

TABLELAND TRAIL HORSE RIDERS CLUB INC.

P.O. Box 1002, ATHERTON Q. 4883.

President: Sheila Tait

Secretary: Marj. Stone

Treasurer: Janet Blaik.

Parliament of Australia Senate.

RE: Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

a. It has been noted that over 480,000 hectares is being transferred from Forestry to National Parks and Conservation Reserves. This has caused concern to our Club due to the Conservation Act of 1992. In the past tracks and roads in the Forests have been kept open by owners leasing areas to access their stock, and by keeping them cleared many horse riders and members of this Club have enjoyed shady rides, excellent scenery and quiet areas in streams/rivers to swim or sit and watch flora and fauna. Our main area covers Forest Reserve 194 and the Herberton Range and this Club tries to choose trail rides in a variety of areas over the Atherton Tablelands. The objectives of National Parks and Conservation Reserves are being lost by the limitation of access to these areas.

The permit system is not too difficult for individuals, but it takes a long time for organizations and is too costly for commercial operators.

b. The resources provided are insufficient to maintain traditional access. We have already started to notice that roads are becoming overgrown and trees have fallen over them, plus lantana seems to be taking over a lot of areas. Our concern is – How can Queensland Parks and Wild Life maintain so much extra area? Having seen on Television the devastating fires in Southern Australia this is already causing concern here in the North.

Resources needed include weed control, the constant checking and opening of roads by removal of fallen trees. Access for trapping arrangements for feral pigs, cats, rabbits and dogs and less restrictions on walkers, cyclists, motorcycles, 4WD vehicles and horse riders.

Many areas would also benefit from a return to management by graziers, whose stock kept the lantana to a more manageable level and, who were traditionally appreciative of land in addition to their freehold properties on which to turn out their cattle.

c. Threats to the objectives of National Parks and other Conservation Reserves are the failure of Queensland Parks and Wild Life to provide the necessary weed and feral animal control. Fire management also could do a great deal to diminish the growth of lantana, and this could be followed up by controlled grazing.

There is also the threat of public cynicism about National Parks. The huge areas concerned and the limitations and cost of access throughout Far North Queensland is already an unpopular concept in the eyes of the general public, as noted in Lakefield National Parks.

Visitor areas, where they exist, are informative of the environmentally interesting features, but are only evident in a few selected icon areas.

d. The government would be acting in a more responsible manner than at present by reducing the size of present National Parks, failing to take more National Parks and Conservation Reserves, and by carrying out the above suggestions for weed and feral animal control, grazing, and ease of public access.

In addition, funding could be directed to local Councils for the maintenance of roads in their Shires.

Horse Riders are being constantly told by the Government that they can ride along any gazetted road. On checking out which road or track is the official gazetted road this Club is finding that there are numerous roads inaccessible because of landslide, bridges have not been maintained and has been badly overgrown. There has been a forestry track that has been accessible in the same area, or a Land Owner has allowed access through their property, which means the local Council has not had to keep the gazetted road open.

e. The record of Governments in their creation and management of National Parks and other Conservations Reserves is perceived as being over extensive, in taking in larger areas than is necessary for genuine environmental or conservations values, then failing to provide the funding required for satisfactory maintenance.

Much of the acquired land is no longer of benefit to anyone. While it is acknowledged that not all previous owners managed the land in an environmentally sensitive manner, in general, community users and leaseholders who lived and worked on site were able to make a living and tried to correct past mistakes.

A blanket take-over by government, with single Rangers for large areas, is an ineffective tool for large undertakings. The real function of the Rangers is unclear. Monitoring alone such large areas cannot possibly be management.

Marjorie Stone, Hon. Secretary,
Tableland Trail Horse Riders Club Inc.