

SUBMISSION TO THE 2024-25 STATE BUDGET PROCESS



Enhancing management, public safety and community engagement in Queensland's protected area estate

The [National Parks Association of Queensland Inc](#) (NPAQ) is the longest-servicing environmental non-government organisation in Queensland and one of the oldest in Australia. Since 1930, NPAQ has played a pivotal role in the creation of many national parks in Queensland and has a specific mission to ensure the protection, expansion, effective management and presentation of national parks and other protected areas across Queensland.

Queensland's protected area estate currently includes up to 1300 individual parks and reserves, covering approximately 17 million hectares of land ([CAPAD, 2022](#)). That's about 8.4% of Queensland under some form of formal protection.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) has primary responsibility for managing the protected area estate, with a stated 1614 FTEs and an annual budget of \$396 million as at 30 June 2023 ([State Budget 2023-24, Service Delivery Statements](#)).

Park rangers are the frontline service providers in most instances and their roles and responsibilities have expanded significantly over recent years, particularly as visitation has been growing and with the escalating demands of fire management.

[A 2022 paper published in Biodiversity Conservation by Craigie and Pressey](#) sought to explore the nexus between available budgets and legislative responsibilities of protected area managers. The paper concluded that, whilst the management objectives for protected areas in Queensland are diverse, the protection of natural and cultural values was no longer driving the allocation of management resources. Instead, in the face of constrained management budgets, managers are often prioritising actions directed towards visitors' experience, to the detriment of actions focused on biodiversity management.

This new analysis highlights and quantifies what many park rangers have known for some time; that more funding is urgently required, and that funding needs to be directed more effectively to specific biodiversity management activities if QPWS is going to fulfil its primary responsibility in the long term.

Queensland's investment is also lagging behind other states and jurisdictions, which is impacting its "on-park" capacity and capability. In 2018, a [Queensland Treasury Corporation report](#) compared Queensland's investment in protected area management against various other jurisdictions. Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales invest between \$23/ha and \$58/ha. The USA is the exemplar at \$121/ha. At just \$16/ha, QPWS funding is clearly deficient.

Whilst park management funding is a perennial issue, the [2018 QTC Report](#) also made specific recommendations in relation to raising visitation fees and funding in line with other park management services in Australia and overseas. NPAQ would encourage the State government to reconsider those recommendations, to help close the gap with other states.

Raising the level of investment at this time is critically important for enabling QPWS to maintain the natural and cultural values that parks were established to protect, as well as for providing and maintaining an expanding and diverse range of suitable, safe and sustainable visitor experiences.

If Queensland is to meet the Palaszczuk Government's target to protect 17% of terrestrial ecosystems (i.e. double the current 8.4%) and provide world class nature destinations by the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics, then QPWS must be allocated a commensurate increase in State appropriations and diversified income streams.

The \$262.5 million over four years allocated in the 2021-22 State budget for acquiring new protected areas was a good start. The additional \$210.9 million over four years allocated in the 2022-23 State budget was also welcome and NPAQ understands that this additional funding will primarily enable an expansion of management planning, co-management arrangements and the indigenous ranger program.

What appears to be missing from the previous two budget announcements is any increased capacity and operating expenditure for day-to-day management of the existing protected area estate (i.e. the current 8.4%). Specifically, funding for additional park rangers and for an enhanced fire management capability, as exists in most other states.

NPAQ accepts that State government funding is limited, which is why we would also recommend that the State, through QPWS, develops partnerships with likeminded organisations, community and volunteer groups and the ecotourism sector more broadly, to help manage and present the expanding protected area estate in Queensland to a world class standard. This aligns with the “Connect” theme in [Queensland’s Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030](#). NPAQ stands ready to assist with that theme.

