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Health and Community Services Committee
Queensland Government
Brisbane

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**Amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992
Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No 2) 2013**

Introduction

North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) wishes the following comments to be taken into account in relation to the proposed amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (NCA) and associated legislation.

NQCC acknowledges the government's aim of meeting the economic objective of 'obtaining the greatest return from scarce resources' but urges it to remember that beyond this somewhat simplistic Economics 101 definition, there are more complex aspects of economics that reflect the multifaceted nature of our social constructs and the environmental network in which they exist.

Despite the ability of humans to influence the environment, it is worth remembering that, without it, we cannot exist. And nor do we want to. As the former US Senator Gaylord Nelson said "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around".

In relation to the amendments, NQCC is greatly concerned that what are deemed economic imperatives will result in a sorely diminished environment, to the ultimate detriment of the economy.

Specific Concerns

Changing the Object of the Act

NQCC disputes the government's claim that National Parks (NPs) have been 'locked up', the claim behind the proposed amendments. What NPs *have* been is closed to some activities that would damage the environmental values of the parks. This is only sensible. There is no point allowing areas the community wants protected to be damaged by allowing unsuitable use.

By watering down the Object of the NCA, its legal strength is being weakened. By including specific reference to potential uses of National Parks, other than the conservation of nature, the *raison d'être* of the Act is lost, and with it the power of the Act to protect.

Once the Object encompasses 'social, cultural and commercial use' where is the line to be drawn? How (especially in the absence of management plans) are decisions to be made about the nature of uses, especially commercial uses. Are NPs, by a slow process of 'creep', to become nothing other than new spaces for development of residences, hotels, shops, and mines?

Who will be responsible for cumulative impacts and, given the failure of CIAs in the major projects development area, who will assess them?

The three proposed additions only refer to protected areas, whereas the NCA also contains provisions relating to the conservation of wildlife outside protected areas. The additions are all presently encompassed by the management principles for each class of protected area, where certain uses are qualified in terms of the extent to which they can apply. Placing them in the Object in such a broad and unqualified manner changes the whole basis of the Act.

Abolishing the requirement for management plans

Management of anything requires a plan. A plan enables the setting of targets, schedules, monitoring requirements, tasks and evaluations. As is widely recognised in industry, without measurement, management is impossible.

Management statements are poor cousins of management plans and would be of extremely limited use in maintaining or improving management of NPS. While the capacity to prepare management plans remains, there is little incentive to do so.

Loss of public input

There is no requirement for public input into management statements. The opportunity for public input into the management of a public asset is essential. Without such public input, NPs are without doubt going to be 'locked up'. They will be locked up for exploitation resulting from secret negotiations between government and commercial enterprises.

NQCC is opposed to the proposed amendments on the above-mentioned grounds and asks for the proposed amendments to be changed accordingly.



Coordinator