
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Terms of Reference

In response to resolutions at its 1998 and 1999 conferences, and representations from constituent bodies, the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) established this Public Inquiry in January 2000. The Inquiry was chaired by Associate Professor Bob Beeton, Head of the School of Natural and Rural Systems Management, University of Queensland.

The Terms of Reference set by LGAQ for this Inquiry were:-

- to examine existing policy and legislation to ensure the policy climate comprehensively supports improved management of crown land, in particular National Parks, across the State;
- to identify a range of models to achieve improved management of National Parks;
- to identify the strategic role, if any, Local Government can achieve in partnership with the State Government;
- to investigate possible linkages between State Government, Local Government, regional groups of Councils and the community which could improve the management of National Parks; and
- to identify an appropriate level of State funding for National Parks.

The overall objective for the Inquiry was to identify ways to enhance the benefits of the National Parks system for the Queensland community.

Inquiry Process

The process adopted for the Inquiry involved the following steps:-

A public launch of the Inquiry involving media representatives in late January 2000;

Letters sent in late January to all Councils in Queensland along with a wide range of stakeholder groups explaining the Inquiry and providing details of the terms of reference and public consultation process and inviting submissions by 25 February 2000;

Advertisements in Newspapers in late January advising of the Inquiry and its Terms of Reference and seeking public submissions by 25 February 2000;

Advertisements in Newspapers in late February advising of the date and location of Public Hearings;

Public Hearings held in Cairns, Emerald and Brisbane in March 2000 to allow private citizens, stakeholder organisations and Local Government an opportunity to present views to the Inquiry or to expand on points made in written submissions;

Where it seemed appropriate the Inquiry requested additional material from those who appeared at hearings. This material was treated as additional submissions to the Inquiry.

Following an approach from the Inquiry chair the Minister for Environment directed that, discussions take place with senior representatives of QPWS. These discussions aimed at facilitating co-operation in establishing matters of fact. In addition feedback and supporting information in relation to matters raised in submissions or at Public Hearings was requested by the Inquiry;

Review and analysis of relevant research and other background information along with analysis and consideration of all submissions and information presented to the Inquiry through the public processes.

The opportunity was provided for QPWS representatives to respond to particular assertions made to the Inquiry and to provide data and other information relevant to key points.

Structure of the report

In the report, the Inquiry presented key issues for the management of the National Park estate as they developed during the Inquiry process. These issues are then related to the specific terms of reference that established the limits of the Inquiry. Where operational recommendations are suggested by analysis of the key issues they are presented following the discussion of the issue. These are followed by recommendations addressing each term of reference. Together, these recommendations are the Inquiry's report to the LGAQ. This executive summary follows the structure of the report.

Issues for the Management of National Park Estate

Resourcing

The topic of resourcing of the National Park system was raised by a significant number of submissions and in comments made at the Public Hearings. The evidence presented to the Inquiry paints a clear picture of a chronic under-resourced National Parks system in the 1990s. The on-the-ground resources are not sufficient to effectively maintain the conservation values of the estate and maintain existing capital assets, let alone provide the visitor experiences, which are an integral part of the internationally recognised role of National Parks. This is a cause of concern given that National Parks are a key element in Queensland's biodiversity maintenance strategy and its positioning of itself as a provider of sustainable tourism.

QPWS currently does not hold time series data on operational budgets by Park or District. This suggests that internal management and data systems have been inadequate. Discussions with QPWS indicate that these past inadequacies in budgeting and accounting are now being addressed. Accrual accounting is being implemented with valuation of assets taking place.

Without data on operational outlays by function, it is not possible to effectively manage existing resources and monitor performance. QPWS should become more open and accountable for the funding it receives and ensure published information is sufficient to identify the resources devoted to each aspect of Park management. This reporting should include both spatial and functional elements.

An additional finding is that current budgeting systems appear inadequate with Districts not receiving budget allocations until late in a financial year. This often leads to uncertainty for both staff, the community and possibly at times rushed and inappropriate expenditure.

Recommendation 1: QPWS should upgrade its annual reporting to allow both better management and public scrutiny of resources allocated to Park operations and maintenance.

Recommendation 2: Internal QPWS budgeting processes should be reviewed to ensure Districts receive budget allocations early in each financial year.

(Recommendations 26, 27 and 28 deal specifically with the quantum of QPWS resourcing).

Local and Regional Economic Impacts

Many submissions highlighted the economic benefits to Queensland of the National Park system. There were however differences in views regarding the distribution of benefits at the local, regional and state level. Evidence was presented of negative economic impacts in some local areas whereas in others the economic benefits identified from the Park system were substantial.

There is a need for more research on the social and economic benefits of the National Park system to local communities and economies. Such research could assist in mounting a strong case for enhanced funding.

Recommendation 3: QPWS should establish capacity for social and economic research to allow evaluation of the significant economic contribution of Parks to local, regional and state

economies. This research should be used to assist in demonstrating to Government the merits of additional funding support. QPWS should build on its relations with Queensland Tourism and research institutions in developing the required analytical tools.

Pest Management and Landcare

Councils and rural groups or individuals made significant comment on this topic. Matters such as feral pig control, weed management, fire control and fencing were addressed at the hearings and in submissions. Of particular concern was the fact that QPWS, while recognizing the significance of “good neighbour” principles in management of Park areas, does not always apply them in practice. The feeling was that impacts of Parks on surrounding land uses were of little concern to some within QPWS districts. This situation is particularly evident in the Wet Tropics where jurisdictional confusion and policy conflict aggravates an already difficult situation.

Recommendation 4: QPWS should articulate a “good neighbour” policy to direct its approach to fire control, fencing, weed and feral animal control. QPWS should work co-operatively with Local Government, neighbours and other community stakeholders on these matters, and give increased priority and funding to addressing landcare and pest management problems. Pest Management Plans developed at a local level should integrate requirements for National Parks and other government lands.

Recommendation 5: QPWS should as a matter of priority review its policies in relation to feral pig control in conjunction with all stakeholders and develop positive initiatives to address problems identified by rural industry groups.

Recommendation 6: The Queensland and Commonwealth government’s review land management guidelines in the Wet Tropics WHA to bring them in line with Queensland-wide good neighbour policies.

Community Relations

The manner in which QPWS staff set about establishing sound relations with the local community appears to vary significantly across the state. While some Councils indicated a positive working relationship, others suggested that there was very limited consultation at a local level and little attempt to involve the local community. The Inquiry could not fully establish the basis of this variation, however, some explanation may lie in the poor resourcing issues and service culture.

Concerns were also expressed in relation to lack of consultation when acquisition of parks was being considered. Local knowledge of significance to overall management of a Park was often not taken advantage of.

The issue of QPWS culture was also raised in a number of submissions. The view was expressed that the organisation culture encourages a focus on protection of the environment with visitors being looked on as a burden to management. Some submissions suggested that elements of an adaptive learning culture do exist however this modern approach is apparently frustrated.

Concerns were also voiced by indigenous communities in relation to QPWS approach to involvement of Aboriginal people. There appears to have been inadequate attention given to this matter. This is especially the case if QPWS is benchmarked against other Australian agencies.

Recommendation 7: Park acquisition and development should be a transparent process

involving public consultation, with measures to address any development impacts or associated infrastructure needs being included in the acquisition and development program.

Recommendation 8: An objective of QPWS should be to establish local community participation and involvement in Park Management. This will require development of consultative and advisory mechanisms, effective communication strategies as well as greater engagement of the local community by QPWS staff.

Recommendation 9: QPWS should be proactive in development of staff capacity to engage communities and visitors and to achieve a customer service culture within the organisation.

Recommendation 10: QPWS should take a more proactive role in involvement of indigenous people in its activities, and recognise that because of its role as the State's principle custodian of natural and cultural heritage it is an important agency in the reconciliation process. This role should extend to recruitment, training and greater employment of indigenous people in Park management and interpretation roles.

Recommendation 11: The Queensland government should recognise that recommendation 10 will require above base funding allocations.

Local Government Finance

The impact on the rate base of a number of rural councils was identified in submissions. In a limited number of cases, the loss of rate base amounted to more than 10% of rate revenue capacity. However, for most councils the loss of rate base is relatively small and as such is not a major concern.

Recommendation 12: Where more than 5% of the Unimproved Capital Valuation of a Local Government is included in National Parks or other protected areas, an annual payment in lieu of rates should be made by QPWS, equivalent to the rate applying to surrounding rural lands if levied on the Park valuation. This payment should be designated for specific public works projects such as Park access roads, parking or associated public facilities agreed between QPWS and the Local Government concerned. Further planning and timing of such works should be negotiated with QPWS so that park management is not compromised. Any arrangement should allow for funds to be accumulated over time.

Addressing the Terms of Reference

TOR1- Policy and Legislative Climate

“to examine existing policy and legislation to ensure the policy climate comprehensively supports improved management of crown land, in particular National Parks, across the State”

The Act provides little direction in the way management of protected areas should take place or identifies the range of principles other than the *Cardinal Principle* of conservation. Some matters which could be incorporated in the Act to provide guidance to QPWS include:-

- greater transparency in selection of reserves including public consultation;
 - emphasis on fostering partnerships with the community as an element of nature conservation;
- promoting “good neighbour” principles in protected area management;

(these first three points effectively mean that a landscape based management approach is required)

the need to provide visitor and recreational experiences which are enriched by the natural features of the protected areas;

- promoting understanding of indigenous cultural heritage in the context of the natural environment; giving genuine effect to the joint management of lands of cultural significance to indigenous people.

The current policy framework is also focused on the need for public ownership and management of protected areas. There may be a need to consider other models to achieve overall conservation objectives. While it is accepted that public ownership and management of key protected areas is necessary, the extent of protected areas can be increased through community and private sector involvement.

Recommendation 13: The Nature Conservation Act 1992 should be revised to provide clearer guidance on principles necessary to ensure “best practice” management of National Parks and other protected areas. Particular principles for consideration are noted in 4.1.2 of this Report.

Recommendation 14: QPWS should pay more attention to mechanisms other than public acquisition of land to achieve representation of biodiversity, such as Conservation Agreements, with public and private land holders.

Recommendation 15: LGAQ should seek to establish bipartisan support for the principle that a well managed protected area system is an essential element in a modern society and a key to effectively establishing this State’s identity in terms of its natural and cultural heritage.

