PROTECTING BEAUTIFUL QUEENSLAND

Policy Priorities 2024 - 2028

PROTECT BEAUTIFUL QUEENSLAND

PROTECT BEAUTIFUL QUEENSLAND

Protect Beautiful Queensland is an alliance of conservation, First Nations, natural resource management, tourism and recreation organisations. We are working towards a common goal of growing Queensland's protected area estate and improving its management for the benefit and enjoyment of all Queenslanders, our wildlife, communities, culture, and businesses.

Our alliance is committed to non-partisan, evidence-based solutions to achieve the target of doubling Queensland's protected areas to 17% by 2030.

We are working together with Traditional Owners, local communities, farmers, scientists, recreational users, outdoors industry representatives and government agencies to create new and well-managed protected areas, so we can secure a healthy future nature and our treasured way of life.

We want all Queenslanders and future generations to have greater access to the beautiful nature that our state has in abundance. We are committed to fostering equitable access and inclusive management. We embrace collaborative efforts for lasting protection and conservation of natural and cultural values across all land tenures.

Our vision is to double Queensland's protected areas by 2030 in well-managed parks, private protected areas and Indigenous protected areas with inclusive, collaborative and well-funded management arrangements.

Balkanu
Cape York Development Corporation P/L

GONDWANA RAINFOREST TRUST
Wildlife. Climate. People. Planet.

National Parks Association of Queensland Inc.
Connect and protect

NRM REGIONS QUEENSLAND

Outdoors QUEENSLAND
Live life outdoors

Pew

QUEENSLAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We recognise the diverse cultures, histories and heritage of the many countries across Queensland and their deep connection to the lands, waters and seas. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Cover image: Estuaries and mangroves at Bowen and along the Queensland coast provide exceptional recreational and conservation opportunities. Credit: Kerry Trapnell

Back cover image: Palm cockatoo (probosciger aterrimus) in the Kutini-Payamu (Iron Range) National Park. Credit: Alamy Stock Photo

August 2024
protectqueensland.org.au

Authorised by D. Copeman, 377 Montague Rd West End QLD 4101
Printed by Enviro Print, 20 Marine Drive Fingal Bay NSW 2315

SUMMARY

Queensland boasts some of the most outstanding natural and living cultural landscapes remaining in the world. From the dense forests of the Great Dividing Range to the outback rivers of the Channel Country and north to the Savannahs of the Gulf and Cape York, our State has a wealth of remarkable and diverse landscapes and is a global biodiversity hotspot.

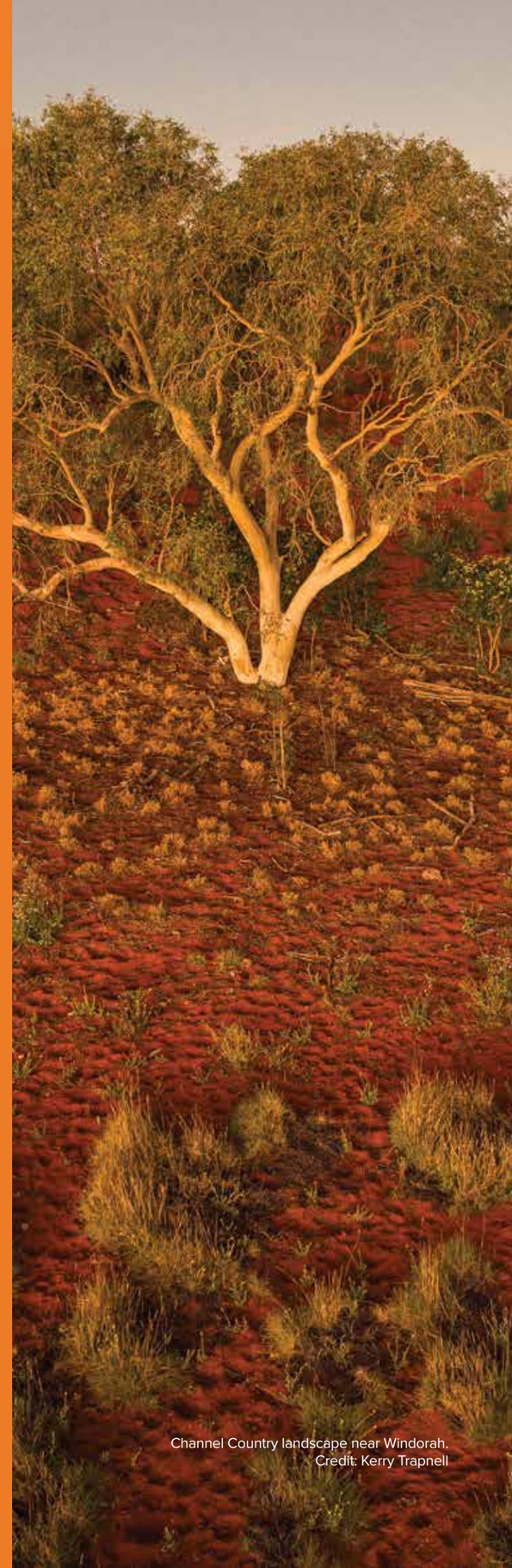
Queenslanders love nature, with polling showing that 77% want more national parks, and 71% support a doubling of parks by 2030. These figures are supported by enthusiastic public use of national parks, with almost two thirds of Queenslanders having visited a national park in the last 12 months and over 90% saying national parks are important for their lifestyle. The expansion of protected areas is central to the outdoor recreation sector, which in turn delivers significant health and economic benefits for Queenslanders, and to Queensland's tourism industry, a major pillar of our economy.

