

Tableland Forest Users Group

State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

By Email: sdiic@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Ted Malone MP,

RE: QUEENSLAND LAND TENURE REVIEW

We refer to the Tenure Review and invitation to supply submissions in that regard.

I have been asked to send this urgent submission as spokesperson for the Tableland Forest Users Group, (FUG) a community group formed in 2010 to oppose and/or negotiate the best outcome in the forest transfer process then being undertaken by the previous government.

As FUG only found out about this review very late in the piece we have only had time to attach an initial letter we wrote to the Minister in December 2010 about the proposed Forest Transfer process to which this group objected in principle.

However given that the then government policy was intent on the process proceeding TFUG made submissions about the Multi User Trail map process that had been undertaken.

The Multi user trail network was a fall back - bare minimum position.

The position of FUG has always been from the start that state forest should not be simply transitioned to national park without thorough scientific basis and compliance with national park criteria and informed and meaningful consultation with the affected users and communities.

The attached letter refers to many of the points raised with the previous government as to why there should not be automatic transfer of state forests into national parks and are still relevant.

We are trying to locate original earlier documentation that set out our member groups opposition to the process and will forward for your information.

Kind Regards

Anne English | Chair



TABLELANDS FOREST USERS GROUP

Our Ref: Anne English 4309
Your Ref:

23 December 2010

COPY

The Honourable
Stephen Robertson MP
Department of Environment
& Resource Management

And to:

Ministerial Committee
State Forest Transfer Process

Dear Minister/ Committee members,

RE: NORTH QLD ECOTONE FOREST TRANSFERS

The Tablelands Forest Users Group or Recreational Working Group (DERM reference) have worked together with DERM on the draft tenure map,¹ produced by DERM to capture horse riding and other user trail activity in State Forests on the Atherton Tableland, proposed for tenure transition to National Parks.

At a meeting on 25 November 2010, Andrew Millerd, DERM, presented the final draft tenure map and explained formulation principles and processes to the group. The group had previously met with DERM about concerns on loss of access to transition areas, particularly for horse riding, when areas transition to National Parks.

The group was informed of the methodology adopted in the SEQ Forest transfer process of identification of trails and transition thereof to forest reserve, to permit controlled access for horse trail rider activity with balance State Forest areas transitioned to National Parks.

The working group does not endorse the concept of wholesale transfer of State Forest to National Park tenures as an easy fix to the States' desire to increase National Park estate targets (where areas do not otherwise meet National Park criteria).

The working group does however endorse DERM's approach to use similar methodology to the SEQ forest transfer process in order to address recreational concerns for access in the transition process for forests on the Atherton Tableland.

¹ Atherton Tablelands QPWS Multi-Use Trails map (copy **attached**)

The group supports the proposal to transfer all areas marked with heavy black lines on the Multi Use Trail map to Forest Reserve tenure and two areas, one to the north east of Atherton in the Herberton Range State Forest and the other around Tepon/Herberton to Conservation Park on the understanding that permits for horse riding will be available for those tenures as well.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

DERM has engaged with representatives of the horse riding industry and recreational groups to identify formed management needs and tracks historically and currently used.

DERM made it clear and the group accepted, the exercise did not involve the creation of any new tracks for horse use.

The DERM consultation process with the group has been inclusive and thorough and has resulted in the draft tenure map described, which is supported and endorsed by the working group with the following comments that we would ask to be included:

- a. A link in the Conservation Park between E.Hill and Rolley Road; and
- b. Water reserve link through the Herberton Range Conservation Park

The group strongly advocates that the draft Multi-Use trails map represents the bare minimum position for horse trails and Conservation Parks and that it would not support, and would strongly object to, any further cuts that would reduce forest reserve and Conservation Park areas (as now identified) available to recreational activity including horse riding.

Any final outcome and transfer of tenure that does not provide areas in forest reserve or Conservation Park tenure to permit continued horse riding access would have the effect of extinguishing long standing access for recreational and competitive horse riding activities in public areas.

RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND HERITAGE VALUE

Much of the country comprised in the State Forests targeted for transfer is not pristine.