TOR2 – Models for Improved Management

“to identify a range of models to achieve improved management of National Parks”

The Inquiry received a significant and diverse range of suggestions regarding the management of National Parks. Within QPWS, there appears to be some reluctance to look at mechanisms to maximise outcomes from the limited resources available. While there are some examples of contracting-out of services, the Inquiry was presented with evidence that indicates that at times the culture of using internal resources results in considerable inefficiencies.

A number of submissions focused on the need for “user pays” arrangements if management systems are to improve. When the visitor profile is considered (78% estimated as independent day trippers), it is apparent that any user pays system must focus on this group. This group requires walking tracks, picnic areas and associated amenities, road access and car parking and interpretation services.

Recommendation 16: QPWS should develop a proactive approach to alternative models for service delivery including contracting-out of maintenance and other operations where cost effectiveness can be demonstrated. This will require changes in attitudes within QPWS as well as ensuring appropriate delegations exist at a District level for managing overall resources.

Recommendation 17: Greater use should be made of user pays approaches where a specific service is provided to visitors or where use requires amelioration of potential impacts on resource values.

TOR3 - Strategic Roles for Local Government

“to identify the strategic role, if any, Local Government can achieve in partnership with the State Government”

Local Government has a lead role in planning and land use management for its communities. In addition, Local Government is the key agency for Pest Management Plans under the *Rural Lands Protection Act*. Other areas where Local Governments play a key role include developing and maintaining the local road network, local economic development and SES activities. All of these activities are critical to effective management of National Parks. Local Government is a key stakeholder as well as playing a strategic role relevant to the National Park system.

The strategic role of Local Government in supporting conservation initiatives is also apparent. Many Councils have introduced environmental levies which have been used to acquire significant conservation land. Others have introduced rate rebates where landowners enter into Voluntary Conservation Agreements.

While there are notable exceptions, the realisation of this role at a Local Government level will require staff capacity building and resource allocation.

Recommendation 18: Local Government should be involved at a District level in development of Park Management Plans to gain a shared commitment to Park management approaches as well as leveraging required support in relevant aspects of plan implementation.

Recommendation 19: The LGAQ promote to its membership the concept of conservation as a landscape-based use and management activity. In doing this the better integration of local government planning schemes with National Park management plans is an essential element.

Recommendation 20: Local Government should consider participation with QPWS in developments associated with National Parks where this can achieve benefits to the local community through enhanced economic activity. This could include both on and off park facilities. Local Government should accept that not all funding for Park visitor services and facilities should be a QPWS responsibility.

Recommendation 21: Where National Parks represent a significant land use activity within a Local Government area, QPWS should be recognised by Local Government as a key stakeholder in development of Strategic Plans, Economic Development strategies, Recreation Plans and other planning initiatives, with planning outcomes providing appropriate support and integration of Parks within overall management and development strategies for the wider community.

Recommendation 22: Mechanisms should be established between QPWS and Local Governments to allow greater sharing of resources to enhance operational efficiencies of each party. This includes resources such as plant and equipment as well as planning and management resources including GIS capability.

TOR4 - Community and Government Linkages

“to investigate possible linkages between State Government, Local Government, regional groups of Councils and the community which could improve the management of National Parks”

Opportunities exist for active involvement of the community in aspects of Park management as well as for corporate sponsorship of specific Parks and associated management and development. Fostering relevant partnership arrangements is an important role for QPWS. To be effective, these partnerships need to foster involvement in decision making to gain commitment and a sense of “ownership”.

As noted earlier, there appears to be an urgent need for greater involvement of indigenous communities in Park management.

Recommendation 23: QPWS should seek to give effect to partnerships, recommended to be mandated in legislation, across a full range of activities. This would include:-
development of a culture that sees outreach as a hallmark;
recognising community involvement and partnerships are essential elements in implementing conservation objectives;

- **recognition of the contribution made to community well-being through involvement in tourism planning;**

acceptance of the use of local contracting capacity as an essential component of Park operation.

Recommendation 24: QPWS enhance its approaches to community participation and involvement including development of partnerships as elements of both conservation of the public protected areas as well as conservation outside the public reserve system.

Recommendation 25: QPWS rekindle and develop its former distinguished role in natural and cultural heritage interpretation and community education. The Service should become the primary agency involved in promoting the ‘telling the stories’ of Queensland’s landscapes and important cultural sites to the people.

TOR5 - Funding of National Parks

“to identify an appropriate level of State funding for National Parks”

It is outside the terms of reference of this Inquiry to comment on the need for growth in the National Park and other Protected Area estate. However, we observe that Queensland is Australia’s most biodiverse state. Currently 69% of the State’s regional ecosystems are represented in the State’s National Parks. The most significant areas of under representation are the western regions of the state. The conclusions to be drawn from these facts are that the pressures to expand the estate will not decrease. The implication to be drawn is that the Service’s and Government’s capacity to manage the acquisition of estate, manage what it has acquired and contribute to regional economies represents an enormous challenge

Available information suggests that operational funding of two to three times the current level of around \$4.50 per hectare would be required to realistically move towards desirable levels of management and to provide the services required of the QPWS managed estate. The Inquiry believes that it is critical that the Parliament acknowledges that resourcing is the major problem at the present time and that strategies must be put in place to overcome the deficiency.

In developing effective funding regimes it must be recognised that:-

there is a significant unmet maintenance need requiring a substantial immediate short term funding supported by an increase in base funding;

all new capital investments (including investments in land) must be accompanied by an additional contribution to the recurrent budget of QPWS;

there are increasing community expectations in relation to standards and safety that will continue to add pressure for enhanced funding for Parks.

Recommendation 26: The LGAQ support establishment of a new funding base for QPWS based on National Benchmarks. LGAQ should actively lobby government and all political parties for such an enhanced funding regime.

Recommendation 27: LGAQ should seek establishment of a Parks 2010 program which aims to address the unmet backlog in Park maintenance and development within a ten year period. This program should embrace the restoring of both natural capital by removing the threat of invasive exotics and capital infrastructure such as tracks, structures and interpretive facilities. The program should link to employment and training initiatives and involve Local Governments as a partner. A particular focus should be on involvement of indigenous communities.

Recommendation 28: In establishing ongoing funding policies, the Government must recognise that all new capital investments should be matched by an increase in recurrent budgets in accordance with accrual accounting practices.

Implementing Recommendations

The Inquiry was required to report to the LGAQ. This report is the result of the work of the Inquiry in the context of the Terms of Reference.

It is for the LGAQ to consider the results of the Inquiry and make appropriate representations to Government on those matters regarded as important to both Local Governments and the wider communities they represent. The fundamental point arising from the Inquiry is that without adequate resources the National Park system in this State cannot meet the expectations of the community or the principles established by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. **The Inquiry recommends to the LGAQ that they take a strong position in relation to this matter of current under-resourcing and use their influence to encourage other spheres of Government to immediately address this problem.**

It is also apparent to the Inquiry that individual Local Governments can play a more proactive and strategic role in relation to National Parks in particular, and conservation in general. **The LGAQ should seek to enhance their member Councils' recognition of the importance of National Parks and the way in which they can contribute to both conservation and tourism objectives.**

Many of the Recommendations made by the Inquiry relate to the way in which QPWS does business and the culture of the organisation. QPWS is operating within an environment of change. The organisation must be equipped to adapt to this changing environment and particularly to the increasing community expectations and requirements in relation to the protected area system. It is not apparent at this point that the culture of the organisation has changed to reflect modern management approaches or to place emphasis on service to the external customers. This will be a key challenge to the organisation in implementing required change.

It is the view of this Inquiry that QPWS has not supported and facilitated indigenous involvement in Park management and interpretation to the extent that is consistent with National and International practice. A commitment to greater participation of indigenous people must be seen as a corporate philosophy and not simply left to local situations, approaches and attitudes. Such a commitment could be in the context of broader community involvement.

A new beginning

The Inquiry is of the view that a fundamental change in attitude by both government and administration is required if Queensland's National Parks and other protected areas are to play the role they should. This role is establishing the States natural and cultural identity. It is clear that the current state of the system is in no small part due to inconsistent policy direction and lack of political commitment by both sides of the political divide. We accept that this is to some extent inevitable in a representative democracy. However, we pose the question - *"is this what society expects of those charged with the management of its heritage?"* We believe the answer is no and call on all parties to accept that a well managed protected area system is a hallmark of a modern intelligent society.

Local Government Association of Queensland Public Inquiry Management of National Parks in Queensland

Inquiry Background and Process

Terms of Reference

- 1.2.1. The issue of management of National Parks has been raised at a number of LGAQ Annual Conferences¹. Concern was expressed about the apparent problems the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) has with managing this expanding system of National Parks. There is a view that the Service is under-resourced, restricting its capacity to provide required facilities and to implement desirable management practices.
- 1.2.2. In recognition of these concerns, the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) established a public Inquiry in January 2000. The Inquiry was chaired by Associate Professor R.J.S. (Bob) Beeton, Head of the School of Natural and Rural Systems Management, University of Queensland. Associate Professor Beeton was assisted by Mr. Alan Morton and staff of the LGAQ.
- 1.2.3. The overall objective for the Inquiry was to identify ways to enhance the benefits of the National Parks system for the Queensland community.
- 1.2.4. The Terms of Reference set by LGAQ for this Inquiry were:-
 - to examine existing policy and legislation to ensure the policy climate comprehensively supports improved management of crown land, in particular National Parks, across the State;
 - to identify a range of models to achieve improved management of National Parks;
 - to identify the strategic role, if any, Local Government can achieve in partnership with the State Government;
 - to investigate possible linkages between State Government, Local Government, regional groups of Councils and the community which could improve the management of National Parks; and
 - to identify an appropriate level of State funding for National Parks.
- 1.2.5. While there are many other matters of significance to management of National Parks in Queensland, the Inquiry has recognised that only matters of relevance to these specific Terms of Reference should be considered.
- 1.2.6. In undertaking this Inquiry it was also recognised that co-operation and support of the State Government was essential and that the results should complement reviews of National Parks being undertaken within Government. To this end the Inquiry wrote to the Minister seeking his co-operation. The Minister agreed that QPWS could co-operate with the Inquiry on matters of fact.

¹ In particular at both the 1998 and 1999 conferences.

