

IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

SENATE INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Introduction

Ipswich City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas being undertaken by the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee.

The submission identifies both a number of issues experienced by Ipswich City Council in protected area management within Ipswich as well as observations on the overall issue of protected areas in Queensland. Many of these issues are common across South-east Queensland (SEQ).

The submission also identifies opportunities and proposes recommendations to address these issues. It is hoped that these opportunities and proposed recommendations will be considered and incorporated into protected area management in the future.

Background

General

Ipswich City Council recognises the important role that State Government plays in protecting, managing and enhancing significant ecological values through various protected areas. Council also recognises that funding and resourcing for the continued acquisition and management of protected areas currently provided by State Government in Ipswich and SEQ is limited. Council considers that this current level of activity is not sufficient to ensure the long-term viability of protected areas in SEQ in general.

As part of the submission, Council has identified a number of issues and opportunities that could be undertaken by State Government to improve the protected area system within SEQ and Ipswich City. The need to address these issues is crucial for the long-term viability of protected areas and significant ecological values in SEQ.

It is important to note that in Ipswich and within SEQ in general, there is an increasing demand for publicly accessible greenspace areas whether within national parks, regional parks or other reserves to cater for a range of recreational opportunities. Protected area management in Ipswich and in SEQ must be undertaken to include a multi-purpose focus, to meet increasing population demands.

In 2000, Ipswich City Council provided a submission to the Local Government Association of Queensland's National Parks Public Inquiry into the management of National Parks in Queensland. Many of the issues identified by the LGAQ Inquiry in

2000 are still relevant to current protected area management in Queensland and as a result, are again raised through this submission.

Context - Ipswich City Council Area

Ipswich City Council in SEQ, contains a very small area under state and federally recognised protected area management (429 hectares of a total 120 154 hectares or 0.35% of Ipswich City Council area). These areas have the status of Conservation Park under the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and are owned by Queensland Government. Ipswich City Council through a trustee agreement manages these areas. The Queensland State Government does not currently manage any protected areas with the City. In comparison, other local government areas within SEQ contain between 14-29% state owned and managed protected areas.

The absence of extensive State managed parks and reserves in Ipswich City has resulted in nearly all of the conservation areas within the City to date being acquired through Ipswich City Council initiatives. This cost is borne by local ratepayers. Council has purchased (and manages) over 4600 hectares of ecologically significant land through an Environmental levy.

A recent Greenspace Targets Study (2005) for the City has revealed that a further 3-4000 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace areas are required to meet future sustainable growth of the City (refer to a copy of the attached report for further detail). This area is required to meet quality of life and nature-based recreation objectives for the City as well as SEQ. It is recognised that a coordinated approach to meeting these targets is required by all levels of government.

The community through the Ipswich 2020 and Beyond Vision for the City (2005) also identified the need to identify, protect and enhance biodiversity assets through acquisition of conservation areas. A suggested mechanism is through a partnership process with the state government to ensure long-term protection of conservation areas.

At the regional level, the SEQ Regional Plan (2005) has identified that the population growth of SEQ and associated urban and rural development is placing increasing pressure on the natural environment including current protected areas within the region. The SEQ Regional Plan recognises that protecting and managing the natural environment is fundamental to achieving a sustainable future for the region. It will require the coordination of policy initiatives and collaboration across government, industry and the community to ensure protection of the region's natural environment.

Specific Issues and Opportunities

Identified below are current issues faced by Ipswich City Council in regards to the protected area reserve system. It is important to note that these issues are common across South-east Queensland. Suggested recommendations are also identified for each issue.

1. Appropriate State Government Resources Required for Management of Protected Areas

Council currently manages state owned conservation parks through a trustee agreement pursuant to the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. It has been identified that there is a lack of appropriate resources (financial, staff, and in-kind support such as management advice) provided by State Government to assist Council manage conservation parks within the City.