- It has been logged at least 5 times since European settlement.
- It has been used by both horse and bullock teams for both the Forestry and Mining industries.
- Some areas have been subject to cattle grazing leases

- A weed regime has already been established through prior use. Continued use by motor vehicles and bikes is just as likely to be influential in regard to the established weed regime as continued equine activity
- The transfer of state forests to National Parks around the Herberton area are not being targeted to protect specified species, presumably because there is no studies that identify country where specified species live. There is little evidence that the continued passage of horses through the areas to be transferred to National Park will cause any threats to any species that lives in the area as horses and other recreational pursuits have been continuously active in the area since 1880 (when the town of Herberton was settled).
- It was of note that during the meeting of 25 November the DERM Officer distributed a weed identification sheet and requested that any sighting of this weed be reported. If horse riders are not permitted in the area then they will not be able to report new or strange weeds. A horse provides a much more effective observation platform due to the increased height of the rider's eyes and that the rider does not have to continually concentrate on steering the vehicle.
- The history and heritage of the Herberton and Atherton Tablelands was entirely built on the backs of horses, mules and bullocks who provided the mobility and power to find, develop and sustain the mines, logging and agriculture of the pioneers since 1880 and until the development of railways in the early 1900's. This heritage is being retained by the strong interest in equestrian activities, fostered in part by people such as Kevin Rolley who have been at the forefront of developing the Tepon Equestrian Centre and securing grants and funds to provide a national standard facility in that location.
- Inter-generational knowledge of cultural history and association with horses and equine transport is important to tableland communities. It should not be ignored as a relevant consideration. Many of the trails identified in this process are in fact historical trails used by early pioneers and explorers who opened up the country for settlement. They were communication and freight routes for early pockets of bush communities that were the foundation of today's large and thriving communities of Atherton, Herberton, Ravenshoe, Malanda and Mareeba.
- Many of the trails identified were used by the elder generation of today as children, either for travel to school or accompanying parents and relatives on stores trips to town from the more remote settlements e.g. Stannery Hills and Irvinebank. There is an elder generation on the Tableland who tell stories and reminisce to their grandchildren and great grandchildren about their times as children, riding to school or riding on horses or in carriages along some of these trails to go to town or do their everyday business. This is living history 50-70 years ago in the forties and fifties when such use was still common. Some of the elder generation who are still fit and can get into a saddle, are the

trail bosses or advisors on organized trail rides that occur today.

- Tenure transition on the basis proposed in the Multi use trail map offers DERM and QPWS, in conjunction with interested community groups and industry, the opportunity to develop interpretive signage and information about the European cultural history of the trail network, a feature that might compliment interpretative signage that tells the indigenous story of the areas to be transferred to National Parks.
- The younger generations should be encouraged to learn from their elders and also have the opportunity of learning bush skills by accessing via the multi-use trails these forestry areas. Skills such as bush navigation, vegetation, animal and weed identification are all important skills within a community that can be useful and called upon in times of emergency. Many trail users are involved in local fire brigade, SES and other community groups that assist police and emergency services in the event someone becomes lost, bush fires or cyclonic weather events.
- There may be a perception amongst Politicians and Ministerial Committee members that horse riding is for an elite, well-healed section of the community. That perception is far from the truth. Trail horse riding is an activity that appeals to a broad cross section of our community from professionals to blue collar working families. Owning and caring for a horse can be expensive, but less so in primarily rural areas of the Tablelands where there are plenty of paddocks for grazing. Kids learn to look after and be responsible for another living being. That teaches them values such as discipline, responsibility, routine, empathy, socialization in a group, the value of horse, gear and equipment, quality time with family, respect for animals and elders who communicate bush knowledge as they ride along and use the trails. In some areas there are 6 or 7 members of the same family who participate? So equine activity is not just a sport for the 'elite' as some may think, it is in rural areas such as the Tablelands, an essential and important ingredient for the fabric of community life.
- These propositions are consistent with the social and economic objectives for retention and conservation of cultural values adopted in the Master Plan for Queensland's National Park System,² which include:

The parks system will be managed to provide substantial and sustainable environmental, social and economic benefits to the Queensland community while maintaining the intrinsic values

And further consistent with the principles outlined in DERM tenure transfer information to the effect:

Cultural heritage conservation must involve the community, especially those for whom each park holds special significance. Actions might include

² DERM, November 2001.

*encouraging or supporting cultural links, recognising community knowledge, and the recording or renewal of living cultural expressions.*³

PROPOSED CONSERVATION PARK-

Mountain Bike Area

The group also strongly support the DERM initiative to set aside the area identified for Conservation Park in the Herberton Range State Forest east of Atherton. That area has been identified as critically important for the development of the internationally recognised mountain bike competition industry. The potential for that industry to attract economic benefits and growth to the Tablelands is well recognised and accepted by the Group as an extremely important community interest that should be supported and fostered.