As Queensland positions itself as a leader in protected area growth, through its ambitious Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030, the creation of new parks presents an opportunity to dramatically enhance economic and lifestyle opportunities for Queenslanders who love the outdoors.

Protected area growth also presents opportunities to improve outcomes for land management at a time when agricultural activity is intensifying. With most of Queensland under private ownership and 88% used for primary production, working with the agricultural sector will be crucial in securing protection and management where it is most needed.

The leadership of First Nations peoples in consent, decision making and management of Country must increase. For this to be realised, a collaborative approach that involves First nations peoples, farmers, recreational users and local communities is needed to co-design policy, regional strategy and crucially, an investment framework.

To reach Queensland's protected area target of 17%, increase recreational and eco-tourism opportunities, and return land back to First Nations peoples, more investment is needed in protected area growth and management.



Channel Country landscape near Windorah. Credit: Kerry Trapnell

CONTEXT AND IMPERATIVE

Queensland is home to a remarkable 85% of Australia's native mammals, 72% of its native birds, and slightly over 50% of its native reptiles and frogs. Within Queensland, 1,049 species of plants and animals are classified as threatened under the Nature Conservation Act 1992, with 713 species found only in Queensland.

By better protecting and managing Queensland's natural landscapes we can play a critical role in protecting Australia's unique natural and cultural heritage.

In October 2020, the Queensland Government released the Queensland Protected Area Strategy 2020 - 2030 as part of a commitment to deliver a 'world leading protected area network' and effectively double the area of national parks and private reserves from 8.2 percent to 17 percent.

Since that announcement, progress has been slow. However, recent land acquisitions supported by the release of $262.5 million in funding in the 2022 State budget are welcomed. This funding directly increased third party investment and facilitated some of the largest philanthropic contributions to national park creation in Queensland's history.

In October 2022, Queensland agreed to work with other federal and state jurisdictions to reverse environmental decline and prevent new extinctions.[1] This commitment included all Environment Ministers agreeing "to work collectively to achieve a national target to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's landmass and 30% of Australia's marine areas by 2030."

In December 2022, more than 190 countries, including Australia, signed on to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Target 3 of this plan is to protect at least 30% of our planet's land and oceans by 2030.

