

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **‘Hands off Hinchinbrook’ stall tonight at Townsville’s Strand Night Markets**

A growing number of community members and organisations including North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) have come together to hold a stall in Townsville tonight, 5.30pm-9.00pm to raise awareness about the Queensland Government’s plan to allow private tourism leases within National Parks.

The Queensland Government initiated an Expressions of Interest (EOI) process in October inviting private companies to submit proposals for privately run “ecotourism” developments on long-term private leases within National Parks, specifically the Thorsborne Trail (Hinchinbrook Island NP); Cooloola Great Walk (Great Sandy NP); and Whitsunday Island Trail (Whitsunday Islands NP).

“The primary objective of tourism companies is profits while the primary objective of National Parks is the protection of biodiversity conservation. This is a mismatch that will result in the degradation of our National Parks,” said Tarquin Moon, NQCC Campaigns Manager.

“There is a lack of understanding about the importance of National Parks among our decision-makers but the community is clear and they see right through the issue that this is about the privatization of a public assets,” she said.

“Today at our stall we are gathering signatures for the Parliamentary Petition that has already collected 2000 signatures within a short couple of weeks. That is a rapid response from the community that sends the clear message that National Parks must remain to be owned by the state, funded by the state and managed by the state!”

“Hinchinbrook Island National Parks provides visitors with a most extraordinary wilderness experience because the primary purpose is for the conservation of the Island’s natural values with visitation access being secondary. Why is the Government seeking to become a broker for private companies and meanwhile forgetting their duty to protect public interests?”

Queensland Government’s Department of Innovation, Tourism Industry Development and the Commonwealth Games department’s ‘Expressions of Interest’ process (EOI) deadline passed at the end of last month offering private leases of up to 60 years within National Parks. Queensland’s National Parks and World Heritage sites represent efforts to quarantine fragile ecosystems from human development. These areas are already under significant pressure and scientists recognise that Queensland has the lowest proportion of land in protected areas (around 8%) of any state or territory in Australia, well short of the international target of 17 %. Queensland’s National Parks represent 5.6% which makes up part of the 8% of Queensland’s protected area estate.

The tender process is calling for the development of accommodation pods (self-contained units), guided tours and “hardening” of the track within Hinchinbrook Island, initiated by the Department of Innovation, Tourism Industry Development and the Commonwealth Games.

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