for restoring natural ecological function in areas around and between National Parks and thus, connectivity.
- All jurisdictions should commit to CBD targets for connectivity.

### **Pests**

- Feral livestock, pets and exotic weeds present a significant threat to the values of National Parks and one that requires constant active management.
- Baiting programs on National Parks are still using indiscriminate baits that kill native fauna.
- Even native herbivores can sometimes reach pest levels and threaten native vegetation, in part due to persecution of top predators, dingoes, to protect livestock.
- Many species like dogs, buffel grass and goats are may be cultivated on neighboring properties and present a constant source of feral escapes.
- Mechanical and herbicidal controls are known to have poor cost effectiveness against most weeds.

#### **SOLUTIONS:**

- Restore dingoes as top predators, by protecting them and ending persecution.
- Baiting programs for feral pests must be species-specific and entail monitoring of impacts on native fauna.
- Stricter quarantine regulations to prevent new pests arriving.
- Regulation or incentives for landholders neighbouring National Parks to remove or prevent pest species like buffel grass.
- Enhance support for biological control of weeds.
- Restore fire regimes that eliminate weeds.

### **Fishing**

- Queensland allows recreational fishing in fresh and estuarine waters of 56 terrestrial National Parks, undermining the concept of National Parks as places free of extractive uses.
- Commercial fishing is illegal, but still goes on unchallenged in fresh and estuarine waters of at least 19 terrestrial National Parks.
- Ironically, fishing is prohibited in Marine National Parks under the Marine Parks Act and regulation.
- There is no systematic regulation or monitoring of impacts of fishing on National Park values.
- In contrast Native Title holders wishing to exercise their rights with respect to hunting and fishing are channeled through a regulatory process.

#### **SOLUTIONS:**

- Queensland National Parks open to fishing do not meet National Reserve System inclusion criteria and should not be included.
- Enforcement action against commercial fishing in National Parks in Queensland.
- Phaseout the regulatory protection for fishing in National Parks in Queensland as inconsistent with purposes of the Nature Conservation Act.

### **Visitor pressure**

- Visitor pressure is increasing in Queensland particularly in the Southeast Queensland corner. Southeast Queensland is poorly served by National Parks and population is exploding.
- High impact recreation interests (horse riders, trail bikes, 4WD clubs) are pressuring for access to National Parks, which will degrade park values. National Parks are tourism's strongest asset in Qld, but are at risk of growing visitor pressure and commercialisation.
- The Queensland government's Tourism in Protected Areas initiative has some good aspects such as estimation of Sustainable Visitor Capacities (SVCs). But it also has some aspects of concern such as creating tradeable property interests over National Parks for commercial tour operations.
- The present emphasis is on mass tourism rather than high quality eco-tourism compatible with the purpose of parks.
- There is growing pressure for "user-pays" approaches to fund parks and greater commercialisation of parks including placement of commercial, privately owned infrastructure on National Parks in Queensland. The "user pays" philosophy distorts management agency mission away from protection to one of fostering high visitor numbers.

- Visitors are not the principal users of parks. The entire community benefits from the biodiversity protection and ecosystem services provided by parks whether they visit or not.

**SOLUTIONS:**

- Fund parks out of levies on activities that degrade the natural environment such as motor vehicles, greenfield development on the urban edge, mining royalties and land rents.
- Funding of parks management proportionate to the balance of visitor and non-visitor values such as ecosystem services and biodiversity protection.
- Strict limitation on commercial operations to prevent creating private property rights over parks.
- Only accredited eco-tourist operations allowed in National Parks.
- Provision of recreation parks near urban areas to absorb pressure for high impact recreation and divert such high impact activities away from National Parks.

***d the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of National Parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans; and***

See a above

***e the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of National Parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.***

See b above