Question on Notice
No. 1823
Asked on Thursday 1 November 2007

QUESTION:

MR WETTENHALL asked the Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation (Mr McNamara)—

Will the Minister give details of the Queensland Government's major acquisitions for the protected area estate since 1998 and outline the commitments for future acquisitions with particular reference to Cape York and Far North Queensland?

ANSWER:

Since 1998, the protected area estate in Queensland has increased by more than 1.25 million hectares, and the government is well on target to meet its commitment of having 5 percent of Queensland protected as National Park.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been funded to undertake a number of priority land acquisition programs to increase the representation of biodiversity in the national park estate, consolidate existing national park boundaries and to achieve Indigenous land outcomes for Cape York Peninsula (CYP).

The central strategy for conserving biodiversity is through the establishment of a 'comprehensive', 'adequate' and 'representative' protected area system which is consistent with principle 8 of the National Strategy for Conservation of Australia's Biodiversity (1996).

The EPA has invested considerable effort over the last 15 years to identify priority acquisitions to achieve biodiversity targets and 80 percent representation of Queensland's regional ecosystems. Acquisition priorities are set using a number of criteria, including threat, landholder willingness to negotiate, quantum of funding available at the time, and relative value able to be obtained with the available funding.

Coastal Acquisition Program
Between 1998 and 2002 the State went into partnership with the Commonwealth and various local governments to provide $9 million out of a total of $11 million funding to acquire land under the Coastal Acquisition Program to protected strategic landscape linkages in the rapidly developing coastal zone.

Cape York Peninsula
Since 1998 the CYP program has been allocated a total budget of $10.5 million and has already acquired over 1.4 million hectares as high conservation value land. The program focuses on acquiring land with high conservation values on CYP on the basis that approximately 50 percent will become national park and 50 percent Aboriginal land with nature refuges. Negotiations are still under way with Traditional Owners regarding final tenure outcomes for many of the acquisitions.

So far, the program has created 330,000 hectares of new national parks including impressive extensions to Cape Melville, Iron Range and Lakefield National Parks as

well as new national parks including Jack River National Park from the former Kalpowar Station, Melsonby (Gaarraay) National Park and Yuku-Baja Muliku National Park from Archer Point.

The most recent acquisition was Kalinga Station, a 79,700 hectare property located approximately 330 kilometres north of Mareeba, which adjoins the Lakefield National Park. Kalinga Station was identified as a target acquisition to implement the 2004 Election Commitment to 'Protect Cape York Peninsula's world class natural and cultural heritage'.

Negotiations continue for several priority acquisitions that will increase the level of protection in this unique region. A further $15 million has been allocated this year for future acquisitions of high conservation properties in CYP.

Biodiversity Acquisitions
In 2004, the Government committed $2.5 million to acquire land for biodiversity protection. Much of this money was used to leverage funding from the Commonwealth National Reserve Program to assist in achieving Australia's Commitments under the Biodiversity Convention.

Acquisitions include:

- Beeron Holdings, a former pastoral lease of about 7,000 hectares which is situated approximately 80 kilometres south of Mundubbera in the extensively-cleared Brigalow Belt South and comprises two vulnerable regional ecosystems. Its acquisition will facilitate improved management of the Burnett catchments due to its location adjoining the neighbouring 70,900 hectares Allies Creek State Forest.

- Toubly Station acquired for addition to the Culgoa Floodplain National Park. This 18,600 hectare parcel protects an additional 18 kilometre stretch of Nebine Creek offering additional protection of catchment values (part of the Murray-Darling Basin) as well as the associated floodplain wetlands such as gilgais, claypans and swamps. The Toulby property contains major samples of 14 Regional Ecosystems, 2 of which are classified as 'endangered' and 6 'of concern' within the Mulga Lands region.

- Humboldt Station which comprises 13,100 hectares is located about 45 kilometres north of Rolleston in the Brigalow Belt. The property contains 18 regional ecosystems of which 6 are 'endangered' and 3 are 'of concern'. Humboldt is contiguous with the Shotover Range and unbroken tracts of forested lands south of Blackdown Tableland National Park.

South East Queensland
In 2006-2007 the EPA spent more than $1.6 million to acquire four properties of conservation significance for addition to the Springbrook National Park. This was followed by a Government commitment to allocate $20 million for priority land purchases for the South East Queensland Rainforest Acquisition Program. The South East Queensland Rainforest Program seeks to consolidate existing National Parks in the fastest growing region in the State, focusing on rainforest biodiversity hot spots.

The Springbrook National Park and surrounds is an area of significant biodiversity and part of the recently renamed Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area; however, the national park is very fragmented and efforts to prevent further fragmentation continue to be a priority.

The program aims to purchase lands that contain areas of rainforest under threat from development, or where rehabilitation will restore critical links in the landscape.

So far, more than 415 hectares have been acquired. A further $15 million has been allocated to the acquisition program for the next three years.

Daintree Buyback
Since 2004 the Government has dedicated a total of $15 million to the Daintree Buyback Program.

The Daintree Buyback Program purchases land north of the Daintree River to remedy inappropriate subdivisions that were approved in the 1980s, and to consolidate these lands into the World Heritage listed Daintree National Park.

To date, more than 169 lots covering 234 hectares have been acquired and another 40 or so are being negotiated.

The Daintree is a major drawcard for North Queensland tourism, and this significant investment can only increase the attractiveness of the region for Australian and international visitors.

Vegetation Management Acquisitions
Since 2006, more than $3.3 million from the Vegetation Management Framework Financial Assistance Package has been spent acquiring land for addition to the protected area estate.

Glengarlin Station, located 90 kilometres south of Roma, is a 2,730 hectare former grazing property that contains remnant brigalow and poplar box woodland on alluvial plains. It is a regional ecosystem ‘of concern’ that has a low representation in Queensland’s current protected area estate. Glengarlin provides suitable habitat for rare and threatened animals such as the golden tailed gecko, a legless lizard known as the brigalow scaly foot, the woma python, rough-collared frog, painted honeyeater, and square-tailed kite.

Rose-Lea Park is located 30 kilometres south of Monto and this 1,370 hectare property will add a large forested portion of the important Brigalow Belt Significant Area into the protected area estate, including a section of old growth Brigalow now rare in the area, along with endangered vine thickets communities.

The most recent acquisition is Binya Station, a 13,710 hectare property located south of Cunnamulla. Around 70 percent of the property lies within significant riparian corridors along the Warrego River and Cuttaburra Creek. The floodplain landscape contains coolibah, mulga, cypress pine and bluegrass communities, most with low representation in the protected area estate.

The Government is committed to ensuring Queensland continues the effort to establish a World Class Reserve System of National Parks. The Government is well on target to meet its commitment of having five percent of Queensland as national park in order to maximise the representation of biodiversity in the protected area estate.