

Dear Panel,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Townsville Labor Environment Action Network (LEAN). Townsville LEAN is a group of local Australian Labor Party Members with an interest in environmental policy and management.

Townsville LEAN welcomes your discussion paper on the Tourism Recovery Plan. Tourism is a vital industry in the Queensland economy which, with appropriate policies and planning, can offer opportunities for more sustainable state development and employment.

We particularly welcome the paper's suggestions for the expansion of Queensland's Indigenous Tourism and innovations in the area of regenerative tourism (both page 13). LEAN Townsville believes that the latter may be particularly relevant given that 2021 is the start of the United Nations Decade for Ecological Restoration (see link - <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org>)

We were, however, concerned by some of the other emphasises on page 13 of your discussion paper. These included repositioning Queensland as an adventure tourism hub and your comments on the "successful" integration of tourism in National Parks in other states; your suggestion for simpler project facilitation and regulatory reform to allow tourism businesses to do things differently.

Our concern grows from our conviction that the fundamental purpose of Queensland's National Parks and Protected Area system is to help conserve the State's unique biodiversity and maintain the crucial environmental services these natural environments provide to our state. We also see an appropriately resourced and appropriately managed world class National Parks and Protected Areas system as a key element of potential comparative advantage for Queensland as both a national and international tourism destination. This is particularly true in the tropical areas of the state as we are blessed by being one of the few high-income countries with a substantial proportion of our land and seascapes occurring in the tropical latitudes.

LEAN Townsville is not opposed to adventure tourism per se. However, we believe state officials and industry planners should approach the development of these facilities from a recreation systems, landscape perspective and ensure that such facilities are located in areas outside National Parks. We also note that the developments in Tasmania have not been universally welcomed and that they have even contributed to questions being raised at the international level about compliance with the 2016 management plans for the World Heritage Area in Tasmania. We also enclose a 2013 opinion piece published in the Sydney Morning Herald by a group of eminent Australian scientists and conservationists including Prof Barry Jones, a former Science Minister in the Hawke Labor Government and a former Federal President of the Australia Labor Party. This opinion piece was written when similar encouragement of private tourism facilities in National Parks was proposed by the Napthine Government in Victoria.

Please find the following responses to the specific consultation questions listed on page 15 of your discussion document.

What could be done at the local area to increase the benefits of tourism?

Townsville is located close to both the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Areas and has the globally significant wetlands of the Bowling Green Bay RAMSAR site on the city's southern door stop. The city would benefit from a permanent Indigenous Rangers Group to bring public lands including our National Parks and Conservation Reserves under traditional fire management and improved weed management regimes. With appropriate investment in interpretation facilities, our world class wetland areas at Bowling Green Bay and the Town Common Conservation Park could become major foci for both education and nature-based tourism. With the James Cook University, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Great Barrier Reef Management Authority and other bodies headquartered or present in Townsville, Townsville is a logical focus for educational tourism focused on the conservation, management and restoration of tropical ecosystems.

Local benefits would be enhanced by the development of opportunities for indigenous people and local social and environmental management entrepreneurs in areas such as wildlife interpretation and experience-based programs in ecosystem restoration and management.

How do you want Queensland tourism to be defined in the 2020's?

We would like to see a high quality, high value-added tourism industry that is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

How do we make the best use of our tourism assets? In your own words what is missing?

Best use of tourism assets would be made by a system of comprehensive tourism planning in key regions. Such planning should reduce conflict over particular proposals, by pre-identifying areas where different types of nature-based, cultural, educational and facility-based activities can take place. Such an approach would help to ensure that each region is served by a diverse range of recreation and tourism opportunities without compromising the management integrity of National Parks or other key conservation sites.

What practical measures can and should be taken to ensure tourism helps regenerate natural environments, and bring greater awareness as well as economic benefits?

In undertaking the regional planning outlined in response to the last question, planners should liaise with traditional owners, staff from the Department of Environment and Science, local NRM Groups and the voluntary conservation sector to identify restoration priorities in each region. A range of activities from voluntary sponsorship packages to supervised field conservation/restoration activities could then be built for each region.

