



## Selling nature short

Queensland's failure to invest in protected areas placing wildlife at risk





# Executive Summary

As Queenslanders we are incredibly lucky to live in a state with more plant and animal species than any other state or territory in Australia. In fact, if Queensland was its own country, it would be one of the most species rich in the world.

The extraordinary diversity of our species and landscapes means Queensland has both an immense responsibility and opportunity when it comes to nature conservation.

Unfortunately, Queensland is not doing enough to protect these natural values for the future: a recent Queensland Government report found that 955 species are threatened with extinction in the state, the second-highest number in the country.<sup>1</sup>



The extraordinary diversity of our species and landscapes means Queensland carries an immense responsibility and opportunity when it comes to nature conservation.

National parks and other protected areas provide a vital haven for native wildlife and attract millions of visitors to Queensland, contributing more than \$5 billion each year to the state economy.<sup>2</sup>

The present Queensland Government recognises the environmental, social and economic values of protected areas and has repeatedly committed since 2015 to establishing a 'world-leading protected area system' covering 17 per cent of the state.<sup>3</sup>

However, achieving this ambition will require a substantial shift in policy direction.

Queensland has the lowest percentage of protected land in Australia<sup>4</sup> and is lagging behind the world. More than 140 countries have protected a larger proportion of their land, including many developing countries.<sup>5</sup>

The Palaszczuk Government has declared new protected areas over the past five years, but at current

rates of establishment it would take a lifetime to meet the state's 17 per cent protected area target.

To build a world-leading protected area system in Queensland, it is clear that substantial new investment is needed. Instead, funding for new national parks has fallen from nearly \$20 million per year (2012-15) to less than \$7 million per year under the Palaszczuk Government (2015-2020).<sup>6</sup>

## Key findings

1. **Queensland has the lowest percentage of protected land in Australia (8.4%), less than half the national average (19%).<sup>7</sup>**
2. **Queensland Government funding for new national parks has fallen by 65%, from nearly \$20 million (2012-15) to less than \$7 million per year (2015-20).<sup>8</sup>**
3. **Funding for private protected areas is stretched to breaking point, with landholders receiving less than 25 cents per hectare over the past five years.<sup>9</sup>**
4. **There is strong public support for increased investment in national parks and other protected areas.<sup>10</sup>**
5. **Increased investment in protected areas will deliver multiple environmental, social and economic benefits for Queensland.**

## Recommendations

To build a world-leading protected area network, new investment in protected areas is needed. Priorities for investment include:

1. \$55 million per year to purchase land for new national parks.
2. \$56 million per year for improved management of national parks.
3. \$24 million per year for new and existing private protected areas.
4. \$50 million over five years for the Cape York tenure resolution program.<sup>11</sup>



# Introduction

## Protected areas provide diverse benefits

National parks and other protected areas provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

Protected areas are widely recognised as one of the most effective approaches to the conservation of nature. They provide legal protection for critical wildlife habitats, ecosystems and landscapes and are central to providing refugia for threatened species and preserving ecosystem function.

Protected areas provide a generous return on public investment by supporting nature-based tourism, as well as public health and recreation benefits and ecosystem services like clean air and water.



A 2017 Galaxy poll in Queensland found most people (84%) believe that more land should be protected in national parks and reserves. ”

Queensland's national parks are a powerful drawcard for locals and tourists from Australia and around the world. Visitors to national parks spend about \$5.6 billion every year, of which \$952 million can be strongly attributed to national parks. This expenditure has a positive direct impact on local businesses and jobs<sup>12</sup>

WWF estimated that even a modest investment of \$11 million per year in new parks could generate as much as a 27% increase in nature-based tourism value.<sup>13</sup>

## Strong public support for protected areas

Queenslanders love their national parks: a 2017 Galaxy poll in Queensland found most people (84%) believe that more land should be protected in national parks and reserves, with 75% of people surveyed stating that 20% or more of the state should be protected in national parks and reserves<sup>14</sup>

Most respondents (83%) supported increased investment in national parks. Support for increased investment is consistently high across the state, with

Western Queensland recording the highest level of support (89%).

Most Queenslanders (89%) agreed that private landholders have an important role to play in protecting wildlife on their land, with 84% supporting state funding for nature refuge landholders to protect wildlife habitat, control feral animals and remove weeds.