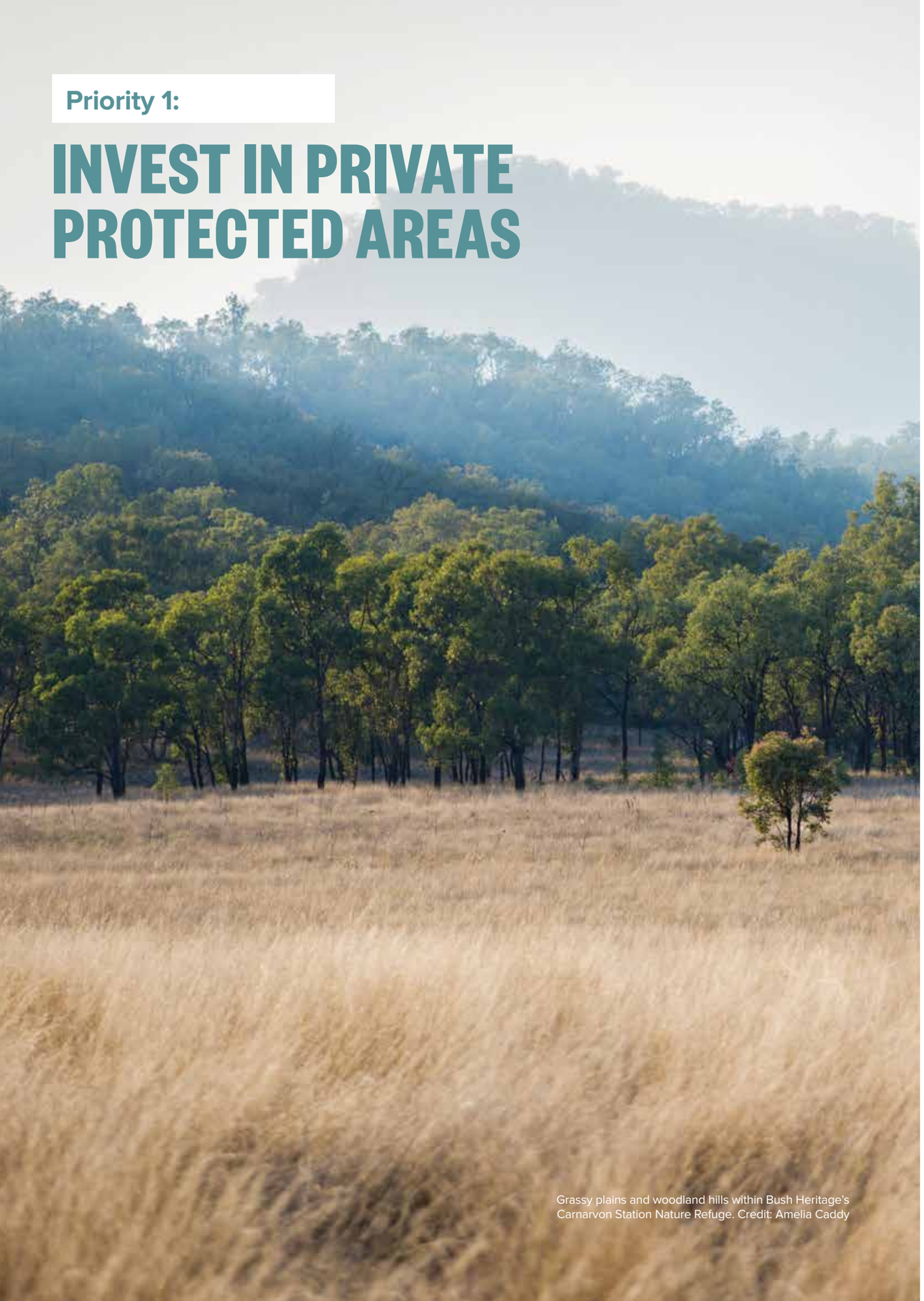
In June 2024, the Federal Government released a Draft National Roadmap for protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land by 2030. The draft roadmap identified the leadership required from First Nations people and the role of public, private and Indigenous land tenure would play.

With globally significant levels of biodiversity and as Australia's most biodiverse state, Queensland must make a substantive contribution to the national target. By protecting 17% of our state, Queensland would be making a 4% contribution to the national target.

Lannercost State Forest in northern Queensland remains unprotected despite significant natural and cultural values. Credit: Paul Curtis

Priority 1:

INVEST IN PRIVATE PROTECTED AREAS



Grassy plains and woodland hills within Bush Heritage's Carnarvon Station Nature Refuge. Credit: Amelia Caddy

Queensland's Private Protected Areas Program is Australia's most successful conservation covenant initiative. Nature refuge agreements with landholders have been established on more than 550 private properties representing close to 4.5 million hectares of high-value conservation land that is now protected in the national reserve system.

However, growth of the network has significantly slowed due to underinvestment in the program during the last decade.[2] Funding more attractive incentive mechanisms such as ongoing stewardship payments will be critical to the continued success and renewed growth of Queensland's private protected areas.[3]

Queensland is currently the only Australian state that imposes a land tax on conservation covenanted land. However, if land is used entirely or partially for primary production, landholders are generally eligible for a primary production exemption. This policy discourages landowners from designating significant portions of their land, which are otherwise used for primary production, as conservation areas (such as nature refuges).