Budget Priority

Based on the context set out above, and to achieve better funding parity with other states, NPAQ regards the following as a priority for the 2024-25 State budget process:

\$221.5 million over 4 years and \$79.3 million per annum ongoing, to enhance management, public safety and community engagement in Queensland's protected area estate, comprising:

- \$42.5 million over 4 years and \$18 million per annum ongoing, to build a strike force of 100 specialist rangers to lead and coordinate QPWS fire management capacity and capability;
- \$50.9 million over 4 years and \$21.6 million per annum ongoing, to employ an additional 120 park rangers to improve the management and presentation of the existing protected area estate in Queensland;
- \$34 million over 4 years and \$14.4 million per annum ongoing, to employ an additional 80 park rangers to manage newly acquired land that will be added into the protected area estate in Queensland;
- \$83.7 million over 4 years and \$22.5 million ongoing, to support additional park management infrastructure (bases, walking trails, visitor facilities) and associated maintenance costs; and
- \$10.5 million over 4 years and \$2.8 million ongoing, to enhance community engagement in Queensland’s protected area estate (in line with the “Connect” theme in [Queensland’s Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030](#)).

Securing this funding would complement and round out previous budget allocations to QPWS, which were for land acquisitions in Budget 2021-22 and co-management arrangements in Budget 2022-23.

Figures quoted above are based on \$160,000 per new ranger position, including salary and operating costs, and standard indexation of 3% per annum. [See attached spreadsheet for more detail.]

Thank you for your consideration of this submission to the 2024-25 State Budget process.



Chris Thomas | Chief Executive Officer | **National Parks Association of Queensland Inc**

Enhancing management, public safety and community engagement in Queensland's protected area estate	Budget Year	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	Over 4 Years	Ongoing
	Indexation	0%	3%	3%	3%		3%
\$221.5 million over 4 years and \$79.3 million per annum ongoing, to enhance management, public safety and community engagement in Queensland's protected area estate, comprising:	TOTAL	\$ 34,500,000	\$ 47,895,000	\$ 62,062,650	\$ 77,037,254	\$ 221,494,904	\$ 79,348,371
\$42.5 million over 4 years and \$18 million per annum ongoing, to build a strike force of 100 specialist rangers to lead and coordinate QPWS fire management capacity and capability	100 FTEs	25	50	75	100		100
	Cost per ranger	\$ 160,000	\$ 164,800	\$ 169,744	\$ 174,836		\$ 180,081
	Budget	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 8,240,000	\$ 12,730,800	\$ 17,483,632	\$ 42,454,432	\$ 18,008,141
\$50.9 million over 4 years and \$21.6 million per annum ongoing, to employ an additional 120 park rangers to improve the management and presentation of the existing protected area estate in Queensland	120 FTEs	30	60	90	120		120
	Cost per ranger	\$ 160,000	\$ 164,800	\$ 169,744	\$ 174,836		\$ 180,081
	Budget	\$ 4,800,000	\$ 9,888,000	\$ 15,276,960	\$ 20,980,358	\$ 50,945,318	\$ 21,609,769
\$34 million over 4 years and \$14.4 million per annum ongoing, to employ an additional 80 park rangers to manage newly acquired land that will be added into the protected area estate in Queensland	80 FTEs	20	40	60	80		80
	Cost per ranger	\$ 160,000	\$ 164,800	\$ 169,744	\$ 174,836		\$ 180,081
	Budget	\$ 3,200,000	\$ 6,592,000	\$ 10,184,640	\$ 13,986,906	\$ 33,963,546	\$ 14,406,513
\$83.7 million over 4 years and \$22.5 million ongoing, to support additional park management infrastructure (bases, walking trails, visitor facilities) and associated maintenance costs	Budget	\$ 20,000,000	\$ 20,600,000	\$ 21,218,000	\$ 21,854,540	\$ 83,672,540	\$ 22,510,176
\$10.5 million over 4 years and \$2.8 million ongoing, to enhance community engagement in Queensland's protected area estate (in line with the "Connect" theme in Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030)	Budget	\$ 2,500,000	\$ 2,575,000	\$ 2,652,250	\$ 2,731,818	\$ 10,459,068	\$ 2,813,772
Total check		\$ 34,500,000	\$ 47,895,000	\$ 62,062,650	\$ 77,037,254	\$ 221,494,904	\$ 79,348,371