

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

22 November 2023

## **Protecting Queensland's natural assets and great lifestyle: Submission to Queensland's 2024-25 State Budget**

Dear Treasurer,

The twin global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss present existential threat to humanity. How we choose to invest for the coming year will have enormous repercussions for our community and the environment that supports our great lifestyles. In 2024-2025, Queenslanders ought to be supported by a budget that sets us up to reverse biodiversity loss and secure a safe climate whilst providing economic opportunities for regional Queenslanders and the broader community.

This submission focuses on the nature and biodiversity requirements that Queensland Conservation Council sees as essential for investment. Queensland's iconic natural environment plays a key role in enhancing our great lifestyle and provides the critical ecosystem services that we all depend on to work, live and play. Natural assets should be valued in a way that allows for the protection, enhancement and restoration of diverse ecosystems. The bedrock of economic stability is a thriving natural environment.

In order to protect and enhance the great lifestyle that depends on natural resources, there needs to be significant investment to ensure that:

- There are no new extinctions of flora or fauna;
- The protected area estate is expanded to 17% in line with the Protected Areas Strategy 2020-2030;
- 100 million hectares of native vegetation is appropriately managed and restored through either regulation or incentive-based programs;
- Queensland is home to a world class biodiversity and carbon market, offering projects that support the protection, restoration and connectivity of thriving landscapes.

### **Expand protected areas**

The Palaszczuk Government has in this term of government provided some historic positive investments to enable implementation of the landmark Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030. The Government's \$262 million investment for new protected areas in 2022-2023 was the largest single commitment of its kind.

It was followed by a further \$210.9m commitments over four years in 2023-2024. These funds have boosted the State's acquisition program for new protected areas, and will help enable expansion of management planning, Indigenous rangers and fire management.

To enable full implementation of the Strategy we recommend investing at least \$200 million additional investment over four years and \$70m per annum ongoing. This would enable Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to reach parity with other states' spending on parks services.

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

Natural assets are the backbone of our regions. As a geographically distributed population, commercial use of natural resources such as timber and minerals have long underpinned the prosperity of Queenslanders. In no sector is this more true than tourism.

Tourism in Queensland is a \$23 billion 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.

The Palaszczuk Government's Towards Tourism 2032 plan aims to more than double the state's tourism overnight expenditure to more than \$44 billion in overnight visitor expenditure annually by the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. To achieve this by 2032 we need to invest in national parks and nature refuges now. They are the base assets that underpin most international visitor experiences.

Investment in existing protected areas and their growth under the Protected Areas Strategy 2020 stimulates multiple streams of revenue generation to the Queensland economy. For example, a University of Queensland study<sup>1</sup> showed that for every \$1 spent on Queensland's national parks, \$6.30 in benefits is generated, including in the hospitality and tourism sectors.

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

The Palaszczuk Government's Queensland Protected Area Strategy 2020 - 2030 (the Strategy), commits to delivering a 'world leading protected area network' and effectively double the land area of national parks and private reserves from 8.26% to 17% of the state's land area. Fifteen million hectares will need to transition to protected area in order to meet this target.

The upcoming State Budget is an opportunity to continue momentum for national park expansion, and bolster the capacity of under-resourced park rangers to manage the vast conservation estate.

In Queensland our national park managers are lagging behind other states in funding and performance. In 2018 a Queensland Treasury Corporation report compared Queensland's investment in national park management against other jurisdictions.

Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales invest between \$23/ha and \$58/ha. At \$16 per hectare, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service funding is well behind other states. Raising this level of investment is critically important not only for visitor experience but for enabling rangers to maintain the natural values parks were established to protect.

If Queensland is to provide world class nature destinations by the 2032 Olympics and meet the Palaszczuk Government's target to protect 17% of terrestrial ecosystems, Queensland Parks

---

<sup>1</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.

and Wildlife Service will also need to diversify income streams and increase self-generated income.

We would support implementation of many of the key findings of the Queensland Treasury Corporation Protected Areas Financial Sustainability Strategy Report , including raising visitation fees and funding in line with other park management services which have undergone successful transitions.