Supporting landholders to establish and maintain private protected areas is a highly cost-effective approach to conservation, whilst also supporting sustainable agriculture in many places. They are established by way of voluntary agreement with the existing landholder who remains responsible for the management of the land and its conservation values.

Support for landholders undertaking land management activities, including appropriate fire management, is essential to ensure a well-managed private protected area network and stimulate new landholder participation. Nature Assist and Landholder Grants provide support for new projects that enhance protection and management of conservation values. However, on average only $2 million per year is invested in supporting landholders with nature refuges[4], representing less than 44 cents per hectare spent on management.

The program's success in attracting new landholders will require stewardship payments and additional funding for conservation and land management projects. The creation of special wildlife reserves – a class of private protected areas in Queensland that provides a similar level of protection as that of a national park, including protection from mining – has attracted significant interest and co-investment from national and international investors. This co-investment has led directly to the growth of Queensland's private protected areas and will be a significant contributor in the program's future.

Recommendations

Maintain investment in Queensland's private protected area program by:

1.1 Investing $56 million over four years to pilot and implement new stewardship incentives to support existing landholders and to attract new participants into the Private Protected Area Program.

1.2 Increasing the capacity of the Private Protected Area Program to support existing and attract new landholders with an additional $2.1 million per annum allocated to operational funding for 13 new positions, including a dedicated role for progressing Special Wildlife Reserves.

1.3 Renewing and increasing funding for Nature Assist grants to landholders to $12 million per year with an additional annual increment of $3 million to support the growth of the network.

1.4 Invest in research to identify new models and opportunities for sustainable agriculture to co-exist with the conservation values of nature refuges.

1.5 Introducing an exemption to land tax for conservation covenants (i.e. nature refuges and Special Wildlife Reserves) that would align Queensland with all other Australian States.

Bushwalkers enjoying World Heritage listed Lamington National Park.
Credit: Ben Blanche

Priority 2:

CONTINUE TO EXPAND NATIONAL PARKS

Polling conducted in 2024 revealed that 77% of Queenslanders want more national parks, with 71% supporting doubling the area of national parks by 2030.[5]

Almost two thirds of Queenslanders polled had visited a national park in the previous 12 months. 94% stated that protecting native animals and plants is the best reason to boost protected areas and more than 90% felt national parks are important for Queensland's recreational lifestyle.

Protected areas generate and attract multiple inflows of revenue to the Queensland economy each year. This includes tourism, co-financing, carbon sequestration, and additional management investment.

The economic benefits of national parks are well documented, with national park visitation contributing $2.7 billion per year to Queensland's economy. For every dollar spent on managing Queensland's national parks, an average $6.30 is generated in return from the tourism and hospitality sector.[6]

Further, nature-based recreation makes a significant contribution to the total social and economic benefits of sport and recreation, estimated at about $18 billion (or 5% of Gross State Product) in 2019.[7]

Queensland Government investment in acquiring land for new national parks has proven effective in leveraging significant co-investment from the private sector. Since the release of the Protected Area Strategy, third party organisations have invested approximately $30 million in support of land acquisitions for national parks.

Recommendations

Continue to expand national parks and other public conservation tenures by:

2.1 Maintaining an acquisition fund with an ongoing annual addition of $100 million up until 2030, continuing to leverage third party investment.

2.2 Systematically review public and state-owned land to identify areas of high conservation significance including state forests, unallocated state land, stock routes (recognising their multiple uses and values) and other government owned land units.

2.3 Better implementing the Gurra Gurra Framework to ensure there is increasing First Nations rights, interests and leadership in protected area growth and delivery including the free, prior and informed consent from Traditional Owners.

2.4 Maintaining adherence to the national science-based framework and the CAR (comprehensive, adequate and representative) principles and continuing to resource Queensland's Protected Area Strategy and Expansion unit within the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation.

2.5 Ensuring greater coordination between government departments to accelerate protection and appropriately resolve competing land uses and encumbrances.

Dhaarrba Elder Richard Bowen on Country returned under the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program. Credit: Kerry Trapnell.

