SUMMARY OF PROTECTED AREA GROWTH & INVESTMENT

Delivery of Queensland's Protected Area Strategy one year on

November 2021

Version 1.1

Queensland Conservation

Wilderness Society
Life. Support.

National Parks Association of Queensland Inc.
connect and protect

THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY **3**

THE STRATEGY'S OBJECTIVES **5**

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES **6**

GROWTH 6

National and Conservation Parks 8

Private Protected Areas 9

CARE 10

CONNECTION 12

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS **13**

ACQUISITION FUNDING 13

JOINT MANAGEMENT 14

MANAGEMENT FUNDING 15

ATTACHMENT 1 ..... **17**

Cover: an unprotected stretch of the Alice River, southern Cape York Peninsula. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

National Parks For Life

SUMMARY

In October 2020, the Palaszczuk Government released the long-awaited *Queensland Protected Area Strategy 2020 - 2030* (the Strategy) as part of its commitment to deliver a 'world leading protected area network' across 17 per cent of the state.

The release of the Strategy came with a "down payment" of $60 million, spread over four years for new national parks and nature refuges and expanding the network of First Nations rangers

A breakdown of the initial funding is presented below.

FUNDING AREA & YEAR	2020-21 ($M)	2021-22 ($M)	2022-23 ($M)	2023-24 ($M)
Strategic Acquisitions	7.69	5.02	5.94	9.35
Private Protected Areas	1.24	2.48	2.32	1.96
Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program			7.50	11.81
Annual Sub-totals	8.93	12.19	15.76	23.12
Four-year Total				**$60 million**

Source: Question on Notice No. 1146, Wednesday 2 December 2020.

The strategy is the primary mechanism to deliver the Queensland government's commitment to protect 17% of the state. We're currently at 8.26%, the lowest of all states and territories in Australia.

Over the past 12 months the Queensland Government has protected 15,699 hectares, well below the average annual area of 207,728 hectares since the Palaszczuk Government was elected.

While each of these new protected areas is welcome, if expansion remains at this rate of growth, it will take more than 1,000 years to reach 17 per cent.

"if expansion remains at this rate of growth, it will take more than 1,000 years to reach 17%"

Unprotected landscapes are still threatened throughout Queensland. This site in north Queensland is being cleared for energy infrastructure despite being habitat for threatened species. Photo: Steven Nowakowski

THE STRATEGY'S OBJECTIVES

The *Queensland Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030* aims to:

- *improve conservation of biodiversity, including increased protection for threatened species, on protected areas through improved management and growth of the protected area system*
- *create regional jobs through enabling growth and opportunities for the tourism and conservation sectors*
- *increase resilience of protected areas to climate change through a connected landscape that provides refugia for native wildlife*
- *support Connection to Country through genuine partnerships with First Nations peoples that removes barriers and supports First Nations peoples leadership in protecting and caring for Country*
- *secure innovative funding streams to promote, effectively manage and sustainably grow the protected area system*
- *deliver social, health, economic and cultural benefits to Queenslanders.*

Daintree National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land) was returned to the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people on the 29 September 2021. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Protected Areas Strategy identifies three broad strategic priorities:

Grow: expanding the protected area estate to 17 percent of the state's land.

Care: achieving global best practice in the management of protected areas.

Connect: building community connection and support for protected areas.

GROWTH

Over the past year, protected areas have grown by 15,699 hectares through additions to existing national parks and new or expanded nature refuges.[1]

The declaration of these new protected areas is welcome, but falls far short of the rate of expansion needed to reach 17 percent protection within a reasonable timeframe. If protected area expansion continues at this rate, it will take more than 1,000 years to reach the Queensland Government's protected area target.

[1] Tabled papers, notice papers, parliamentary bills, media statements and annual reports by the Department of Environment and Science.

TENURE	AREA
National Park	12,184
Conservation Park	2,971
Nature Refuge	544
Total	**15,699 hectares**

While there are a number of new national parks and private protected areas in the pipeline, there have been no large new protected areas (>5,000 hectares) declared since the strategy was released.

Since 2015, when the Palaszczuk Government was elected to office, 1,454,093 hectares have been protected. On average, the Palaszczuk government has protected 207,721 hectares each year. At this rate it will take 72 years to reach 17%.

“On average, the Palaszczuk government has protected 207,721 hectares each year. At this rate it will take 72 years to reach 17%.”

National and Conservation Parks

One of the highlights of the past year was the protection of Glen Rock State Forest in the Main Range Conservation Park and National Park.

