

Submission regarding the proposed amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992

Mr Trevor Ruthenberg MP, Chair
Health and Community Services Committee,
Parliament House,
Brisbane 4000

Dear Mr Ruthenberg,

Below please find my submission regarding proposed amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992

Yours Faithfully,

Gayle Johnson
11 August 2013,

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SUBMISSION

Re. the proposed amendments to the Object of the Act in Section 4, I strongly propose in that these amendments be removed. These amendments completely change the purpose of the act. The Act, as it stands, is primarily concerned with the conservation of nature. This is how it should remain. These amendments will mean that social, commercial and cultural uses will be part of the object.

There is no need for these proposed additions within the Object as they are all clearly dealt with in the management principles for each class of protected area. If they are placed within the Object in the unqualified manner proposed this will change the whole basis of the Act.

New class of protected area - Regional Parks

This new class has come about by the abolition of Conservation Parks and Resources Reserves and their merging into Regional Parks. The name is misleading. It contains no implication of resource protection. This poses a danger to resource protection.

National park (scientific) and national park (recovery)

The loss of these categories by subsuming them under National Parks poses a grave danger to the efficacy of the functions carried out by these important categories.

National parks (scientific) involve strict protection and management for a particular conservation purposes. Public access is strongly controlled. This class of national park is used for parks that protect, for example, northern hairy-nosed wombats in Epping Forest. They sometimes require strong manipulation of the environment (including other native species) in order to ensure the survival of an endangered species. To simply absorb them into national parks is unacceptable, unnecessary and likely to be ineffective. Not only that, many of the activities necessarily carried out in National Parks (Scientific) would be in breach of the cardinal principle of a National park.

Similarly, absorbing National Park (Recovery) into national parks is incompatible with the status of national parks. This designation was to allow for restoration of land destined to become national parks but not yet ready. It could take many years to restore such lands. They need special management and a separate category. As in the case of National Park (Scientific), restoration may require activities that are not consistent with the management of national parks.

Forest Reserve

The category of Forest Reserve was established to act as a holding tenure in the SEQ Forest Agreement process. Many State forests that were being transferred to national park status contained a number of encumbrances (e.g. grazing) that had to be determined and negotiated before the land could be dedicated as national park. Forest Reserve has been an extremely useful holding tenure that affords great flexibility. It seems pointless and counter-productive to abolish it.

Management Plans for proposed changes

If, contrary to the cardinal principle of national parks, activities such as tourist resort development are proposed for a national park, it is essential that a management plan be developed before such an activity is authorized.

It is also vital that a management plan should go through a public consultation process so that public feedback can be received.

Conclusion

National Parks cover only 4.8% of Queensland. This is lower than in any other Australian state and low by International standards. It would be shameful to downgrade the quality of what we have and also to reduce the chance that other areas - such as National Park (Recovery) – could be added to the National Park estate. Queensland has amazing, and in many cases unique, fauna, flora and landscapes. To hold our heads high on the international stage we need to do everything we can to protect these wonders especially in these worrying times of biodiversity decline.

Yours Sincerely

Gayle Johnson