



**PROTECT  
CONSERVE  
SUSTAIN**

Health and Community Services Committee

Queensland Parliament

BRISBANE 4000

13 September 2013

### **Submission on Nature Conservation and other legislation Amendment Bill**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on the Nature Conservation and other Legislation Amendment Bill. We would draw your attention to the submission from the National Parks Association of Queensland on this matter that represents a more detailed response to these issues.

Our key comments on this bill concern the changes proposed to the Objects of the Act and the changes proposed to protected area tenure.

#### **Objects of the current Nature Conservation Act**

The objects of the current Act are very clear; they are about the protection of nature, delivered through a Protected Area system. This is of particular importance in Queensland given the limited extent of the Protected Area estate in this state. It is estimated that just over 5% of the state is in National Parks, a figure well below international standards. The IUCN provide guidance on this suggesting that a minimum 17% of landmass should be dedicated to nature protection (IUCN categories I & II).

If the State Government is intent upon providing more social, cultural, recreational and commercial access to natural environments it should follow the example set by countries such as the USA and NZ. In these jurisdictions, a far greater percentage of landmass is under protected tenure, in the case of NZ over 30% and in the USA just under 30%. Of this land under protection, over 10% is dedicated to nature conservation (IUCN categories I & II) with the rest available for appropriate social, cultural, recreational and commercial use. This would appear to be a far more sensible and logical approach.

We note that according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its recent review of progress on Australia (economy, society and environment) that the environment is suffering and trending

downwards, and has been for the past 10 years.



**Legend:**

- Progress has generally been made in this headline indicator compared with ten years ago.
- This headline indicator has generally regressed compared with ten years ago.
- There has been no significant movement in this headline indicator compared with ten years ago.
- There is either no headline indicator for this area of progress or no time series.

Particularly given these statistics, the proposal that the State Government further reduce protection within the Protected Area estate should be rejected.

QCC supports the retention of the cardinal principle on the protection of nature as the primary function of a National Park and the retention of the current Objects of the Nature Conservation Act.

QCC supports the establishment of a far greater protected area estate. An estate that dedicates land for Nature Conservation (under IUCN categories I & II) and permits appropriate social, cultural, recreational and commercial uses outside of IUCN I & II areas.

**Special Management Areas/ Removal of some Protected Area Categories**

The removal of National Parks (scientific) and replacement with Special Management Areas effectively means that Queensland will have no IUCN category 1A protected areas. This would be an astonishing outcome for a State that prides itself on its natural wonders and healthy environment.

Under the NCA framework, National Parks (scientific) specific principles must be applied, there is no scope for recreational use. This is because these areas are unique and vulnerable and act as areas for special scientific interest. The introduction of a Special Management Area removes the specific principles of a national Park (scientific) and the IUCN classification.

**New Management Principles**

New management principles will erode the cardinal principle on the protection of nature in National Parks. Proposed allowable activities need only be consistent with nature conservation. Such a provision is fraught with problems around interpretation. What does consistent mean in this context?

It is clear from these proposed amendments that the intent is to water down requirements to allow activities to take place in national parks, rather than require those activities to meet the strict

guidelines of current regulation. (We should not forget that these proposals only concern protected areas representing 5% of Queensland. All of these proposed activities could occur in the other 95% of Queensland)

For instance, where the cardinal principle currents states

*‘.to provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values’*

It is proposed to state

*‘...the use will provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the preservation of the land’s natural condition and the protection of the land’s cultural resources and values.’*

Great emphasis has also been dedicated to removing and avoiding any possible liabilities that the State may incur from allowing these activities into National Parks. Very little emphasis has been given to the liabilities these activities may have on the values within the National Parks. What provisions have been put in place to ensure adverse consequences to National Park values are prevented?

Should an endangered habitat or species be threatened or even destroyed, what are the liabilities of those responsible? And how does the State intend to claim compensation and reparation?

## **Conclusion**

QCC does not believe that the amendments proposed to this legislation are in the interests of nature protection. As we have outlined our environment (biodiversity) is in deep trouble. It should be incumbent upon the State to rectify and reverse this trend. Allowing access to Queensland most precious and valuable natural environments in our national parks is not the way to achieve this.

There are currently plenty of opportunities available for individuals and groups to access National Parks for social, cultural and recreational purposes-under current requirements.

There are plenty of alternatives outside of the National Park estate for other activities. These should be actively encouraged as they have a far greater potential for recreational and commercial benefit.

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