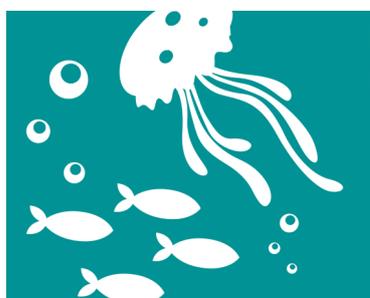


‘Protecting Queensland’s Future should come naturally’

Conservation Priorities for Queensland 2017



INTRODUCTION

QUEENSLAND IS AN AMAZING PLACE FOR NATURE:

WE HAVE A WIDE VARIETY OF REGIONAL ECOSYSTEMS, AND VERY SPECIAL NATURAL AREAS SUCH AS CAPE YORK PENINSULA, CHANNEL COUNTRY, THE GREAT BARRIER REEF AND SAND ISLANDS, AND CORAL CAYS, PRISTINE RIVERS, RAINFORESTS, THE BRIGALOW BELT AND VAST NORTHERN SAVANNAH WOODLANDS. WE HAVE SPECTACULAR NATIONAL PARKS, AND MARINE AREAS, SENSATIONAL BEACHES, AND OUTBACK LANDSCAPES. WE HAVE LOTS OF SPECIES AND ARE A RELATIVE BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT.

There's much to love and look after in natural Queensland, but from a conservation perspective our recent track record of caring and protecting Queensland is pretty patchy. Land clearing is the largest single threat to our biodiversity including threatened species. Land clearing is once again out of control, and our laws need to be much stronger. Key species including Queensland's fauna emblem the Koala are under threat. In SE Qld, we risk losing the koala as a wild species in the next 10 years.

The Great Barrier Reef has been hit hard by climate change warming the oceans – we have had two coral bleaching episodes in as many years. Water quality needs improving, but we also need to do much more as our part in responding to climate change. Our pristine, free flowing rivers are no longer protected from destructive

development, and our coastal and urban fringe areas are under constant threat of new development destroying or impacting on natural ecosystems and habitats.

Queensland's natural environment is very special and needs to be considered a state policy priority by all the state's political parties.

This document lays out the conservation priorities for Queensland as we approach the next state election, as seen by the Queensland Conservation Council, the peak body for conservation groups in the state.

01

LAND CLEARING PRIORITIES



Land Clearing is out of control again in Queensland

SINCE LAWS, POLICIES AND ENFORCEMENT PROCESSES WERE SUBSTANTIALLY WEAKENED IN 2012 AND 2013, QUEENSLAND'S LAND CLEARING RATES HAVE RISEN DRAMATICALLY TO LEVELS NOT SEEN FOR MORE THAN A DECADE. CLEARING HAS A MAJOR IMPACT ON NATIVE WILDLIFE AND THREATENED SPECIES WHICH DEPEND ON WOODLANDS FOR HABITAT. CLEARING IS ALSO BAD FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, WATERWAYS, AND THE CLIMATE. STATE LAND CLEARING LEGISLATION, PLANNING LEGISLATION, ENFORCEMENT POLICIES AND MONITORING PROCESSES ALL NEED TO BE STRENGTHENED AND USED TO ACHIEVE A NEW LEVEL OF PROTECTION FROM CLEARING THREATS.

There are 7 Key Priorities that work more directly as the essential asks in an immediate state context:

