



11 September 2013

The Research Director
Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: Inquiry into the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment
Bill (No. 2) 2013**

The Queensland Trust for Nature (QTFN) welcomes the opportunity to support the Committee in its important work to review legislation and shape future strategies in the planning and development of nature conservation areas in Queensland, especially in the management of National Parks.

QTFN believes the burden of managing Queensland's nature conservation areas, including National Parks, should not fall solely on the shoulders of government and could be enhanced and improved by harnessing community expertise and energy.

The work of the Committee is critical to achieving better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Queenslanders, through strategic and structural changes in the planning and management of nature conservation lands in Queensland.

Our response to the Committee

QTFN supports the proposed red tape reduction and the broadening of access to State National Parks to allow more commercial activities in protected areas. QTFN's support is qualified on the basis that these activities are allowed in appropriate areas and are well managed and regulated. It is important to state clearly that protected areas containing fragile habitat and ecosystems should not be exposed to private, commercial activity. Approval for projects should be based on them being exemplars of environmental and conservation values.

QTFN supports and is pleased with the retention of the Nature Refuge tenure within the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2013. QTFN believes that the State Government cannot act in isolation to protect and enhance the State's biodiversity and that the community and private sector need to be more engaged. The Nature Refuge is a great example

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of a successful mechanism to engage with private landholders. While not covered in the Nature Conservation Act 1992, QTFN encourages the State to consider strengthening the ability for private landholders to permanently protect their property with either a 'Private National Park' or a tiered Nature Refuge covenant classification that provides greater protection to those areas possessing significant biodiversity values of National Park quality.

QTFN agrees that, with appropriate standards and safeguards, ecotourism presents an opportunity for the State to facilitate world best practice environmental activities which provide both enhanced public understanding and greater connection to the natural values of Queensland's protected areas. QTFN believes that a clear vision and strategic agenda needs to be developed for ecotourism in Queensland. This vision would recognise the environmental, social and economic value of nature and the need to protect the State's natural capital base.

QTFN supports ecotourism that is conducted adopting world best practice and methodology (an example is the Silky Oaks Lodge complex adjacent to the Daintree National Park), allowing visitors to develop a unique connection with nature. The QTFN recognises that ecotourism is a broader opportunity than just the provision of nature-based accommodation and includes the development of research and educational opportunities within National Parks to deepen the nature experience. Partnerships between regional universities and existing leading industry operators should be encouraged to provide education and training courses in the eco-tourism and hospitality industries that will attract international students while strengthening the skills of one of Queensland's core sectors.

QTFN believes that National Parks should be areas of high biodiversity and ecological value and that their brand should be enhanced by reclassifying areas of lesser quality. QTFN therefore recommends that the State conduct a classification review of National Parks and, where necessary, reallocate to a Regional Park classification those properties that do not possess suitable National Park values. This would preserve the uniqueness and value of those areas assessed as suitable to be National Parks. QTFN recommends the retention of Regional Parks as they play a valuable role in the preservation of wildlife corridors and the State's overall biodiversity.

QTFN proposes that the current legislative review presents the State with a rare opportunity to assess not only what activities are conducted within National Parks and how they are assessed, but also the ongoing roles of the State, community groups, private enterprise and the not for profit sector in the management of Queensland's protected areas.

The current and past practice of isolating protected areas from people does not ensure ecological resilience. Some claim that this has, in fact, delivered the opposite outcome, which is why our parks require greater management of ferals and weeds. QTFN believes the State should pursue an adaptive, polycentric management regime involving and drawing on the knowledge of multiple stakeholders that emphasises an approach that presumes people are an integral part of the natural environment.

We have had three decades of the alternative, so-called sustainable development that purports to be about trying to achieve "balance between jobs and the environment" and it has proved ineffective. -The environment continues to suffer a net loss on a day to day basis. QTFN believes that "commercialising the environment", that is, making ecosystems function (including the

provision of natural amenity) part of the world of economics is a necessary strategy for the future. It is essential because without monetisation of the critical elements of the process of conservation there is no “convertible currency” that both reflects the value of the environment and provides sufficient incentive to achieve accumulation of natural capital - which is what is required for the longer term sustainability of the planet.

