

QUEENSLAND
TOURISM &
CONSERVATION
ALLIANCE



**Protected Areas Support Queensland's Olympic and Paralympic Legacy
Submission to Queensland's 2026-27 State Budget**

Dear Treasurer

By way of introduction, the Queensland Tourism and Conservation Alliance (QTCA) is a non-partisan alliance of peak tourism and conservation bodies advocating for increased and strategic investment in Queensland's protected area estate. QTCA supports the Queensland Government's vision of a world-class protected area system and a thriving nature-based tourism sector. QTCA formed in 2022 with representatives from the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, National Parks Association of Queensland, Ecotourism Australia, Queensland First Nations Tourism Council, Queensland Conservation Council and The Pew Charitable Trusts. Our collective expertise provides a unique opportunity for government to effectively deliver policy priorities and election commitments within a collaborative framework.

Importance of nature-based tourism

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. 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.

The former Labor Government sought 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 Queensland's 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 protected areas, as well as acquiring and creating new protected areas 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.

Support for national parks

Polling conducted in 2024 revealed that 77% of Queenslanders want more national parks, with 71% supporting doubling the area of national parks by 2030.¹ Almost two thirds of Queenslanders polled had

¹ Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov 3–14 Jan. Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance. 2024. protectqueensland.org.au

visited a national park in the previous 12 months. 94% stated that protecting native animals and plants is the best reason to boost protected areas and more than 90% felt national parks are important for Queensland's recreational lifestyle.

Successful protected area expansion will stimulate regional tourism growth

Investment in existing protected areas and their growth under the 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. 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.

The power of acquisitions

We note the former 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 is an average of over 2 million hectares per year.

Since allocating \$262.5 million in 2022, the Queensland government has acquired only one million hectares of land for future protected areas. The upcoming State Budget is therefore a critical opportunity to build on the current momentum and accelerate protected area expansion.

Enable world-class management of our protected areas

In Queensland, our 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 park management against other jurisdictions.

Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales invest between \$23/ha and \$58/ha. At just \$16 per hectare, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) 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 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 advance towards Queensland'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.

Enhancing management and public safety in Queensland's protected areas

Queensland's protected area estate currently includes up to 1300 individual parks and reserves, covering approximately 17 million hectares of land (CAPAD, 2022). That is about 8.9% of Queensland under some form of formal protection.

QPWS has primary responsibility for managing the protected area estate, with 1758 FTEs and an annual budget of \$492 million stated in the State Budget 2025-26, Service Delivery Statements².

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.

² [Budget 2025-26 SDS DETSI](#)

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.

Policy context

In October 2020, the Queensland Government released the *Queensland Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030* as part of its commitment to deliver a 'world leading protected area network' and effectively double the area of national parks and private reserves from around 8.2 percent to 17 percent of the state.

In October 2022, Queensland also agreed to work with other federal and state jurisdictions to reverse environmental decline and prevent new extinctions.³ This commitment included all Environment Ministers at the time agreeing *to work collectively to achieve a national target to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's landmass and 30% of Australia's marine areas by 2030.*

With globally significant levels of biodiversity and as Australia's most biodiverse state, Queensland should make a meaningful contribution to the national target. By aiming to protect 17% of Queensland, the Crisafulli government would be making a 4% contribution to the national 30% target.

Increased funding for the growth and management of protected areas is consistent with LNP election commitments⁴ and Minister Powell's Charter Letter which stated: *Grow Queensland's protected areas to ensure our state's rich ecological gifts and natural wonders are maintained and preserved.*⁵

In addition, the Crisafulli Government's *Queensland Future Timber Plan* announced there will be no reintroduction of native timber harvesting from state-owned native forests within the South East Queensland Regional Plan area and these areas would provide recreational and conservation opportunities.⁶

QTCA welcomed the Crisafulli Government's commitment of \$84.6 million over 5 years and \$29.6 million per annum ongoing under the More Rangers, Better Neighbours initiative for enhanced management of national parks and protected areas including 150 additional QPWS and Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers over 4 years, including restoring funding for 40 specialist fire rangers.

QTCA is also encouraged by the Crisafulli Government's commitment to protect in one term at least equivalent to what the former government protected in three terms.⁷ To meet this commitment, approximately 1.88 million hectares will need protecting by October 2028.⁸

³ Environment Ministers Meeting 21 October 2022, Agreed Communique

⁴ LNP 2024, *The Right Priorities for Queensland's Future*, p. 39.

⁵ David Crisafulli, 2024, Charter Letter to Minister Powell, page 2.

⁶ Perrett 2025 Landmark Qld Future Timber Plan Delivered

<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/103740?ref=snapshot.bcsda.org.au>

⁷ DETSI (2025), *A Fresh Start for Private Protected Areas*, Discussion paper, p.3.

⁸ Target estimate reached by adding all nature refuges, national parks and other NCA tenures delivered between February 2015 to October 2024.

Budget priority

Based on the context set out above, and to achieve better funding parity with other states, QTCA supports the following as a priority for the 2026-27 State budget process:

- An additional \$250 million over 4 years to continue to acquire land to add to Queensland's protected area estate (as national parks and/or conservation parks);
- An additional \$10 million over 4 years to support the effective transition of State forests in South East Queensland into Queensland's protected area estate;
- An additional \$24 million per year to employ a further 150 park rangers to enhance management and public safety in Queensland's protected area estate (at \$160,000pa per ranger position);
- An additional \$10 million per year to support additional park management infrastructure (walking trails, visitor facilities, accessibility measures etc.) and associated maintenance costs; and
- An additional \$1 million per year to enhance community engagement in Queensland's protected area estate (in line with the "Connect" theme in Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030).

Thank you for considering our submission. Please contact me should you wish to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely



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