1.3 Inquiry Process

1.3.1. The process adopted for the Inquiry involved the following steps:-

- A public launch of the Inquiry involving media representatives in late January 2000;
- Letters sent in late January to all Councils in Queensland along with a wide range of stakeholder groups explaining the Inquiry and providing details of the terms of reference and public consultation process and inviting submissions by 25 February 2000;
- Advertisements in Newspapers in late January advising of the Inquiry and its Terms of Reference and seeking public submissions by 25 February 2000;
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- Public Hearings held in Cairns, Emerald and Brisbane in March 2000 to allow private citizens, stakeholder organisations and Local Government an opportunity to present views to the Inquiry or to expand on points made in written submissions;
- Where it seemed appropriate the Inquiry requested additional material from those who appeared at hearings. This material was treated as additional submissions to the Inquiry.
- Following an approach from the Inquiry chair the Minister for Environment directed that discussions take place with senior representatives of QPWS. These discussions aimed at facilitating co-operation in establishing matters of fact. In addition feedback and supporting information in relation to matters raised in submissions or at Public Hearings was requested by the Inquiry;
- Review and analysis of relevant research and other background information along with analysis and consideration of all submissions and information presented to the Inquiry through the public processes.

1.3.2. The opportunity was provided for QPWS representatives to respond to particular assertions made to the Inquiry and to provide data and other information relevant to key points.

1.3.3. All submissions to the Inquiry are presented in Volume 2 of the Inquiry Report.

1.3.4. Copies of letters, advertisements and other public releases by the Inquiry including a Discussion Paper prepared at the end of February are included in Appendix 1 of this Report.

1.4 Research Background

1.4.1. A list of all reference material consulted is provided in Appendix 2 of this report.

2. Overview of Queensland National Parks System

2.1.1. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) was re-established in December 1998 from some components of the old Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service.² There have been a number of administrative changes during the 1990s affecting the structure of the Nature Conservation program. This presents some problems in tracking the performance of the Service in management of National Parks. This issue is considered later in this Report.

²The QNPWS had been established in 1976-1977 from elements of the DPI (Fauna Branch), Forestry Department (Forestry Unit) and Department of Lands. The QNPWS functioned as an independent entity within a parent department until the early 1990s when it was progressively incorporated into the Department of Environment and Heritage and its successors.

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- 2.1.2. The current goals³ of QPWS are to:-
revitalise the profile of Queensland's Natural Heritage;
effectively manage Queensland's protected area estate and its wildlife;
foster ecological sustainability in the use of our natural resources;
promote nature-based tourism;
protect Queensland's World Heritage areas;
work in partnerships with communities to establish strong values in conservation management;
build a strong and stable conservation policy and planning framework; and
respect the culture of indigenous people..
- 2.1.3. According to information published by QPWS, at 30 June 1999, there were 458 terrestrial protected areas across the State covering a total area of 7,058,420 hectares. This compares with a protected area of some 4,298,311 hectares at 30 June 1991 and represents an increase in the total area protected of some 64.2% over the period.
- 2.1.4. The distribution of National Parks and other protected areas across the State by region is summarised at Table 2.1.
- 2.1.5. The Table reveals that, over the period from 1991 to 1998, the total designated area increased by some 59%. The Channel Country, Northwest Highlands, Mitchell Grass Downs and Brigalow Belt accounted for over 72% of the increase in protected area in the State. The increased area in the Channel Country alone accounted for more than 40% of the expansion.
- 2.1.6. The data illustrates a substantial change in the profile of National Parks across the State. This background is relevant to a number of matters raised in submissions to the Inquiry.
- 2.1.7. It is outside the terms of reference of this Inquiry to comment on the need for growth in the National Park and other Protected Area estate. However, we observe that Queensland is Australia's most biodiverse state. Currently 69% of the State's regional ecosystems are represented in the State's National Parks (see table 2.1). The most significant areas of under representation are the western regions of the State. The conclusions to be drawn from these facts are that the pressures to expand the estate will not decrease. The implication to be drawn is that the Service's and Government's capacity to manage the acquisition of estate, manage what it has acquired and contribute to regional economies represents an enormous challenge.

³The Inquiry is aware of the current master planning process being undertaken by QPWS and accepts that these goals are subject to review.

Table 2.1: National Parks and Other Protected Areas by Region 1991 and 1998

(* Data at 30 April 1991 - Source: Table 1, Annual Report 1990/91 Qld Dept Environment & Heritage** Data at 28 February 1998 - Source: Table 9, Annual Report 1998/99 Qld Environmental Protection Agency *** source Sattler and Williams (1999)⁴)

Bio Region	Total Area***	Protected Area (ha) 1991	Protected Area (ha) 1998**	Share of Estate 1991	Share of Estate 1998	Area Growth (%)	Area Growth (ha)	Current % of Regional Ecosystems in Protected Areas ***	Location
Northwest Highlands	6,950,000	12,200	369,100	0.3%	5.50%	2925.4%	356,900	65.9%	west
Gulf Plains	21,377,000	507,100	525,300	11.9%	7.80%	3.6%	18,200	30.1%	west
Cape York Peninsula	11,548,000	1,472,660	1,594,100	34.5%	23.60%	8.2%	121,440	84.4%	north
Mitchell Grass Downs	22,787,000	13,800	238,900	0.3%	3.50%	1631.2%	225,100	39.6%	west
Channel Country	24,594,000	613,500	1,634,700	14.4%	24.20%	166.5%	1,021,200	78.6%	west
Mulga Lands	19,097,000	344,952	464,900	8.1%	6.90%	34.8%	119,948	71.2%	west
Wet Tropics	1,850,000	232,261	310,400	5.4%	4.60%	33.6%	78,139	72.4%	coastal
Central Qld Coast	1,151,000	117,879	142,300	2.8%	2.10%	20.7%	24,421	89.2%	coastal
Einasleigh Uplands	12,808,000	63,333	226,900	1.5%	3.40%	258.3%	163,567	56.5%	west
Desert Uplands	6,882,000	86,000	153,800	2.0%	2.30%	78.8%	67,800	43.1%	west
Brigalow Belt	35,158,000	522,648	730,400	12.3%	10.80%	39.7%	207,752	67.5%	central
South East Qld	8,231,000	251,300	341,800	5.9%	5.10%	36.0%	90,500	86.2%	coastal
New England Tableland	341,000	25,189	26,500	0.6%	0.40%	5.2%	1,311	66.7%	southern
TOTAL	172,774,000	4,262,822	6,759,100	100%	100%	59%	2,496,278	69%	

⁴ Sattler, P.S. and Williams, R.D. (eds) (1999) The Conservation Status of Queensland's Bioregional Ecosystems. EPA and NPAQ inc, Brisbane

Identification of Key Issues for Management of the National Park Estate

Resourcing

The topic of resourcing of the National Park system was one that was raised by a significant number of submissions and in comments made at the Public Hearings. The position expressed was that QPWS was substantially under-resourced relative to the significant expansion in Park areas and unable to effectively provide the required level of development or maintenance of the Park system.

Some international and interstate comparisons were provided to the Inquiry. In a submission by Carter, Hockings and Baxter, it was noted that “... *Australia, at US\$359/km² spends less on protected area management than any comparable developed nation. We invest less than half as much as New Zealand and a third as much as Canada.*” In terms of interstate investment in protected area management, the submission goes on to comment that “... *Queensland has the second lowest investment per capita and the third lowest per hectare investment.*”. Comparative data sourced from the ANZECC benchmarking project is shown in Table 3.1. The data confirms this comment and also shows that Queensland has the lowest expenditure per visitor.

Table 3.1: Expenditure on National Parks (A\$) - 1997/98

	Qld	NSW	Vic	WA	Tas	SA	NT
per capita	9.73	18.01	7.82	17.35	43.93	10.34	72.68
per hectare	4.35	24.80	9.60	1.82	10.40	0.73	4.40
per visitor	2.59	5.38	2.70	3.85	10.40	4.10	4.90
staff/000 sq km	7.30	16.20	15.50	1.70	12.90	1.60	5.40

Source: QPWS supplied data from ANZECC benchmarking on investment in protected area management

QPWS provided some additional data on trends in a number of key indicators. Table 3.2 shows this information. The table suggests that on a per hectare basis, park management expenditure has increased by 35% over the four year period shown. This figure does not reconcile with other QPWS data as shown in Table 3.3 where QPWS recurrent expenditure over the same period grew by only 4%. These difficulties in obtaining an accurate picture of funding for National Parks suggest an urgent need to upgrade internal accounting as well as public reporting.

Table 3.2: Trends in Park Management Expenditure - Queensland

	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99
Expenditure/ha	\$3.49	\$3.40	\$4.33	\$4.35	\$4.72
Expenditure/visit	\$2.95	\$2.82	\$3.05	\$2.59	\$2.70
% user pays income to total operating outlay	13%	14%	16%	17%	18%
labour cost as % total operating outlay	76%	68%	64%	61%	66%
Area under QPWS management (ha)	6,758,202	7,467,653	7,548,827	7,543,282	7,548,289

Source: QPWS

As noted earlier in this Report, there have been administrative changes during the 1990s affecting the structure of the Nature Conservation program. This makes it difficult to provide a trend analysis of resourcing based on published information.

However, a review of Annual Reports and Departmental Statements covering the Program provided the following overview of the resources applied to National Park management and associated activities.

Table 3.3 provides details of funding for National Parks along with staffing resources from 1993 to 1999. Some care should be taken in interpretation of these figures as there may be changes in reporting methodology, and figures include associated programs and activities.

The table shows that the resources applied to National Parks increased at a relatively rapid rate in the early 1990s, peaking in 1994. Since that time there has been little real increase in overall funding resources through to 1999, with decreases in the period around 1996/1997. It has been impossible for the Inquiry to fully identify the impact of the expansion of the environmental function of the department (DEH, DoE and EPA respectively) on the resourcing of the QPWS. The Inquiry suspects that realignment of staff to other functions may be an underlying factor in the perceived decrease in effective field staff that has received much comment in submissions and at hearings. This may suggest a need for a clearer definition of roles in the future.

A 7% real growth in funding from 1993 to 1999 is small when compared with the 28% increase in managed area over the same period, and the 60% increase in National Park areas shown by Table 2.1 for the 1991 to 1998 period.

Staff resources also peaked in 1994/95. The number of Rangers employed in 1999 was 372, only marginally greater than in 1993. The increase in operational staffing since 1993 appears small relative to the change in areas to be managed. It was also suggested to the Inquiry that the scope of work required of staff has increased. While this may reflect changing government priorities it effectively diverts staff resource away from protected area management. Comments on this were made in verbal evidence presented to the Inquiry.