1. Permanently protect all remnant/old-growth native woodlands and forests – legislation should ensure all remnant native woodlands and forests are protected across all sectors (including agriculture, urban development and mining), including by removing clearing exemptions under the Planning Act 2016.
2. Permanently protect all high conservation value non-remnant native woodlands and forests – legislation should ensure all high conservation value non-remnant native woodlands and forests are protected across all sectors. "High conservation value" should include but not be limited to endangered vegetation species and communities, vegetation in Reef catchments, riparian areas, threatened species habitat (actual and potential), and areas where landscape integrity is at risk (see www.hcvnetwork.org). This protection should not be restricted by age of vegetation.
3. Remove "Self-Assessable Codes" for land clearing – All purpose-based self-assessable codes undermine land clearing controls, and should be removed and replaced with permits for clearing consistent with Points 1 and 2 above. Minor clearing should only be permitted for low ecological impact, small-scale maintenance activities such as firebreaks, fences and critical infrastructure – but this should still require a permit to ensure tight enforcement.
4. Ensure strong monitoring and resourcing for the enforcement of land clearing laws – Monitoring and enforcement is critical to the effectiveness of the updated laws, and it is essential that staffing and resourcing is adequate to implement the laws.
5. Improve mapping for vegetation and halt exemptions via property maps – Property Maps of Assessable Vegetation are important to delineate exactly where protected vegetation exists on a landholders' property. However the mapping is currently limited with respect to essential habitat and other high conservation value areas. The mapping of protected vegetation must be made more robust and scientifically credible, with updates as new science and data is made available. These maps should not confer any permanent right to clear native vegetation marked as exempt (Category X) – as current legislation does.
6. Establish a substantial ecological carbon fund and support restoration opportunities – Allocate at least \$300 million over a three-year period to fund ecological carbon projects that meet the dual objectives of sequestering carbon and restoring biodiversity and landscape health, while providing a substantial economic boost to regional Queensland. This includes priority investment in Reef catchments and threatened species habitat where there is dual carbon benefit. Restoration opportunities for Queensland landholders should also be supported.
7. Commit to prompt, transparent and regular (minimum annual) release of clearing data and reporting on impacts – Queensland's State Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) program is world-leading and should continue to be fully resourced and supported. The annual SLATS spatial data should be decoupled from the SLATS report and released as soon as it is scientifically validated. Follow up reporting of carbon stocks and changes and biodiversity impacts of clearing detected are necessary to further enable government and the community to better monitor the impacts of land carbon initiatives and their efficacy.

02

RENEWABLE ENERGY PRIORITIES



Renewable energy is one critical pathway to cutting CARBON EMISSIONS

QUEENSLAND HAS BEEN A LEADER IN TAKE UP OF HOUSEHOLD LEVEL ROOFTOP SOLAR, BUT UNTIL RECENTLY IT HAS NOT BEEN A STATE WHERE LARGE SCALE RENEWABLES HAS TAKEN OFF. THIS SITUATION IS RAPIDLY CHANGING, WITH SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENT COMING INTO LARGE SCALE RENEWABLES. THE RENEWABLES CLEAN ENERGY REVOLUTION IS HAPPENING, BUT IT NEEDS STEERING AND SUPPORT TO ENSURE ACCELERATED DELIVERY OF CLEAN ENERGY THAT IS PROVIDED IN SOCIALLY-EQUITABLE WAYS.

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

1. Support the '50% renewable energy by 2030' target and support legislation putting it into law to send a strong signal to industry and the community that government is very serious about achieving the target, and that investment can be made with that in mind. Legislation will also provide the mechanics for progressive milestones, regular performance assessment, progress reporting to Parliament and the public, and is also harder for future governments to overturn.
2. For the pre-2020 period, ensure a rapid take up of renewables, including use of reverse auction to secure 1,500–2,000+ MW of renewable energy by 2020. The current aim of 400MW should be easily exceeded, given falling price of renewable energy, market interest and competition, and further capacity to store generated renewable energy.
3. Strong emphasis on energy efficiency and demand reduction through smart technologies, and renewed focus on better household/commercial/industrial energy consumption and management. This will ensure that current renewable energy plans and targets (based on ongoing growth in total energy generation and demand) are accelerated and surpassed.
4. Further government support for additional rapid update of largescale renewables projects, and a more explicit commitment to displacing coal and gas based power production.
5. Further government support for expansion of household rooftop solar generation and storage (including consideration of a supplementary Feed in Tariff for low income households who can install).
6. Establish priority projects (research into options, testing of technologies, implementation plans) to secure specific private rental housing renewable energy initiatives to enable private renters (one third of Queenslanders!) to directly benefit from renewable energy generation and to create incentives for landlords and dwelling owners to install systems (panels, storage etc).
7. Establish other business/commercial and community renewables projects (micro grids, neighbourhood networks, local storage and distribution hubs) to supplement grid-based generation and distribution.
8. Other policy mechanisms (including price regulations) and support packages for ensuring low income households are not disadvantaged in the shift to renewable energy.
9. Commit to no new coal/gas energy development.
10. More formal planning for the managed transition from coal/gas/oil fuel energy generation, including retirement of existing fossil fuel-based power stations to full renewable energy in Queensland.

