



114 Boundary Street
Railway Estate, Townsville
Qld, 4810
PO Box 364, Townsville
Ph: 61 07 47716226
office@nqcc.org.au
www.nqcc.org.au

Responsible Officer

Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing

ecotourismplan@nprsr.qld.gov.au.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Call for comment on Draft Queensland Ecotourism Plan

I understand from a colleague on Magnetic Island that the Department has agreed to accept submissions on this issue until 5pm today (3 June). This submission is made in accordance with that information with apologies for its lateness.

Queensland ecotourism plan released by Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sports and Racing, has provided a three year strategic plan to develop ecotourism in the state. Under their promotions to brand Queensland as an ecotourism destination, it was mentioned that the visitors should be provided with 'hero experiences' which encourage them to connect with the natural environment.

It is important to investigate the activities planned under proposed strategy, in terms of their impacts to the National Parks of the state. Camping, bushwalking, horse riding, cycling, use of four wheel drive vehicles, trail bike riding, fishing, reef activities, wild life encounters and adventure recreation are among the activities encouraged and facilitated under the department of National Parks, Recreation, Sports and Racing. In addition, ecotourism infrastructure such as resorts and lodges are also planned to establish in and near the National Parks.

North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) agrees that National Parks are very significant assets for Queensland and Australia; but these assets are not necessarily robust or suitable facilities for economic exploitation. The cardinal principle behind the selection and preservation of specific areas relates to the conservation of natural assets, of biodiversity, species, and values; it does not relate to exploitation, or monetary concerns, and not even to the number of humans accessing the area.

This is *not* to say that NQCC wishes people to be prevented from enjoying the environment, except where such is likely to damage the natural assets. This is our concern with respect to the Draft Ecotourism Plan. NQCC also objects to the use of terminology such as 'unlocking environmental assets': these assets are not locked up, they are open on a non-discriminatory basis. Having criteria about what can and cannot be done in protected areas is a way of ensuring preservation, not of locking people out.

QPWS's own commissioned surveys show that 70% of Queenslanders visited a National Park in the last 12 months, and that there were 27 million domestic visits to terrestrial Parks over the same period. Queensland's National Parks are a major performer in the tourism sector generating over \$1 billion a year in income, and contributing more than \$400m to the gross state product.

According to the definition provided by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the principles of ecotourism are to:

- Minimize impact
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

Obviously, merely increasing the number of tourists per year will not automatically help in achieving the goals of ecotourism. Indeed, increasing the number has the potential to damage resources, especially if those increased numbers are associated with increased damaging impacts. Some of the potentially damaging impacts are discussed below.

As an aside, it is noticeable that the graphics chosen to adorn the draft plan are almost exclusively confined to images of no more than two people undertaking the most passive of activities, walking and canoeing. In reality, the plan would allow for other, far more damaging, activities.

Horse riding

Despite the common impacts occurred by both hiking and bike riding, there are specific social and biophysical impacts of horses such as those associated with manure and urine, grazing and the construction and use of tethering yards and fences (Pickering *et al.*, 2010).

Newsome *et al.*, (2002) included some other impacts such as user conflicts, introduction of weeds and accidental transport of fungal pathogens.

In the conflict between protecting flora, fauna and representative ecosystems and providing for a variety of recreational uses, the government has favoured the using of the protected ecosystems rather than protecting them. This is not acceptable.

Hiking and mountain biking

According to Pickering *et al.*, (2010) many impacts on vegetation, soils and trails are similar for hiking, mountain biking and horse riding, although there can be differences in severity. These impacts include, but not limited to damage to existing trails, soil erosion, compaction and nutrification, changes in hydrology, trail widening, exposure of roots, rocks and bedrock. Plants can be damaged due to reduction in vegetation height and biomass, changes in species composition, creation of informal trails and the spread of weeds and plant pathogens.

Mountain bike specific impacts soil and vegetation damage from skidding and the construction of unauthorised trails, jumps, bridges and other trail technical features.

Camping

Hiking and camping are the activities that proved to have most profound ecological impacts. Trampling is a major effect of camping (and hiking) which causes abrasion of vegetation, abrasion of organic soil horizons and compaction of soil. As the tree saplings are damaged, the overstorey trees of the campsites will not be replaced in the campsites. Camping has off-site impacts such as informal trailing and impacts caused by the collection of wood.

www.leopold.wilderness.net/research/fprojects/docs12/Ecotourism.pdf

Environmental risks of lodges and resorts

With the proposed expansion of tourism, there will be an increased demand for lodges and resorts. It is important to analyse the possible impacts on the environment due to the construction and operation of these facilities. Accommodation facilities inside the national parks will cause critical damaged to the ecosystem.

There are high risks of spreading weeds and pests, contamination of soil, water and air, depletion of ecosystem and ecosystem services. The cultural heritage in the national parks will be negatively affected by degradation of heritage items and heritage sites.

These impacts will take a long time to recover and there should be a stronger plan and long term vision for expanding tourist activities.

There is no point educating tourists to protect the environment while simultaneously encouraging them to undertake activities that impose negative impacts on the environment.

The report states that the impacts will be minimised. But, when a large number of tourists cause 'minimum' impacts, there can be significant cumulative effects on these protected ecosystems. This issue needs to be fully addressed.

Shooting in protected area

A deal struck between the O'Farrell Government and the Shooters and Fishers party to allow amateur and recreational hunting in NSW National Parks has raised the public concern. This poses a threat to the bush walkers in the parks and can affect the number of tourists visiting the park. This has been introduced under the Game and Feral Animal control Act to reduce the number of feral animals by allowing shooting. In fact, recreational shooters have been shown to limit shooting in order to maintain a population for their sporting activities. There is also no guarantee that targeted animals are treated humanely.

Yours faithfully



31 May 2013