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A response to the Senate Sub Committee investigation into funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine parks.

By the Cairns Four Wheel Drive Club, with a particular reference to national parks, and conservation reserves.

(A) Values and objectives of national parks and conservation reserves.

The members of the Cairns Four Wheel Drive Club are in support of conserving areas of Australia that are of special significance, be they biological, cultural and scenic.

There is several categories of protection available to governments. The situation in Queensland is there is currently a process where public land, which are unallocated state land (U.S.L), forestry, and other tenures which are currently being given national park status.

There is certainly areas which meet the criteria for national parks, especially those within the World Heritage areas. There have been large areas in the south east of Queensland made into national parks, and areas in Far North Queensland marked for transfer into national parks which we feel do not meet the requirements for national park status. Rather conservation park, recreation park or resource park would have been more appropriate. The reasoning behind the transfer process appears to be more political than environmentally motivated.

(B) Are governments providing sufficient resources to meet national parks management requirements.

By there very nature, national parks require a high degree of management, if they are to meet the objectives of protecting, conserving, and in some cases rehabilitating the environment. Also managing visitation and providing infrastructure to reduce human impact in conjunction with pest and weed control costs money and lots of it.

Currently the resources being allocated to meet national parks and conservation reserves are far below that required to meet these objectives. With the Federal share of funding to the World Heritage areas having been severely reduced by the millions over the past ten years. State funding for parks has been static and not even kept up with the CPI.

With the addition of USL and forestry reserves being added to the national park net work, the area now under parks control has increased considerably, in some cases the area has doubled. However the funding and resources has not matched this increased work load.

Land that used to be forestry once generated income, this income was used to manage the land and the infrastructure.

In national parks there are very few opportunities that can generate an income, as harvesting, collecting forest products are not allowed. In fact apart from breathing there is not much else humans can do legally.

While tourism can directly input a small income in the form of permit fees, it is the tax payers that have to foot the bill.

A source of income could be a yearly national park pass, with the income directly invested into the national park service, not into the state's consolidated revenue, and not at the cost of current or future funding.

As mentioned earlier, designating areas, a different park status, the opportunities for generating income increases, there by maintaining conservation values and reducing the burden on government finances.

(C) Any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, conservation reserves and marine parks.

Before a threat assessment can be made, a study of the area must be conducted to understand and catalogue its various natural and cultural assets, also infrastructure which exists in the park need to be assessed for it's future on going costs of maintenance, and upgrading as population increases place more pressure on that infrastructure.

Some of the most obvious threats to national park values would have to be pests and weeds. We have a server problem with feral pigs, to the point that conservation groups are advocating the us 1080 baits to stem the problem of the rapid rise in there population. This problem in part, is due the banning of pig hunting in areas which have become part of the world heritage area and insufficient funding to maintain a constant trapping programme.

In areas in the Cape York where cattle lease holds have been purchased or converted into national parks the problem is same. Weeds also are of concern, as they compete for resources and change the environment to a point where it can cause a shift in the population of the fauna and population numbers can become critical.

Global warming is another threat to conservation values, the solution which is outside our current terms of reference.

Just because an area has been made a national park, doesn't mean that it's values will automatically be protected. If governments do not fund parks properly then they have failed in their duty. If funds aren't available then national parks legislation must be amended to allow a more proactive approach.

(D) Responsibilities of governments with regards to the creation and management of national parks other conservation reserves and marine protected areas with reference to long term plans.

Ultimately the government is the authority which has the power to determine if areas require protection. Its important that the process is done for the right reasons, not done for political expediency. A more wholistic approach is required to conservation expecially where urban sprawl is concerned, more effort is needed in maintaining habitat corridors between isolated vegetation pockets. Eg. new developments must set aside 15% - 20% of their land to stop habitat fragmentation.

Where leasehold or freehold land is involved, if land is resumed then people are properly recompensed. There is also other EPA legislation such as the vegetation protection act which has already deprived freehold land owners their ability to utilize their land as they wish. Yet are required to pay rates on that land at top market rates. This is not fair.

More co-operation is needed between park management and local authorities with maintenance of road infrastructure into national parks and other conservation parks. One of the casualties of creating national parks is the loss of access to favourite locations due to track closures, visitor number reductions, banning of horse riding. It is a strongly held view that if access is continually denied or reduced, then what is the point of having national parks. One of the side effects of reducing access to public lands, is that private owners and lease holders are experiencing more visitation to their properties and due to insurance reasons are now denying access because of litigation fears. The net result is less access to outdoor locations with higher pressures being placed on those accessible places.

(E) Record of governments with regards to the creation and management of national parks other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

As has been expressed earlier we applaud the creation of conservation zones such as national parks. Governments have been active in protecting areas of national significance and it is our hope that a more flexible approach to land conservation can be under taken so that access for all recreational groups can be maintained. Because connectively to the land is important to all Australians, it is important to noted in Queensland that a person can enter a national park without a permit. However this applies to individuals. If a group of people wish to enter together then they are hamstrung with red tape. Groups which are not conducting a competitive event should not require permits either. It has to be remembered a good proportion of the population do not meet the requirements for F.I.T. (free and independent traveller). Because of age, youth, impairment many people can not take on extensive walking

tracks, where as vehicle base transport such as 4WD's , motorbikes and horses still enables their freedom. These and other recreational groups can co-exist on tracks and don't need to be segregated.

Groups such as bike riding clubs, bush walking clubs and 4WD clubs all understand tread lightly principles and are more conscious of environmental impacts than the average individual. Recreational groups have also suggested in helping land managers with assisting in maintenance, example is adopt a track, however this and other suggestions and offers have never been taken up. This needs to change.

SUMMARY

- We support the protection of the environment.
- We question the process which determines the designation of national parks over other tenures.
- Creating national parks, is no guarantee of saving the environment.
- Look at conservation areas, recreational parks and resources parks as alternatives.
- Funding is well below that required to protect and maintain infrastructure provided in parks.
- A three fold increasing in funding available for parks is required right now.
- Parks create \$100 per hectare of income for the state of Queensland and yet only \$5 per hectare is spent on managing it.
- The Federal government has to face up to it's responsibilities and pay its share in the upkeep of national assets.
- A yearly park pass could be introduced to help in the financing of parks.
- More resources be made available to combat pests and weeds.
- A more planned, efficient and consistent approach to dealing with pests and weeds.
- Both local government and parks management need to cooperate much more closely with dealing with pests and weeds as pests and weeds don't recognize borders.
- Local government and parks management need to cooperate with maintaining trail and roads which access national park and public reserves.
- A review of the approach to environmental protection is required. Stop creating islands of protected vegetation and look at connectivity (eg habitat corridors)
- Due consideration be given to land holders for rates rebate for loss of productivity due to vegetation protection act.
- Remove red tape for recreational groups which do not conduct competitive events in parks.
- Walking tracks are great, but maintain road infrastructure so that the less able can still maintain their connection with the land.
- Reducing access to public lands invariably places more pressure on those areas which remain open.
- Recreational groups are more environmentally conscious.
- Recreational groups are willing to assist in the maintenance of our national assets.

- Different recreational groups can coexist in parks at the same time.

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