

September 13, 2013

Fraser Coast Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland

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**Submission on proposed changes to the Nature Conservation Act.**

**Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No.2) 2013**

**Introduction:**

The diversity of fauna and flora in Queensland is immense and beautiful. . Artists and poets have been enthralled by the natural beauty of Australia’s landscape. Our precious few protected areas offer the only sanctuary for the unique animals and plants that have evolved on this continent over millions of years.

All surveys show that the major reason tourists visit our state is to experience the wonder of nature in highly protected areas such as the Great Barrier Reef, Fraser Island, and the Wet Tropics. It is beholden on the Queensland Government and indeed all Queenslanders to afford our natural ecosystems and biodiversity the highest level of protection possible.

We consider that parts of the Amendment Bill will lower the protection of natural areas currently protected in the Nature Conservation Act..

**Policy objectives and the reason for them:**

One of the reasons cited for the alteration of the objective is “to increase access to national parks and other public lands.”

We do not think this reason bears scrutiny. Currently National Parks are one of the most accessible of land tenures. Any person who is capable of movement on foot or in any sort of vehicle can enjoy the national park experience on some level. Fit persons can enjoy mountain climbing, ordinary folk bushwalking and those who are unable or do not wish to engage in physical activity can picnic or enjoy a drive through the park. Many parks now have wheel chair friendly sections of track. Which “tourists or wider community” cannot access National Parks?

In fact, establishment of resorts will restrict public access since privately leased premises will not be open to the public eg Tangalooma on Moreton Island.

**Proposed amendments:**

“a) *Broaden the object of the NCA* to provide for recreation and commercial uses in protected areas, while continuing to retain a focus on nature conservation.”

We strongly urge the retention of the object of National Parks as nature conservation only. Conservation of biodiversity and nature is one of the obligations of an educated civilised society. Expanding the objective to recreation and commercial activities is unnecessary especially when such a small proportion of Queensland is protected with National Park status (less than 5%). The total area of protected estate in Queensland is only 7% - the lowest of any state in Australia. Resorts, providers of hospitality and tour guide operators can be situated outside the National Parks on private land providing employment and financial opportunities for the residents adjacent to National Parks. This currently is achieved with great success by businesses such as Binna Burra, tourist resorts in the Daintree area, near Carnarvon National Park and many other places.

“b) *Reduce the number of protected area tenure classes* currently provided for under the NCA through abolishing or amalgamating tenures.”

- “combine the national park, national park (scientific) and national park (recovery) tenures into one tenure class called ‘national park’”;

We oppose the reclassification of national parks (scientific) and national parks (recovery) within the National Park definition. In addition, scientific national parks and recovery national parks will have to be included in a new classification – Special Management Areas. The reduction in redtape here will be minimal.

The management of National Parks is basically as hands off as possible. Weed control, feral animal control, visitor and fire management are the basic elements. Likewise National Parks are available for public enjoyment.

However, in a National Park (scientific) there may well be interference with wildlife that is against the basic tenets of a National Park. In addition, public visitation is limited to prevent weed introduction and other interference with fragile ecosystems.

Likewise, recovery National Parks may involve more aggressive management – planting, gradual phasing out of grazing, terminating leasehold arrangements and so on. The category should be maintained. We recommend retaining National Parks (scientific) and National Parks (recovery) and not putting them into Special Managed Area category.

- “combine the conservation park and resources reserve tenures into one tenure class called ‘regional park’ “;

We oppose the amalgamation of conservation parks and resource reserve tenure into regional parks. The proposed amendment weakens the protection level that had been afforded by conservation park status. Once conservation parks are included in the category of regional parks, resource extraction will be allowed. In other words, the lowest common denominator will apply when the two classes are merged. The category of conservation park should be retained.

- “grandfather the ‘forest reserve’ tenure from future use, and then abolish the tenure category following a review and reclassification process of all remaining forest reserves.”

It is to be hoped that with a healthy timber plantation industry offering opportunities for rural landholders for additional employment and financial return and for accumulation of carbon

credits – particularly in a political environment where “direct action” to reduce greenhouse gases is to be adopted – that harvesting of native forests will soon be seen as counterproductive. In this case, the inclusion of more native forests in the protected estate will be seen as a wise use of the resource. To “grandfather” the forest reserve tenure seems short sighted. We oppose elimination of the forest reserve category and the “grandfathering” of this category of protected area.

“c) *Revise the management principles* for protected areas consistent with the new tenure classes.”

- “In addition, the management principles for national parks have been expanded to provide for educational, recreational and ecotourism opportunities.”

Protected areas such as National Parks have always been available for educational, recreation and ecotourism – consider the massive ecotourism on Fraser Island or the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Wonderful recreational opportunities exist in National Parks – passive recreation, active recreation such as snorkelling, hiking, mountain climbing. None of the National Parks in Queensland are so massive in area that ecotourism facilities cannot be established outside the parks and still allow good access to the National Park.

- “The Bill amends the NCA to replace the requirement that the Minister prepare a management plan with a requirement that the chief executive prepare a management statement for the area. Both the object of the NCA (section 5) and the management principles of protected areas (section 15) will recognise that a management statement is to be used and *considered* in the management of a protected area.”

One of the objections to the preparation of management plans is the administrative work involved in public consultation.

We encourage the retention of National Park Management plans which involve public consultation in their development. Valuable information regarding these parks – both the assets and the threats – can be garnered from members of the public who are intimately familiar with the park and activities that occur within and without. In addition the Management Plan is a statutory instrument.

We recommend that management of protected areas involve public consultation and the preparation of statutory management plans in preference to management statements.

If for financial reasons, management statements are the selected option, we request that there be at least one opportunity for public input into the statements.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. We hope that our views will be helpful in the preparation of the final amendment.

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