To effectively manage state owned protected areas (as well as state owned and managed protected areas), Council recommends that the Queensland Government seek opportunities to appropriately fund and resource protected area management. The objective is to meet increasing management demands, as well as to manage external influences such as increase nature-based recreational demands. State Government must recognise that all new capital investments should be matched by an increase in appropriate budgets for the management of these areas.

During the investigation into opportunities for the appropriate funding and resourcing of protected areas in Queensland, Council recommends that State Government investigate opportunities for user pays approaches where a specific service is provided to visitors or where use requires amelioration of potential impacts on resource values. However, user fees must not be a substitute for the State's responsibility to pay for the management of the natural resource base and the protection of the values embodied in protected areas.

2. Recognition of Council Owned Conservation Areas as Protected Areas

Ipswich City as well as other local governments in SEQ are important landowners and managers of large areas containing significant ecological values. There is currently poor recognition by the state and federal governments of local governments' role in protected area acquisitions and management. Council recognises that areas acquired for conservation purposes by local governments provide a valuable contribution to Australia's protected area estate.

Council is seeking support from State and Federal Government to recognise local government's role in contributing to a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve (CAR) system for Australia. This can be achieved through the recognition of local government acquired conservation areas as protected areas.

3. Coordination and Integration between Acquisition Programs

Currently, there is poor coordination and integration between local and state governments regarding activities to secure land for protected areas. Both local and state government undertake different processes to identify ecologically significant areas for acquisition, often without consultation between both parties in regards to strategically targeting acquisition programs.

To help ensure that a CAR reserve system is achieved and to meet increasing and varying community demand for the use of the areas, Council recommends that there is improved coordination and integration through partnership approaches acquiring land for protected areas. A coordinated approach can be resource and cost effective, while achieving significant conservation outcomes.

4. Appropriate Resources Required for Acquisition of Protected Areas in Ipswich and SEQ

Currently it would appear that funding is a low priority for protected area management and resourcing in SEQ by State Government. In the past, State Government has been the major provider for acquiring and managing protected areas. It also appears that there is a shift by state government to move responsibility of acquisitions and management of significant ecological areas towards local government.

A lack of appropriate funding by state government for protected area acquisitions in ICC in the past, has led to Council proactively acquiring over 4600ha of ecologically significant areas. The purpose being to protect, manage and enhance significant national, state, regional and local ecological values.

While Council recognises that the state government is focusing its acquisition program in other parts of the state due to a number of reasons, it must be recognised that there is still a strong need for securing and managing protected areas in South-east Queensland.

Overall, there is a severe lack of greenspace in SEQ, which currently lies at around 16% of it's area. This is well below other comparable regions in Australia (eg Sydney Metropolitan Region). Publicly accessible greenspace (which incorporates protected areas) for a wide range of recreational opportunities is becoming a significant issue in Ipswich and SEQ.

The Regional Forest Agreement process that is currently being undertaken has reduced access for a number of recreation opportunities within South-east Queensland. This issue needs to be also considered in protected area management in South-east Queensland.

Council recognises that areas acquired for conservation purposes and future protected area acquisitions now need to have a multi-purpose function to cater for the increasing demands for publicly accessible open space that includes recreational opportunities where appropriate.

It is recommended that a coordinated approach between all relevant stakeholders in regards to acquisition for conservation purposes in Ipswich and SEQ be undertaken. This approach needs to incorporate a multi-purpose approach to meet environmental, social and economic requirements.

5. Threats to Values

Council recognises that some of the major threats to values within protected areas include weed and pest management, inappropriate fire regimes, and potential impacts from climate change. There is often a lack of scientific research available from the state government and other key research organisations to local governments for the management of protected areas eg. management of threatened species within local government conservation reserve framework.

As a priority, protected area management in Queensland needs to be appropriately resourced to address internal and external threats such as weeds, inappropriate fire regimes, feral animals, and fragmentation. Other issues threatening protected areas include climate change, urbanisation and agricultural expansion. These also require appropriate financial and in-kind resourcing.

State Government also needs to ensure that pest management plans are integrated and implemented in association with other state, local and regional pest management plans developed pursuant to the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*.