3.1.10 This analysis does support views put to the Inquiry that the existing National Parks system is not adequately resourced in terms of desirable management regimes. Submissions cited reductions in Park rangers across the State and provided details of staff reductions in particular Parks. For example, comment was made that Eungella National Park previously had five ranger positions but that this had now reduced to two. Tamborine was stated as having five rangers ten years ago but that there were now only three rangers. We understand that this may reflect changing district structure, however principles of research triangulation suggest that real reductions have occurred.

Table 3.3: Resourcing of National Parks in Queensland 1993 to 1999

Year ending 30 June	National Parks Recurrent Funding \$' 000s		Staffing		Protected Area (ha) (annual report data)	QPWS data on area under QPWS management
	Actual	1999 \$ values	Admin/ Professional	Rangers	(1991 protected area = 4,262,822 ha)	(1991 area = 4,560,000 ha)
1993	\$43,982	\$49,480	155	350	n.a.	5,880,000
1994	\$59,985	\$66,228	244	512	n.a.	6,600,000
1995	\$50,893	\$53,680	244	542	n.a.	6,758,202
1996	\$47,222	\$48,548	168	439	n.a.	7,467,653
1997	\$47,256	\$48,470	136	382	n.a.	7,548,827
1998	\$50,225	\$51,086	159	372	6,759,100	7,543,282
1999	\$53,000	\$53,000	193	372	7,058,420	7,548,289
Real Growth 1993 to 1999		7.1%	24.5%	6.2%		28.4%

Note: 1999 budget adjusted for reallocation of business support program

Source: Departmental Program Statements. Figures include other protected areas and associated programs. Staffing trends involve some reallocation to other conservation programs or changes in reporting full time equivalents.

Mirani Shire Council commented “... *inadequate funding of National Parks which, in the case of Eungella, has over the past few years seen a degrading of the Park so that it is now an embarrassment to many people who rely on tourism for their livelihood.*” It was suggested to the Inquiry that these are not isolated incidents but reflect a state wide trend as human resources are spread more thinly across an expanding protected area estate.

Some additional information supplied by QPWS provides further background on staffing in terms of full time equivalents. Table 3.4 provides details. The figures are different to those shown in Table 3.3, particularly in terms of the number of administrative and professional staff. Again the issue of the inadequacy of QPWS reporting to the public arises. Notwithstanding these concerns the 1994 to 1999 staffing numbers in table 3.4 again suggest that the service must have great difficulty in coping with an estate expansion of greater than 50%.

Table 3.4: QPWS Staffing (Full Time Equivalents)

Staff (FTE)	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Rangers	397	388	390	384	376
research/specialist/ admin	122	129	121	121	116
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total staff (FTE)	519	517	511	505	492

Source: QPWS (includes all parks/related areas where QPWS responsible for management)

Comments at Public Hearings indicated that walking tracks were often closed on an ongoing basis (for example after a tree fall) rather than being able to undertake the necessary maintenance activities. The number of Parks closed to public access was also referenced as a further illustration of the lack of resources at the operational level. For example, Booringa Shire noted that “... *the closure of Chesterton and Thrushton National Parks has excluded visitors from experiencing a unique educational and recreational experience ... Council has on occasions approached Parks and Wildlife with proposals to open the parks with limited access to supervised tour groups, but these efforts have not yielded any success.*”

The Inquiry sought QPWS comment on these closures and was informed that these Parks are not closed. The only closures according to QPWS are at times of fire danger or extreme wet conditions. Whatever the precise situation is, it is apparent that QPWS communication is poor if a number of Shires have come to the view that a Park is permanently closed.

The Queensland Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs Inc. provided details of track closures in recent years in the Cairns Region. These tracks include The Bump Track, Black Mountain Road, Windsor Tablelands, Goldsborough, Copperlode Dam to Clohesy River, Herberton State Forest and the H-Road. While some of these closures may be justified, the impression was that the public consultation process was inadequate. This has no doubt been contributed to in some way by the confusion produced by the intertwining identities of WTMA, QPWS and DNR.

The matter of track closures relates in part to increasing litigation by Park visitors. QPWS currently outlays around \$3 million per year on claims, with a total of \$11 million having been paid out in claims over the least ten years (QPWS data). This indicates that there is an increasing trend towards litigation. Track standards required to meet current health and safety requirements are far higher than say ten years ago. This results in an increasing backlog of works required to meet these increasing community standards and expectations.

There are also other regulatory factors impacting on the requirement for increased standards of Park facilities. Table 3.5 provides details of QPWS works scheduled in 1999/2000 to meet EPA licensing requirements.

Table 3.5: Works Scheduled to Meet EPA Licensing Requirements - 1999/2000

National Park	Workscope
Lochern	Remove Contaminated Ranger Accommodation
Eungella - Finch Hatton Gorge	Relocate Toilets
Carnarvon – Carnarvon Gorge	Effluent System
Main Range – Queen Mary Falls	Effluent System
Cania Gorge	Effluent System
Girraween	Effluent System
Bowling Green Bay	Improve Filtration of Water Supply

3.1.18. Boonah Shire identified a number of access and parking issues in the Shire which they believe discourages visitors as well as increasing hazards. Given that these Parks are in the heavily trafficked South East Queensland area, the situations identified and associated comments undoubtedly apply across the total Park system. Parking and access problems include:-

- Mt. Greville - gravel road access to poor unpaved parking facilities;
- Main Range (north of Cunningham’s Gap)- no suitable access to the base of the range;
- Main Range (Spicers Gap) - unsealed road along steep areas leading to the top of the range, with designated but unpaved parking areas;
- Main Range (between Spicers Gap and the Head Road) - poor to nil practical access. The Head Road is sealed with no parking and visitors therefore park on the shoulder of roads;
- Mt Barney - access to the Upper Portals is via a steep gravel track that washes out quite easily.

3.1.19. Human resource matters are also a key consideration in effective Park management. It was suggested to the Inquiry that there has been a significant drop in morale within QPWS. The Queensland Rangers Association noted “... *current general staffing levels are not in place to fulfil the basic legislative requirements of protected area management. Inadequate staffing levels exacerbate safety problems, create unsustainable workloads and generate low morale and personnel problems.*” The Wildlife Preservation Society commented that “... *the drop in morale in the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is appalling to our members. The reduction in Park rangers and their services, is having an impact on local government areas.*”

3.1.20. The matter of under-resourcing of National Parks in Queensland has been recognised for many years. Yet no real effort has been made by Government to address the problem. This is evidenced by a 1994 report by Bruce Gall, then Director of Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service on the adequacy of resourcing of the National Parks of Cape York Peninsula which was made available to the Inquiry. The report concluded:-

- National Parks in Cape York are seriously under resourced in respect of staff levels, and operating and capital works budgets.
- The *salaries budget* for Cape York District for 1994/95 is *insufficient* to pay the wages/salaries of staff *currently* employed. There is a projected shortfall of \$93,569.
- A further three positions are currently being held vacant due to budget constraints.

- An additional nine positions have been identified as being necessary to bring the staff levels up to the minimum required for effective management.
- The *operating budget* for Cape York District for 1994/95 is *insufficient* to meet a *minimal* standard of management. There is a shortfall of \$103,200.
- A notional operational budget for the *effective* management of Cape York parks was developed. The shortfall between the 1994/95 allocation (\$159,000) and the notional effective budget is \$348,500.
- The *capital works budget* for Cape York District is similarly *inadequate*. None of this year's funding is being spent to provide new visitor infrastructure.
- Most parks in Cape York Peninsula were established in the late 1970's, and since that time expenditure on visitor infrastructure has been low.

There is no evidence that the situation has changed since the Gall report was completed.

Submissions and comments made at the Public Hearings indicate that the resourcing situation at an operational level remains critical. Capital budgets are apparently being used to supplement limited operational budgets, rangers are working excessive hours with significant amounts of this not as paid time, ranger wives/partners and volunteers are providing significant unpaid support, park offices are frequently closed during weekends and peak holiday periods because of staffing restrictions. This situation is aggravated by budgets for Districts not being finalised until late in the financial year.

The Queensland Rangers Association stated that “... *field staff positions are deliberately kept vacant by management so savings in wages costs can supplement the operating budget. This practice can raise WH&S issues and puts undue stress on remaining staff to work unpaid extra hours to maintain their parks and meet client services.*”

The Inquiry has been informed the EPA recently resolved a significant number of unfilled vacancies by either filling them or abolishing the positions.

The Cape York Peninsula Development Association Inc. provided some data on funding of Parks in Cape York. The submission notes that “... *approximately \$1.6 million of State Government funds were provided in the 1999/2000 financial year for management of these 2 million hectares of conservation lands. This equates to about \$0.80 per hectare. By comparison, the whole of Queensland's parks funding rate is \$3.00 per hectare. NT spends \$12.80 per hectare. NSW spends \$20 per hectare.*” While information available to the Inquiry suggests that the figures used for this comparison are not always of a “like-with-like” nature, the point made that the level of funding available in Cape York is nowhere near enough is clearly valid, as evidenced by the Gall Report.

It is beyond the resources of this Inquiry to fully research the current resourcing of QPWS.⁵ The evidence presented to the Inquiry does however paint a very clear picture of an under-resourced National Parks system. The on-the-ground resources are not sufficient to effectively maintain the conservation values of the estate let alone provide the visitor experiences that are an integral part of the internationally recognised role of National Parks. This is a cause of concern given that National Parks are a key element in Queensland's positioning of itself as a provider of sustainable tourism. (see **Recommendations 26, 27 and 28**).

QPWS has stated that the 1999/2000 budget policy direction was to make Parks the first priority in use of funds. The Inquiry applauds this approach however, it is not apparent at this point that this has made any measurable difference on-the-ground.

⁵The Fenwick Inquiry commissioned by the Department of Premier and Cabinet has been charged with this task. The Inquiry is of the view that the release of this report will be important in bench marking Queensland against the rest of Australia and the World in best practice terms.

Information on District level budgets over recent years was sought from QPWS. The information was not available. However, QPWS was able to extract information on a number of “representative Districts” Table 3.6. The expenditure figures for all Districts shown at Table 3.6 grew at a much faster rate than overall QPWS funding identified at Table 3.3 (49% growth in 3 years compared with 12% growth overall). In the absence of overall figures on expenditure by all Districts and activities the figures provided by QPWS for selected Districts do not provide any real insight into changes in resource allocations “on-the-ground” across the State. We note in passing the contrast between expenditure growth in these areas and the estate growth given in Table 2.1.