Industry bodies might wish to consider how they could internalise rehabilitation and impact mitigation in their charging practices to enhance the pool of sustainable funding that could support such activities.

Do you see any additional trends or emerging changes that we must consider?

Beyond the immediate challenges of the current pandemic, one of the greatest challenges will be developing a sustainable tourism industry in a rapidly decarbonising world. Queensland tourism should develop a strategy that will allow all state tourist enterprises to offer net-zero carbon emission packages, no later than 2030 with pilot demonstration areas initiated by 2022. Offshore island attractions such as Yunbenun-Magnetic Island would be strong candidates as pilot demonstration areas.

What are your ideas for the future of Queensland's tourism industry?

We hope the future of tourism in Queensland will see the sector offer a diverse range of environmental, cultural and recreational opportunities underpinned by excellence in conservation and natural resource management and well designed and managed social and physical infrastructure.

What do you see as the obstacles to progress?

We believe that one of the more significant obstacles to development of an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable tourist sector in Queensland is the prevalence of a narrow project-based planning focus as against a broader systems approach to the sector. In some areas, the underfunded National Park Service is unable to maintain the natural environment at the standard required to attract visitors. Environmental restoration and maintenance is essential for a high quality national park system.

Yours sincerely

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The insidious threat to our natural heritage

Moves by the Napthine government towards the privatisation and commercialisation of national parks are a betrayal of public trust, writes a group of eminent Australians.

By Eminent Australians

August 19, 2013 – 3.00am

Australian national parks are very special places. They contain the outstanding examples of our natural and cultural heritage remaining after the major settlement and development phases of our past.

Australia's first national park, Royal National Park south of Sydney, established in 1878, was the second in the world (the first being Yellowstone in the United States). Our national parks are recognised internationally by world authorities not only because of their diversity and quality of the natural systems they protect, but also because of the way they have been managed over the past 135 years.

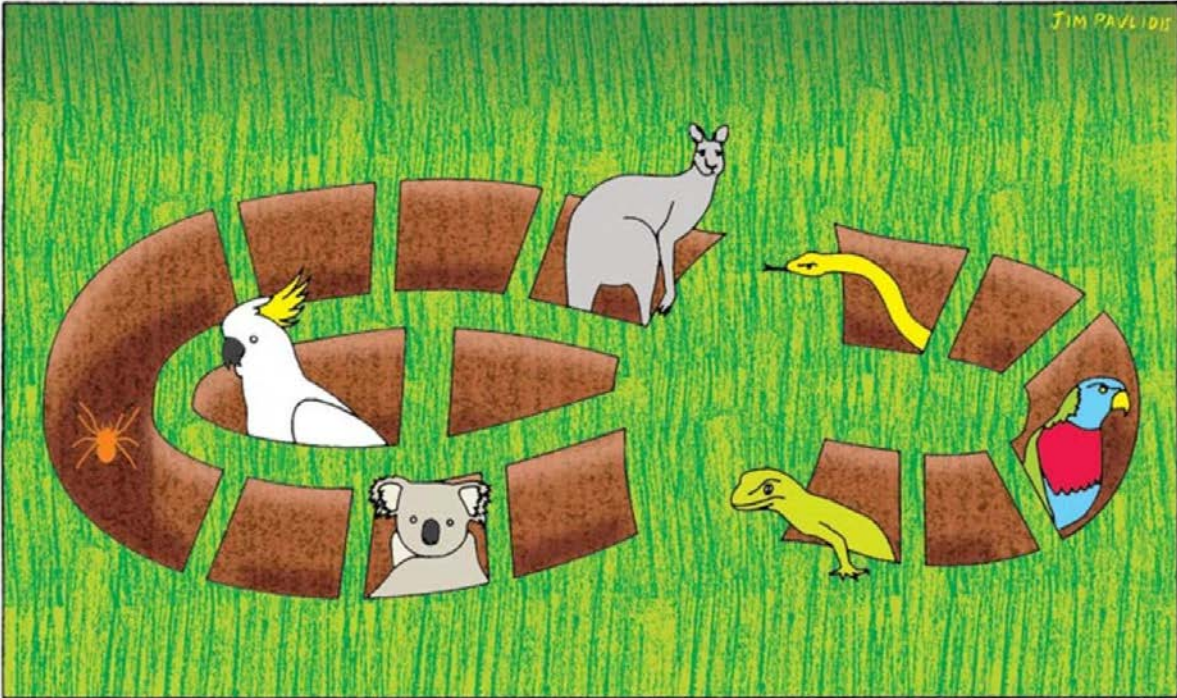


Illustration: Jim Pavlidis.

