



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

Submission

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*Presented by
Isaac Regional Council*

Isaac Regional Council: Submission to Agriculture and Environment Committee – Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and other legislation Amendment Bill 2017

Introduction

Isaac Regional Council (IRC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Queensland Parliament's Agriculture and Environment Committee regarding the *Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017*. This submission is made in the context of the potential impacts of the Bill on public and private sector operations in the Isaac local government area (LGA).

Background

On 14 June 2017 Hon Dr Steven Miles MP, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef introduced the Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 into the Queensland Parliament. The Bill was referred to the Agriculture and Environment Committee for detailed consideration. The committee is due to report on the Bill by Friday 11 August 2017.

According to the Explanatory Notes, Acts amended by the Bill, and the policy objectives, are as follows:

- the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
 - to establish a new class of privately owned or managed protected area (special wildlife reserve)
- the *Biodiscovery Act 2004*
 - to provide that s 24 (Collection authority concerning land dedicated as new national park or declared as marine park) applies to special wildlife reserves and their declaration
- the *Forestry Act 1959*, the *Fossicking Act 1994* and the *Mineral Resources Act 1989*
 - to add a special wildlife reserve to the types of areas defined as *protected area* under these Acts
- the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*
 - to include special wildlife reserves in the list of protected areas to which this Act does not apply for the clearing of vegetation
- the *Land Act 1994* and the *Land Title Act 1994*
 - to streamline the process by which conservation agreements, for new and existing protected areas, survive tenure dealing processes such as tenure conversion and lease renewal

- to clarify (in the Land Act) that where a protected area declaration is made over a lease, the purpose of the underlying lease is consistent with nature conservation
- the *Environmental Offsets Act 2014*
 - to recognise the new class of protected area (special wildlife reserve) under the Nature Conservation Act
 - to clarify administrative arrangements for approving offset proposals under part 6 of the Environmental Offsets Act in relation to offsets that have or may be granted under the *Planning Act 2016*
- the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*
 - to ensure that risks to the Great Barrier Reef can be managed consistently regardless of whether potentially harmful activities are conducted wholly within Queensland waters or partly within Queensland waters and partly in adjacent Commonwealth waters, within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

Regional Overview

The Isaac LGA spans an area of approximately 58,000 km² in Central Queensland, from the coast to the coalfields, located 1,000km north-west of Brisbane and 900km south of Cairns.

The region's estimated resident population is 24,795 although with an additional 9,455 resource sector workers housed in temporary accommodation at any one time the full-time equivalent population can fluctuate to an estimated 35,250.¹

Historically the Isaac economy has been driven by the resource sector which still contributes over 75% of the region's GRP of \$5.3 billion². The Isaac LGA hosts 24 operational coal mines which produced 62% of Queensland's total saleable coal in 2016³. CSG operations have an average annual production of 380mm³.⁴ Agriculture is also an important industry with agricultural output in Isaac being valued at \$226m.⁵

While the region predominately produces high grade metallurgical coal and is shielded from much of the uncertainty surrounding the future of thermal coal, regional leaders recognise the regional state and national economies cannot rely on a finite resource indefinitely, and have embarked on an exciting journey to strengthen and diversify the region's traditional economic base and ensure socio-economic sustainability for generations to come.

Tourism is identified as a key strategic focus area for the sustainable development of the regional economy. The Isaac Region's natural assets include 100 kilometres of pristine, largely undeveloped coastline together with the big skies and rugged ranges of the western plains. One of the Isaac LGAs key attractions for visitors is the General Permission Areas which permit fossicking for Gold near the town of Clermont in the west of the region.

¹ Queensland Government Statistician's Office, Bowen Basin Population Report 2016

² REMPLAN 2017

³ DNRM 2016 production of saleable coal by individual mines 2015, accessed at <https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/coal-industry-review-statistical-tables/resource/1b7fb643-c880-42bf-940b-fc3c582d239d>

⁴ DNRM 2017 Coal Seam Gas Production accessed at <https://data.qld.gov.au/dataset/petroleum-gas-production-and-reserve-statistics/resource/63a8a6cc-7fb6-4040-b4e7-9d453b14d3ed> 02/02/2017

⁵ REMPLAN 2017

General Comments

Clermont is a vibrant community of approximately 2,450 people situated in the west of the Isaac Region and lying on the established 'Great Inland Way' drive touring route. The local economy is underpinned by agriculture (largely beef and grain production), coal mining and tourism. A key component of Clermont's tourism offering is the opportunity to fossick for gold in General Permission Areas on State land close to the town.

Fossicking Activities attract approximately 1000⁶ people to Clermont each year for extended stays contributing approximately \$0.5 million⁷ to the local economy. One of the town's small businesses is dedicated solely to providing for the needs of gold fossickers and is wholly dependent on continued visitation to remain viable.

Given the significant contribution fossickers make to the local visitor economy the Clermont community have expressed concern regarding the potential for the *Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017* to negatively impact public access to, and activity on, the local General Permission Areas upon which fossicking activities are undertaken.

Isaac Regional Council notes the *Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017* affects at least ten separate Acts including the *Fossicking Act 1994* and *Mineral Resources Act 1989*.

While it is understood the intent of the *Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017* is to facilitate 'Special Wildlife Reserves' in partnership with private landholders and on a voluntary basis, Isaac Regional Council seeks clarification of potential impacts regarding access to, and activity on, General Permission Areas located on State owned land, which could deter ongoing visitation and undermine the local economy.

Recommendation:

The Agriculture and Environment committee consider and report on any potential impacts of the *Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017* in relation to access to, and activity on, General Permission Areas which could be detrimental to fossicking driven visitation and therefore the local economy.

⁶ Isaac Regional Council Fossicking kit sales records 2017

⁷ REMPLAN 2017