

From: [Peter O'Reilly](#)
To: [Health and Community Services Committee](#)
Subject: Proposed amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992
Date: Friday, 13 September 2013 10:20:42 AM

Dear Sir/Madam,

Object of the Nature Conservation Act 1992

The Nature Conservation Act 1992 (NCA) has been an impediment to the development of high quality ecotourism experiences in the state of Queensland for the last two decades.

In years past Australia was the recognised world leader in ecotourism providing best practice nature tourism experience that were environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

While Queensland pioneered this sector of the industry based on its wealth of natural assets, it rapidly fell behind the other states due to an incompatibility of the NCA with even world's best practice in environmentally sustainable tourism proposals.

While the NCA clearly stated and upheld its cardinal principle of conservation, the interpretation applied by the bureaucracy assumed that conservation and any form of development whatsoever were mutually exclusive ideals. This is despite elements of the NCA expressing a broader view; for instance the NCA definitions state that, "Conservation is the protection and maintenance of nature while allowing for its ecologically sustainable use".

Unfortunately such sentiments have been lost in the Act's interpretation and thus it is necessary to broaden the object of the Act to more clearly state its intent.

In the 21st century it is more broadly understood that best practice in the management of our natural heritage stretches far beyond the mere locking up of valuable heritage.

The object of Environment Australia's best practice guidelines for the management of national heritage is "to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit to all generations".

A failure to successfully present those heritage values and engender a desire to further preserve them for the future generations is clearly a conservation failure; it's simply a matter of time.

I applaud the proposed amendments to the Nature Conservation Act that recognises:

- a) the development of ecotourism principles over the past 20 years;
- b) ecotourism's ability to provide a sustainable cashflow for the funding of conservation;
- c) the advancements made in ecologically sustainable technology; and
- d) the proven role ecotourism experiences play in the presentation of the heritage values .

In my opinion the proposed amendments will result is a more sustainable protected area management system.

Proposed tenure changes

The proposed changes to the tenure system within the NCA, in the main, is also worthy of support. Our system of multiple tenures is undermining the value of the National Park brand, harbouring unnecessary bureaucracy, and regulatory complexity.

In the past decade the State Government has pandered to the conservation movement by adding huge tracts of generally degraded land to the National Park estate. Such action has devalued the National Park brand significantly through the acceptance of areas whose conservation values are relatively less than those of traditional National parks, and through the further dilution of the departmental budget over greater areas of protected areas leading to an overall degradation of facilities and conservation works that can be applied. Such areas should be included in Regional Parks where their conservation status and recreational value can be appropriately recognised.

Special management areas for scientific purposes can be declared where required without the need for a separate tenure and the additional complexity. I do however believe that there needs to be greater recognition of our World Heritage Areas as the pinnacle of our protected areas. This too can be managed via special management declarations.

Tourism and conservation often stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight to preserve our natural heritage. Often once that fight is won the conservationists immediately turn on the tourism industry as the new enemy. One needs only to look to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park to see what can be achieved once that "automatic confrontation" situation is in the past and an environment of partnership prevails. The GBRMP is recognised as the world's best managed marine protected area. Tourism plays a vital role in monitoring it's condition, presenting it's values and helping to pay for its preservation. The economic return is outstanding with approximately 50000 jobs and \$3.7 Billion in economic activity (Access Economics and GBRMPA Research Publication No. 98, 2009).

Again I applaud the Government for taking steps to achieve such an outcome across the State in our terrestrial protected areas.

Sincere regards

Peter

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