Priority 3:

MAINTAIN TENURE RESOLUTION PROGRAM

The landmark Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program delivers social, cultural, economic and environmental outcomes.

Since 1995, the Queensland Government has returned 4.3 million hectares of land on Cape York Peninsula back to First Nations ownership under the program.

This includes 2.7 million hectares of jointly managed national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) and approximately 1.5 million hectares of Aboriginal freehold.[8]

With the support of both Federal and successive Queensland governments, the program has delivered outstanding social, employment and economic opportunities to First Nations people.[9] The program was created to provide land use certainty through the identification, acquisition, protection and return of land of high natural and cultural significance. It has been the most successful land use and conservation planning initiative in Australia.

Land access and ownership provides Indigenous Australians with a competitive advantage in economic opportunity from their own customary land.[10]

Philanthropic funding, tourism, fee for service, carbon and other revenue opportunities have all directly stemmed from land ownership under the program.[11]

Traditional Owner groups with land returned under this process have established a variety of enterprises and grown employment and revenue opportunities across their land. Some Aboriginal corporations now employ up to 60 people at peak times as a result of the program.[12]

Under the program, Cape York Peninsula has become one of the most comprehensively protected bioregions in Australia, with over four million hectares protected in national parks or nature refuges, the largest area of all Queensland bioregions. With all of Cape York Peninsula's national parks under First Nations ownership and joint management, there is ongoing growth in Indigenous rangers and land management enterprises.

Due to the program's success, First Nations leaders and conservation advocates are calling for the model to be extended across more of Queensland.[13] The Daintree, Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), Mulgumpin (Moreton Island), and Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Parks are now all managed under a similar model.

Recommendations

3.1. Commit to the ongoing delivery of the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program and the return of land to First Nations people on Cape York Peninsula by funding the program with an additional annual allocation of $20 million to support further acquisitions and program delivery over four years.

3.2 Commit to continue exploring and supporting opportunities to expand tenure resolution across Queensland, increasing the extent and delivery of joint management models.

CASE STUDY: THE DAINTREE RAINFOREST

The Daintree rainforests are some of the oldest rainforests on Earth and provide a refuge for a staggering diversity of flora and fauna including the world's highest concentration of ancient flowering plants. The area is globally recognised for its natural and cultural values and are the traditional homelands of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji People, who already have over 200,000 hectares of their Country protected as national park, nature refuges and Indigenous Protected Areas.

In 1982, the Daintree lowlands between the Daintree River and Cape Tribulation were subdivided into 1,136 freehold properties. This opened the area up to land clearing, fragmentation, roads and invasive species.

In 2021, lowland tropical rainforests of the Wet Tropics were listed as endangered under the Federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Despite this, clearing for development remains a threat.

We have an opportunity to better protect the integrity of this remarkable ecosystem and prevent further losses.

In a world-leading and innovative conservation initiative, Gondwana Rainforest Trust have partnered with the Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation to purchase the remaining undeveloped freehold properties and hand them over to the Traditional Owners, the Eastern Kuku Yalanji People, through the Queensland Government's Tenure Resolution Process.

Through this partnership, 29 properties were acquired between July 2019 and July 2023 so they can be protected in perpetuity under Queensland's Nature Conservation Act. This process allows for properties to be proposed for inclusion in the Daintree National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land). These acquisitions have been funded by donations from the public and demonstrates the level of public interest in the conservation of the area.

Jabalbina Ranger Yindili Ryan. Credit: Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation

"Eastern Kuku Yalanji People need and seek both development and conservation as they look to prosper throughout their Country, seeking economic opportunities to provide jobs and infrastructure to support their growing population. Increased housing, tourism and participation in emerging nature-based markets will underpin long-term sustainable development and conservation of the natural and cultural values of their homelands."

- Josh Paterson, CEO Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation

Recommendations

3.3 Commit to working with Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation to identify and co-finance the acquisition, protection and divestment back to First Nations ownership, of the remaining priority undeveloped blocks of the Daintree lowlands. This should be supported through increased funding for additional land management and additional support to deliver socio-economic outcomes including tourism, ranger housing and appropriate economic development.

The Daintree rainforests form some of the oldest extant rainforest communities in the world. Credit: Kerry Trapnell

Camping in Byfield National Park.
Credit: Ben Blanche

Priority 4:

STRENGTHEN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Queensland's natural and cultural landscapes are a core part of the state's identity, and form the backbone of a thriving outdoor lifestyle.

