

**Protect the Bush Alliance**  
**Submission to Land Tenure Inquiry**  
 3rd August 2012

The Protect the Bush Alliance (the Alliance) undertakes activities which describe and advocate the protection of high conservation areas in Queensland. The Alliance includes groups such as Birds Australia, Wildlife Queensland and the National Parks Association, and has a strong interest in wildlife conservation and protected areas.

This submission focuses on:

1. The cardinal principle that governs the management of National Parks
2. National Park-based tourism and recreation benefits most from preserving and valuing National Parks
3. Protecting Nature Refuges
4. Land for public recreation

**1. The cardinal principle that governs the management of National Parks**

For over 50 years National Parks have been managed according to the cardinal principle:

*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.*

The State Government defines *natural condition* as 'protection from human interference - allowing natural processes to proceed'. That is, National Parks are managed for nature first so that they are available for public appreciation and enjoyment.

The cardinal principle is embodied in the Queensland Biodiversity Strategy, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Master Plan (for protected areas), and underpins every action within individual National Park management plans. An activity that poses a threat to this principle threatens a National Park's natural condition, and the values that have led to gazettal as a National Park in the first place.

This Parliamentary Inquiry should uphold the place and role of the cardinal principle as it applies to National Parks in Queensland. The Alliance is concerned that changes to the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* could erode or lessen the application of this principle.

**2. National Park-based tourism and recreation benefits most from preserving and valuing National Parks**

National Parks are the jewels in the conservation crown of this State, and preserve some of the very best landscapes and natural attractions in Australia.

Six out of 10 people in this State have visited a National Park. These visitors do not expect to find or come across eco-resorts or lodges in National Parks. This does not mean that new National Parks cannot be sensitively designed adjacent to, or incorporating, a range of other land tenures that allow fixed accommodation.

Heavy forms of recreation pose a fundamental risk to the National Parks brand in Queensland. Put simply, allowing horses, motorbikes and unchecked access to 4WD's to traverse National Parks will introduce weeds, compact tracks, create erosion and increase the risk of bushfire. These types of recreation threaten the very natural values that attract tourists to our Parks, the same values that underpin a large component of the tourism industry in Queensland.

### **3. Protecting Nature Refuges (NR)**

The Alliance understands that there are 411 Nature Refuges in Queensland covering almost three million hectares of land. Participating landholders have often managed remnant vegetation on their land for generations, and the vital ingredient in the success of this program is their goodwill. The lack of legislative security and permanent protection of NR agreements in the face of mining and other extractive industries presents major uncertainty **for all parties** - landholders, government and mining interests.

Bimblebox Nature Refuge, 50km NW of Alpha in Central Queensland, is a case in point. Recent on-site survey efforts by Alliance members have yielded an endangered species (Black throated finch), over 150 other bird species and nearly 300 plant species (including two that they are yet to be formally named). The likely destruction of Bimblebox sends a message to other conservation minded graziers that their efforts are not valued or held in high regard. If the China First mine is allowed to proceed, it will be the first time that a Queensland property covered by a Nature Refuge Agreement is destroyed for mineral extraction.

The Alliance believes that the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* should be amended to include an additional **class of Nature Refuge that is exempt from mining**. This would provide greater conservation certainty to prospective Nature Refuge landholders.

### **4. Land for public recreation**

The Alliance supports the identification and use of land suitable for various types of recreation, especially as a tool to remove pressure away from the impact of inappropriate activities in National Parks. A process should be established to identify, obtain, and retain land for public recreation purposes, with particular regard to:

- The type of recreation in question
- Reasonable proximity to larger urban areas