



10 July 2017

**ATTENTION: AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Dear Committee:

**Re: Committee inquiry into Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017**

QTFN made a submission supporting the introduction of the Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 into the Queensland Parliament. I understand the Bill has been referred to the Agriculture and Environment Committee for consideration.

I would be pleased to appear as a witness at the Committee's hearings on 12 July 2017 if required.

The Queensland Trust for Nature (QTFN) strongly supports the proposal for a new class of privately owned and managed protected areas known as special wildlife reserves under the *Nature Conservation Act*. Providing protection on private land of exceptional conservation significance akin to the protection offered to national parks is an important step forward in growing and improving Queensland's protected area estate.

It is important to offer private landholders a range of opportunities to protect the ecological values of their land and special wildlife reserves will mean owners of particularly significant areas can access protection like that offered to national parks without handing that land over to the State. The introduction of this legislation reflects that there are many areas critical to Queensland's biodiversity which are owned by private families, organisations or individuals.

Assessment of landholder suitability and the use of outcomes based management criteria are essential for the implementation to be successful. It is our view that overly prescriptive management criteria are difficult to carry out and monitor over time.

**QTFN Context**

The Queensland Trust for Nature (QTFN) is an independent not-for-profit organisation established to protect Queensland's natural environment. Much of our operation focuses on connecting and protecting areas of high ecological value on privately owned land. We aim to support private landowners who wish to continue productive uses on their land while also protecting conservation values. We believe local and state Government regulations and funding plays an essential role in assisting private landholders who choose to protect the ecological values of their properties.

QTFN operates a revolving fund that is used to buy, covenant and re-sell land with high conservation values. The Trust also develops partnerships with other organisations to identify, acquire, manage and protect land. Since its establishment in 2004, QTFN has acquired 17 Queensland properties protecting

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over 104,000 hectares of important biodiversity. QTFN's revolving fund model, unique in Queensland, provides a long-term, reusable source of funding to help protect Queensland's biodiversity. While QTFN's current operations are unlikely to include areas suitable as special wildlife reserves we strongly support the opportunity to leverage private and philanthropic funding to support the permanent protection and management of areas of outstanding conservation and ecological significance outside of State owned and funded national parks.

### **Submission**

We provided more detailed comments in our original submission. For the Committee's benefit, these are summarised below:

#### **1. Assessments:**

- Transparency in relation to the determination and assessment of the relative values of particular land should be publicly available.
- Statements of reasons should accompany decisions in relation to special wildlife reserves and supporting material (including the departmental assessment and recommendation) must be made available to the public.
- As with all private protected areas, involvement of independent, skilled conservation land managers like QTFN is essential in assisting Agencies to process assessments and recommendations to Government.

#### **2. Landholder Suitability:**

- Ongoing management costs are clearly a consideration when assessing landholder suitability.
- It is important to ensure funding and incentives available to private landholders wishing to protect conservation values on their land is not diluted or reduced as a result of the introduction of special wildlife reserves; assessment of long-term viability of landholders to support management costs is critical to this.

#### **3. Ongoing Management:**

- Ongoing management requirements should be outcomes based and focused on the conservation values of the land. This will provide landholders with the ability to be flexible and innovate in order to achieve this.
- Processes should support self-auditing where possible with regular (but not frequent) checks or audits to ensure outcomes are being achieved (and potential problems are identified as early as possible).
- Given landholder suitability criteria, there should be confidence that land will be appropriately managed and resourced. Similarly, given the organisational requirements and scale of suitable landholders, QTFN is keen to ensure funding or incentives made available to smaller landholders are not diverted to support special wildlife reserves. It is critical that incentives available for other forms of protection of private land remain in place.

### **Conclusion**

It is QTFN's view that special wildlife reserves add an important tool to the available means of protection of ecological values on privately owned land. Ensuring the ability of suitable organisations and landholders who have the means to privately protect and manage areas with values akin to those of national parks are able to do so without draining on the public purse is a significant step forward.

We strongly encourage the Queensland Government to continue its consideration of how to improve tools available and support for other areas of privately owned land that provide important connections for habitat connectivity, wildlife corridors and climate change refugia.

We would be pleased to discuss this submission or any other matters with members at any time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nerida Bradley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Nerida Bradley  
Executive General Manager