



The Research Director  
 State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee  
 Parliament House  
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 Brisbane Queensland 4000

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3<sup>rd</sup> August 2012

Dear Dr. Munro

**RE: Submission to Inquiry into the future and continued relevance of Government land tenure across Queensland**

I have been directed by the State Council of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (Wildlife Queensland) to forward a submission for consideration with regard to the above Inquiry.

Wildlife Queensland is one of the most respected wildlife-focused conservation groups in Queensland. With over 4500 supporters spread across numerous branches throughout Queensland, Wildlife Queensland is a strong voice for our wildlife and its habitat.

Wildlife Queensland is apolitical. Our aims include;

**Preserve** the flora and fauna of Australia by all lawful means

**Educate** the community in an understanding of the principles of conservation and preservation of the natural environment

**Discourage** by all legal means, the possible destruction, exploitation and unnecessary development of any part of the natural environment.

**Encourage** rational land use and proper land planning of existing and future development, and the use of the natural environment and its management.

Wildlife Queensland welcomes the opportunity to make comment. It is our understanding that the terms of reference indicate that the Committee should give particular reference to the following issues:

- Ensuring our pastoral and tourism industries are viable into the future;
- The balanced protection of Queensland's ecological values;
- Ongoing and sustainable resource development; and
- The needs and aspirations of traditional owners

Wildlife Queensland appreciates the necessity for development to occur in Queensland. However such development not only needs to meet the needs of the

community the development should be necessary and must be ecologically sustainable and harm to the environment and cultural heritage must be avoided or as a last resort minimised and mitigated against. Wildlife Queensland strongly opposes unnecessary and unsustainable development. Unfortunately certain statements made by the current Government appear to put at risk unnecessary threats to our environment, our wildlife and its habitat, agricultural industries and more than likely cultural heritage tradition and practice.

Wildlife Queensland will focus its comments on the first three issues listed that should be of particular concern to the Committee. There are other organisations far more qualified and appropriate to address the needs and aspirations of traditional owners. However Wildlife Queensland gives the strongest support possible to ensure the aspirations and cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are addressed.

**Ensuring our pastoral and tourism industries are viable into the future.**

Wildlife Queensland strongly supports a viable and sustainable agricultural industry as one of the greatest threats to the planet is food security. The pastoral sector is a major component of that industry. Wildlife Queensland is of the opinion that the current tenure of rural leasehold land is a major plank in achieving a viable pastoral industry. Such land leased for agricultural, grazing or pastoral uses provided is for a term of 20 years or more and greater than 100hectares in extent enable the Government to facilitate that this land is managed appropriately so that it continues to produce quality food and fibre as it has done for over one hundred and seventy years. This is achieved through the use of the Delbessie Agreement (Department of Natural Resources and Water,2007)that can secure long-term environmental, social and economic sustainability not only for rural communities but the community of Queensland. The thrust of the Delbessie Agreement is to assist the leaseholders where necessary to better manage environmental risks without compromising their economic returns and leaving the land and the biodiversity it supports in as good if not enhanced condition for the benefit of future generations. While Wildlife Queensland has some concerns with the assessment process it is relatively early days and where appropriate and necessary the assistance and educational benefits that may accrue to the leaseholder, the environment and in some situations the traditional owners Delbessie Agreement is a giant step forward and should be maintained. This process that is applied when renewing a lease and assists Government in ensuring that this land resource is managed appropriately would be lost should rural leasehold be done away with. Rural Leasehold land to which the Delbessie Agreement applies is slightly in excess of 51% of Queensland land mass. Granted the Queensland Government does have control of other lands but Wildlife Queensland is of the opinion that is not a burden to bear to ensure land use is appropriate and not causing unnecessary environmental harm.

Currently perpetual leases can still apply and their level of security approaches that of freehold land. While Wildlife Queensland would prefer conversion from rural leasehold land not to occur there are stringent guidelines that have to be met including but not limited to native title being determined, the land is resilient and in good condition with little or no government oversight required and all public interest and planning requirements have been determined.

In summary the loss of rural leasehold land would remove a relatively simple oversight the State has over 51% of Queensland to facilitate appropriate land

management practices. To counter inappropriate practices causing environmental harm, provided the impacts were reversible, would undoubtedly add unnecessary significant costs to the State's budget.