Table 3.6: Recurrent Expenditure for Selected Districts 1995/96 to 1998/99 - \$'000s

QPWS District	1995/96 \$,000	1996/97 \$,000	1997/98 \$,000	1998/99 \$,000	Growth 95/96 to 98/99
Tablelands	644	n.a.	577	883	37.1%
Burdekin	449	574	862	832	85.3%
Mackay (Cumberland)	1069	1109	1655	1634	52.9%
Capricorn	921	987	1113	1273	38.2%
Wide Bay- Burnett	762	825	922	884	16.0%
South Coast	1083	1252	1683	1864	72.1%
Roma	616	693	713	892	44.8%
Total Selected Districts	5544	n.a.	7525	8262	49.0%
Total QPWS Budget	47222	47256	50225	53000	12.2%
% QPWS Budget	11.7%	n.a.	15.0%	15.6%	

Source: QPWS. Expenditure is operational funding including wages from all sources. Capital not included.

The inability of QPWS to provide detailed information on operational budgets by Park or District across the full range of activities suggests that internal management and data systems have become inadequate. Discussions with QPWS indicate that these past inadequacies in budgeting and accounting are now being addressed. Accrual accounting is being implemented with valuation of assets taking place. This will allow a better identification of funding needs to meet asset maintenance requirements. Without data on operational outlays by function, it is not possible to effectively manage existing resources and monitor performance. QPWS should become more open and accountable for the funding it receives and ensure that published information is sufficient to identify the resources devoted to each aspect of Park management. This reporting should include both spatial and functional elements.

Clearly the lack of public information leads to frustration. The Queensland Federation of Bush Walking Clubs submission states “*Taxpayers need to know the use of QPWS money and to question*

its misdirection or wastefulness. The (deliberate?) lack of accurate detailed resourcing and spending information from QPWS hampers responsible comment. Evidence, known to us, reveals wasteful practices. We list some of these briefly below:” (See Volume two for details)

An additional finding is that current budgeting systems appear inadequate with Districts not receiving budget allocations until late in a financial year. This often leads to uncertainty for both staff, the community and possibly at times rushed and inappropriate expenditure.

Recommendation 1: QPWS should upgrade its annual reporting to allow both better management and public scrutiny of resources allocated to Park operations and maintenance.

Recommendation 2: Internal QPWS budgeting processes should be reviewed to ensure Districts receive budget allocations early in each financial year.

Local and Regional Economic Impacts

Many submissions highlighted the economic benefits to Queensland of the National Park system. A 1998 study by Kinhill Economics estimated total economic activity flowing from tourism and visitor use of parks and associated accommodation as between \$1.02 billion and \$1.46 billion per annum. Visitor use of Parks was estimated to support around 6000 jobs directly and many more indirectly. Visitor use levels are estimated by QPWS to have grown from 8 million person visit days in 1994 to the current estimate of 13.2 million. Independent day visitors are estimated as comprising 78% of these visits with commercial day visits accounting for 15%.

A study by Pearson *et al* (2000) found that in 1998, Noosa National park contributed \$26 million to the local economy and \$34 million to the regional economy. The total economic impact was estimated at \$54 million and the creation of 797 jobs. During the same period the Park’s budget was \$429,000.

The Wildlife Protection Association of Australia stated that “... *any community, which is close to a substantial National Park is extremely fortunate. National Parks can provide appropriate recreational opportunities, tourism opportunities, job opportunities, and enhance local communities “just by being there”*

There is however, little doubt that, at an individual Local Government level, costs and benefits are not balanced. In some areas e.g. Noosa, the economic benefits from National Park visitation are likely to far outweigh any costs imposed on the community and on the Local Government. In other areas e.g. Daintree, drive-in visitors often stay in neighbouring Local Government areas and purchase supplies elsewhere. While the region benefits, an individual Council or community may in fact see only the cost side of the ledger. These costs include loss of rates, additional outlays on roads and visitor amenities, costs imposed by inadequate pest and noxious plant management in National Parks, community disruption and loss of business opportunity.

Diamantina Shire noted that “... *the proposition has been put to Council by the State Government that the increased tourist numbers visiting these Parks more than makes up for the loss in rate revenue and extra costs involved in maintaining roads. Council absolutely refutes this argument ...”* The submission provides a number of examples of cost increases for Council as well as loss of rate revenue, without compensating increase in tourism activity.

While the Local Government Grants Commission is one mechanism through which Local Government is compensated for reduced revenue capacity or additional expenditure needs, the funding available is insufficient to fully compensate any Council. There is a need for mechanisms which redistribute some of the overall economic benefits to those areas with higher costs or abnormal losses of revenue

capacity. Specific purpose funding of road upgrade requirement associated with National Park is one such mechanism and was suggested in a number of Council submissions. Apparently between 1989 and 1991 the then QNPWS made some contributions in this area. However, the practice was abandoned after 1992.

A number of Councils pointed to losses to their economy from Park designation in rural areas. This was a result of reduced population and business activity through cessation of grazing. Flinders Shire stated *"... it is even more unfortunate for struggling rural areas when good, productive land is acquired by Governments thereby reducing the rate income to Shire Councils. These properties/businesses also support the local infrastructure and businesses in the area. It can best be described as a negative multiplier effect or in some instances another nail in the coffin for rural areas. An example of this is Moorinya National park previously known as "Shirley" Station that was acquired in 1993. In the year 2000 ... there are no directional signs; those that exist refer to "Shirley" Station; there are no public or camping facilities, no general public access is permitted, no park management/development plans have been developed and little information on the Park is available."*

Comments such as those above are given particular emphasis when the likely future development of the Protected Area estate are considered (see earlier). The concern is that communities least able to carry the initial impact of declaration will be asked to carry the burden. Clearly the solution is not to reduce the Governments conservation effort, it is rather to manage new parks to increase local economic benefit.

We conclude that there is a need for more research on the social and economic benefits of the National Park system to local communities and economies. Such research could assist in mounting a strong case for enhanced funding. As the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society Inc. notes *"... QPWS should have the analytical tools and capacity for social and economic research to more clearly demonstrate to Government and communities the major economic contribution of national parks to local, regional and state economies."* An identical conclusion was reached in the Vision review of the NSW NPWS.

Recommendation 3: QPWS should establish capacity for social and economic research to allow evaluation of the significant economic contribution of Parks to local, regional and state economies. This research should be used to assist in demonstrating to Government the merits of additional funding support. QPWS should build on its relations with Queensland Tourism and research institutions⁶ in developing the required analytical tools.

Pest Management and Landcare

Councils and rural groups or individuals made significant comment on this topic. Of particular concern was the fact that QPWS, while recognising the significance of "good neighbour" principles in management of Park areas, does not always apply them in practice. The feeling was that impacts of Parks on surrounding land uses was of little concern to some within QPWS. districts. This situation is particularly evident in the Wet Tropics where jurisdictional confusion and policy conflict aggravates an already difficult situation.

Canegrowers and their representative bodies were particularly critical in relation to management of feral pigs. One farmer noted that the loss of cane in 1999 through feral pig activity amounted to more than

⁶The Chair of the Inquiry declares that he has an interest in this matter. He is the principal investigator in a research program to which QPWS is an in kind contributor. However, this finding is consistent with world practice and a similar finding was reached by the NSW NPWS Visions for a New Millennium Report.

\$108,000 in the Mulgrave Mill area. When multiplier effects are taken into account, this represents a loss of around \$400,000 to the regional economy in one Mill area. The farmer illustrated the impact that banning of feral pig hunting in 1989 by the fact that in 1998 only 33 scalps from traps in the Mulgrave Mill area were recorded in contrast to 384 from pig hunters.

Submissions from Canegrowers echoed these concerns. Canegrowers Cairns stated that “... *prior to the enactment of the Nature Conservation Act and the Wet Tropics Management Authority Act, feral pigs numbers were kept in check by farmers and professional pig hunters, and by an industry funded bounty for pig scalps. This occurred because hunters were able to pursue pigs from their farms into national parks/state forests ... since then, feral pig numbers have increased dramatically.*”

Douglas Shire saw feral pigs and pond apple as two examples of inadequately funded pest control in National Parks. The Council noted the importance of the Community Based Feral Pig Trapping Program which is jointly funded by the Council, QPWS, WTMA and DNR. for the Daintree area. However, no similar funding is available for feral pig control in other National Parks in the area.

The Wildlife Protection Association of Australia presented a different perspective on control of pest plants and animals as follows “... *we also make the point that all mislocated (feral) plants and animals were introduced to National Parks by the agricultural industry. They didn't just arrive there by themselves! The Industry therefore has an obligation to contribute to the control of weeds and mislocated animals in National Parks.*”

The problem of inadequate noxious weed management in National Parks was highlighted in many submissions. As one statement to the Inquiry put it “... *weeds are running riot in National Parks*”. The CSIRO Entomology Weed Management Program confirmed this perspective “... *we would like to draw your attention to the inadequate level of management and resources directed towards weeds and pests within the national parks system of Queensland... the government should acquaint itself with the impacts the pests and weeds have on ecosystems.*”

The different approach to noxious plant management on private lands compared with Crown land was highlighted by a number of submissions. The Whitsunday Rivers Integrated Catchment Management Association stated that “... *it appears that there is insufficient resources put into addressing these weed problems compared with private lands in the Shire which are effectively managed by the Shire Weeds Management Committee for declared pests under the Rural Lands Protection Act.*” This clearly arises because the crown is not bound by the legislative framework that it imposes on other landholders.

The Environment Institute of Australia - South East Queensland Division made a similar point. “... *The State must endeavour to have a “good neighbour” policy towards those land owners whose properties adjoin and surround national parks. The frequent complaint of such land owners is that national parks are very poorly managed with regards to the control of noxious plants and animal pests and that national parks act as reservoirs for pest species which constantly “re-infect” surrounding private properties. As there are legal obligations (as well as vested economic considerations) for private land owners to control plant and animal pests upon their own properties it is iniquitous that the State does not adequately do the same ... the state neglects this duty with an immunity from prosecution not enjoyed by other land owners.*”

The Queensland Federation of Queensland Bush Walking Clubs place great emphasis on these issues “*Even though it probably is not our primary national environmental problem we believe the most important environmental issue facing National Parks in the future will be elimination, reduction or control of exotic species and the maintenance of existing biological integrity and biodiversity.*”. The Federation discusses these issues at length in its submission (Volume two) and call for a coordinated national effort.

Some submissions did however suggest that the problem of inadequate weed management existed external to National Parks and pointed to inadequate control of weeds by some Councils on roadside verges, parkland and on watercourses.