There is also a need for a long-term strategic approach with appropriate funding and resourcing for key threatening processes eg weed and feral animal management for appropriate management in protected areas.

Council also recommends that State Government should work co-operatively with local government, neighbours and other community stakeholders in regards to pest animal and weed management, fire management and other threatening processes in regards to the management of protected area estate and adjacent areas to ensure a co-ordinated management approach and development of partnerships for effective management of these areas.

6. Relationship with Off-park Conservation Initiatives

It must be recognised that protected areas are only one type of land use to protect ecologically significant areas and an extensive well-managed and resourced protected area system will still not provide adequate protection of biodiversity.

Council supports an integrated approach to biodiversity planning that incorporates a range of integrated planning and management across various tenures that includes a comprehensive system of biodiversity conservation on both public and private land.

The Queensland State Government operates the Nature Refuge Program, an off-park voluntary conservation program pursuant to the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. It is recognised that the implementation and development of this program to complement the protected area estate is currently restricted due to lack of appropriate financial (including appropriate landholder incentives and support) and staff resources. It is recommended that State Government investigate opportunities to adequately resource this program.

There is also poor integration of the Nature Refuge Program with other off-park conservation initiatives including Council programs such as voluntary conservation agreements, and Land for Wildlife in Ipswich and South-east Queensland.

Council recommends that all stakeholders involved in private land conservation develop an integrated partnership approach to off-park conservation to ensure a coordinated approach to the protection of ecological processes and values on private land to complement the protected area estate.

7. Local and Regional Economic Impacts

Protected areas have the ability to provide extensive economic benefits to Queensland at the local, regional and state levels. However, economic benefits from protected areas are often limited due to the lack of resources required to manage and construct appropriate infrastructure within protected areas.

There is a need for more research on the social and economic benefits of the protected area system to local and regional communities and economies. It is recommended that the Queensland State Government establish capacity or social and economic research to allow evaluation of the significant economic contribution of protected areas to local, regional and state economies. This research should be used to assist in demonstrating to Government the merits of additional funding to support further acquisitions, management and construction of appropriate infrastructure.

8. Community Relations

It is recognised that there are often limited attempts to involve the local community in protected area management. Local communities can often provide significant local knowledge in regards to protected area management in Queensland.

Opportunities exist for active involvement of the community in aspects of protected area management and the development of partnerships as elements of both conservation of the public protect area estate and well as conservation on private lands.

It is also recommended that the State Government investigate opportunities to incorporate local community participation and involvement into protected area management. This would require development of consultative and advisory mechanisms, effective communication strategies as well as greater engagement of the local community by State Government protected area staff.

Council also recommends that State Government also commit to its important role in natural and cultural heritage interpretation and community education through the provision of appropriate financial and staff resources.

9. Indigenous Community Involvement

It is recognised that indigenous communities can play a key role in protected area management. Council supports the need for state government to continue to undertake a proactive role in the involvement of indigenous people in protected area management. The involvement of indigenous communities in protected area management should also be extended to recruitment, training and greater employment of indigenous people in protected area management and interpretation roles.

Future Opportunities/Partnerships

Ipswich City Council recognises the efforts that state and federal governments undertake to protect, manage and enhance protected areas and their values.

Council recognises that conservation initiatives such as protected area mechanisms must adopt innovative and adaptive strategies and consist of collaborative and co-management approaches in order to confront pressures facing protected areas in Australia currently and in the future.

Council recognises that the protected area system is an important tool for assisting with the conservation of Australia's biodiversity within the broader integrated landscape management. However, Council also recognises that appropriate funding and resourcing is required to ensure that the objectives and values of the protected area system are maintained and enhanced to ensure long-term viability of the values they contain.

Council welcomes opportunities and partnerships to assist State and Federal Government in the protection, management and enhancement of current protected areas as well as the securement of future protected areas to meet current threats and demands on protected areas currently occurring in Ipswich City and South-east Queensland.