

Submission to Land Tenure Inquiry

Jackie Cooper

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This submission is made in the expectation that all land currently protected in Queensland for its natural and environmental values will be safeguarded into the future as undeveloped, protected, pristine places; and that substantive new tracts in the state will be declared national park.

The competing objectives of agriculture, resources development, recreation and biodiversity often collide in the contested territory of our remaining natural places. I make this submission as one who values the natural environment and believes that too much country has already been sacrificed for short-term objectives and short-sighted monetary gain. Our generation is perhaps the last to enjoy the luxury of choosing which places to preserve and which are to be consumed by housing, mining, infrastructure, high-impact recreational activities and other irreversible and exploitative forms of land use. I and many others believe we owe the future an obligation of stewardship of the natural environment – our biogeoheritage – and we cannot stint on the protection of remaining pristine places. We must be clear-eyed and strategic about what lands we sequester and preserve in perpetuity. Time is no longer on our side.

Summary

I submit that the Inquiry should uphold and ensure

- The inalienability of existing protected natural areas, especially national parks
- Increased national park in Queensland
- The cardinal principle for protection of national parks: *'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...'*
- That national park legislation is strengthened to ensure environmental protection
- That ecosystem services in national parks are acknowledged and given preeminence
- That commercial activities, nature-based tourism, eco resorts and the like are established outside national park boundaries, not within
- That wilderness reserves and nature refuges are protected from mining and quarrying
- Joint management by the state and Traditional Owners of national parks on Indigenous-owned land
- Genuine and transparent consultation with stakeholders regarding all legislation

Queensland needs more national parks

This statement is not up for debate: Queensland has the lowest percentage of national parks in Australia, less than 5 per cent, and that is grossly insufficient.

Queensland's natural assets are magnificent: flora and fauna, ecosystems, landscapes. These treasures should not require special pleading. But where I live, on North Stradbroke Island in South-East Queensland, the iconic koala, once counted in millions, barely clings to survival; and whether or not it dodges extinction is by no means certain. Development brings the responsibility to identify the special places essential to protect to ensure biodiversity and resilience, and not least, also the transcendent wonderment that wild and semi-wild places and vistas elicit.

Those places already selected – national parks, wilderness reserves and nature refuges – have undergone careful assessment and should be protected to the utmost. That entails excluding exploitative intrusions such as mining exploration and high-impact activity such as trail bikes, horses, eco lodges, restaurants.

Everyone has a democratic right to national parks

Everyone – including unborn generations – has a right to experience nature in its raw, pristine forms: not contaminated by infrastructure; not churned over and 'remediated' by mining; not as fenced-off nature theme park.