QTFN urges the Committee to consider the following six initiatives that will enhance the natural capital base of Queensland and improve the day-to-day management of nature conservation areas:

1. **Audit** -Conduct an audit of all National Parks in Queensland to ensure their designation is appropriate and consistent with the high environmental and ecological values normally associated with National Park status;
2. **Strategy** - Prepare a long-term vision and strategic agenda for Queensland’s National Parks and other key nature conservation areas focusing on achieving improved conservation and management outcomes for resilient natural systems with less dependence on budgetary support from the State;
3. **Stakeholder based governance structure** - Engage fully with all key stakeholders and establish a community-based governance structure for the ongoing management and development of National Parks in Queensland, backed by a new management regime which harnesses the contribution of relevant stakeholders within the community. QTFN proposes the Government consider a new park management regime whereby an umbrella organisation provides state-wide oversight of management and governance, while individual parks are managed by local community groups. This would allow Departmental staff to concentrate on environmental management and not facility management. QTFN would be pleased to provide further detail to the Committee on this proposal.
4. **Philanthropic Foundation** - Establish a broadly based philanthropic foundation to secure additional revenue streams from individuals, not-for-profit organisations and companies interested in contributing to the revitalisation and restoration of Queensland’s National Parks.
5. **Volunteering** – Establish mechanisms through community stakeholder organisations and the philanthropic foundation to attract volunteers to help improve conservation areas through the building of green infrastructure and performing essential land care activities (weed eradication, feral animal containment, etc.);
6. **Research and Education** – Auspiced by the State, but delivered via the umbrella organisation, develop commercially-based alliances with universities, scientific research bodies and other relevant groups to leverage the value of nature to society and monetise the ecological services provided by conservation lands.

The new structure and management models in which the community is a true partner in the management of protected areas have been successfully applied overseas. For example, in the United States the management expenses of National Parks are supplemented by corporate partnerships, philanthropy and volunteering.

It is proposed that Queensland review the various governance models throughout the world and develop a unique finance and management model that would provide greater resources to the management of Queensland's National Parks.

QTFN is ready to pursue these suggestions with the State as it believes that the management and funding of National Parks can be undertaken in a more innovative and efficient manner - to the benefit of all Queenslanders and all National Parks stakeholders.

QTFN looks forward to providing further information and support to the Committee and the review.

QTFN

QTFN is an independent not-for-profit organisation committed to protecting Queensland's unique natural biodiversity by proactively conserving and improving public and private lands of State and national environmental significance.

QTFN does not operate as an environmental lobby group. For us, results come through building positive long term partnerships with all stakeholders from individual community members in regional areas to major public corporations and foundations committed to collaboratively building and restoring the natural capital base of Queensland.

QTFN has achieved extraordinary results in nature conservation through the operation of a special revolving fund and the establishment of new nature refuges to expand the area of protected lands in Queensland and to ensure threatened flora and fauna species are saved for future generations.

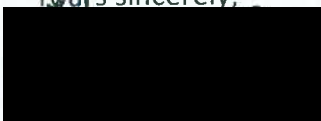
Once protected and enhanced, the properties acquired by QTFN are normally on-sold to private land owners and other groups who undertake the continued stewardship of the covenanted land and oversee its future management and protection at negligible expense to the State.

Unlike other conservation funds, QTFN is able to buy and sell private property to protect at-risk ecosystems and secure management solutions through commercial contracts. Since its establishment in 2004, the QTFN has acquired 13 properties - more than 101,900 hectares - and sold nine to protect more than 101,420 hectares of important biodiversity, utilising the Nature Refuge covenant.


Once protected and enhanced, the properties acquired by QTFN are normally on-sold to private land owners and other groups who undertake the continued stewardship of the covenanted land and oversee its future management and protection, at negligible expense to the State.

QTFN can deliver an innovative, commercial conservation service on behalf of the State and other stakeholders by applying its financial acumen to meet the challenges of biodiversity protection.

Yours sincerely,


Graham Marshall
Trustee


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