03

CLIMATE CHANGE PRIORITIES



Climate Change is the greatest long-term existential threat

TO OUR WAY OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT. IT'S MORE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS ARE STARTING TO BE WITNESSED IN TERMS OF SHIFTS IN WEATHER PATTERNS AND THEIR IMPACTS, AND INCIDENTS SUCH AS CORAL BLEACHING ON THE GREAT BARRIER REEF FROM ELEVATED OCEAN TEMPERATURES AND ACIDIFICATION. WHILE ADAPTATION STRATEGY WORK IS ALREADY UNDERWAY IN QUEENSLAND, THE RELEASE OF THE QUEENSLAND CLIMATE CHANGE TRANSITION STRATEGY IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN STATE LEVEL ACTION ON GLOBAL WARMING. BUT IT NEEDS TO BE ENSHRINED IN LAW AND PROVIDED POLICY AND POLITICAL SUPPORT.

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

1. Implement the commitments in the Queensland Climate Change Transitions Strategy.

Legislate (-a Queensland Climate Change Action and Responsibility Act-) to back-in the commitments in the Climate Transitions Strategy. Legislation will send a strong signal to industry and the community that government is very serious about achieving the targets, and that government, industry, and community action can be undertaken with that in mind. Legislation will also provide the mechanics for progressive milestones, regular performance assessment, progress reporting to Parliament and the public.

Support the most comprehensive approach possible to rapid state action on climate change mitigation via explicit commitments to there being no new fossil fuel extraction projects in Queensland, and ensuring existing extraction projects are phased out as quickly as possible.

As part of the commitment to achieve whole-of-state carbon-neutrality (zero net emissions) by 2050, make an explicit commitment that the Queensland government's own carbon footprint (public sector, including agencies, services and GOCs) will achieve carbon-neutrality (zero net emissions) by 2030. Commit \$100 million + over forward estimates to support the achievement of this.

Strong emphasis on energy efficiency and demand reduction through smart technologies, and renewed focus on better household/commercial/ industrial energy consumption and management, to ensure that current carbon emissions reduction targets (based on ongoing growth in total energy generation and demand) are accelerated and surpassed.

2. Support for carbon sequestration in native woodlands (see land clearing priorities).
3. Ensure Queensland takes responsibility for carbon emissions outside of the state but using Queensland-originating fossil fuels, and commit to ceasing the exporting of coal and gas.
4. Appoint representatives of Queensland Conservation Council and the Queensland Council of Social Service onto the Queensland Climate Advisory Council, to ensure conservation and community interests are included in advice provided.

04

Economic and Social Transitions

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

QUEENSLAND'S CURRENT DEPENDENCY ON FOSSIL FUELS MINING ROYALTIES FOR PART OF ITS INCOME IS NOT HEALTHY IN LONG TERM FINANCIAL OR HUMAN WELFARE TERMS. BOOMBUST SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY, SUCH AS MINING, CREATE INSTABILITY AND SIGNIFICANT VOLATILITY IN REVENUE RAISING AND PLANNING. QUEENSLAND NEEDS TO WEAN ITS ECONOMY OFF RELIANCE ON FOSSIL FUELS MINING AND EXPORT, AND SHIFT TO MORE SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES, AND TRANSITION OUR ENERGY TO RENEWABLES AND AWAY FROM COAL AND GAS.