Nearly 6,300 hectares was be protected in total by the creation of the 2,891 hectare Main Range Conservation Park, accommodating recreational users, and the addition of 3,408 hectares to Main Range National Park protecting important habitat for the glossy-black cockatoo, brush-tailed rock wallaby and the powerful owl.

The former Glen Rock State Forest is now part of the Main Range National and Conservation Parks. Photo: Ben Blanche.

Other additions to the public protected estate over the past year included: Pinnacles National Park (4,370ha), Deepwater National Park (128ha), Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park (3,286ha), Mount Walsh National Park (1,000ha) and Wongaloo Conservation Park (82ha).

Over the past year, 15,155 hectares of new national parks and conservation parks were declared.

“Over the past year, 15,155 hectares of new national parks and conservation parks were declared.”

By contrast, the Bligh Government declared an average of 167,910 hectares of national parks and conservation parks each year, 10 times more than the progress made by the Palaszczuk Government since the Protected Areas Strategy was released.

Private Protected Areas

Over the past year, there were eight nature refuge declarations: Merala Nature Refuge (30ha), Misty Mountain Nature Refuge (26ha), Mount Elliot Nature Refuge (81ha), Rock of Ages Nature Refuge (11ha), Cockatoo’s Corner Nature Refuge (115ha), Glider’s Glade Nature Refuge (112ha), Koala Crossing Nature Refuge (64ha), Wallabies Knoll Nature Refuge (77ha) and Kurranji Bubu Nature Refuge (28ha).

These new nature refuges cover a total area of 544 hectares. By contrast, the Bligh Government created an average of 610,000 hectares of nature refuges each year, more than one thousand times the Palaszczuk Government’s progress over the past year.

"the Bligh Government created an average of 610,000 hectares of nature refuges each year, more than one thousand times the Palaszczuk Government's progress over the past year."

CARE

In June 2021, Minister Scanlon announced a $1.4 billion[2] budget to "protect the country's immense biodiversity and create jobs". Of this, $8.6 million was allocated infrastructure improvements, visitor experience and engaging with First Nations people in national parks.[3]

This followed the December 2020 budget where $10.1 million was announced for various tourism and visitor infrastructure facilities across national parks and World Heritage areas.

A range of funding announcements and projects spread over both budgets focused on Queensland's wildlife including koalas, crocodiles, flying foxes and other species. While this is welcome, there are few new threatened species recovery projects delivered in protected areas.

Exceptions include a new partnership with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to improve the management and monitoring of the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat in Epping Forest National Park, announced in October 2021[4] and the removal of barbed wire fencing

[2] A mix of existing and new funding.
[3] Qld Govt Media Statement: Budget to grow Queensland environment, jobs and economic recovery 15 June 2021
[4] AWC website, New partnership to protect endangered Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat, 23 October 2021

from Diamantina National Park to protect the rare and endangered night parrot, among other species, announced in August 2021.[5]

Funding directed towards the management of natural and cultural values of protected areas relative to investment in park infrastructure remains disproportionately low. A key priority for future investment should be directed towards improving threatened species populations, the restoration of habitat and the protection of ecosystems from invasive species within the Protected Area estate.

First Nations co-stewardship of protected areas continues to be delivered under both joint management and co-management arrangements across Queensland's national parks. On 29 September 2021, 160,000 hectares of the Daintree and nearby national parks were returned to the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people under the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program.[6] In addition, Mulgumpin (Moreton Island) was returned to the Quandamooka People earlier this year.

Eastern Kuku Yalanji people signed the agreements to take ownership of the World Heritage listed Daintree national parks in September 2021. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

[5] Qld Govt Media Statement, Diamantina National Park de-fenced 6 August 2021.
[6] Qld Govt Media Statement, 160,000 hectares returned on path to reconciliation.

CONNECTION

Although community appreciation and connection in response to Queensland Government initiatives delivered as a result of the Protected Area Strategy are difficult to quantify, the importance of protected areas to the Queensland community has increased.

Domestic and international travel restrictions over the past 18 months have resulted in what is likely to be the highest ever rates of visitation to national parks. The increased utilisation of national parks has underscored the importance of protected areas for a range of co-benefits including social, cultural, well-being and economic outcomes.

National parks are the foundation of the State's recovering tourism industry. They benefit the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders[7] and provide further valuable co-benefits across the multiple portfolios of First Nations partnerships, regional development, agriculture, water and natural resources.

