

Environment groups question state's priorities

Recent moves by the Queensland Government to open national parks to cattle grazing and to open bushland to land-clearing have drawn criticism from environmental groups.



Credit: John Carnemolla/istockphoto

Commenting on the proposal to ‘unlock’ national parks for cattle grazing, Paul Donatui of the National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) says: ‘National parks exist to protect our unique plants, animals and landscapes. Any decision to allow grazing in national parks would be a direct breach of the Nature Conservation Act in Queensland.’

The NPAQ is concerned the Queensland Government will use a recently announced scientific review of protected areas to change and revoke the conservation status of some national parks.

‘There is also the issue of 12 properties bought during the last two years of the Bligh Government, but not yet gazetted by the [current] government as national park,’ adds Mr Donatui.

‘These 12 places, more than 400 000 hectares of land, were all purchased with funding support from the federal government’s national reserve system program with the expectation that they will be declared national park.’

Meanwhile, WWF-Australia says [a scientific report](#) that has been peer reviewed by ecologists shows proposals to wind back Queensland’s landmark tree-clearing laws would be a disaster for Queensland’s bushland.

WWF-Australia CEO Dermot O’Gorman said the scientific report showed that claims from sections of the Queensland Cabinet that the proposed rollback would not damage the environment were incorrect.

‘If these laws are passed, broad-scale bulldozing of bushland will lead to an increased extinction risk for wildlife, cause

soil erosion, water pollution and release millions of tonnes of CO₂,’ Mr O’Gorman said.

Report author, WWF conservation scientist Dr Martin Taylor, said the scale of rollback would have a staggering impact on Queensland’s native animals and plants.

‘Two million hectares of bushland put at risk due to this proposed change is home to at least 163 species of endangered and vulnerable native plants and animals – including koalas, wallabies, cockatoos, cassowaries and quolls.

‘New loopholes would mean [the Queensland Government] could allow broad-scale land-clearing of as much as 1.3 million hectares of mature bushland.’

Professor William F. Laurance, who peer-reviewed the scientific paper, said major components of the Queensland land clearing laws of 2006 and amendments made in 2009, would be rolled back as part of the proposal currently before parliament.

‘Queensland’s landmark tree-clearing laws drastically curbed bushland destruction, which was previously on a par with forest clearing rates in the Amazon. It’s terrible to think that in 2013 we would even consider reopening these areas to bulldozers,’ Professor Laurance said.

Sources: NPAQ & WWF-Australia

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