Wildlife Queensland is not opposed to tourism and does not profess to have broad expertise in that area. Wildlife Queensland's knowledge is broadly limited to the nature based tourism sector of the industry. Nature-based tourism is an important contributor to Queensland's economy. National parks are one of the State's biggest tourist attractions. In 2009 they hosted more than 16 million visits, and more than 40 per cent of all international visitors to Australia in 2009 included a trip to a national park (Department of Natural Resources and Water, 2009). It is estimated that tourists who visit Queensland's national parks contribute around \$4.5 billion annually to the State's economy, representing around 28 percent of total visitor spend (Ballantyne et al 2008). This spend is both through specific tourism on national parks and through people staying longer in the local area when visiting a protected area or forest. The economic benefits are therefore dispersed widely throughout Queensland providing economic sustenance for many regional communities. However nature based tourism must take its rightful place and be second to the cardinal principle of management of national parks in accordance with the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* – 'To provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and protection of the area's cultural resources and values.'

Wildlife Queensland is of the opinion that nature based tourism is best served by keeping the national parks in their natural state to the greatest and placing non passive activities and major infrastructure on tenures other than all classes of national parks. Wildlife Queensland is concerned that commercial development within has the potential to be inconsistent with the cardinal principle of managing national parks. The aim of protection is to prevent or minimise impacts that may degrade ecosystems and to facilitate regeneration. Any form of commercial development therefore should involve the least possible human impact on ecological processes and take into consideration all aspects of the area's natural and cultural values.

Wildlife Queensland is not opposed to other tenures under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* being used in accordance with an approved management plan for infrastructure development or some active recreational pursuits.

### **The balanced protection of Queensland's ecological values.**

Australia is a megadiverse country and has very large numbers of plant and animal species and other elements of biodiversity. Australia also has a very high level of endemic and distinctive species among its plants and animals. Australia, for example, is a world centre of marsupial evolution and diversity. Australia therefore is responsible for the conservation of many highly significant species and ecosystems found nowhere else in the world. Australia also is responsible for the conservation of species with an international range, such as dugongs and marine turtles, which are inadequately conserved in neighbouring, less developed countries due to lack of resources.

Queensland has major components of the natural heritage of the nation, including

for example, the Great Barrier Reef, tropical rainforests, tropical savannahs and important wetlands such as the Channel Country. Queensland has made some significant achievements in nature conservation with five world heritage sites and numerous protected areas

The complexity of wildlife habitat requirements is shown by the life cycles of highly mobile species. Migratory birds need wetlands to be conserved all along their migrations routes, which may extend for thousands of kilometres, or their survival will be threatened. Fruit bats, feeding on eucalypt blossom, regularly move for hundreds of kilometres up and down the east coast of Australia and need access to large areas of eucalypt forest throughout this range. Conservation of such species requires planning for habitat protection over very large areas and between different jurisdictions and tenures.

Conservation strategies based mainly on the provision of large reserves in key locations are likely to be inadequate for wildlife conservation in the face of rapid climate change. Models are required for the design of wildlife conservation systems on a continental scale across millions of hectares. Such mechanisms should not only address the CAR factors (comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness), but also include connectivity and resilience to facilitate continuation of ecological processes and adaptation to climate change. Managing biodiversity should become an integral part of all major developments and similar activities.

Wildlife Queensland shares the vision as outlined in Naturally Queensland 2020 (Department of Environment and Resource Management, 2011);

‘Queensland’s outstanding biodiversity, landscapes, seascapes and cultural heritage places are protected, and enjoyed and cherished now and in the future’

The simple fact is that biodiversity is in decline and the balanced protection of Queensland’s ecological values is not occurring under current development strategies and land use. The prime activity should be to arrest the decline and then reverse the trend. National parks are the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation within the protected area estate system. Australia has committed to the international target of including 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas in national parks by 2020 as a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity treaty 2010. Queensland has slightly less than 5% unlike Tasmania (24%) and for an international comparison New Zealand (about 30% in protected area estate). Wildlife Queensland supports expanding our national park system, building resilience into this system and ensuring our national parks are well managed, adequately resourced and address threats of climate change. This will assist in arresting biodiversity decline.

Wildlife Queensland is of the opinion that percentage targets are not the best possible measure or test of effectiveness of a national park system. Some ecosystems may require much higher representation for adequate functioning. Percentage targets of extent are also questionable. There is a need to ensure comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) examples of all regional ecosystems. In addition there is a concern that percentage targets are a danger politically because once reached the hard work performed to achieve them may slow down or even stop. This would not bode well for the continued expansion and management of national parks according to best practice.

While many regional ecosystems are already protected, for most of these the area conserved is well below an adequate level for long-term conservation. The entire range of regional ecosystems must be adequately represented in protected areas. Along the coast there are a number of subregions in the bioregions that are poorly conserved. In the centre and west of the State, protected area coverage remains limited. A number of priority bioregions are in semi-arid rangelands where climate change may place further strain on marginally productive lands and could lead to species loss and possible ecosystem collapse. The bioregional approach will ensure some of this country is represented in the protected area system.