National parks are not only celebrated for their natural beauty and cultural values, but they are also highly valued by Queenslanders for their health and wellbeing benefits. 94% of Queenslanders agree that national parks are important for recreation.[14]

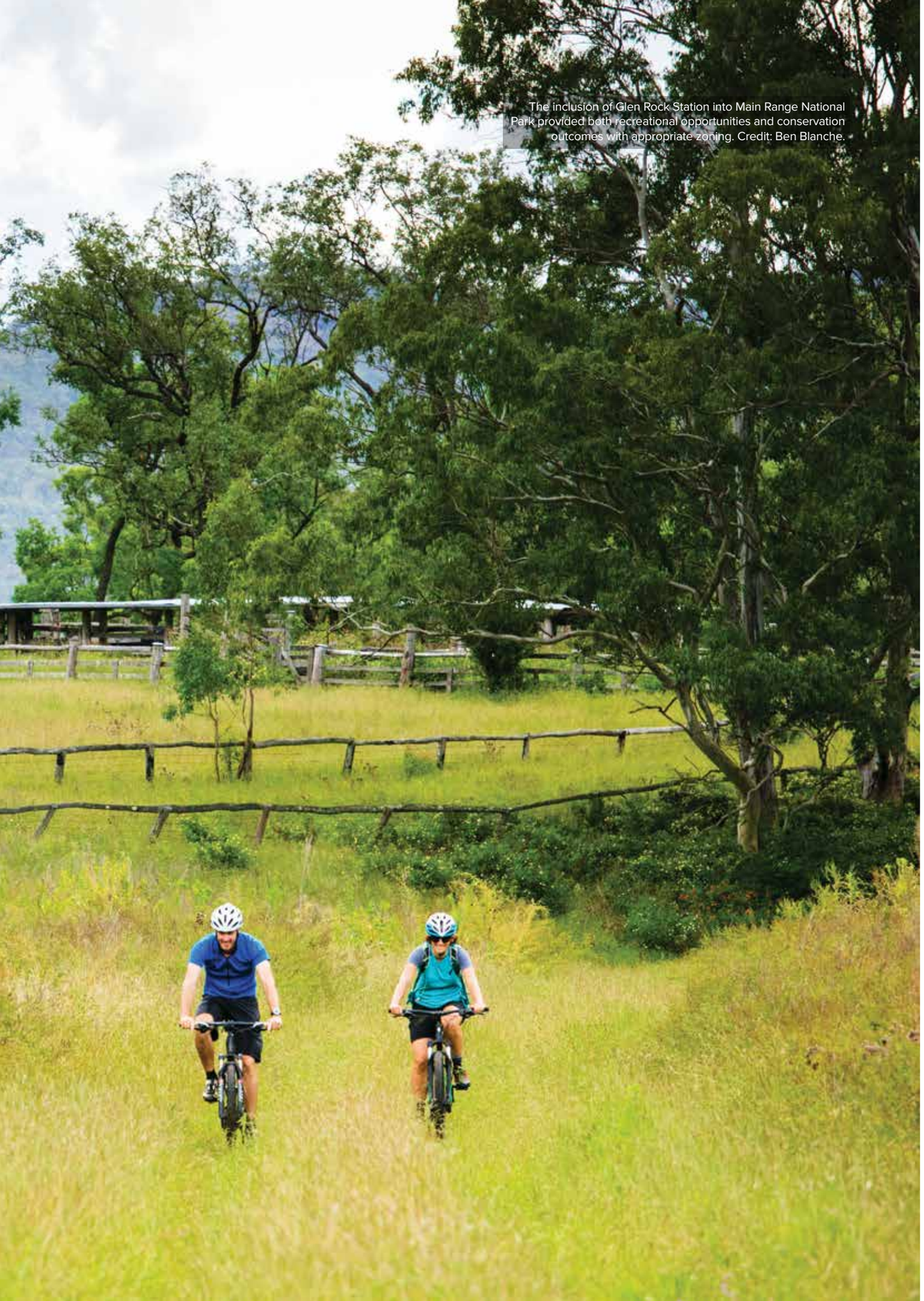
In addition to national parks, outdoor activities occur across a wide variety of tenures - on private land, and on land owned by local, state and federal governments. To ensure Queensland can provide a diverse range of outdoor recreational activities in nature, all landholders should be enabled to offer ecotourism, nature therapy, outdoor education and a broad range of recreational opportunities on their land.