The problem is no doubt complex but can only be solved by a cooperative and integrated approach. As Local Government has a major role in weed and pest management under the *Rural Lands Protection Act* then Pest Management Plans should cover National Parks and gain QPWS commitment and resourcing.

The issue of inadequate fire management was covered in many submissions. This was related to “good neighbour” principles with the perception being that QPWS were not adequately addressing this important aspect of management. Examples were given of fires in National Parks where QPWS staff were not available to assist over weekends.

Rosalie Shire stated that “... *the policy of not burning in State controlled areas has been eased and it is understood that some burning is allowed. However, it would appear to be intermittent and not undertaken in a planned way. The result is that fire escapes and causes loss of pasture and stock for the surrounding properties.*” Kolan Shire noted “... *the lack of controlled burning not only puts the property of others at risk but also the lives of the local personnel who go out to try to control these bush fires - generally on a voluntary basis.*”

Diamantina Shire provided some details of landcare problems. “*Since the expiration of the grazing lease over Diamantina National Park, it would appear that the Department of Environment and Heritage has not had the resources to maintain or remove fencing. As a result of this, large lengths of fencing have been damaged through flooding and it is possible that with further flooding the river may be littered with fencing wire etc. It is also apparent that the department is unable to fund the clearing of fire breaks which on a property of approximately 5,000 square kilometres is obviously expensive, but should be considered to be an integral part of being a good neighbour, especially when a body of feed is allowed to develop to an extent where fires are a real hazard.*”

Recommendation 4: QPWS should articulate a “good neighbour” policy to direct its approach to fire control, fencing, weed and feral animal control. QPWS should work co-operatively with Local Government, neighbours and other community stakeholders on these matters, and give increased priority and funding to addressing landcare and pest management problems. Pest Management Plans developed at a local level should integrate requirements for National Parks and other government lands.

Recommendation 5: QPWS should as a matter of priority review its policies in relation to feral pig control in conjunction with all stakeholders and develop positive initiatives to address problems identified by rural industry groups.

Recommendation 6: The Queensland and Commonwealth governments’ review land management guidelines in the Wet Tropics WHA to bring them in line with Queensland-wide good neighbour policies.

Community Relations

The manner in which QPWS staff set about establishing sound relations with the local community appears to vary significantly across the state. While some Councils indicated a positive working relationship, others suggested that there was very limited consultation at a local level and little attempt to involve the local community. The Inquiry could not fully establish the basis of this variation, however, some explanation may lie in the poor resourcing issue and service culture.

The National Parks Association pointed out that “... parties need to recognise that the QPWS is in fact a land holder in the district and so needs to establish a rapport with neighbours and the Local Authorities concerned. A spirit of co-operation will help overcome many tensions as the problems are not all one way.”

For Mirani Shire, a recent experience in consulting with key stakeholders in relation to Eungella National Park has resulted in a negative impression of the responsiveness of QPWS to such community involvement. In a letter to local members following a response from Minister Welford to suggestions on priority works the Council states that “... Council was concerned that it had gone to the trouble of consulting with the key stakeholders in what has turned out to be a pointless exercise.”

The Queensland Federation of Queensland Bush Walking Clubs corroborated this view “We have corroborated suspicions, built up over many years, that at least some community consultation exercises conducted by QPWS or its consultants are in fact “Clayton’s” processes. The outcomes can be predicted in advance. They simply comply with the “pay-masters” preferences. This engenders a feeling that the costly and elaborate consultations are just “window dressing”. Disillusionment and a reluctance to put effort into any contributions are consequences. Eventually, this casts doubt over any consultant’s report.”

Diamantina Shire expressed concerns in relation to lack of consultation when acquisition of parks was being considered. “... lack of consultation is a hallmark of National Park acquisition and is totally at odds with Council’s efforts to plan and develop its infrastructure and community facilities. Council’s capacity to successfully manage land use throughout its area is affected. The department is also missing out on the opportunity to gain some first hand knowledge and advice into potential problems that may be faced.”

The impact of lack of consultation on the Shire was illustrated by the case of Simpson Desert National Park “... upon acquisition, it was found that there was no gazetted access to the Park at all and Council

was placed in a position where it was required to seek gazettal of approximately 70 kilometres of road through several hundred sand dunes in one of the most inhospitable and inaccessible parts of Australia.”

For some Councils, the apparent lack of any balancing of conservation issues with cost efficient local maintenance can have a detrimental financial impact. Bulloo Shire stated that “... *availability of gravel for road construction and maintenance is extremely important in a region where there are few sites that have suitable road building material. Council traditionally extracted gravel from two main pits within Currawinya National Park and had unrestricted access to this gravel. There are few other suitable sites available within reasonable haulage distance. With increasing visitor numbers, the need for road construction and maintenance work to be carried out on access roads also increases, and it is frustrating to find Council is forbidden to acquire road materials from sites where it has extracted materials for the last forty or fifty years. Negotiations have been ongoing for a number of years ... in order that Council is able to excise a portion of the park for the purpose of gravel extraction.*” Again it appears that responsiveness to the local community is lacking within QPWS.

There were also concerns voiced by indigenous communities in relation to QPWS approach to involvement of Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal Coordinating Council noted “... *the employment potential of Aboriginal people by QPWS is not realised in Cape York in particular or Queensland in general. Traditional ecological knowledge could successfully be applied and incorporated into National Park management for the benefit of all Australians. However, the recalcitrant approach by the QPWS to the employment of Aboriginal people has been disappointing. The active recruitment of non-Aboriginal Rangers and managers by the QPWS into Cape York and North Queensland has helped create a racial divide... The organisational culture of the QPWS is to pour scorn on learning indigenous culture or language*”. There appears to have been inadequate attention given to this matter. This is especially the case if QPWS is benchmarked against other Australian agencies.

The issue of QPWS culture was also raised in a number of other submissions. Mr. Shane O’Reilly (speaking on behalf of O’Reilly’s Guest House and Binna Burra Lodge) stated that “... *the department needs to change its culture and include people management as one of its key objectives. It should focus on forming alliances with the other stakeholders who use the park. The rangers need to form a relationship with the park visitors and be seen to be proactive in the park’s protection and interpretation.*” The view was expressed that the organisation culture encourages a focus on protection of the environment with visitors being looked on as a burden to management. Some submissions suggested that elements of an adaptive learning culture do exist however this modern approach is apparently frustrated.

Recommendation 7: Park acquisition and development should be a transparent process involving public consultation, with measures to address any development impacts or associated infrastructure needs being included in the acquisition and development program.

Recommendation 8: An objective of QPWS should be to establish local community participation and involvement in Park Management. This will require development of consultative and advisory mechanisms, effective communication strategies as well as greater engagement of the local community by QPWS staff.

Recommendation 9: QPWS should be proactive in development of staff capacity to engage communities and visitors and to achieve a customer service culture within the organisation.

Recommendation 10: QPWS should take a more proactive role in involvement of indigenous people in its activities, and recognise that because of its role as the State’s principle custodian of natural and cultural heritage it is an important agency in the reconciliation process. This role should extend to recruitment, training and employment of indigenous people in Park management and interpretation roles.

Recommendation 11: That the Queensland government recognises that Recommendation 10 will require above base funding allocations.

Local Government Finance

The impact on the rate base of a number of rural councils was identified in submissions. Diamantina Shire estimated that recent acquisitions had resulted in loss of approximately 10% to 12% of general rate revenue. For Cook Shire a similar percentage of rate loss was also reported. For Bulloo Shire, the loss was estimated at around 4% of rate base.

However, for most councils the loss of rate base is relatively small and as such is not a major concern. Nevertheless, a loss of 10% of rate base is a significant matter for the limited number of small rural councils involved. It is very difficult to pass on the required rate increases to the remaining land owners. Inevitably services must suffer.

There are also pressures to provide services required by the change in land use. As Diamantina Shire noted *“... in the event of a significant change in land use, as with creation of a National Park, these roads are generally not up to a standard on which inexperienced drivers should be negotiating some of the most inhospitable and remote country in Australia ... in the interest of safety there is pressure put on Council to upgrade the roads and to provide more funds for the maintenance of the roads in order that they are kept to a standard which is as far as possible, safe for road users. This must be achieved however, with significantly reduced resources.”*

Some submissions suggested that some form of rating of National Parks be introduced to assist Local Government. The Environment Institute of Australia - South East Queensland Division suggested *“... national parks should be rateable properties and that NPWS pay rates on the national park estate to the respective local authorities in which the national parks are located.”* Bulloo Shire stated *“... Council acknowledges its obligation to work with the State Government in protecting areas of national significance, however firmly believes that National Parks should be liable to pay rates in view of the additional services required to be provided by Council. Whilst Council would still be subsidising the works from other funding sources, the revenue would have a considerable impact on Council’s increased ability to adequately provide services which complement the National Parks.”*

Councils in South East Queensland including Caboolture and Ipswich identified trustee arrangements and Council funding provided for Conservation Parks in their areas. For example, Caboolture Shire has supported infrastructure development in Conservation Parks and identified over \$50,000 in Council funding in recent years. Ipswich City Council identified more than \$300,000 of Council funds spent on infrastructure in Conservation Parks over the last five years. Their environmental levy has also allowed acquisition of 2500 hectares of significant conservation land in the Shire.

Recommendation 12: Where more than 5% of the Unimproved Capital Valuation of a Local Government is included in National Parks or other protected areas, an annual payment in lieu of rates should be made by QPWS, equivalent to the rate applying to surrounding rural lands if levied on the Park valuation. This payment should be designated for specific public works projects such as Park access roads, parking or associated public facilities agreed between QPWS and the Local Government concerned. Further planning and timing of such works should be negotiated with QPWS so that park management is not compromised. Any arrangement should allow for funds to be accumulated over time.

Findings in Relation to Terms of Reference

In undertaking this review and making recommendations, the Inquiry has been struck by the parallels between the problems of the QPWS and the problems identified by the Visions review conducted in 1997 and 1998 in NSW. The Inquiry sees little benefit in repeating the parallels in this section of the report, rather the summary recommendations of Visions for a New Millennium are attached as Appendix 3. The striking difference between the NSW NPWS and the QPWS is the extremely low funding base of the QPWS. The effect of this is that the QPWS lacks the adaptive capacity of its sister agency in NSW. Consequently the need for action on the recommendations made here are most urgent.

A number of Recommendations relevant to each Term of Reference have been made in earlier sections of this Report. These are referenced where relevant to particular matters discussed below.

