

Health and Community Services Parliamentary Committee  
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Re: Submission to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2013

Background:

My husband and I have lived in the Gold Coast hinterland for the last 20 years and have been active during that time in protecting our national parks and the surrounding natural areas. The Gold Coast hinterland is noted for its biodiversity and this whole area has been mapped by the Queensland Government as being of State significance for biodiversity.

I am writing this submission, not because I believe that it will be heeded, but because I want to put on public record my strong opposition to these proposed changes to the Nature Conservation Act.

All levels of Government in Australia, Federal, State and Local, have the obligation to protect Australia's biodiversity. Australia is acknowledged as the world's 12th most biodiverse nation, the only "developed" country on the list. We also have the distinction of destroying that biodiversity very rapidly, though we have made recent advances towards conservation through the Federal Government's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, the Queensland Government's Biodiversity and Mapping Methodology, the Vegetation Management Act and the Nature Conservation Act, and through Gold Coast City Council's award-winning Nature Conservation Strategy.

National Parks in Queensland are less than 5% of the landscape and have been dedicated as havens for our wildlife, both flora and fauna. Australia's biodiversity and ecosystems of all types should be represented and preserved through our national parks.

There is no mandate for you to do this. It is environmental vandalism. It used to be that when you went into a national park, you were to leave nothing but footprints and take nothing but photos. I wouldn't dare steal a plant or capture or kill an animal, but it seems all of those rules will be thrown out the window with this legislation. A big developer can just come into one of our national parks and set up a hotel.

Issues:

Pressures - I do not support any weakening of the Nature Conservation Act provisions as reflected in this Bill. The pressures on national parks close to existing development are already great and they should not be increased by allowing uses that conflict with the preservation of nature.

Host communities - Additionally, allowing development within national parks would be a betrayal of host communities, many of which have built their businesses around providing for the needs of visitors outside the national park boundaries. These local businesses have operated under great constraints, yet this Bill would allow others to actually exploit the national park itself for their financial gain.

Recreational uses – Horse riding and motorised vehicles will not only do much damage themselves, but will also increase the distance into the national parks that increasing numbers of visitors will travel, thus disturbing the habitat of our native wildlife, much of which is nocturnal and very easily disrupted.

Ecosystem services - National Parks are needed as centres from which Australia gains much-needed clean air, fresh water, carbon absorption and wildlife habitat. These ecosystem services are being compromised by the proposed changes to the Act.

Regional Forest Agreements - Instead, the State Government should be investing in extending the existing national parks – something previous Governments achieved with the addition of areas of

former State Forests to the National Park estate because of their biological significance through the Regional Forest Agreements. These agreements, developed together with the logging industry, the environment community and the state government, saved additional lands and made the logging industry more sustainable, thus enabling the Queensland Government to achieve lower greenhouse emissions by using these forests and seagrass beds as on-going carbon sinks.

Climate Change - During a recent visit to the Gold Coast from The Climate Commission, a commissioner warned that given the increased threats to biodiversity from global warming, we should be doing everything to 'treasure' our national parks, not exploit them.

Mass Extinctions - Recent reports from the UN Environment Programme indicate that "the Earth is in the midst of a mass extinction of life. Scientists estimate that 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird and mammal become extinct every 24 hours. This is nearly 1,000 times the "natural" or "background" rate and, say many biologists, is greater than anything the world has experienced since the vanishing of the dinosaurs nearly 65m years ago."

Commonwealth Games - These amendments to the Nature Conservation Act will be one more example of the State tearing down the framework of legislation to protect the biodiversity of this state, and particularly the Gold Coast hinterland – putting our pledge to the Commonwealth Games at risk. As outlined in the City Profile document, upon which was based the decision to hold the Games in the Gold Coast:

"A strong framework of State Government legislation combined with the Candidate City's Nature Conservation Strategy 2009–2019 provide the basis for conserving the City's unique biodiversity.

"A city loved for its green, gold and blue – protecting and enhancing the **natural** environment, open spaces, beaches and waterways, where we understand the fundamental importance of the **natural** environment to the future of the City.

"Protection and Enhancement of Significant Features of the **Natural** Environment and Cultural Heritage - Both the State and City are committed to protecting, managing and restoring a diverse network of public and private lands. This strategy drives the foundation for a sustainable city. Over the next five years the City will spend more than AUD \$78 million (GBP £49 million) on **nature** conservation initiatives.

"Environmental Awareness Raising - The Candidature Committee recognises that education, communication and marketing programmes are critical for building community support, engagement and appreciation and supports the targets set by the State Government under the NRM Plan 2009–2031.

"Gold Coast City currently delivers an integrated education, communication and marketing programme focused on specific environmental, conservation and sustainability programmes and initiatives. The Games can support these initiatives and raise awareness amongst the community to help prevent and reduce adverse environmental effects and to incorporate the green ambitions of a Gold Coast City 2018 Commonwealth Games."

Specific Amendments – I have read and support the submissions of the National Parks Association of Queensland and of David Jinks, Gold Coast Botanist. I don't need to repeat the specifics of these submissions here, except to say that I think it is a nonsense to change the categories. Those working within National Parks understand the distinctions between the various tenures and to blur these distinctions is neither necessary or prudent. For example, National Park Scientific does not allow any access except for scientific research or purposes.

### Conclusion

The very idea of a development in a National Park is anathema to me and the whole of the environment community. To allow a resort and/or service area to be constructed within the bounds of the national park, or even within a 100m buffer zone, is inconceivable to me.

As someone who has dedicated the past 20 years of my life to advocating on behalf of the environment (much at the expense of family life), I can firmly say that I have never experienced quite the same level of commitment to destroying what little natural environment we have left as I have from this government. This government, either through ignorance or vengeance, or both, is actively seeking out opportunities to destroy long-held values of the people of this country, this state and this city.

This is an outrageous abuse of the power that you have. I beg of you – do not bring this Bill into law. It will result in “death by a thousand cuts” of our national parks.

In despair,

Sheila Davis

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