## Policy commitments not matched with investment

The Queensland Government recognises the important benefits of protected areas and has committed to building a 'world leading protected area system' covering 17 per cent of the state.<sup>15</sup>

These commitments were welcomed by state, national and international conservation organisations, but it is becoming increasingly clear that the Queensland Government is failing to make the strategic investments necessary to fulfil this important vision.

This chronic lack of investment has been accompanied by long and continuing delays in the completion of the *Queensland Protected Areas Strategy*.

While the Queensland Government has made some positive progress on protected areas, the level of investment and rate of park establishment falls far short of its vision of a world-leading protected area network.

Some new protected areas have been declared over the past five years, but at current rates of establishment it would take a lifetime to meet the state's 17 per cent protected area target





# National Comparison

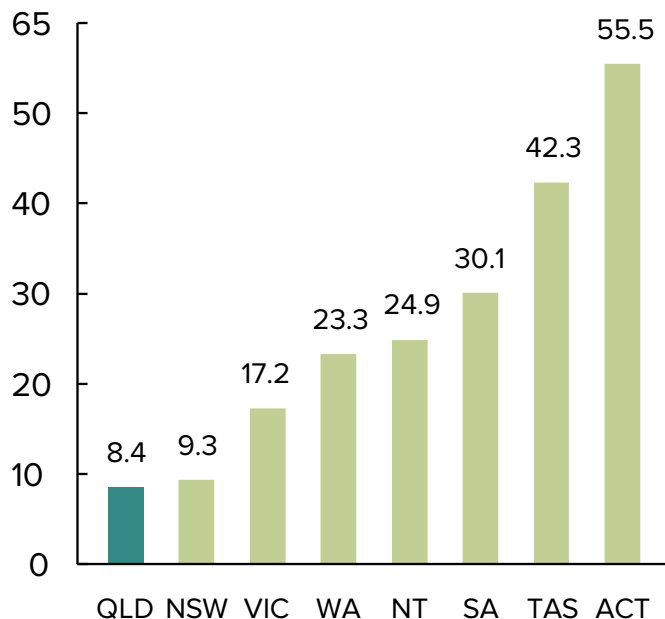
## Queensland has the lowest percentage of protected land in Australia

Queensland has the lowest proportion of land in protected areas (8.4%) of any state in Australia, well short of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity target of 17 per cent by 2020.

By comparison, the ACT has protected 55%, Tasmania 42%, South Australia 30%, the Northern Territory 25%, Western Australia 23%, Victoria 17% and New South Wales 9%.<sup>16</sup>

Queensland's exceptionally slow progress on protected area establishment is not a result of any fundamental barrier, but rather a reflection of a puzzling lack of government interest in making the necessary capital budget measures, despite the measures needed being very modest in comparison to the many billions budgeted for other infrastructure.

Queensland has well-established legislative and policy mechanisms to support an expansion of the protected area estate (including private protected areas), but to date insufficient financial resources have been committed for this purpose.



**Figure 1.** Percentage of land area protected by Australian states and territories.<sup>17</sup>

# International Comparison

## 140 countries have protected a higher percentage of their land than Queensland

Queensland is the most biologically diverse state in an extraordinarily diverse country, with a relatively low population density, ample financial resources and broad public support for nature conservation.

Yet, when it comes to protected areas, Queensland is lagging behind the world. There are over 140 countries

that have protected a larger percentage of their land, including many developing countries and more densely settled countries.

There are more than 80 countries that have protected more than twice as much land as Queensland (>17%) including: New Zealand, China, Japan, Brazil, most Central American countries, 17 African countries and every country in the European Union.<sup>18</sup>