Tepon Area

The Horse sports area was constructed at Tepon using public funding on the basis that the area was central to a number of horse sports that in part was due to the availability of a variety of areas that could be used for recreational and competition equestrian events. This included one grant for \$60,000 for construction of club facilities.

The usefulness of the expensive Tepon Equestrian Centre will be substantially reduced should horse-riding areas in the Herberton- Ravenshoe area be lost or significantly reduced due to forest user transition to National Park without horse trail preservation and the setting aside of an area as Conservation Park.

The proposed Conservation Park areas around Tepon are therefore strongly endorsed as this will provide maximum flexibility for events and commercial activities associated with equine use causing the trails to be preserved, monitored and developed in the future.

ECONOMIC USE AND OPPORTUNITY

State Forests on the Tablelands have provided the matrix within which recreational and commercial equine activities have developed. The State Forests around Herberton, Ravenshoe and Atherton have been a source of routes for recreational horse riding (and dismounted pack donkey treks since 2001) and competitive horse riding events for many years. In fact the Endurance Horse Riding Club in the 1990's estimated that there were some 740km of roads and tracks that could be used in competitive endurance riding in the Herberton- Ravenshoe region. Several Endurance riding events have attracted interstate and international entrants in the last ten years due to this extensive network of routes that provide variety, alternatives and scenic routes mostly away from major public roads.

3

http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/managing_parks_and_forests/forest_transfer_processes_in_queensland/wet_tropics_forest_transfer/index.html

In 1992 the world wide Ecochallenge was held near Millaa Millaa. One section of the competition involved teams riding horses on a 20-30km stretch of track in rainforest country in the area known as Maalan. This extreme sport brought teams from any countries and generated substantial income for the area. Nearly 200 horses were involved.

More recently equine events using forest tracks and the Herberton Tepon facility as a base indicate the growing interest and potential for sporting event staging on the Tableland⁴ that could be severely prejudiced if access were denied by transition of State Forest to National park without accommodating tenure for the continuation of such activities.

Economic Affects: Herberton

Average household income in the Atherton Tablelands has fallen marginally since 1981 (table 2.9). The worst affected shire was Herberton, which saw the average income of households fall by approximately 16 per cent. Areas of Greatest Disadvantage, Queensland, 1996 (SLA by SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage) Herberton SLA rated 30/90 index of 896.268⁵

This is most likely to be a direct consequence of two events:

- The collapse of tin prices, and
- Cessation of logging and saw milling in 1998.

The collapse of the tin price in 1980's effectively stopped alluvial tin mining as an employer. This coupled with World Heritage Listing severely reduced employment and wealth in the Herberton area.

World Heritage listing of a large amount of the rainforest significantly changed access to natural resources in the region and ended timber milling. Studies carried out in 1987 showed that cessation of logging in World Heritage listed areas of northeast Queensland could result in significant social and economic impacts. An evaluation of the Structural Adjustment Package and its administration shows that it was an effective short term economic solution but it failed to address the social impacts perceived in a survey of communities in the affected regions.⁶

The ongoing transfer of state forests into national park will not increase tourism visitation, in the area as the focus of tourism is established on rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef. The State forests used for horse riding to be transferred are open forest and unlikely to attract additional tourists who seek a National Park experience.

Herberton has recognised the potential of recreational horse riding with the development of the Tepon Equestrian Centre and increased interest in the Endurance events. Certainly observations indicate that visitation and overnight stays to Herberton has increased by the number of horse floats that can be seen transiting to Herberton for organised events during weekends. As the attractions of the area

⁴ Refer Synopsis Tepon Equestrian Park (**attached**)

⁵ Geographical Disadvantage – Profile of Places

⁶ Atherton Tablelands Regional Analysis, Bureau of Transport Economics, Working Paper 43.2001

become better known then it would be expected that more equestrian tourists will visit the facilities and then return for other activities including trail riding and endurance events.

The Minister and Committee are referred to the synopses of equine groups **attached** for further information of historical, current and potential equine use of the horse trails network.

The multi-use trails identified by DERM will also accommodate use by 4WD and motor bike enthusiasts where conditions permit. Representatives from both have been involved in the Group and it is hoped that this joint offer is the start of greater understanding between horse riders and motorised bush colleagues. Their access and interests are just as important as preservation of equine access and you are referred to synopsis from DSMRA also **attached** for that reference.