TOR1- Policy and Legislative Climate

The Inquiry was required to *examine existing policy and legislation to ensure the policy climate comprehensively supports improved management of crown land, in particular National Parks, across the State.* The *Nature Conservation Act 1992* provides the legislative framework within which management of protected areas takes place. The Act's object is the conservation of nature. The Act, amongst other things, puts emphasis on:-

- dedication and declaration of areas representative of the biological diversity, natural features and wilderness of Queensland as protected areas;
- managing protected areas;
- protecting native wildlife and its habitat.

The Act benchmarks well against internationally accepted guidelines for Protected Area classification. For National Parks the *Cardinal Principle of Management* represents a statement of intent however, little direction exists on the way management should take place. Some matters which could be incorporated in the Act⁷ to provide guidance to QPWS include:-

- greater transparency in selection of reserves including public consultation;
- emphasis on fostering partnerships with the community as an element of nature conservation;
- promoting "good neighbour" principles in protected area management;

(these first three points effectively mean that a landscape based management approach is required)

⁷ The Inquiry recognises that such matter could be done by regulation or even administrative procedure manuals. However, the need for cultural change suggests that firmer direction may be needed.

the need to provide visitor and recreational experiences which are enriched by the natural features of the protected areas;

promoting understanding of indigenous cultural heritage in the context of the natural environment.

giving genuine effect to the joint management of lands of cultural significance to indigenous people.

The current policy framework is also focused on the need for public ownership and management of protected areas. It is apparent to the Inquiry that the resources have not been provided to effectively manage the existing protected area system, let alone the expanding system required to achieve representation of biological diversity across the State (see Table 2.1). There may be a need to consider other models to achieve overall conservation objectives. For example, in the UK the National Park estate is based on private ownership. While it is accepted that public ownership and management of key protected areas is necessary, the extent of protected areas can be increased through community and private sector involvement. For example, individual landowners have entered into Conservation Agreements with Local Governments using rate rebate systems. The barriers to such an approach are institutional and cultural. Both QPWS and rural communities and individuals will need to change for an enduring result to be achieved.

The matter of “good neighbour policy” is one which has been brought to the attention of this Inquiry in a wide range of submissions. This needs to be accepted within QPWS as an essential element of sound management practice. This requires, amongst other things, QPWS building effective and cooperative relationships with Local Government, communities, neighbouring landholders and other stakeholders. Such relationships require integration of land management practices to the benefit of the community as a whole, not simply to the benefit of the Park in isolation from its community (see **Recommendations 4 and 8**).

4.1.5 The Inquiry is of the view that a fundamental change in attitude by both government and administration is required if Queensland's National Parks and other protected areas are to play the role they should. This role is establishing the States natural and cultural identity. It is clear that the current state of the system is in no small part due to inconsistent policy direction and lack of political commitment by both sides of the political divide. We accept that this is to some extent inevitable in a representative democracy. However, we pose the question - *“is this what society expects of those charged with the management of its heritage?”* We believe the answer is no and call on all parties to accept that a well managed protected area system is a hallmark of a modern intelligent society

Recommendation 13: The Nature Conservation Act 1992 should be revised to provide clearer guidance on principles necessary to ensure “best practice” management of National Parks and other protected areas. Particular principles for consideration are noted in 4.1.2 of this Report.

Recommendation 14: QPWS should pay more attention to mechanisms other than public acquisition of land to achieve representation of biodiversity, such as Conservation Agreements, with public and private land holders.

Recommendation 15: LGAQ should seek to establish bipartisan support for the principle that a well managed protected area system is an essential element in a modern society and a key to effectively establishing this State’s identity in terms of its natural and cultural heritage.

TOR2 - Models for Improved Management

4.2.1 The second Term of Reference sought to *identify a range of models to achieve improved management of National Parks*. Many submissions focused on this topic, with emphasis typically being on enhanced partnerships with the community. For Local Governments, an effective partnership with QPWS was seen as essential to integrate planning, infrastructure development and matters such as pest management (**see Recommendation 4**).

Within QPWS, there appears to be some reluctance to look at mechanisms to maximise outcomes from the limited resources available. While there are some examples of contracting-out of services, the Inquiry was presented with evidence that indicates that at times the culture of using internal resources results in considerable inefficiencies. Examples quoted included flying a chainsaw operator from a provincial centre to clear a fallen tree because local rangers did not have the necessary operators certificate as well as undertaking track maintenance at locations requiring excessive daily travel with day labour resources. In both cases local contractors could potentially provide better value for money.

In many situations there are local contractors or the Local Government with the required skills and equipment to provide cost effective services for many Park activities e.g. mowing/slashing, toilet cleaning, fire wood collection, track maintenance, clearing fire breaks, weed management, pest animal eradication and so on. The extent of contracting-out within QPWS is, in the opinion of this Inquiry, far less than is desirable in terms of efficient and effective management of current resources. While each situation should be judged on its merits, QPWS should review its current approaches to basic operations to identify opportunities for contract services. It is understood that this approach is hindered to some degree by budget processes and funding allocations to Districts and by limits on delegations to operational staff.

Community Partnerships were seen as necessary to enhance management of National Parks. Local community involvement provides additional resources in various aspects of Park management. To be effective, these partnerships need to foster involvement in decision making to gain commitment and a sense of "ownership". As noted earlier, practical partnerships are necessary if issues such as fire and pest management are to be addressed. (**see Recommendation 4 and 8**).

The Queensland Federation of Bush Walking Clubs commented on the problems the Service has had with National Park management planning: *"We have commented previously on expensive Management Plan consultation processes failing to run to completion. In recent years, approved Management Plans finalized after expensive consultation and agreement remain unimplemented. We confirm earlier similar comments regarding the Fraser Island long-distant walking track survey."*

A number of submissions focused on the need for "user pays" arrangements if management systems are to improve. While a number of groups believe that day access should be without charge almost as a "right", the majority of submissions on this point accept that reasonable charges for services used by visitors, whether campers, day trippers or people on commercial tours is desirable. The key point made is that whatever is introduced must be efficient in terms of the cost of collection versus the revenue obtained. The Queensland Rangers Association saw merit in a Pass system similar to that operating in South Australia. Others felt that camping fees were far too low.

When the visitor profile is considered (78% estimated as independent day trippers), it is apparent that any user pays system must focus on this group. This group requires walking tracks, picnic areas and associated amenities, road access and car parking and interpretation services. These are areas where submissions point to deterioration of assets and under funding. In high use parks, it would not be difficult to collect a car parking fee. In low use parks however, direct collection of fees would be very difficult. However, focusing user charges on high use Parks should be an acceptable strategy provided a portion of the funds is available to develop facilities in other Parks rather than being regarded as available only for development of facilities in that Park. As a number of submissions noted, a number of options are feasible as shown by overseas experience.

Some submissions were vociferous in their objections to used fees. For example the Queensland Federation of Bush Walking Clubs stated: *“There appears to be little constraint on individual QPWS staff officers running “private or hidden agendas” if they are careful enough to formulate them within the constraints of the prevailing mind-set. We know, because we have been told and have witnessed repeated corroboration, that at least some influential staff in QPWS, with pressure from Treasury, have long sort to introduce a universal entry fee for Parks’ visitors against community and Ministerial wishes. Recent efforts appear to be directed to doing this by stealth; first as a “trial” in some more frequently visited Parks, then more widely. Certainly, this is a gray area and we accept that initiative should not be stifled and that some individuals may be far-sighted. Their reasoned arguments should carry them forward not slick, stealthy and wasteful use of “the system”. Why should the Public continue to fund persistent activity against which they are opposed?*

This Inquiry believes that introduction of user charges is essential as one element of the Park management strategy. Determining the most appropriate approach is for QPWS. However, the Inquiry is of the view that 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. The principle should be that fees are collected for a specific service of ameliorative activity. In the Visions for the New Millennium Report, the NSW NPWS explored some of the issues involved in this matter. Section 6 of this report would be a useful starting point for QPWS.

Recommendation 16: QPWS should develop a proactive approach to alternative models for service delivery including contracting-out of maintenance and other operations where cost effectiveness can be demonstrated. This will require changes in attitudes within QPWS as well as ensuring appropriate delegations exist at a District level for managing overall resources.

Recommendation 17: Greater use should be made of user pays approaches where a specific service is provided to visitors or where use requires amelioration of potential impacts on resource values.

TOR3 - Strategic Roles for Local Government

The Inquiry was asked to *identify the strategic role, if any, Local Government can achieve in partnership with the State Government.* As noted earlier in this report, Local Government has a lead role in planning and land use management for its communities. In addition, Local Government is the key agency for Pest Management Plans under the *Rural Lands Protection Act* (see **Recommendation 4**). Other areas where Local Governments play a key role include developing and maintaining the local road network, local economic development and SES activities.

All of these activities are critical to effective management of National Parks and it is apparent that Local Government is a key stakeholder as well as playing a strategic role relevant to the National Park system.

As many submissions noted, gazettal of a National Park is a significant change in land use with potential to impact on requirements for infrastructure, particularly roads. Yet there is no consultative process involving Local Government when National Parks are acquired. The fact that some Councils have only found out about a new National Park after gazettal points to a significant attitude problem within QPWS in terms of establishing effective relationships with communities (see **Recommendation 7**).

Unless the QPWS charter adequately addresses this important link with Local Government, then the current unsatisfactory situation will continue.

The strategic role of Local Government in supporting conservation initiatives is also apparent. Many Councils have introduced environmental levies which have been used to acquire significant conservation land. Others have introduced rate rebates where landowners enter into Voluntary Conservation Agreements (see **Recommendation 14**).

The Australian Rainforest Conservation Society Inc. saw this strategic role as “... *Local Government has a major role in partnership with the state government and communities in:-*

ensuring off-reserve protection through regional and local parks, and planning schemes which link the formal protected area of the State by buffers, corridors and sympathetically managed adjacent lands; and

improving formal reserve protection and interpretation through cooperative planning of gateway communities that provide the appropriate infrastructure for visitor accommodation, transport and park interpretation.”

4.3.7 While there are notable exceptions, the realisation of this role at a Local Government level will require staff capacity building and resource allocation.

Recommendation 18: Local Government should be involved at a District level in development of Park Management Plans to gain a shared commitment to Park management approaches as well as leveraging required support in relevant aspects of plan implementation.

Recommendation 19: The LGAQ promote to its membership the concept of conservation as a landscape-based use and activity. In doing this the better integration of local government planning schemes with National Park management plans is an essential element.