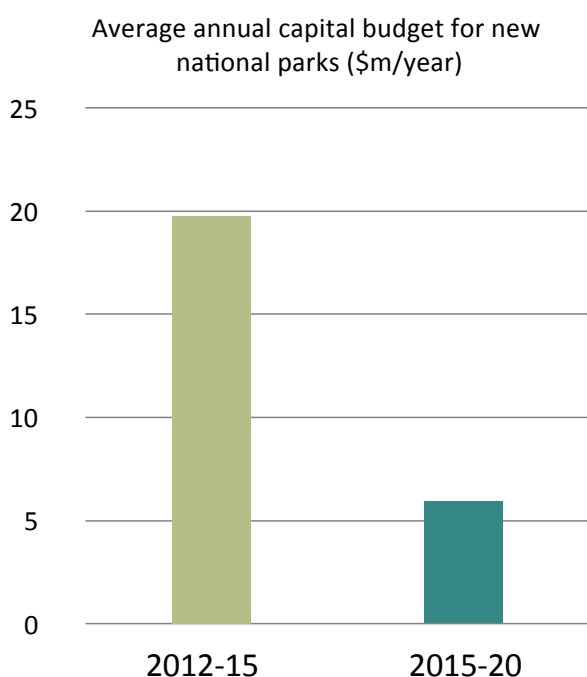
# Protected area budget allocations

## Funding for new national parks reduced by 65 per cent

To build a world-leading protected area system, funding must be allocated in the state budget to support the purchase of land for new national parks.

However, rather than increasing the budget for new parks, the Palaszczuk Government has reduced this funding by 65 per cent.

Funding for new national parks has been reduced from nearly \$20 million per year (three year average, 2012-2015) to less than \$7 million per year under the Palaszczuk Government (five year average, 2015-20)<sup>19</sup>.



**Figure 2.** Average annual funding for the purchase of new land for national parks in Queensland.<sup>20</sup>

Consistent with the Queensland Government's commitment to build a world-leading protected area system, we recommend increased investment in Queensland's national parks to protect native wildlife habitats and create new tourism and employment opportunities for regional and remote communities.

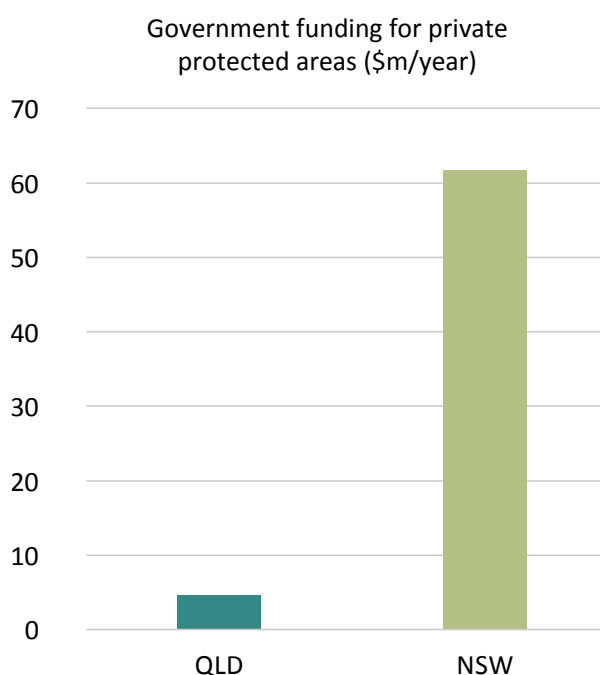
## Private protected area funding stretched to breaking point

Over the past decade, more than 500 landholders have chosen to dedicate part of their land for conservation, covering a total area of more than four million hectares.

The Nature Refuges Program has been highly popular with landholders, but limited investment in recent years presents a threat to the program's sustainability.

The current level of support available to nature refuge landholders is insufficient to support landholders' efforts to effectively manage existing nature refuges or to provide an appropriate incentive for new entrants to the program.

By contrast, the NSW Government is investing \$247 million over four years to support private landholders to protect and conserve natural values on their land, although this is widely recognised as poor compensation for the weakening of the state's native vegetation laws in 2017.



**Figure 3.** Funding for private land conservation in Queensland and New South Wales.<sup>21</sup>



The draft *Queensland Protected Areas Strategy* recognised that the support provides is “not considered adequate by many landholders” and that “the current range of incentives could be expanded to attract greater participation from private landholders”.

Increased investment in private protected areas would provide an opportunity to recognise and support the commitment and hard work of nature refuge landholders and a cost-effective strategy for expanding the protected area estate.

The present government is to be congratulated for amending legislation to allow for a type of nature refuge equivalent to national park, “special wildlife reserves”. However, without incentives and support, the uptake of this new opportunity remains in doubt.



## Recommendations

Lack of investment in new protected areas is placing our wildlife at risk and holding back growth of our economically valuable nature-based tourism industry and the tens of thousands of jobs provided.