As Queenslanders, we treasure outdoor experiences that build connections to place, community and family. Outdoor recreation strengthens individual and community health, lifts productivity, and builds resilience while connecting people to our shared cultural heritage.

Recommendations

4.1 Establish a comprehensive, integrated and collaborative policy agenda dedicated to enabling appropriate recreation and increased accessibility of the outdoors through strategic planning, zoning and establishment of new protected areas with appropriate tenures.

4.2 Invest in the growth of the recreation sector through the creation of a dedicated Outdoor Recreation program with dedicated extension personnel providing advice and delivering incentives for all landholders to explore recreational opportunities on their land.



The inclusion of Glen Rock Station into Main Range National Park provided both recreational opportunities and conservation outcomes with appropriate zoning. Credit: Ben Blanche.

Priority 5:

IMPROVE MANAGEMENT ACROSS THE PROTECTED AREA ESTATE

Recent research has demonstrated that the management of Queensland national parks is failing to meet the objectives of the Nature Conservation Act 1992, with a disproportionate amount of funding spent on visitor infrastructure, and not on the management of natural and cultural values.[15]

Increasing funding for the management of national parks is essential to reverse the decline towards extinction for many species and deliver the objectives of the Protected Area Strategy. This includes investment in culturally and ecologically appropriate fire management with increased interventions to protect land and property from uncontrolled burns.

Queensland's national parks also underpin a $23 billion tourism industry employing up to 24,190 direct and indirect jobs across Queensland.[16]

Since the release of the Protected Area Strategy in 2020, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has acquired an additional 700,000 to 1 million hectares (approx.). However, there has been no commensurate increase in the management workforce.

Recommendations

5.1 Invest an additional $32 million per year to enable the creation of approximately 200 new ranger positions.[17]

5.2 Invest an annual increase of $100 million per year allocated to support increased operational and management costs across the entire national park estate.

5.3 Increase investment with an additional $10 million per year to support co-management initiatives and capacity building with Traditional Owners, including traditional fire management.

REFERENCES

1 Environment Ministers Meeting 21 Oct Agreed Communique. 2022.

2 Allen L, Ledgar R, Leverington A, Leverington F. Nature Refuges in Queensland. Protected Area Solutions. 2018.

3 Queensland Government. Land used for primary production. Public Ruling LTA053.1.3. 2021. https://qro.qld.gov.au/resource/lta053-1/

4 Estimates 30 Jul. Health and Environment Committee - Environment and the Great Barrier Reef. 2021.

5 Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov 3–14 Jan. Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance. 2024. https://protectqueensland.org.au/2024/02/public-support-for-doubling-queenslands-national-parks/

6 Driml S, Brown R, Moreno Silva C. Estimating the Value of National Parks to the Queensland Economy, Discussion Papers Series 636, School of Economics, University of Queensland. 2020.

7 Tunny G. Economic, Social and Health Impacts of Sport and Active Recreation in Queensland. Adept Economics. 2019. https://adepteconomics.com.au/resources/economic-contribution-of-sport-and-outdoor-recreation-in-qld-final-report-may-19-2/

8 Queensland Government. 160,000 hectares returned on path to reconciliation. Media release, 29 Sep 2021. https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/93360

9 Leverington A. A review of the objectives of the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program and recommendations for ongoing investment. Report prepared for Queensland Conservation Council. 2021.

10 Australian Government. National Roadmap for Indigenous Skills, Jobs and Wealth Creation. NIAA. 2021.

11 Olkola Aboriginal Corporation have established tourism, pastoral, carbon and land management enterprises on land returned under the program.

