

From: [Shane O'Reilly](#)
To: [Health and Community Services Committee](#)
Subject: Submission
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Attachments: Amendments to the Nature Conservations Act 1992.docx

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Best regards,
Shane O'Reilly | Managing Director
O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat | Villas | Lost World Spa & Conference Centre | O'Reilly's Canungra Valley Vineyards
Lamington National Park Road via Canungra, Queensland 4275



PO Box 392, Nerang, Queensland 4211
Telephone: [REDACTED] | Direct: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED] | Fax: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED] | Web: www.oreillys.com.au

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Amendments to the Nature Conservations Act 1992 (NCA).

Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No2) 2013.

12th September 2013.

To: The Health and Community Services Parliamentary Committee.

Submitted by: Shane O'Reilly
Managing Director
National Park Pty Ltd

Changes to the Object of the NCA.

1. I am of the belief that some people would interpret the proposed changes to the Object of NCA as an “attack” on the integrity and values that underpin our National Parks. The point they miss here is asking how are our Parks really going under the current legislation? The answer unfortunately is not that well. They are under-resourced, their facilities are often run down, poorly maintained and technically out of date, interpretation and education is at best left to notice boards, rangers are an endangered species, and while the Parks are still free for the public to visit – visitation is going down and if visitation was to be a factor of those actually getting out into the Parks proper – further than the car park and picnic ground, then the numbers “visiting” would be decreased much further.
2. For decades – our National Parks have been squeezed financially and managerially by successive Governments looking for cost efficiencies. Governments have been allowed to do this by a general public whom while “liking” National Parks as a concept, are now being drawn to other recreational activities outside of these protected areas and subsequently have become increasingly disengaged from any real relationship with National Parks.
3. Therefore in this context, the changes to the Object of the Act are vital, because without it, we will not see a reversal in this long term trend away from National Parks to other activities. The reason for this is 20 years ago most people visited a National Park to walk in the bush for the day – mostly for relaxation through exercise. Today the trend is for exercise to be done during the week usually on a bike or running or at a gym. On the weekend there is sport and often an organised event that puts the week’s training to the test. These events are often linked to a charitable organisation so that participants also get the extra rush of adrenaline by helping those less fortunate.

4. This gives background as to why National Parks are losing relevance in today's society and this trend is very dangerous for the future of our Parks and for the conservation values and objectives that underpin them.
5. There is a concern of some people that National Parks should not be required to be "profitable" and give the tainted view that this is the ultimate object. And those people are correct in that the Parks do not need to be profitable, but the Parks do need to be relevant. However they are incorrect in that profit is the ultimate goal – conservation is.
6. To be relevant the Parks need to be valued by the wider community, not just a small fringe. Once they are relevant, they will be visited by that wider community. Once they are visited, the visitors will spend money if an appropriate offer is available; the Park suddenly produces an economic return to the provider of the product or service, as well as a qualitative dividend in the form of an increased awareness and appreciation of nature and conservation generally – purely by experiencing that Park.
7. For our Parks to be once again relevant to the general public they must provide activities, have events, modern facilities, interpretation, eco-tourism – this is why the object of the Act needs to be changed.
8. The fill circle arising from these amendments means our National Parks will once again be relevant and treasured and visited by the public. This will in turn produce many benefits some quantitative (financial) and some qualitative (awareness/ appreciation) and thus Governments will be implored to deliver sufficient resources to both manage and maintain the conservation values and the recreational activities as prescribed under the Act. The future of our National Parks will be secured – otherwise we continue in this downward spiral where National Parks lose relevance and resources and their capacity for upholding their own conservation values.

Other points:

1. Abolishing some of the various classes of protected areas does nothing to detract from conservation and is generally good housekeeping especially when some of those classes have never been declared in any area.
2. Expanding the management principles is in accordance with the points raised under the proposed changes to the Object of the Act. It is noted that the cardinal principle remains.
3. The production of management plans for protected areas has been a complete failure over the 10 plus years. These plans are so incredibly slow to produce that they are usually out of date by the time they are documented or they are never completed – which is more common the case, because even the proponents realise they are already out of date and require further work. Therefore replacing these with management statements seems a reasonable goal which should at least be achieved and provide direction for the management of the Park.

4. Management statements could allow some public consultation or submission process to ensure that all aspects are considered when drawing these up.

<end 12th Sept 2013 NCA amendments>