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Queensland Conference and Camping Centres

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The Chair
 Queensland Government Agriculture and Environment Committee
 Parliament House
 Brisbane QLD 4000

SUBMISSION REGARDING THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Queensland Conference and Camping Centres is the largest single provider of Outdoor Education programming in Queensland and has operated Outdoor Education in the State since 1927 when our programs commenced with sea-going expeditions in Moreton Bay. We currently cater to more than 50,000 guests annually and provide Outdoor Education services (both Centre-based and journey-based programs) to more than 30,000 students annually. QCCC was the winner of the QORF Award for Excellence in Outdoor Education in 2013.

Our primary concern is the intention to *reinstate 'the conservation of nature' as the sole object of the Nature Conservation Act 1992 so that the preservation of the national parks will take precedence over other objectives*. By reinstating this as the "sole objective" other current objectives such as *"the use and enjoyment of protected areas by the community"* will be removed and therefore made subservient when 'preservation' takes precedence over all other objectives. We believe this change is detrimental to the long-term viability of National Parks because the use and enjoyment by the community, and particularly when it comes to education and recreation, are not subservient to preservation, they are essential to it.

Richard Louv has concluded ground-breaking research in the area of Nature Deficit Disorder and its impact on today's youth. He asserts that without an immersive and interpretational experience of nature, future generations will not only cease to value the environment, they will grow to fear it and also that *"time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children's health."* It stands to reason that when these generations assume positions of responsibility for the planet's natural assets they will not ascribe sufficient value upon them unless they have experienced them first hand and grown to appreciate them in depth. Thus allowing, and more importantly investing in and encouraging educational access to National Parks assets is vital to their long-term survival.

The previous government recognised the importance of access to National Parks for Educational Providers who facilitate Outdoor Education programs for schools and made significant concessions to enable them to efficiently partner with schools (domestic, interstate and international) to access National Parks for interpretational and immersive experiences of nature. They were also pro-active about working with the Outdoor Education industry to:

1. Make specific changes to permits, licences and group sizes to allow educational providers to deliver viable journey-based programs to a cost-conscious market—the Mums and Dads of Queensland.
2. Remove bottlenecks and impediments of access to certain areas which are not of interest to commercial operators, but are ideal for educational programming.

We speak for several other journey-based educational operators when we suggest the previous government were good at listening to the specific needs of the Outdoor Education industry, valued the intent of what we hoped to achieve with future generations, and worked collaboratively with us to grow the number of young people enjoying remarkable educational experiences in some of the State's best National Park assets. This period reversed a legacy National Parks had built up over the two previous decades where the industry viewed many of the decisions being made as obtuse, pedantic and over-officious. We are concerned that a change in the over-arching philosophical view towards National Parks with preservation taking precedence over other objectives might:

1. Erode access granted to educational providers in recent years (eg we have been empowered to return our school-based expeditions into Moreton Bay, an area where our heritage of running programs stretches back nearly ninety years); and
2. Frustrate upcoming applications for improved numbers and access to under-utilised National Parks assets for educational expeditions (eg a recent request we have made to take schools into the under-utilised areas of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk).

Whilst we understand that allowances for educational purposes and allowing recreation are enshrined in other areas of the Act, we are concerned by the proposed removal of the clause "the use and enjoyment of protected areas by the community". If these objects are not identified as important objects of the Act, we fear that this will, once again, lead to a regime where these essential activities are interpreted as not relevant to the conservation of nature. Our experience is that this has previously provided some bureaucrats in the Department of National Parks with a blunt instrument to bludgeon reasonable requests for access.

Particularly where these requests are for educational purposes we believe this interpretation of the purpose of the Conservation Act to be near-sighted. A few days of access to a National Parks area can provide students with something they will not achieve in years of classroom teaching in subjects such as Biology. We believe that the education of future generations and their enjoyment of National Parks through sustainable recreation is an essential aspect of Parks Conservation and urge the Committee to uphold Educational and Recreation access as **essential** objects of the Nature Conservation Act 1992. We therefore suggest the sentence should read:

"The conservation of nature, with access for educational purposes seen as integral to the process of conservation, is the sole object of the Nature Conservation Act 1992. The preservation of the national parks and access to them by future generations through educational expeditions will take precedence over other objectives."

In summary we would argue that access and education are indeed critical to the long-term welfare of these areas of national importance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AG' followed by a stylized 'LA'.

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