



NPAQ acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Queensland national park estate and strongly supports co-stewardship with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Since 1930: National Parks Association of Queensland Inc. ABN 60206792095

Patron: Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC, PSM Governor of Queensland

NPAQ POLICY: ECOTOURISM IN NATIONAL PARKS – DECEMBER 2022

Purpose

To outline the National Parks Association of Queensland Inc. (NPAQ) policy position on ecotourism in national parks, consistent with the management principles set out in Part 4 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Definitions

Part 4 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* states that:

- (1) A national park is to be managed to—
 - (a) provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area’s natural condition and the protection of the area’s cultural resources and values; and
 - (b) present the area’s cultural and natural resources and their values; and
 - (c) ensure that the only use of the area is nature-based and ecologically sustainable; and
 - (d) provide opportunities for educational and recreational activities in a way consistent with the area’s natural and cultural resources and values; and
 - (e) provide opportunities for ecotourism in a way consistent with the area’s natural and cultural resources and values.
- (2) The management principle mentioned in subsection (1)(a) is the cardinal principle for the management of national parks.

Ecotourism Australia defines ecotourism as “ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation”.

Ecotourism aims to preserve the integrity of the destination. Its focus is on conserving the local environment and historical heritage, while supporting the culture and encouraging people to look after the natural resources that attracts them to the region.

Policy Statement

NPAQ recognises that there is increasing demand for access to national parks for a range of uses, including ecotourism.

Appropriate facilities and activities in national parks will likely expand the range of people who connect with, and become more appreciative of natural and cultural values, leading to broader community support for national parks. This can represent a benefit to parks, regional communities and the tourism industry.

Inappropriate developments, highly competitive events and thrill-seeking activities that merely use national parks as a convenience or scenic backdrop can all cause detrimental impacts and/or place undue demands on limited park management resources and will not be supported by NPAQ. Inappropriate developments are those that are out of scale, not sympathetic to their natural surroundings, and are not primarily focused on appreciation of national park values.

Ecotourism facilities and activities in national parks should have minimal impact and be carefully monitored to ensure that:

- Appreciation of natural and cultural values is central to the activity and actively promoted;
- The integrity of the national park is maintained; and
- Independent visitors' enjoyment is not infringed.

With ever-increasing pressures on the national park system, any ecotourism facilities or activities within national parks must align with leading practice to avoid degradation of the park values and visitor experience. Trained and accredited interpretative staff should deliver high quality interpretation of park values.

Sufficient revenue should be raised from ecotourism activities to meaningfully contribute to the maintenance of local infrastructure (e.g. nearby trails, lookouts, amenities), as well as improvement of the local environment (via restoration, revegetation, weed management etc.).

As of November 2022, Queensland's protected areas' estate is only about half the 17% target committed to by the Queensland government. The expansion of ecotourism in national parks should be considered in the context of realistically funded management and long-term commitment to strategic growth of the protected areas' estate.

NPAQ's position is that the following ten principles should be applied when considering ecotourism interest or applications in national parks.

1. Any new private accommodation and associated service infrastructure should be located outside of national parks, to avoid any actual (or perceived) impacts on park values. This is often referred to as the 'adjacency principle'.
2. In the rare situation where no external alternative exists to support genuine ecotourism activities, new private accommodation within national parks should be:
 - a. sensitively designed to be in harmony with the surrounding landscape;
 - b. temporary in nature and suitable for easy removal;
 - c. located in cleared or degraded areas;
 - d. supported by minimal, low impact service infrastructure.

Servicing of such accommodation within national parks should also be restricted to limited periods, to minimise disturbance to wildlife and visitor experience.

3. Other visitor infrastructure in national parks, such as walking trails, shelters, campgrounds, toilets and lookouts, should have minimal environmental impact and should be thoughtfully designed to reflect local conditions of slope, soil, vegetation and visibility.
4. High impact and thrill-seeking activities should not be supported or endorsed in national parks.

5. Ecotourism activities in national parks should be subject to prior impact assessment, with enforceable conditions put in place to ensure natural and cultural values are properly protected.
6. Ecotourism activities in national parks should be monitored on an annual basis for compliance purposes and to determine any necessary remedial measures.
7. An upfront bond should be required of ecotourism developments, to cover any necessary remedial measures.
8. High quality interpretation of park values and the values of the traditional owners should be integral to any approved ecotourism activity. Such interpretation should also be delivered by trained and accredited interpretative staff who can effectively communicate expert knowledge of the park's values and unique features.
9. Ecotourism revenue generated for Government should be publicly reported and directed to national park management, preferably in the park where the revenue was generated.
10. Visitor numbers should be capped, based upon ecological resilience and maintaining a high-quality visitor experience, consistent with either the park management plan or best practice.

Ecotourism in national parks, as assessed by NPAQ against the ten principles set out in this policy.

High impact with no obvious compatibility with national park values (not supported)	Potential impacts dependent on details of proposal (case-by-case assessment)	Negligible/minimal impact and consistent with national park values (supported)
Trail biking	Commercial rafting, trail running	Guided walks / board walks/ surfaced trails
Downhill or speed-based mountain biking	Commercial fixed camp sites	Camping in designated areas
Zip lining/ bungy jumping	Soft adventure e.g. climbing / canoeing / abseiling	Guided activities e.g. bird watching/ nature walks /cultural interpretation
Adventure 4WDing	Tracks for access to remote sites and facilities	Low key vehicle access to designated sites
Permanent accommodation	Appropriately scaled, temporary accommodation supporting genuine ecotourism activities	Education
Horse riding / competitive events	Long distance touring / nature-based cycling #	Photography
Use of drones	Canopy walks	Research

To be informed by the NPAC mountain biking review

***Policy endorsed by Council out of session in December 2022
To be reviewed by end December 2023***