Recommendation 20: Local Government should consider participation with QPWS in developments associated with National Parks where this can achieve benefits to the local community through enhanced economic activity. This could include both on and off park facilities. Local Government should accept that not all funding for Park visitor services and facilities should be a QPWS responsibility.

Recommendation 21: Where National Parks represent a significant land use activity within a Local Government area, QPWS should be recognised by Local Government as a key stakeholder in development of Strategic Plans, Economic Development strategies, Recreation Plans and other planning initiatives, with planning outcomes providing appropriate support and integration of Parks within overall management and development strategies for the wider community.

Recommendation 22: Mechanisms should be established between QPWS and Local Governments to allow greater sharing of resources to enhance operational efficiencies of each party. This includes resources such as plant and equipment as well as planning and management resources including GIS capability.

4.4 TOR4 - Community and Government Linkages

The Inquiry was required to *investigate possible linkages between State Government, Local Government, regional groups of Councils and the community which could improve the management of National Parks.”*

Some of these linkages have already been noted in previous sections. These include linkages in planning and land use management, in land acquisition to complement the National Park system, contracted services for routine maintenance. There must also be an integrated approach in matters such as feral animal control, in control of noxious weeds and fire hazards. It is also important for the National Park system to acknowledge the shared nature of ecosystems and the fact that park management will have effects on surrounding lands. (see **Recommendations 4 and 8**).

Policy statements along the lines of those of Parks Canada provide an appropriate framework for linkages between QPWS, the community and other stakeholders. For example Parks Canada policy states that:- “... Parks Canada will take the lead role in establishing integrated and collaborative management agreements and programs with adjacent land owners and land management agencies. Parks Canada will seek mutually satisfactory solutions to trans-boundary concerns associated with the management of shared ecosystem components, the effects of adjacent land use practices on park ecosystems, or the effects of park management practices on the use of adjacent lands.” The policy also identifies the role of Parks Canada as a participant in regional land use planning initiatives. In Australia, the Visions for a New Millennium Report places significance emphasis on such an approach.

Opportunities exist for active involvement of the community in aspects of Park management as well as for corporate sponsorship of specific Parks and associated management and development. Fostering relevant partnership arrangements is an important role for QPWS. The established steps for such a process are:

- recognise the need;
- ensure both sides agree on the need;
- agree to act;
- define the input of the partners;
- define and agree to the management system; and
- reflect, learn and report on experience.

There appears to be an urgent need for greater involvement of indigenous communities in Park management. The nature of Australia as presented in National Parks is indivisibly linked with the countries indigenous and European history. Traditional owners need to be consulted in relation to aspirations of indigenous communities in relation to Park management and use. As the Aboriginal Coordinating Council states “... the management regime of National Parks needs to be undertaken in cooperation with the management regime of neighbouring DOGIT lands” They go on to note “... QPWS has a long history of facilitating the management of National Parks as being distinct and separate.” (see **Recommendation 10**).

In its submission the Queensland Federation of Bush Walking Clubs links the funding and management of National Parks to community access: “*There exists an urgent need to fully restore, by way of legislation, the right for people to inexpensively visit and interact with their National Parks in accordance with the original meaning of what a National Park would offer. The chance of “counseling” of Parks staff about “Parks being for People” as well as for Nature Conservation has proven ineffective. The environmental problems facing National Parks are so great that only with widespread active, sympathetic community involvement and genuine deep understanding will it be possible to maintain Parks and their funding into the future.*”

Recommendation 23: QPWS should seek to give effect to partnerships, recommended to be mandated in legislation, across a full range of activities. This would include:-

- development of a culture that sees outreach as a hallmark;
- recognising community involvement and partnerships are essential elements in implementing conservation objectives;

recognition of the contribution made to community well being through involvement in tourism planning;

- **acceptance of the use of local contracting capacity as an essential component of Park operation.**

Recommendation 24: QPWS enhance its approaches to community participation and involvement including development of partnerships as elements of both conservation of the public protected areas as well as conservation outside the public reserve system.

Recommendation 25: QPWS rekindle and develop its former distinguished role in natural and cultural heritage interpretation and community education. The Service should become the primary agency involved in promoting the ‘telling the stories’ of Queensland’s landscapes and important cultural sites to the people⁸.

4.5 TOR5 - Funding of National Parks

This Term of Reference required the Inquiry to *identify an appropriate level of state funding for National Parks*. To provide an answer to this would require far more resources and time than were available to the Inquiry. However, the Inquiry considers that it is an indisputable fact that the management of the current National Park system in Queensland is substantially under-resourced.

The precise level of funding required is really not the issue at present. Available information suggests that operational funding of two to three times the current level of around \$4.50 per hectare would be required to realistically move towards desirable levels of management and to provide services and facilities of a standard expected by Park users. The Gall Report on Cape York Peninsula Parks identified a notional budget for effective management of the Park area in 1994. This notional budget was more than three times the actual operational budget.

Some would say that it is unlikely that Government will suddenly change the QPWS budget by such a significant amount, even if a notional operating budget was developed for the whole of the Park system. However, the Inquiry believes that it is critical that the Parliament acknowledges that resourcing is the major problem at the present time and that strategies must be put in place to overcome the deficiency.

Strategies would include:-

acceptance of the principle that government funding must be sufficient to allow the effective maintenance of the conservation values of the Park system. At the present time available funding is not achieving this goal;

introduction of user pays arrangements for service provided as discussed earlier. Funds raised through such charges must however supplement the current government funding rather than becoming a substitute. These user fees would assist in providing visitor facilities, walking tracks and interpretation. The integrity of this approach will inevitably be questioned. Such suspicions can only be addressed if a full reporting of the Service’s budget and funding sources is put in place.

seeking more cost effective ways to carry out routine maintenance. In many areas this will require contracting-out of basic maintenance tasks;

seeking sponsorship of the private sector for appropriate Park development⁹;

utilisation of carbon trade initiatives for areas under restoration¹⁰.

⁸ This recommendation is almost identical to one made in the *Visions for a New Millennium Report* in NSW. In both cases the recommendation reflects a trend away from public engagement. We see this as not being in the interests of conservation.

⁹ The Inquiry recognises that this is a controversial view. However, circumstances do arise where the major beneficiary of a park development is private enterprise. In such circumstances sponsored contributions are acceptable as they communicate to the public an investment in the park by the sponsor that is above normal taxation contributions.

In developing effective funding regimes it must be recognised that:-

there is a significant unmet maintenance need requiring a substantial immediate short term funding supported by an increase in base funding;

all new capital (including investments in land) investments must be accompanied by an additional contribution to the recurrent budget of QPWS;

there are increasing community expectations in relation to standards and safety that will continue to add pressure for enhanced funding for Parks.

Recommendation 26: The LGAQ support establishment of a new funding base for QPWS based on National Benchmarks. LGAQ should actively lobby government and all political parties for such an enhanced funding regime.

Recommendation 27: LGAQ should seek establishment of a Parks 2010 program which aims to address the unmet backlog in Park maintenance and development within a ten year period. This program should embrace the restoring of both natural capital by removing the threat of invasive exotics and capital infrastructure such as tracks, structures and interpretative facilities. The program should link to employment and training initiatives and involve Local Governments as a partner. A particular focus should be on involvement of indigenous communities.

Recommendation 28: In establishing ongoing funding policies, the Government must recognise that all new capital investments should be matched by an increase in recurrent budgets in accordance with accrual accounting practices.

Implementing Recommendations

LGAQ Position

- 5.1.1. The Inquiry was required to report to the LGAQ. This report is the result of the work of the Inquiry in the context of the Terms of Reference. The LGAQ has indicated that it will release this report to the public, including Volume 2 that contains the written submissions received. Many of the issues raised in Public Hearings and submissions go beyond the scope of this Inquiry, while other issues are of a complex nature and require resources far in excess of what was available to this Inquiry in the period from February to April 2000.
- 5.1.2. It is for the LGAQ to consider the results of the Inquiry and make appropriate representations to Government on those matters regarded as important to both Local Governments and the wider communities they represent. The Inquiry has highlighted widespread community concern in relation to the way in which Parks are managed at present. This does not mean that the community does not place a high value on the protected area system. The general tone of submissions and presentations to the Inquiry suggests the opposite is the case. It is because the community places such a high value on protected areas that concerns are expressed.
- 5.1.3. The fundamental point arising from the Inquiry is that without adequate resources the National Park system in this State cannot meet the expectations of the community or the principles established by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. **The Inquiry recommends to the LGAQ that they take a strong position in relation to this matter of current under-resourcing and use their influence to encourage other spheres of Government to immediately address this problem.**

¹⁰A possible example of this is in western parks where the management of grazing pressure could lead to substantial accumulation of soil carbon.

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- 5.1.4. It is also apparent to the Inquiry that individual Local Governments can play a more proactive and strategic role in relation to National Parks. **The LGAQ should seek to enhance their member Councils' recognition of the importance of this asset and the way in which they can contribute to both conservation and tourism objectives.**

5.2 QPWS Position

- 5.2.1. Many of the Recommendations made by the Inquiry relate to the way in which QPWS does business and the culture of the organisation. It should be recognised that the Inquiry has reported on perceptions of the wider community, the QPWS customers, in making these recommendations. This does not imply that positive steps are not being taken within the organisation at the present time. It is apparent to the Inquiry that a number of issues identified by the Inquiry are currently being addressed but that it is too early for these initiatives to reflect in terms of on-the-ground management of the Park system.
- 5.2.2. The Inquiry hopes that QPWS management will see the results of this Inquiry in a positive light and seek Government commitment to address problems identified. The lack of adequate resources is the fundamental problem and this cannot be addressed from within QPWS. This is a matter for Government within the context of the many competing demands on public funds.
- 5.2.3. QPWS is operating within an environment of change. The organisation must be equipped to adapt to this changing environment and particularly to the increasing community expectations and requirements in relation to the protected area system. It is not apparent at this point that the culture of the organisation has changed to reflect modern management approaches or to place emphasis on service to the external customers. This will be a key challenge to the organisation if the change we believe is required is to be implemented .
- 5.2.4. It is the view of this Inquiry that QPWS has not supported and facilitated indigenous involvement in Park management and interpretation to the extent that is consistent with National and International practice. A commitment to greater participation of indigenous people must be seen as a corporate philosophy and not simply left to local situations, approaches and attitudes. Such a commitment should be in the context of broader community involvement.