1. Commit to developing a detailed plan for economic and social transitions to support move away from fossil fuel-dependent economy and carbon-intensive power generation based jobs to new employment opportunities from carbon-neutral industries and emergent technologies.
2. Proposed process would be development of an Economic Transitions White Paper to lay out the issues, the opportunities and the options for the transition of the economy and communities to low/no carbon emissions scenarios.
3. Commit to renewable energy solutions when existing coal/gas fired power stations and other facilities are decommissioned or discontinued.
4. Allocate \$50 million + to establish transitions pilot projects in places such as Gladstone to facilitate transition of the local economy (including local energy production and use).
5. Develop and resource other research and development programs aimed at creating an ecologically-sustainable economy, including carbon neutral employment opportunities for the future.

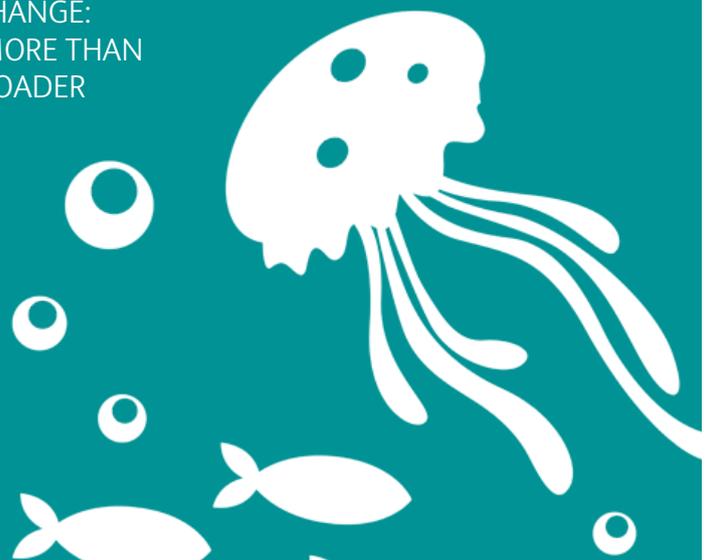
Protection of the Great Barrier Reef

05

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF IS OUR GREATEST SINGLE NATURAL TREASURE, AND IS A GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL AND TOURISM ICON. IT CURRENTLY GENERATES SOME \$6 BILLION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, AND EMPLOYS 60,000 PEOPLE. THE REEF IS ALSO OUR MOST IMMEDIATE LITMUS TEST FOR RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE: SUCCESSIVE YEARS OF CORAL BLEACHING HAVE KILLED MORE THAN HALF EXISTING REEFS, AND THIS WILL CASCADE INTO BROADER ECOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS.

PRIORITIES

1. Ensure that the best possible array of interventions aimed at protecting the Great Barrier Reef, including strong climate change measures on domestic and international greenhouse gas emissions, water quality measures, land clearing laws, ports management and other actions.
2. Revise and strengthen the Reef 2050 Plan, particularly in the area of climate change action.



06

Adani and NAIF

THE PROPOSED ADANI CARMICHAEL MINE IS A HIGH-RISK VENTURE FOR QUEENSLAND, WHICH COULD COST THE STATE SUBSTANTIALLY IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC TERMS. SUPPORT FOR THIS PROJECT OR ANY OTHER NEW COAL MINE IS INCONSISTENT WITH STRONG ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE.



PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

1. Ensure no tax payer dollars are spent on royalties deals or any other forms of direct or implicit subsidies through government agencies on the proposed Adani Carmichael mine.
2. To the maximum extent that it can lawfully and Constitutionally, the State of Queensland should formally veto or otherwise withhold support for any NAIF loan to the Adani rail line development.
3. Withdraw policy and practical support for the proposed Adani Carmichael mine and examine all other opportunities to minimise practical or promotional assistance to the project.

Protected Areas

07

QUEENSLAND CONTINUES TO LAG BEHIND OTHER STATES IN TERMS OF PROPORTION OF LAND AND MARINE AREAS IN NATIONAL PARK AND OTHER FORMAL PROTECTED AREA STATUS.

