

**From:** [Michael GOURLAY](#)  
**To:** [Health and Community Services Committee](#)  
**Subject:** Nature Conservation and other legislation Bill No 2 2013  
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The following comments about proposed changes to the Nature Conservation Act have been compiled at short notice and draw attention to some essential points and principles which should be taken into account by the proponents of these changes.

My comments are based upon my experiences, firstly, as a person who has been fortunate to live for almost all of my life within close access of large National Parks/Nature Conservation areas in both Sydney and Brisbane and, secondly, as a civil engineer who for many years has been involved with sustainable use of waterways, estuaries and coasts and the teaching of engineering students in related courses. In the latter part of this period my attention has been focussed on the Great Barrier Reef and the management of its reef-top islands and the impact of infrastructure on them. My work has included research on the coastal processes forming and maintaining these islands and has taken me to places such as Raine Island, a nature conservation area with restricted human access, and to Heron Island, where there has been multipurpose use as national park, scientific research station and tourist resort.

My experience has convinced me that any tourist development and associated infrastructure either on or adjacent to protected areas needs to be subject to proper management plans and oversight to ensure that all activities are consistent with nature conservation.

It is important to recognise that Nature does not respect legal boundaries even if politicians and lawyers do. It is important that protected areas should be surrounded by appropriate buffer zones that will minimise the impact of development of any kind upon the ecology of the protected area. Wherever possible the boundaries of protected areas should consider the whole physical/ecological system involved.

The Object of the Act should remain primarily the conservation of nature both within and outside protected areas.

There must be classes of protected area where wildlife conservation is the overriding purpose. The present classes National Park (scientific) and National Park (recovery) serve essential specific purposes and may involve practices which are incompatible with the cardinal practice of National Parks, i.e. nature conservation.

The proposed new class of protected areas to be designated as regional parks gives no indication of resource protection and should be changed to one that does or the present classes of conservation park and resources reserve should be retained.

Social, cultural and commercial use of protected areas should be subject to a management plan being developed before these and other nonconservation uses are allowed. This should be required, particularly where tourist development and activities involving the introduction of nonnative species of animals and plants, e.g. grazing, are being proposed. Public consultation should be required when developments are initially proposed and before they are approved.

Nature conservation areas, National Parks, etc, are for the conservation of native fauna and flora and the natural environment in which they live. That should remain their primary declared purpose. Human activities in or adjacent to such areas should be compatible with this purpose. Appropriate facilities need to be provided to allow people to access such areas for educational and noninvasive recreational activities. Such facilities and activities need to be subject to an appropriate approval and regulation process to ensure that they comply and continue to comply with nature conservation principles. While proponents of various tourist and other developments may desire the removal of "green tape" and fast tracking of their developments, and there is no doubt justification for this in some areas, conservation and sustainable use of the natural environment must be the higher priority for all legislation concerned with nature conservation.

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