Recreation Areas for Greater Cairns Region Population

The population of Cairns is projected to increase by 17% in the next 20 years.⁷ The Atherton Tablelands region will provide the terrestrial outdoor recreation area for this increased population. This will include a proportional number of equestrians who will seek suitable areas for riding. It is essential that a network of bridle trails be retained if not further developed to cater for the increased interest in horse riding. The loss of the area of the State forests and Forest Reserves to National Park in the area will significantly reduce the area available for horse riding and increase the pressure on any area readily available for this activity, if the proposed tenure process transitioning trails to forest reserve and two conservation areas is not adopted.

The preliminary estimated resident population of Cairns Regional Council at 30 June 2009 was 164,356 people, an increase of 5,172 people or 3.2 per cent over the year. This compares with an increase of 6,516 people or 4.3 per cent in the year to June 2008.⁸

Projections released in 2008 indicate that by 2016 the expected population of Cairns Regional Council will be between 176,280 and 192,410 people (Table 2)

By 2031 this is expected to change to between 206,090 and 248,770 people.

Table 2: Population projections

Projected population Average annual change

Year	Low Series	Medium Series	High Series	Median	Percentage
2011	165,410	168,297	172,392	4,152	2.7%
2016	176,284	182,684	192,406	2,877	1.7%
2021	185,623	195,540	210,909	2,571	1.4%
2026	195,410	208,532	229,431	2,598	1.3%
2031	206,099	222,640	248,766	2,822	1.3%

⁷ Population and Housing Profile – Cairns, Office of Economic and Statistical Research

⁸ Ibid (Table 1 and Figure 1)

TRANSFER OF HORSE TRAFFIC TO COUNCIL ROAD RESERVES

Should the transfer of state forests not provide concessions for bridle trails then recreational and competition horse riding will be transferred to road reserves controlled by the TRC.⁹ Many of these are currently undeveloped or the road verges are choked with high grass and deep culverts, which moves horses and riders into potential conflicts with motor traffic. The transfer of horse traffic to these roads will cause additional expense and work to TRC.

In addition there are many areas of road reserve that would have to be utilised by horse riders which are simply unsafe for contemporaneous vehicle and equine use.

The Minister and Committee should accept as fact that if horse trails are not preserved as an accommodating tenure within the National Park System, there is simply nowhere else for horse riders seeking to enjoy trail riding/ endurance/ bush experience to ride safely.

There are a limited number of gravel and lesser used roads that might provide an alternative but given the greater numbers that will be forced to use those areas, increased risks due to congestion and increased use are bound to arise.

The network of trails and Conservation Park proposed by DERM permits a sustainable and safe alternative for equine recreational and commercial pursuits.

MONITORING

The group notes the SEQ tenure transfer solution included a monitoring component on equine use. The group is prepared to consider the recommendations of DERM and any scientific evaluation thereof on that issue. The group's representatives are prepared to work with DERM and QPWS to further refine the proposal and translate into an operational plan of management that will address environmental impact concerns whilst recognising the practical needs of undertaking these activities. The group does support some form of base-line investigation that records and identifies current environmental conditions and impacts that can serve as a base-line for any future monitoring that may be implemented in the future.

CONCLUSION

The Tablelands Forest Users Working Group supports DERM proposals for tenure transfer of State Forests to National Parks as represented in the draft multi-use trails map identifying multi-use trail network with heavy black lines, to be preserved as Forest Reserve and the two Conservation Park areas as recommended.

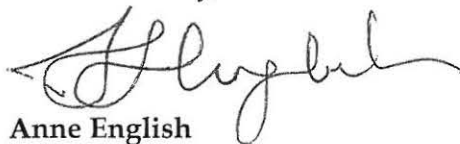
⁹ Tablelands Regional Council

The Group requests favourable consideration of the inclusions of two further areas mentioned on page 2 here of.

The Group are of the view that the draft multi-use map represent the bare minimum of trails required for sustainable horse riding access in the future and does not support any attempt to reduce the number of trails transitional to Forest Reserve.

The Group is willing to keep working with DERM to develop operational management plans to facilitate ongoing equine activities and endorses the Code of Conduct for Recreational Horse Riding as being a useful starting point for that exercise.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A English', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anne English

Representative for

Tablelands Forest Users Group