It's time for the Palaszczuk Government to step up on protected areas, by committing significantly increased funding for national parks and private protected areas.

Queensland conservation organisations are calling on the Palaszczuk Government to lay the foundations for a world-leading protected area system by investing:

1. **\$55 million per year to purchase land for new national parks**
2. **\$56 million per year for improved management of national parks**
3. **\$24 million per year for new and existing private protected areas**
4. **\$50 million over five years for the Cape York tenure resolution program.**

This recommended expenditure represents less than 0.25 per cent of the state budget, but will deliver diverse benefits for native wildlife, regional communities and the state economy.



# Conclusion

With an increasing number of species on the brink of extinction, there's no doubt that Queensland has a huge responsibility when it comes to protecting nature.

Parks have played a critical role in stopping iconic wildlife extinctions. The northern wombat, the bridled nail-tail wallaby and the bilby might already be extinct in Queensland had not their last refuges been saved in national parks (Epping Forest, Taunton and Astrebla).

The Queensland Government has a vision of establishing a world-leading protected area estate. But we will continue to lag behind the rest of the world until the government backs up its promise with budget measures to deliver the habitat protection that our native species so badly need.

Doing so will unlock unparalleled growth and diversity of experiences and destinations for our tourism industry.

Investment in protected areas will deliver diverse economic, social and cultural benefits, including local employment, tourism, improved land management and opportunities for traditional owners to connect with and actively manage country.

We need a bold, comprehensive and adequately funded plan to expand and properly manage our protected areas.

With the right vision, leadership and investment, Queensland can seize the opportunity to build a genuinely world-leading protected area estate.



# References

- <sup>1</sup> Queensland Audit Office (2018) Conserving threatened species, Report 7 (2018-2019).
- <sup>2</sup> Ballantyne R et al (2008), Valuing Tourism Spend Arising from Visitation to Queensland National Parks, Sustainable Tourism CRC.
- <sup>3</sup> Ministerial Statement, Nature refuges total 4 million hectares, 12 October 2015. Ministerial Statement, Have your say on Queensland's Protected Area Strategy, 2 February 2017.
- <sup>4</sup> Australian Government (2016) Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database (CAPAD).
- <sup>5</sup> UN Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2017) National Commitments.
- <sup>6</sup> The capital budget for the Department of Environment and Science (and its predecessors) for new national parks was \$9 million (2012-13), \$23.4 million (2013-14), \$26.8 million (2014-15), \$5.9 million (2015-16), \$5.1 million (2016-17), \$3.2 million (2017-18), \$9.5 million\* (2018-19) and \$9.5 million,\* plus \$1.1 million for North Stradbroke Island (2019-2020)(\*held centrally by Treasury). Source: Queensland Budget Papers 2012-2019.
- <sup>7</sup> Australian Government (2016) Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database (CAPAD).
- <sup>8</sup> Queensland Budget Papers 2012-2019
- <sup>9</sup> Our Living Outback (2018) Investing in People and Nature: Strengthening Conservation Outcomes on Queensland Private Land, September 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> Polling conducted by Galaxy Research in November 2017 (1,000 respondents).
- <sup>11</sup> 'Building a world leading protected area system for Queensland', November 2018. Position statement supported by 23 local, state, national and international conservation organisations.
- <sup>12</sup> Ballantyne R et al (2008), Valuing Tourism Spend Arising from Visitation to Queensland National Parks, Sustainable Tourism CRC.
- <sup>13</sup> WWF-Australia, 2015, Queensland Protected Area Opportunities 2015 -2020.
- <sup>14</sup> Polling conducted by Galaxy Research in November 2017 (1,000 respondents).
- <sup>15</sup> For example: Ministerial Statement, Nature refuges total 4 million hectares, 12 October 2015. Ministerial Statement, Have your say on Queensland's Protected Area Strategy, 2 February 2017.
- <sup>16</sup> Australian Government (2016) *Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database* (CAPAD).
- <sup>17</sup> Australian Government (2016) *Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database* (CAPAD).
- <sup>18</sup> UN Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2017) National Commitments.
- <sup>19</sup> Queensland Budget Papers 2012-2019.
- <sup>20</sup> Queensland Budget Papers 2012-2019.
- <sup>21</sup> Our Living Outback (2018) Investing in People and Nature: Strengthening Conservation Outcomes on Queensland Private Land, September 2018.