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

1. Increase the national park estate by an additional 1 million hectares over the next term of government, and allocate the necessary funds in related budgets to enable this (estimate \$50 million but real cost unknown at this time).
2. Improve baseline funding for National Park management by at least \$20 million pa over the forward estimates.
3. Maintain current marine park protections that recognise the value of marine national parks.
4. There is also a large volume (estimated to be hundreds of thousands of hectares) of publicly-owned Unallocated State Land (USL) in Queensland. These lands are often adjoining existing National Parks and other tenures,

they have conservation values that meet the requirement for Protected Area status, and should be better secured against inconsistent development into the future. They could also enable the Government to create areas with tenure that support eco-tourism opportunities whilst maintaining the integrity of the PA estate. These areas should be assessed and where practical following relevant Native Title and tenure resolution processes, added to the Protected Area Estate to better protect our outstanding cultural and biodiversity assets (and at zero land acquisition cost to the budget).



08

Cape York Peninsula

CAPE YORK PENINSULA REMAINS ONE OF THE FEW AREAS OF AUSTRALIA THAT HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN RECOGNISED AS WORTHY AND CAPABLE OF BEING PLACED ON THE WORLD HERITAGE REGISTER, FOR BOTH NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES. SUBSTANTIAL WORK HAS BEEN DONE ON THE NECESSARY RESEARCH AND INDIGENOUS AND OTHER COMMUNITY CONSULTATION, BUT THOSE PROCESSES HAVE NOT BEEN CONCLUDED. IN THE MEANTIME, IMPORTANT WORK ON TENURE RESOLUTION AND LAND RETURN TO TRADITIONAL OWNERS HAS CONTINUED TO DELIVER SUBSTANTIAL AND HISTORY-FIXING OUTCOMES FOR LAND JUSTICE AND NATURE PROTECTION.

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

1. Support ongoing tenure resolution and land return outcomes on Cape York, based around land uses consistent with maintaining the long-term biodiversity and resilience of Cape York lands as ecologically-functional landscapes.
2. Allocate \$20 million over 5 years for further land acquisitions, and up to \$10 million over 5 years for additional rangers and ensure current CYPAL areas are adequately supported for land and rivers management.
3. Continue to progress a World Heritage nomination of areas of Cape York with the consent of Traditional Owners, and resource on-country based consultation and planning models to enable active and informed participation.



Biodiversity Protection

09

QUEENSLAND'S BIODIVERSITY CONTINUES TO BE UNDER SIGNIFICANT PRESSURE, WITH MANY SPECIES ENDANGERED AND AT RISK OF EXTINCTION AND THREATENING PROCESSES SUCH AS LAND CLEARING DESTROYING THE HABITAT OF MANY OF THESE SPECIES.

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL

1. Commit to a comprehensive suite of legislative and regulatory protections for Queensland's nature, including the strengthening and full implementation of the previous Queensland Biodiversity Strategy and implement it. This should include the legal capacity for conservation initiatives to override mining and damaging development.
2. Restore the SEQ Regional Forestry Agreement and other conservation programs to progress the transition of high conservation value State Forests into protected estate.



10

Queensland Environmental protection legislation and Environment Department



NOT WITHSTANDING SOME PROGRESSIVE IMPROVEMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS IN QUEENSLAND, STATE ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS REMAIN SUBSTANTIALLY WEAKER THAN PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND MINING LEGISLATION AND IS INCAPABLE OF DELIVERING STRONG CAPACITY TO PUT THE ENVIRONMENT FIRST WHERE NECESSARY. QUEENSLAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS NEED TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY STRENGTHENED TO PROPERLY PROTECT WHAT WE VALUE AND TREASURE, AND WE NEED A STRONG ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR THEM.

PRIORITIES

1. Commit to substantially strengthen Queensland's environmental protections via legislation, policy and institutions.
2. Enshrine the Precautionary Principle and other Principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development in all State legislation and policies.
3. Fully implement the legislated phasing-out of single use plastic bags, and establish the container deposit scheme in Queensland.
4. Move towards a Zero Waste Queensland by re-instating a levy on waste and licensing identified secondary resource collections.
5. Commit to reviewing and fundamentally overhauling Queensland biodiversity and other environmental offset legislation and policies, to ensure offsets: are not utilised to allow development that should be refused because of environmental impact; are a reserve option not a first option for allowing environmental damage; and guarantee genuine net biodiversity benefits from any offsets.
6. Restructure the Queensland environmental portfolio department in Queensland as follows:

I. A restructured environmental portfolio department should be created headed by a Cabinet-level Minister. Within its portfolio it should have a wide sweep of environmental and related responsibilities including environmental protection; land clearing; water allocation and management; national parks wildlife management and QPWS functions; forestry and fisheries; and climate change, to ensure effective policy coordination at Ministerial and Cabinet levels.

