

3/12/12

Submission regarding the proposal to allow Commercial Eco-Tourist Development within National Parks

From: Peter Young, [REDACTED]



The concept of a National Park would seem simple enough; to protect for posterity representative flora and fauna as well as areas of significant beauty. That preservation, to be worthwhile, must be manifestly free from human interference because, quite simply, human interference changes things.

Who do National Parks cater for? All people now and, most importantly, into the future. To be valuable every effort should be made to ensure that they remain pristine and undamaged.

Should National Parks be available for people to visit? Yes of course; in that way they are able to appreciate the beauty and complexity of natural systems, systems that have been largely compromised elsewhere.

Should the visitors be allowed to compromise the qualities of the National Parks they visit? No, of course not; it would make no sense at all to preserve a place of beauty only to allow that beauty to be despoiled.

Would the construction of Eco-Tourism Resorts within National Parks compromise the qualities of the park they were constructed in? Of course it would; these are some of the ways:

- Vegetation would need to be cleared for the construction site
- The resort would need roads; more vegetation would need to be cleared
- More roads means greater exposure of wildlife to traffic (you would be safe in assuming this is not good news for the wildlife) and vegetation to weed infestation.
- The resort would need water; lots of it. Collection from local watercourses would compromise them by affecting normal water flows while collection into tanks would have much the same effect although less obviously.

- Resorts mean waste; human excrement, cooking waste and general rubbish. All these can be dealt with but all at the expense of what was meant to be protected
- The degradation of parks is materially assisted by having more edges; in the same way that smashed ice will melt more quickly than a block of ice so fragmented National Parks will degrade more quickly than solid intact ones. Development within parks fragments them and leads to more rapid degradation.

Do Eco-Tourism Resorts provide access to National Parks? Well yes and no.; it depends you see on how much money you have. In lots of ways they are exclusive because the costs of running them are high and so then are their charges. Yes they might provide a Gift Shop or Café for those of us on a more modest income but that is not providing access it is simply making access more comfortable.

Is it possible to have successful Eco-Tourism Resorts outside National Parks? Yes; there are numerous excellent examples in Queensland; O'Reilly's Guest House is a thriving commercial Eco-Tourism Resort as is the Carnarvon Gorge Wilderness Lodge.

Where there are NOT Eco-Tourism Resorts outside parks the question is 'Why not?' It is reasonable to suspect that one of the major reasons is that it is not profitable. So why would these operations be any more profitable within the parks? It is an interesting question with significant implications; you see it is fine for an Eco-Tourist proponent to espouse excellent eco- principals but if the cash flow is poor then it is unlikely that those principals will be implemented and if implemented then that they will be maintained on and on into the future.

If Eco-Tourism Resorts are permitted within parks what would be the implications for existing businesses that exist outside the parks? It is clear that the existing businesses; businesses that have invested significantly; would be materially disadvantaged, and so, in a sense we would simply be robbing Peter to pay Paul.

What is the driving imperative of Eco-Tourism Resorts? Profit; not nature conservation or ensuring that the National park is maintained in a pristine state; these may be useful by-products of the desire to make a profit but there is a fundamental conflict of interest between the resort proprietors and the essential concept of a National Park.

Will allowing the development of Eco-Tourism Resorts within National Parks be the end of the decision making process? No, of course not; anybody with children, those canny negotiators, realises that answering the question "Can I have a pet?" in the affirmative is to embark on an endless round of skirmishes on the size and nature of that pet. Why not? Will be the question most dealt with. An uncompromising NO is a far easier position to defend. And so it is with Eco-Tourism Resorts in National Parks; why not one on the cliffs of Carnarvon Gorge; go on, why not? Why not one on the magical waterfalls of Blackdown Tablelands?

Proponents of commercial development will point to its existence in other jurisdictions; they miss several points:

- 1) The fact that something happens elsewhere does not make it appropriate for Queensland; consider the caste system of India.
- 2) Only 5% of Queensland is dedicated to National Parks; compare this with 9% in NSW, 15% in Victoria and 40% in Tasmania. At 5% our National Parks are minimal (the international

standard is 15%) and require all the protection they can get. Allowing development within them will not help in that protection.

- 3) Queensland then has 95% of the state available for the development of Eco-Tourist Resorts; operators can readily use that; they may want but do not need access to the parks
- 4) There are major pressures currently on our parks; the most significant are climate change, feral animal and pest plants. To place them under yet further stress by having commercial development within them is to unnecessarily compromise their integrity

Some final points

- 1) I am entirely unclear how the people of Queensland; the ultimate owners of the National Parks; stand to benefit from the commercial development proposed.
- 2) I am equally unclear as to who will own the infrastructure if any such development proceeds nor what conditions would be placed on any commercial development.
- 3) Finally I am unclear who will provide oversight of any such projects; nor, assuming it is the government, what that oversight will cost. Is it in fact possible that having allowed our parks to be compromised we find ourselves also paying for the privilege?

Summary

National Parks provide the highest level of protection for representative flora and fauna as well as areas of significant beauty; this protection to be for posterity; so for 100 years from now and more.

Commercial development within these parks is inconsistent with that charter of protection and should be rejected.