



Health & Community Services Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane Qld 4000

13<sup>th</sup> September 2013

Dear Committee Members,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2013. These comments are provided on behalf of the Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation (QORF), which is the peak industry body for outdoor recreation in Queensland. Our members consist of a range of outdoor industry stakeholders including not for profit community organisations; club based outdoor recreation providers; commercial operators; independent recreation participants; schools and outdoor recreation and education centres.

The outdoor sector welcomes the increased recognition by State Government of both the inherent values of our natural areas and the appeal of nature based activities to the people of Queensland, and visitors to the state. With this in mind, we offer the following comments in good will.

**Overall Comments**

- We agree that there is the opportunity for managed recreation and commercial outcomes to exist within a 'conservation of nature' strategy.
- The commitment of opening up areas for the "use and enjoyment" "by the community" is a key outcome for our members and the wider outdoor recreation sector. This refers to the fact that community needs should come before commercial gain.
- Following on from the above, it is critical that recreational and educational opportunities are valued in the same way commercial opportunities are.
- There needs to be a guarantee that one use does not preclude other uses from occurring at the same time. Our members have concerns that areas may be locked up for commercial use only, therefore restricting access for other uses.
- "Red tape reduction" needs to flow through to the day to day operation of the parks and public lands. This needs to be reflected in the management plan process.
- It is an expectation of our members that the reduction in the State's exposure to liability will enable the opportunity for more local community arrangements in relation to access, trail construction and maintenance, feral pest management and land management.

## Operational Considerations

- To ensure the above is achieved we would suggest that before any commercial activity operates in a protected area a formal management plan (not just a statement) be in place. This process will ensure the needs of the community are considered.
- The resources needed to prepare formal management plans needs to be acknowledged and the committee should ensure the NPRSR has the appropriate resources and systems to ensure this process is managed effectively and efficiently.
- The removal of the first round of mandatory public consultation on management plans, is a major concern. To have consultation after a draft has been developed is putting the cart before the horse. Community consultation must guide the development of the draft and this consultation must have a robust and systematic structure to ensure each use is given equal footing. To add to this our members have also expressed concern over the requirement for public notice about draft plans. Many of our members do not sit in front of computers and this needs to be considered in future notices and communications.
- Current agreements and access should be given grandfather rights to ensure current users are not impacted by changes or a new management plan.
- With reference to Table 2 Tenure Categories – Management and Use, Education should be included, as a use, in both Regional Park and State Forrest to ensure the continued availability of these areas for outdoor education and school groups.

Again, our thanks for the chance to provide some comment on this bill. We acknowledge the complexity of the task to accommodate to different stakeholder perspectives, but believe that with some wider understanding of the potential and very real impacts of increased commercialisation and a best practice approach to community consultation will ensure a sustainable future for our National Parks and other public lands. Below are a sample of some comments received from our members in relation to this bill.

Regards,

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Abbreviated member comments:

- *“Much mention is indirectly made of better implementation of management plans. To be blunt, we are currently over managed and under resourced. Every plan I have seen is a very long read and not much sunshine at the end of it. And this type of management is costing, and in more than a financial aspect. I have no problem with an over-riding framework of managing these areas in future, so long as local needs, management and most importantly, local Govt. and communities have the ability to benefit and provide communication to the final over-arching authority. Local Govt. that works to better their local communities is the key to unlocking this scenario in my opinion.”*
- *“In a nutshell, the existing NCA is working for us, and thus we have reason to regard any change as potentially "rocking the boat". I am obliged to concentrate on matters of immediate benefit to our members and our member organizations. However, having said that, I work pretty hard at selling my vision of the "bigger picture" to our people, and in that picture I have no doubt that the current amendments are necessary to breathe life into our parks. If we don't do something about engaging the general public, then public expenditure on the minor parks will decline, and they will be lost through neglect and apathy. On the other hand, if the leaders from the various recreational groups step up to the mark and demand the best for their parks - the best balance between conservation and recreation values - then under the current State government we should see a big step forward in the numbers recreating, and the quality of care for the landscape.*  
*What's not to like about the amendments?*  
*I think we are skating on thin ice with respect to the changes in the requirement for management plans.*  
*I'm all for cutting red tape and inefficiency, but I'm very loathe to do so if accountability is also cut. Management plans provided a check point at which the Minister himself can be held accountable. The Minister makes a valid point that the system was so unworkable that very few parks actually had management plans, and the cost of fully implementing plans for all parks was going to be something like \$60M.*  
*The proposed mechanism of having something less formal is OK in so much as it applies to those parks where there is a low level of public interest. And for those few parks where there is a high level of public interest, the Minister can then decree the requirement for a full management plan. However, I can see no mechanism whereby the public can force the issue. The requirements have been seriously watered down, so that there are plenty of escape routes by which the bureaucrats can dodge scrutiny.*  
*I am acutely aware of the importance of the need for accountability here. Several years ago the community pushed back on elements within a draft plan. The fact the NCA mandated that the draft management plan had to go out to public scrutiny was the one thing that enabled us to call a thousand angry punters down on the department. Without this accountability check point, the energy of even thousands of voices would have been lost.”*

- *“Comments:*
  - *the core principles of nature sustainability are retained where they need to be although the suggestion that some areas may be opened to mining and CSG (eg regional parks) would make some communities nervous. Grazing can be more compatible with some of the larger PAs of the right vegetation type so less of a problem.”*
  - *It is good to see that the Bill acknowledges recreation and its role in Protected Area Management (PAM)*
  - *The capacity to update old plans that don’t fit this new paradigm in PAM is a welcome and necessary requirement.*
  - *Good to see some tightening of civil liability for the State to encourage access as long as there is not a transfer of liability impacts to the private sector (not discounting health and safety legislation would still need to be met)*
  - *It is also good to see that there is recognition that other tenures, businesses and communities can augment the management and use of PAMs and have a role to play in promoting PAMs at a broader level (eg regional, national and international).”*
  
- *“COMMENT; The changes to the Nature Conservation Act are welcome as it applies to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area of Far North Queensland. The region covers a patchy strip of mainly forest land over the approximately 300 kms from near Cooktown to Townsville, which has been systematically converted to National Park over the past 20 years. Management of this huge area has been largely neglected, and it is now badly infested with weeds, particularly lantana. Old substantially constructed logging tracks, formerly used for recreation purposes, have become impassable because of fallen trees, some of which had some potential as milled timber. Historical recognition in the form of WW2 relics has been lost. The scientific values of this area are unknown as they have never been explained by any National Park authorities. Small pockets of any perceived value would remain undisturbed by users as the only access in the rainforest is on the established logging tracks.”*