II. All of the relevant science and other relevant expertise within the public service to support these functions should also reside within the agency, not limited to but including the Queensland Herbarium, remote sensing, monitoring, research and development and innovation. All compliance functions from within the current departments of DEHP, DAFF, DNPSR and DNRM should be hosted by the new department.

III. Relevant legislation (and related regulations) administered by the Environment Department should not be limited to but include:

- Environmental Protection Act 1994;
- Nature Conservation Act 1992;
- Vegetation Management Act 1999;
- Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995;
- Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007;
- Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993;
- Marine Parks Act 2004;
- Water Act 2000 (to be revised and replaced);
- Land Act 1995;
- Fisheries Act 1994;
- Environmental Offsets Act 2014;
- Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993;
- National Environment Protection Council (Queensland) Act 1994;
- North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability Act 2011;
- Part 4 Environmental Coordination of the State Development and Public Works
- Organisation Act 1971 (Qld); and
- Future pristine rivers protection legislation.
- Future climate change and renewable energy legislation.

IV. The restructured department should incorporate a wide sweep of environmental assessment and protection functions and associated matters, with strong oversight and decision-making powers. This should include the SLATS process, and VMA enforcement.

11

Rivers protection and water legislation

QUEENSLAND HAS SOME OF THE PLANET'S LAST REMAINING FREE-FLOWING, 'PRISTINE' RIVERS BUT THESE ARE NOT ADEQUATELY PROTECTED FROM MINING AND OTHER DESTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT THREATS.

PRIORITIES AT THE STATE LEVEL



1. Introduce new statutory protections for Queensland's pristine rivers with the necessary head of power to override the mineral and oil/gas mining legislation in key ecologically-sensitive areas. This should be prioritised once community consultation and Indigenous community engagement has been concluded.
2. Ahead of such consultation and legislation, establish moratoria on destructive development (mineral and other resource extraction, intensive / irrigated agriculture, and other forms) in river areas potentially prioritised for protection. A high priority in the regard is the channel country area,

- including the water courses and flood plains of the Thompson River / Cooper Creek, as well as the Georgina and Diamantina Rivers.
3. Build in the requirement for community-based nominations to trigger protected rivers processes.
4. Commit to a wholesale review and rewrite of the Water Act to ensure that the Precautionary Principle and other components of Ecologically Sustainable Development are enshrined in all parts of the legislation, and deliver environmentally-focused management and conservation of the state's limited freshwater reserves.

Funding for QCC and Regional conservation

12

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION ARE KEY COMPONENTS OF GOOD PROGRESSIVE PUBLIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT. QUEENSLAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL AND ITS REGIONAL MEMBERS PROVIDE IMPORTANT ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOVERNMENT ON AWARENESS OF ISSUES, OPTIONS FOR SOLUTIONS, AND POLICY AND LEGISLATION DEVELOPMENT. TO DO THIS WORK PROPERLY AND APPROPRIATELY, THE CONSERVATION SECTOR NEEDS ONGOING SUPPORT.

PRIORITIES

1. Increase the base funding of QCC to \$300,000 pa for 5 years, to allow it to properly undertake environmentally-focused research, policy development, community consultation and engagement processes around the state. Also make special project funds available on application for specific policy and consultation work over 5 years.
2. Allocate additional funds for QCC to hold an annual statewide Queensland conservation conference, to bring together NGOs, government representatives, researchers, land managers, industry and community delegates to develop common plans, programs and future conservation agendas.
3. Increase current funding for Regional Conservation Councils, and in consultation with QCC, examine options for expanding the number and geographic spread of RCCs.

