



The Hon. Cameron Dick MP  
Treasurer and Minister for Investment  
Via email: [treasurer@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:treasurer@ministerial.qld.gov.au)

17 March 2023

**Protected areas support Queensland's Olympic and Paralympic Legacy  
Submission to Queensland's 2023-24 State Budget**

Dear Treasurer

Tourism in Queensland is a \$23 billion a year industry that sustains 174,000 Queensland jobs across 60,000 businesses. There are few sectors of the community that do not benefit from tourism, and nature-based tourism is a significant growth sector that represents a high return on State investment.

Primary motivators for visiting Australia include cultural, nature and wildlife experiences.<sup>1</sup> According to the World Tourism Organisation, the annual growth of the nature-based tourism sector outpaces tourism in general and accounts for 11% of all consumer spending.<sup>2</sup>

The Palaszczuk Government's Towards Tourism 2032 Plan aims to more than double the state's tourism overnight expenditure to more than \$44 billion annually by the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. That is likely to translate to a doubling of visitation to national parks and protected areas, which are the base assets that underpin most international visitor experiences. To achieve that in a sustainable way, significant investment will need to go into upgrading management and visitor experiences in existing national parks and reserves, as well as acquiring and creating new national parks and reserves and associated visitor experiences. This will be a considerable undertaking, that will require careful planning and staged implementation over the coming years, in the lead up to the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Environment and Science (2023) <https://parks.des.qld.gov.au/management/ecotourism/about>

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Treasury Corporation (2018) Queensland protected areas financial sustainability strategy report, presented to the Department of Environment of Science and tabled in Queensland Parliament 8 September 2020.

## **Successful protected area expansion will stimulate regional tourism growth**

Investment in existing protected areas and their growth under the Palaszczuk Government's *Queensland Protected Area Strategy 2020 - 2030* (the Strategy) will stimulate multiple streams of revenue generation to the Queensland economy. For example, a University of Queensland study showed that for every \$1 spent on Queensland's national parks, between \$8 and \$10 is generated in regional tourism and hospitality.<sup>3</sup>

The Strategy commits to delivering a 'world leading protected area network' and effectively doubling the land area of national parks and private reserves from 8.26% to 17% of the state's land area.

We note the Palaszczuk Government's \$262.5 million investment, over four years, in the 2022-23 Queensland budget for acquisition of land for protected areas. This was the largest single investment of its kind and a celebrated milestone for biodiversity conservation and protected area growth.

However, almost 14 million hectares will need to transition to protected areas in order to meet the 17% target. That's an average of 2 million hectares per year. Progress to date is well short of that target. The Commonwealth's recent commitment to 30% of Australia under effective protection by 2030 elevates the importance and urgency around Queensland's contribution.

The upcoming State Budget is an opportunity to accelerate national park expansion, and bolster the capacity of an under-resourced park management service to effectively manage and present the expanding conservation estate.

## **Enable world-class management of our national parks**

In Queensland, our national park management service is lagging behind other states in terms of funding and performance. In 2018, a Queensland Treasury Corporation report compared Queensland's investment in national park management against other jurisdictions.<sup>4</sup>

Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales invest between \$23/ha and \$58/ha.<sup>5</sup> At just \$16 per hectare, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service funding is clearly deficient. Raising this level of investment is critically important for enabling rangers to maintain the natural and cultural values parks were established to protect, as well as for providing and maintaining an expanded and diverse range of suitable and sustainable visitor experiences. Importantly, particular

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<sup>3</sup> Dr Sally Driml, Associate Professor Richard Brown, Ms Claudia Moreno Silva (2020) "Estimating The Value Of National Parks To The Queensland Economy," *Discussion Papers Series 636*, School of Economics, University of Queensland, Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Queensland Treasury Corporation (2018) Queensland protected areas financial sustainability strategy report, presented to the Department of Environment of Science and tabled in Queensland Parliament 8 September 2020.

<sup>5</sup> As above

consideration will need to be given to inclusive and accessible visitor experiences as part of supporting the 2032 Paralympics.

If Queensland is to provide world class nature destinations by the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics and meet the Palaszczuk Government's target to protect 17% of terrestrial ecosystems, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will also need a consummate increase in State appropriations, as well as diversified income streams and increases in self-generated income.

We would support implementation of many of the key findings of the QTC Protected Areas Financial Sustainability Strategy Report<sup>6</sup>, including raising visitation fees and funding in line with other park management services which have undergone successful transitions.

### **Supporting First Nations-led tourism**

Protected areas, including Indigenous Protected Areas, are integral to the cultural resurgence and revitalisation occurring across the State and acknowledged in the Palaszczuk Government's Gurra Gurra Framework 2020-2026. Country, people and culture are inherently interconnected and interdependent.

We support an increase in indigenous ranger positions and the resourcing of First Nations-led small businesses to develop sustainable nature-based tourism ventures, in line with the First Nations Tourism Plan 2020-2025. This plan was developed, directed and driven by First Nations peoples and seeks the creation of mutually beneficial and strategic partnerships to grow the First Nations Tourism Sector.<sup>7</sup>

We recommend the Indigenous Tourism Fund established in 2020-2021 is restarted, and a commitment of \$15 million over three years be provided to facilitate First Nations-led ecotourism products, programs and services in protected areas.

### **Recommendations**

We urge the Government to prioritise investment in expanding and managing national parks and other protected areas, by implementing the following key priority investments:

- 1. Increase investment in the management of existing national parks and other protected areas with an additional \$50 million per year to better protect the values they were created for, including increasing the number of First Nations rangers.**

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<sup>6</sup> As above

<sup>7</sup> First Nations Tourism Plan 2020-2025. Queensland First Nations Tourism Council  
<http://qticazure.blob.core.windows.net/crmblobcontainer/Version%206%20-%20FNTP%20Final%20Version%20-%20High%20res%20Web.pdf>

- 2. Accelerate the expansion of the protected area estate to add a minimum of 2 million hectares per year, with a commensurate increase in ongoing funding for park management and visitor experience development.**
- 3. Add a further \$100 million to the existing \$262.5 million allocated to the expansion of Queensland's national parks, to help fast-track the acquisition program over the forward estimates period.**
- 4. Increase funding for the Private Protected Areas Program to an annual \$25 million across engagement, grant funding, and program expansion.**
- 5. Invest \$5 million per year toward developing First Nations-led ecotourism products, programs and services in protected areas.**

The Queensland Tourism and Conservation Alliance comprises the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, EcoTourism Australia, Queensland First Nations Tourism Council, Queensland Conservation Council, Pew Charitable Trusts and National Parks Association of Queensland.

Please contact me should you wish to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Thomas', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Chris Thomas  
Alliance Convener

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