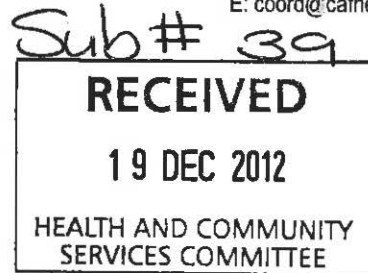




Health and Community Services Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
Sent by email to: hcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.

PO Box 323N, CAIRNS QLD 4870  
T: (07) 4032 1746 F: (07) 4053 3779  
E: coord@cafneec.org.au [www.cafneec.org.au](http://www.cafneec.org.au)



18 December 2012

**Re: Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012**

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) is the peak environment organisation for the region from Cardwell north to Torres Strait and from the coast west to the Gulf of Carpentaria. CAFNEC is a non-profit, community organisation that has been operating for over 30 years with the aim of encouraging the community to value, protect and restore the natural environment.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this Bill, and provide the below points for consideration. There are four major components to this Bill:

1. Amendments to the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* to allow for privately owned and operated ecotourism facilities<sup>1</sup> in Queensland National Parks;
2. Amendments to the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* to provide a simplified process to authorise service facility infrastructure in national parks;
3. Amendments to the *Forestry Act 1959* to remove area (10ha) and time (7yrs) limits from the occupation permit provisions; and
4. Repeal of the *Brisbane Forest Park Act 1977*.

We will be focusing our comments on points 1 and 3 above.

**Privately owned and operated ecotourism facilities in national parks**

The proposed amendment to section 35(1) of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* would allow for construction and operation of ecotourism facilities in national parks. This change would represent a major shift in national park management, and would potentially result in significant environmental, social and economic impacts.

<sup>1</sup> Defined on pg13 of the Bill as a facility that is designed and managed to facilitate the presentation, appreciation and conservation of the land's natural condition and cultural resources and values.



Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.

PO Box 323N, CAIRNS QLD 4870  
T: (07) 4032 1746 F: (07) 4053 3779  
E: [coord@cafneec.org.au](mailto:coord@cafneec.org.au) [www.cafneec.org.au](http://www.cafneec.org.au)

CAFNEC opposes any commercial development in national parks, and is concerned about the long-term negative impacts that this would have on the integrity of Queensland's national parks. We believe that this proposed change is fundamentally flawed and would result in:

- Serious negative environmental impacts on national parks;
- Reduced public access, with private enterprise given exclusive access to public land at the expense of community access; and
- No or limited economic benefit.

#### *Environmental impacts*

The primary purpose of national parks is the conservation of nature, and national parks provide important habitat refuges in a heavily fragmented landscape. Less than 5% of Queensland is national park, and these parks protect some of the most diverse landscapes in Australia. The Queensland government should be aiming to increase this national park estate and to make these areas as resilient and biologically diverse as possible. Habitat that is free of development and high-impact human habitation or visitation is very limited. It is imperative for the survival of species and communities that rely on them that national parks remain as low-impact recreational areas free of commercial development and with minimal infrastructure.

Allowing ecotourism facilities on National Park land would erode the **cardinal principle**<sup>2</sup> which seeks to "provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values" (the State Government defines "natural condition" as "protection from human interference - allowing natural processes to proceed").

#### *Reduced public access to national parks*

Granting ecotourism leases in national parks would allow private ecotourism operations to profit from a public asset at the expense of public access. This would appear to directly contradict the State Government's policy of making National Parks more accessible to the public.

#### *No evidence of economic benefits*

There is no evidence to show that this change would even bring significant economic benefits. The only justification provided is that the tourism industry wants the change. The research findings of Professor Buckley, Director of Griffith University's International Centre for Ecotourism Research,

---

<sup>2</sup> Introduced in the *Forestry Act 1959* during a period of **coalition government**, for over 50 years National Parks in Queensland have been managed according to the cardinal principle.



Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.

PO Box 323N, CAIRNS QLD 4870  
T: (07) 4032 1746 F: (07) 4053 3779  
E: [ccord@cafneec.org.au](mailto:ccord@cafneec.org.au) [www.cafneec.org.au](http://www.cafneec.org.au)

indicate that the benefits to tourism will be minimal.<sup>3</sup> Given these findings, there is no justification for making these changes.

In addition, allowing high-cost, private eco-tourism development for a niche market could detract from the economies of regional communities that adjoin National Parks.

#### *Alternative methods of achieving policy objectives*

Better promotion of national parks, improved transport to and from these areas, and enhancing the quality of the national park experience through improved signage and interpretive walks, etc. are likely to be more effective ways of improving tourism in protected areas.

#### **Amendments to the *Forestry Act 1959***

The general objective of the proposed amendments is to facilitate exploitation of state forests for gas extraction and mining. These state forests are commonly the only areas of native vegetation remaining in important habitat areas. It appears that there is little consideration of the biodiversity values of state forests in the Bill.

It is imperative that the Bill recognises the biodiversity values of state forests and ensures that consideration of those values is embedded in any process to facilitate the issue of permits or leases over state forests. Any action that contributes to the loss and degradation of State Forests, contributes to the loss of biodiversity in Queensland. Already, places such as Hallett State Forest (east of Injune) have virtually disappeared under a matrix of CSG well-heads. These areas represent potential future protected areas, and we are not aware of any thorough scientific assessment (other than ARC's efforts) that articulates the conservation values of these forests.

Sincerely,

Anna McGuire

Coordinator

---

<sup>3</sup> Buckley, R. (2009). Parks and Tourism. PLoS Biol 7 (6): e1000143. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1000143