The challenge now is to build a more complete and resilient protected area system by extending existing protected areas and adding new ones to protect biodiversity to the best possible extent. The selection of new national parks should be completed using a science-based approach to ensure that we have a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of national parks that incorporates connectivity and resilience to allow for adaptation in the face of climate change. Biodiversity planning assessments (BPAs) have been conducted on over half of Queensland's bioregions, identifying priority areas according to a range of criteria including centres of endemism, wildlife refugia and geographical limits. However there is a concern that knowledge gaps need to be rectified. There is need of systematic biodiversity surveys and assessments to address these gaps and or collation of existing data,

However conservation strategies based mainly on the provision of large reserves in key locations are likely to be inadequate for biodiversity conservation. Models are required for the design of wildlife conservation systems on a continental scale across millions of hectares. Such mechanisms should not only address the CAR factors (comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness), but also include connectivity and resilience to facilitate continuation of ecological processes. There is provision in the *Nature Conservation Act* 1992 for Nature Refuges to be declared and managed appropriately. Furthermore conservation covenants on title can occur through due process. In Queensland, these are the key mechanisms for assisting conservation on private landholdings. Nature refuges are established through the Nature Refuge Program. Under this program, voluntary agreements are negotiated between landholders and the Queensland Government for the preservation of land with significant ecological values. Nature Refuges are recognised as a class of protected area under the *Nature Conservation Act* 1992, and currently comprise the second largest expanse of Queensland's protected areas estate. There are no regulatory protections for landholders to ensure the maintenance of environmental values of land under conservation agreements against inappropriate development. Specifically, designation as a nature refuge does not prevent or limit mineral or petroleum exploration and extraction in any way. This is a perverse policy position. Both private funds and significant public money have been invested into the identification, establishment, maintenance and monitoring of conservation covenants on private lands. Taxpayer money is directly invested into these areas, through Queensland's Nature Refuge and Nature Assist Programs, in the form of direct incentives and support mechanisms. Both the environmental values and the public investment in nature refuges in Queensland face significant threat from the expansion of the coal mining industry in this state, Statutory protection of lands under conservation agreements from mining similarly provides appropriate recognition of the

contribution made by private landholders to the protection of extant biodiversity. There needs to be certainty to all parties.

Nature refuges are a very cost effective means of adding to the protected area estate for the government.. Division 4 section 46(1) Nature Refuge needs to be amended to include new categories of nature refuge where the use is for conservation alone, grazing and conservation can occur but mining is exempt and a third category reflecting the current situation. Parties to the agreement should have the right to seek an upgrading of the current status if they meet the criteria. Under the national park tenure, there is a range of differing national parks each encompassing various management principles to accommodate differing needs. It is only logical that there should be a range of options under the nature refuge tenure to accommodate the desires of the landowners entering into such agreements with the government.

Another tool for the use by Government for the protection and management of biodiversity is the Stock Route Network. The value of the network would be enhanced if the Stock Route Network management Bill 2011 was enacted.

In summary with an amendment to provisions of the *Nature Conservation Act* 1992 with regard to introducing three classes of nature refuge and the enactment of the Stock Route Network management Bill 2011, the existing land tenure system provides the tools for the ecological values of Queensland to be protected.

### **Ongoing and sustainable resource development.**

Wildlife Queensland is not opposed to ecologically sustainable development of resources but notes that some developments fail to satisfy that criteria.

Concerns have been expressed about the rights of landholders and leaseholders with regard to mining and petroleum and gas exploration access to their properties Wildlife Queensland appreciates that mining companies are operating within the legal framework. It is appreciated that certain steps have been taken to address this issue. Wildlife Queensland merely raises this issue. However there are more qualified organisations to ensure this issue is adequately addressed.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Briefly Wildlife Queensland is of the opinion that:

- The rural leasehold should be retained with the Delbessie Agreement in place. That the Agreement should be reviewed in order to strengthen it.
- Expansion of the Protected Area Estate including national parks must continue and the cardinal principle of management be retained for national parks. Nature based tourism has a place but it must be secondary to the cardinal principle for national parks.

- Amendment to Nature Conservation Act to introduce new categories of nature refuge
- Enact the Stock Routes Network Management Bill 2011 without change
- Ensure landholders and leaseholders rights are protected and transparent to all parties

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Des Boyland', with a large, stylized 'D' at the end.

Des Boyland, Policies and Campaigns Manager

### **REFERENCES**

Ballantyne R, Brown R, Pegg, S, Scott N, (2008) Valuing tourism spending arising from visitation to Queensland national parks, CRC for Sustainable Tourism.

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