As we rebuild Queensland's economy, investment in the protection, management and promotion of our exceptional natural assets has a critical role to play in delivering much needed employment, economic, health and environmental co-benefits.

[7] Buckley, et al 2019, Economic value of protected areas via visitor mental health, *Nature Communications* **10** 5005 (2019).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the limited progress made on implementation of the Protected Areas Strategy in its first year, there are opportunities for improved performance. Past experience demonstrates that there are no insurmountable barriers to expanding the protected area estate more rapidly, with the right policy settings, investment and political leadership.

Queensland has a strong track record of innovation in nature conservation, extraordinary natural assets, a highly valued nature based tourism industry and a community that values nature for its intrinsic and recreational values. These conditions provide a strong foundation for future success, with high level leadership and levels of state investment commensurate with the Government's vision of a world-class protected area network.

ACQUISITION FUNDING

No additional funding for expansion of protected areas was allocated in the June 2021 budget, despite clear indications that current levels of investment are insufficient to meet the Queensland Government's 17 per cent target.

Of the $60 million provided with the release of the Protected Area Strategy, only $36 million was provided for the expansion of national parks and nature refuges and spread over four years (Table 1). Also, a percentage of acquisition funding is also set aside to pay for capital works to ensure a new property becomes "park ready".

Under current arrangements, the Department of Environment and Science is not adequately funded to make substantive acquisitions in their own right and must seek co-investment from third parties.

Recommendations

1. *Ensure delivery of the Protected Area Strategy is prioritised as a matter of state significance with a commensurate budget allocation relative to the multiple co benefits across environment, health, well-being, employment and the economy through:*

    a. *An increase of $55 million per year for new national park acquisitions,*

    b. *An increase of $24 million per year for private protected areas.*

    c. *Setting annual targets for the growth of national parks and private protected areas matching the rate of growth of the previous Bligh government.*

JOINT MANAGEMENT

The benefits of joint management include diversified employment opportunities and an increase in revenue streams for national parks. In remote regions there are also significant socio-economic benefits, with an increasing number of Indigenous rangers across the sector. Career opportunities, niche tourism and cultural maintenance all arise from joint management of our national parks.

Land tenure initiatives like the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program are significant because they enable the protection of values through inclusive cultural interpretations and management of the landscape.

Recommendations

2. *Continue to fund the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program to acquire and divest land back to First Nations ownership.*

3. *Continue to expand joint management and First Nations ownership of national parks across Queensland.*

MANAGEMENT FUNDING

With the increase in acquisitions, there must also be a commensurate increase in investment for the management of natural and cultural values of protected areas.

Well managed protected areas are one of the most effective ways to reverse the decline in biodiversity and save many species from extinction. However, the majority of additional national park funding is focused on visitor infrastructure and facilities. While this is important, there must be increased investment in maintaining the natural values they were established for.

Recommendation

4. *Ensure management funding is substantially increased to address ongoing threats to natural and cultural values across the protected area estate with an increase of $56 million per year for increased management.*

Recommended additional annual investments required to meet existing policy commitment on protected areas.

ITEM	2022-23 $M	2023-24 $M	2024-25 $M	2025-26 $M
National Park expansion	49*	46*	55	55
National Park management	56	56	56	56
Private protected areas	22*	22*	24	24
Cape York Tenure Resolution	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5

* Variation in the figures above reflects funding announced with the Protected Area Strategy.

ATTACHMENT 1

Protected Area expansions that occurred between October 2020 and October 2021.

Date	Name	Area
10/06/2021	Pinnacles National Park	4,370
11/02/2021	Deepwater National Park	128
11/02/2021	Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park	3,286
11/02/2021	Mount Walsh National Park	1,000
10/07/2021	Wongaloo Conservation Park	82
10/06/2021	Merala Nature Refuge	30
10/06/2021	Misty Mountain Nature Refuge	26
10/06/2021	Mount Elliot Nature Refuge	81
10/06/2021	Rock of Ages Nature Refuge	11
11/02/2021	Cockatoo's Corner Nature Refuge	115
11/02/2021	Glider's Glade Nature Refuge	112
11/02/2021	Koala Crossing Nature Refuge	64
11/02/2021	Wallabies Knoll Nature Refuge	77
14/10/2021	Main Range Conservation Park	2,890
14/10/2021	Main Range National Park	3,400
21/10/2021	Kurranji Bubu Nature Refuge	28
	Total	**15,699**