

National parks: Legacy to our children

Our natural world – our wildlife, landscapes and Indigenous heritage - some of Queensland’s most important assets are deteriorating.

Although Queensland has very high biodiversity it has the smallest proportion of its land in protected areas (just over 8%), well short of other states and the UN international target (17%). Much of our biodiversity, including critical habitats and climate refuges for native plant and animal species, such as inland wetlands, remain outside protected areas. This means little to no dedicated management of multiple threats, and risks remain from potential land use change.

We urgently need more and better-connected protected areas, and better resourced natural areas management as outlined in the *Queensland protected areas financial sustainability strategy*¹.

Benefits of National Parks

For more than a century Queensland’s national parks and other protected areas have enjoyed the continuous support of all governments. We value these beautiful, biologically and culturally rich places with their unique wildlife and Indigenous places. They have inspired generations. They underpin a large part of our tourism industry and provide many benefits:

Future legacy - A world-class national park and protected area system bequeathed to future generations.

Personal connection with nature - We love our national parks, their wild areas and nature and the rich experiences, memories, adventures and holidays they give us.

Rural and Regional Employment - Opportunities for economic and social renewal in regional Queensland with increased jobs and investment associated with tourism.

Ecotourism - This significant industry for Queensland has strong national and international markets – which are growing. A more extensive mosaic of parks highlighting our unique natural heritage will underpin its continued success.

Indigenous peoples - For First Nations, a key source of identity, meaning and health. Opportunities for employment, Indigenous owned tourism-related business, protecting cultural heritage and supporting traditional land management practices

Water - Protected catchments that secure water reserves and water quality for communities and the agricultural sector.

Agriculture - Ecosystem services of nearby protected areas include water security, erosion control, soil fertility, native species pollination and natural pest control, disease management and climate enhancement/mitigation.

CO₂ - Low cost and reliable means to help meet greenhouse gas emission targets by protecting the carbon rich forests, grasslands and wetlands that store carbon.

Health and well-being - Significant contributions to personal mental and physical health and community well-being by providing benefits including places for nature-based recreational activity and reflection.

Increased investment in acquisition and management of national parks is one of the most cost effective and secure ways to save native wildlife and their habitats, especially with the threat of climate change and associated bushfires and floods. Such investment will also help secure the future of the tourism industry and support regional employment.

Key Facts

- Offset of \$29 billion in health costs from all Australian National Parks
- \$2.6 billion in annual visitor spend generated by Queensland National Parks

NPAQ’s request:

- Premier and Treasury Departments support of Queensland’s National Park Estate for their inherent biological importance, value to community well-being and fundamental importance to the tourist industry and regional employment.
- Release and implement a fully funded Queensland Protected Area Strategy to provide a clear pathway to achieving strategic protection of 17% of the State (a long-standing commitment); include sufficient management funding to ensure the integrity of the National Park Estate and to protect threatened species and build climate change resilience.
- Prioritise a nature based economic stimulus for bushfire ecosystem and COVID-19 recovery in national parks.

¹ Queensland Treasury Corporation, September 2018. Queensland protected areas financial sustainability strategy

- Over 17,000 jobs supported - mostly in Queensland regional areas
- Economic value of all pollinators of crops estimated at \$5.6 billion. National parks provide natural pollinators to supplement commercial bees.
- Annual QPWS budget: \$319m (2019/2020) about half the cost of 11 kms new motorway (\$662m)
- Source of new pharmaceuticals - Nature is a main source of drug discovery
- Increasing number of threatened species - 400 more since 2007 (1000 in 2020)
- National parks are often the natural headwaters of our water supply

The Big Issues

Lost Opportunities: National parks are our most effective tool for protecting and managing wildlife habitat, because they are the only public land use dedicated to conservation backed up by the authority of the state.

In the past five years, 175 very high priority properties identified for national park acquisition have gone on the market and been sold mostly for ongoing agricultural use. The properties cover about 241,000 ha of land with high value habitats for 160 threatened species, including the koala, black-throated finch, painted honeyeater, squatter pigeon and yakka skink.

These opportunities to expand national parks and the species they support have been lost due to the ongoing lack of any meaningful budget for new acquisitions.

Funding for Management: Queensland Government funding for new national parks has fallen by 65% over the past 7 years². Underfunding compromises ability to undertake fire management, pest and weed control, interpretation and visitor management.

Loss of Biodiversity: There are 1000 threatened species listed under the *Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992*, 400 more since 2007³. The dominant threats include tree clearing, inappropriate activities, pests and weeds, climate change and livestock grazing⁴.

Using Nature to Drive Economic Recovery: Parks are economic powerhouses - Queensland's national parks are a powerful drawcard for locals and tourists from Australia and around the world. National parks associated spending by visitors in Queensland is about \$4.4 billion every year, of which \$2.6 billion is directly generated by national parks, supporting over 17,000 jobs mostly in regional Queensland⁵.

Recognising Return on Investment: Investment in parks is estimated to generate at least a nine-fold return on investment due to the positive economic impact on businesses and jobs in regional Queensland³.

Community Support: In a 2017 Galaxy poll, over 80% of Australians agreed more land should be protected in national parks and reserves⁶. Roy Morgan polling in 2018 found that 72% of Australians would like to have more national parks and nature reserves and that "buying land for new national parks" is the second most popular government conservation policy preference after stronger tree clearing controls⁷.

² Queensland Budget Papers 2012-2019; The Wilderness Society et al, 2019. Selling Nature Short: Queensland's failure to invest in protected areas placing wildlife at risk.

³ Queensland Government, 2020. Queensland State of the Environment Report 2017 and Enoch, L., personal communication, Sep 2, 2020 at Minister's Environment Round Table.

⁴ Queensland Audit Office, 2018. Conserving threatened species (Report 7: 2018-19).

⁵ Driml, S & Brown, R 2019. Queensland's National Parks: an economically important tourism resource. Presentation to the *Global Eco Asia-Pacific Tourism Conference 2 Dec-2019*.

⁶ Polling conducted by Galaxy Research for Pew Charitable Trusts in November 2017 (1,000 respondents).

⁷ Roy Morgan Research, 2018. Australian Attitudes to Nature 2017. <https://www.wwf.org.au/ArticleDocuments/353/pub-backyard-barometer-australian-attitudes-to-nature-05jun18.pdf.aspx>