### **Reset the Land Restoration Fund to build a new land carbon industry and strengthen the Vegetation Management Framework**

The recently released Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel Report put forward 10 recommendations to reduce the astronomical land clearing figures in Queensland and protect habitat for Queensland's iconic species that contribute towards Queensland's great lifestyle. The recommendations did not include any tightening of legislation that currently allows for broadscale clearing to continue. The focus of the recommendation was on incentivising landholders. With the focus on incentives, there needs to be significant investment in either scaling up existing programs such as the Land Restoration Fund or developing new stewardship based programs, both of which will require significant investment<sup>2</sup>.

Funding is required to urgently implement the recommendations of this report, in particular: to improve and expand the compliance, monitoring and enforcement capabilities of the Department of Resources to ensure that unlawful clearing of habitat is not only prosecuted but significantly reduced in the first instance. Extension officers play a key role in communicating and connecting with regional Queenslanders to ensure that they are aware of the Vegetation Management Framework obligations and are informed of the opportunities in the land carbon sector. Queensland has the world-leading Land Restoration Fund and it is critical that the fund is utilised and take up of the program is scaled up.

Australia is one of 7 megadiverse countries and Queensland is the most biodiverse state, home to over 14,000 flora species and almost three quarters of Australia's bird species. Queensland must invest in natural capital in order to meet the federal government's bold commitment of no new extinctions. With 1049 threatened species currently listed, it is critical that investment is prioritised to protect, restore and regenerate landscapes that contribute to Queensland's great lifestyle. Historically, Australia has not invested nearly enough to protect threatened species<sup>3</sup>. Research by Mappin *et al* 2021<sup>4</sup> found that Australia needed to invest close to \$2b annually over 30 years to restore 13 million hectares of degraded land whilst not impacting on agricultural production or urban environments.

### **Recommendations**

---

<sup>2</sup> EY, 2022, Regulatory and market levers to support Queensland's beef industry towards its 2030 carbon neutral target <https://wwf.org.au/blogs/decarbonisation-pathways-for-queenslands-beef-industry/>

<sup>3</sup> Wintle, BA, Cadenhead, NCR, Morgain, RA, et al. Spending to save: What will it cost to halt Australia's extinction crisis? *Conservation Letters*. 2019; 12:e12682. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12682>

<sup>4</sup> Mappin, B., Ward, A., Hughes, L., Watson, J. E. M., Cosier, P., & Possingham, H. P. (2022). The costs and benefits of restoring a continent's terrestrial ecosystems. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 59, 408–419. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.14008>

We urge the Government to prioritise investment in a thriving natural environment to ensure that our great lifestyle is upheld by implementing the below key priority investments:

- 1. Maintain the existing \$262 million allocated to the expansion of Queensland's national parks up until 2026 and increase this investment over the forward estimates with a further \$100 million.**
- 2. Increase investment in the management of existing national parks with an additional \$200 million over 4 years and \$80 per annum ongoing.**
- 3. Increase funding for the Private Protected Areas Program to enable engagement, grant funding, and program expansion into stewardship.**
- 4. Allocate appropriate funding to develop the Threatened Species Prioritisation Framework, Biodiversity Conservation Strategy Implementation Plan, Recovery Plans, Recommendations from the Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel to ensure the goal of no new extinctions is realised. This is estimated to range from approximately \$260 million to \$430 million by 2030<sup>5</sup>**
- 5. Increase funding to the Department of Environment and Science's regional planning team, to enable effective mapping and modelling of environmental values to meet the commitments made in the review of Queensland's regional plans and in the bio-regional planning MoU with the Commonwealth government. It's our assessment that this would be at least a 3x increase in staff allocation over the next three years, to 12 FTE.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit.

For further information please contact Protected Areas Campaigner Nicky Moffat on 0424 452 350 or Nature Campaigner Natalie Frost on 0411 074 846.



Dave Copeman  
Director  
Queensland Conservation Council  
director@qldconservation.org.au  
0408 841 595

---

<sup>5</sup> EY, 2022, <https://wwwf.org.au/blogs/decarbonisation-pathways-for-queenslands-beef-industry/>