12 Symonds D, CEO Olkola Aboriginal Corporation. Personal communication. Sep 2021.

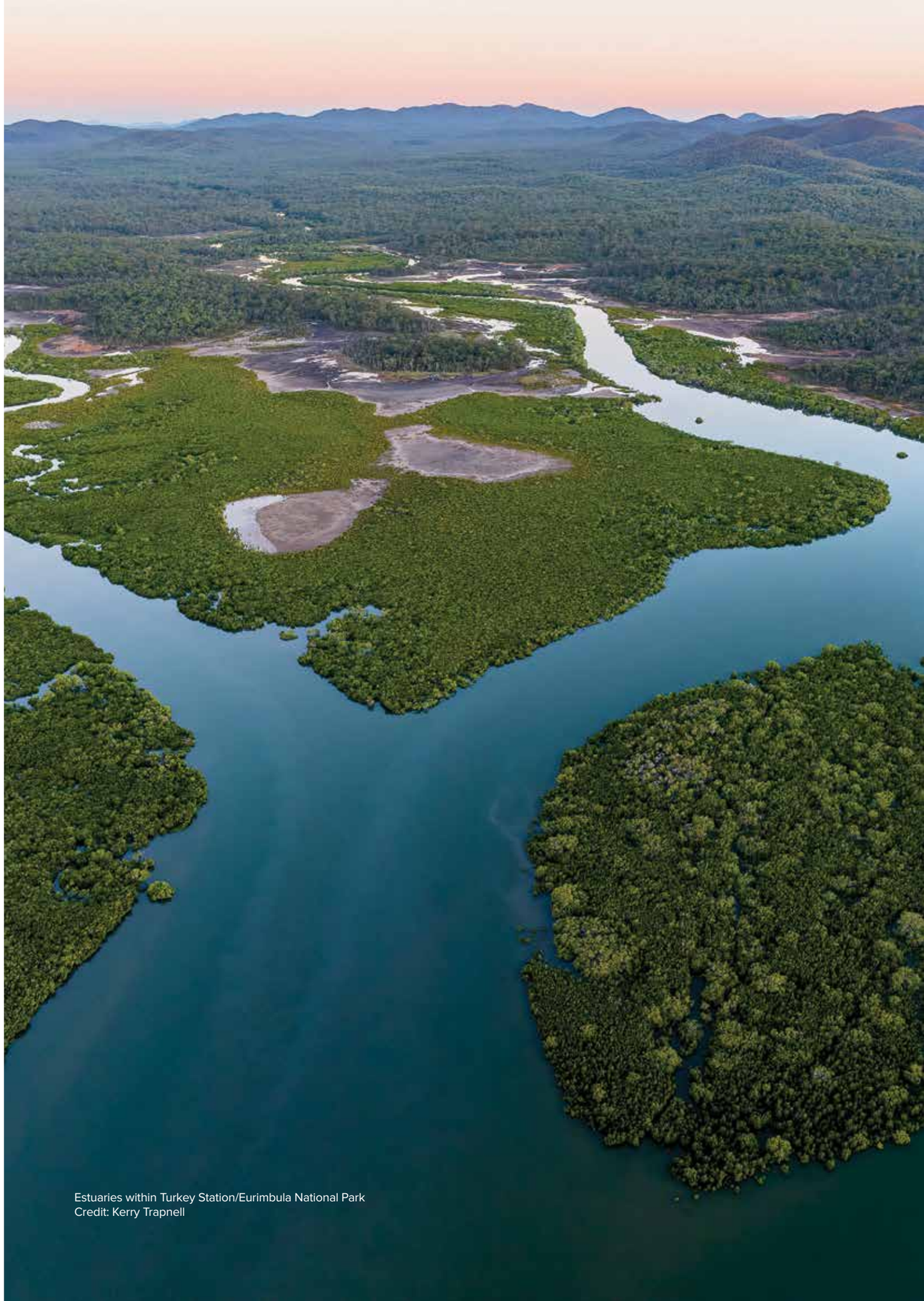
13 Pearson G, Quoted in 'Return of land 'a model for all states''. The Australian. Feb 24 2022.

14 Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov 3–14 Jan. Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance. 2024. https://protectqueensland.org.au/2024/02/public-support-for-doubling-queenslands-national-parks/

15 Craigie ID, Pressy RL. Fine-grained data and models of protected-area management costs reveal cryptic effects of budget shortfalls. Biological Conservation 272. 2022.

16 Drimil S, Brown R, Silva CM. Estimating the value of National Parks to the Queensland Economy, School of Economics Discussion Papers Series 636. School of Economics, The University of Queensland. 2020.

17 Calculated on a cost of $160,000 for each new position inclusive of oncosts and overheads.



Estuaries within Turkey Station/Eurimbula National Park
Credit: Kerry Trapnell