Until now our national parks have been securely protected under state legislation, having been created after thorough scientific assessment and extensive comparative studies. Why then is it now proposed to introduce uses into our parks that are inimical to the very reason for establishing them? National parks have *not* been set aside for grazing by cattle, logging, prospecting, hunting or commercial development. These activities, to be permitted in national parks in several states, are incompatible with the fundamental reasons for creating them - protecting our natural and cultural heritage. Such uses compromise and diminish the reasons for visiting national parks - to enjoy the beauty of natural landscapes and to relax in natural settings removed from the complexities and stresses of modern living.

The most insidious of these intrusive uses are the

proposals of the Victorian government to lease areas within our national parks for up to 99 years to encourage commercial development by private corporations.

In reality, a 99-year lease transfers ownership of a public asset, something we all own and can share, to a private benefit enjoyed by a privileged few. Once the private sector develops resorts and associated infrastructure, the return of this land to the public will never occur. Thus, with long-term leasing provisions embedded in legislation as is now occurring through the National Parks Amendment (Leasing Powers and Other Matters) Bill, most land in our national parks is vulnerable, because leased areas can be readily expanded.

Indeed, the bill now before State Parliament makes clear that up to two-thirds of the land in our national parks could be placed under long-term leases. Of further concern is the provision that allows the decision to lease land in our national parks for 99 years to be made by the responsible minister. A 99-year lease would essentially remove land from the park and transfer tenure and management to the private sector. Currently, such an action can only occur by a decision of the Parliament to pass an amendment to the National Parks Act.

New resort development within national parks is now recognised internationally as undesirable and in conflict with the very things that national parks are established to protect.

Resort developments established in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Canada and the US by the railroad barons are today substantially constrained with only modernising and replacement now occurring.

Closer to home, the new visitor development and camping ground at Cradle Mountain National Park in Tasmania has been built outside the park, as is the Cradle Mountain Lodge. Recently, the calamitous Seal Rocks development at Phillip Island cost taxpayers \$55 million in compensation when the private development foundered. There was also the proposal, to the dismay of many, to develop a resort on the sand dunes of our much-loved national park at Wilsons Promontory. Such a possibility becomes increasingly probable with statutory provisions in the National Parks Act permitting leases of 99 years. We cannot understand why the government would wish to pursue high-risk policies that threaten the security of our national parks when low-risk, attractive development could be encouraged in outstanding locations just outside our national parks.

Bill Borthwick, the Liberal MP who was Victoria's first minister for conservation, held grave fears about commercialising our national parks. In 1992 he said: "The Americans all know that they made that dreadful mistake years and years ago of allowing concessionaires in and taking over. I implore, whether it be Liberal or Labor government in the future, don't fall for the fast-buck concessionaires within national parks." His deeply felt concerns then are just as real today.

Government policy that starts the journey of incremental privatisation and commercialisation of national parks would be a betrayal of public trust.

Professor Graham Brown, AM
Professor Michael Buxton

Professor Peter Doherty, AC
Mrs Alicia Fogarty
Justice John Fogarty, AM
The Hon. David Harper, AM, QC
Professor Barry Jones, AO
John Landy, AC, CVO, MBE
Dr Margaret Leggatt, AM
Dr Mick Lumb, OAM
Duncan Malcolm, AM, JP
Professor Rob Moodie
Sir Gus Nossal, AC, CBE
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Professor Margot Prior, AO
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Don Saunders, PSM
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Professor Spencer Zifcak