



BUSH HERITAGE AUSTRALIA

Committee Secretary
Agriculture and Environment Committee
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Dear Mr Chair and Committee Members

Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017

Bush Heritage Australia welcomes the introduction of the *Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017* ('the Bill').

Bush Heritage Australia is a leading non-government conservation organisation that has the largest portfolio of privately protected area land, owned and managed for conservation purposes in perpetuity, in Queensland. We also partner with indigenous people, landholders, conservation organisations, scientists, industry and government to achieve our vision of "healthy country protected forever". With all but one of our Queensland Reserves having been declared a Nature Refuge, we actively support the Queensland Government's Protected Area Strategy.

In this submission, we address three key issues (a) the importance of a higher level of protection for privately protected areas, (b) benefits of the Special Wildlife Reserve, and (c) increased incentives for privately protected areas.

Importance of a higher level of protection for privately protected areas

Queensland's protected area network has grown to almost 8% of the state, and covers both public and private lands, including national parks and nature refuges. Privately protected areas make an important contribution to Queensland's protected area system, and are recognised nationally and internationally as being critical to the success of robust protected area networks. Whilst the majority of protected areas within Queensland have been created on state-owned lands and waters, they alone are not sufficient to achieve an ecologically representative network of protected areas as required by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, that has a target of 17% terrestrial protected area coverage. Government across Australia grapple with increasing funding constraints and competing priorities.

The essential role played by protected areas that have been initiated by private landholders has become an increasingly important strategy in protecting conservation assets for future generations. The creation of a Special Wildlife Reserve is an extremely cost effective and efficient strategy to contribute to Queensland Government meeting its conservation commitments.

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In Queensland, nature refuges are currently the only protection type available for private landholders to secure their land in legislation and protect biodiversity values as a priority for land use.

A significant threat to privately protected areas for conservation is permanent land use change arising from incompatible land uses that can be authorised by the State notwithstanding the declaration of a Nature Refuge. To illustrate this issue, I refer to the example of Bush Heritage Australia's Pullen Pullen Nature Refuge located in western Queensland that was recently acquired with the support of the Premier and the Government to protect the then only known population of the endangered Night Parrot.

Despite the high conservation values of this Reserve, incompatible land use activity such as mining tenements and leases exist and threaten the very purpose for which the Reserve was acquired. Bush Heritage Australia has the responsibility to manage these incompatible land uses and this takes significant time, resources and operational capacity that might otherwise be directed into on ground conservation land management. Inevitably, this also leads to a level of unnecessary conflict with mining and petroleum tenement holders. The Special Wildlife Reserve Bill addresses this issue by clarifying and describing restrictions around incompatible land uses.

Benefits of Special Wildlife Reserves

One of the major disincentives for private investment in conservation across Australia is the risk and uncertainty of the land that is being acquired for conservation being devalued due to incompatible land uses. These incompatible land uses include mining and petroleum tenements, timber harvesting and quarry materials extraction licences. The higher level of protection afforded by the proposed Special Wildlife Reserve will provide organisations who are investing in the conservation, such as Bush Heritage Australia, an enhanced incentive for increased investment in Queensland. The added security of a Special Wildlife Reserve will provide Bush Heritage Australia's 40,000 supporters with the certainty that their donations will be used on land tenure that is protected in perpetuity.

The Special Wildlife Reserve Bill also recognises that conservation is an effective use of leasehold land and ensures that Special Wildlife Reserves and Nature Refuges on leasehold land can be managed for conservation, notwithstanding the purpose or conditions of the relevant lease. These amendments will provide legal certainty for lease holders wishing to dedicate part or all of their land for conservation, and facilitate access to innovative funding mechanisms. Concurrently the Bill would provide certainty for minerals and petroleum interests as to what are "green light" areas versus restricted. In effect, greater certainty all round.

Increased incentives

Governments can facilitate the creation and operation of privately protected areas by improving incentives and funding for the creation of Special Wildlife Reserves. Long term management of land is expensive and resource intensive. While creating new incentives for Special Wildlife Reserves may be seen to increase governments fiscal load, removing the financial burden of ongoing land management from the public balance sheet and transferring it into private ownership will drastically relieve that load over time. Government's investment in privately protected areas is a highly cost effective tool for securing conservation outcomes.

As a key national stakeholder, Bush Heritage Australia has the opportunity to work with various State and Territory statutory regimes that regulate privately protected areas. That experience and knowledge of the various statutory frameworks means that we can also informatively assert that the Bill offers the most progressive legislative reform and advancement of legal protection of privately protected areas in perpetuity of any State or Territory in Australia. It is everyone's responsibility to conserve our conservation assets for future generations to experience and enjoy. Governments will

