

PROTECT OUR PARKS

Greg Wood
Convenor
Protect Our Parks
Ph: 0422 260 169
Email: protectparks@internode.on.net

06/04/22

Meaghan Scanlon
Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef
Minister for Science & Youth

Dear Minister

I request your attention to the matters listed below that arise from your response, dated 24/03/22, to Parliamentary Petition No 3594-21, respective to proposed development along the Cooloola Great Walk. As described in my letter to you dated 01/04/22, my colleagues and I represent the many thousands of Queenslanders who have formally pledged support to the concerns and objectives stated by Protect Our Parks/Keep Cooloola Cool regarding the fundamental, indeed landmark, matter of encroachment of private leasehold and development concessions upon Cooloola National Parks and into the Queensland National Park estate generally.

Matters arising from, and relevant to, the received Petition response:

1. The provided response does not usefully address the fundamental matter of pursuing private commercial development within National Parks, as identified in point 2 of the Petition. This landmark change to National Park function and purpose is simply referred to as a given, as though somehow this major change has been already reconciled in the public domain. The salient fact is, it hasn't.
 - a. Embedding private commercial development rights within the State's National Parks fundamentally alters the traditional purpose and function of National Park. It does this by imposing strategic and operational objectives upon Parks' management that are distinct from, and very evidently in competition with, the long-standing Cardinal Principle. A principle is no longer 'Cardinal' when placed into balance with other competing objectives.
 - b. Sites P and N, as identified in the DES Site Selection History Report, plainly demonstrate the fraught tension generated by enabling competing objectives. The Site Selection Report explicitly states that ecological and wetland experts deemed Site N to be the option with the greatest risk of incurring significant impacts from the proposed development. Regardless of this expert advice, Site N was chosen due to its scenic (aka tourism) qualities. The travesty of the Site P selection is now well documented and widely communicated to the general horror of the recipient public.
 - c. This destructive pressure upon Cardinal Principle values is enabled solely by amendments made to the Nature Conservation Act by the Newman Govt.

- d. The ALP promised to repeal those amendments in its election campaign preceding the landslide defeat of the incumbent LNP administration, perhaps the most electorally rejected Government in Queensland's history. In default of this promise, successive ALP Governments have purposefully sought to implement those amendments, and thus make them practicably irreversible.
- e. This implementation has proceeded in complete absence of any effective consultation with the Queensland public. This is despite the known high regard and importance Queenslanders hold for their **public** National Park estate as an increasingly unique respite for nature and for equitable access.
- f. The Tourism Department is taking a lead strategic and funding role within this project. This further attests to the dissolution of the Cardinal Principle within Park management, in accord with the evident intent of the Newman Govt. amendments to the NCA. The mechanism of this corrosion of principle is well described by Buckley (2004):

"Conservation interests hope to use tourism as a tool in conservation, whereas tourism interests want to use conservation as a tool in tourism development. Both promote partnerships, but with different political aims."

Thus, conservation imperatives are being evidently subsumed for commercial purposes, and without any public consultation upon this major redirection of publicly significant resources.

- 2. It is asserted that the development proposal, if approved, will proceed in accordance with the Nature Conservation Act. However this claim provides little comfort given the compromise of the NCA by the Newman Govt. amendments.
 - a. *ecologically sustainable:*
Precisely how is this standard measured?
 - b. *in the public interest:*
Precisely how is this determined in the complete absence of any meaningful public notification and consultation on either the principle or the details?
 - c. *provides, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the natural condition and protection of natural and cultural values of the area.*
How can any condition modified by the clause, '**to the greatest possible extent**', provide any certainty of protection?
Expert opinion commonly confirms the rubbery and imprecise standards provided by these assessment criteria; eg Ogilvie (2014 & 2020)
- 3. The response cites global embrace of long distance walking trails as a point of evidence. However such trail networks are already in place within Cooloola and within other Parks across the State. Consequently this piece of evidence is redundant to the actual matter at hand, which is the employment of the Newman Govt. NCA amendments to implement a program of private accommodation development along those trails.
 - a. Acutely relevant, but completely absent from the Ministerial reply, is the well documented global standard of locating private commercial development, such as accommodation, external to protected areas rather than inside of them (Buckley 2013 & 2018). The current Park development proposal(s) distinctly conflict with this global best practice.

4. Reflecting the language of the flawed NCA amendments, the Minister's reply relies heavily upon the construct of 'Eco-tourism' to validate the intended development. However this construct is itself invalidated by:
 - a. the project's evident willingness to destroy significant natural values to enhance tourism values
 - b. the failure to identify and meaningfully consult with the strong local opposition to these proposed development plans. The Government's apparent intent is to impose this major land-use change upon the affected local communities and to not engage with them in any meaningful way.
5. It is asserted that compliance with NCA requirements is assured by extensive investigation of the proponent's preferred accommodation sites and proposed commercial operations. It is asserted this investigation has been guided by advice from specified categories of expert and specified key stakeholders.
 - a. The available evidence indicates that the State Government is the project proponent, and that the 'preferred proponent' is in fact a respondent to the State's advertised expression of interest for a project operator.
 - b. Nonetheless the State is responding to the preferred operator's selection of preferred sites.
 - c. Site Selection Report information respective to Site N, and the extreme impacts evidently likely upon Site P, strongly suggest that the contractor's preference for these sites outweighed the available expert and local Departmental advice.
 - d. The reply cites Noosa Parks Association (NPA) as a key sectoral stakeholder providing guiding advice to the project's development. This designation begs the question of what recognition has this process given to the identity and the input of the many ENGO's and community groups that, unlike NPA, have stated fundamental opposition to this project in both principle and detail.

Questions arising:

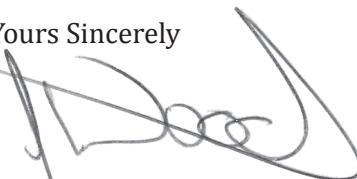
We propose the following as discussion points for the meeting requested in our letter dated April 1. Subject to further definition of matters within that meeting we would request a written response each numbered item.

1. Given the matters listed above under point 1, can it be explained how:
 - i. acting to embed the Newman Govt. NCA amendments into contractual practice, and
 - ii. thereby permanently disabling the Cardinal Principle of Parks management,
 might be considered a reasonable action in the absence of any public consultation on that significant change?
2. Noting that the response makes no claim of having publicly consulted on the vital matters related to this project, and that the public assert concern at this lack, can it be explained how key outcomes listed in the response can be considered achieved without due public consultation? These include:
 - i. That the use overall is in the public interest
 - ii. That the development does not affect any areas currently enjoyed by the

- public, or (by logical extension) impose upon or degrade any publicly enjoyed values and public expectations regarding those values?
- iii. That the project is eco-tourism, given local engagement and inclusion is a key structural principle of that category?
3. If claim is made that public consultation has occurred, can specification be provided of the matters that are subject to change or variance due to received public feedback?
 4. Can the Department provide the empirical standards and methodology used to evaluate the assessment criteria identified above in 2 a) b) & c)?
 5. Can the Department provide expert opinion that endorses the merit of both the definition and the methodological application of the above-mentioned assessment criteria?
 6. Respective to point 3a above:
 - i. Does the Department recognise that its plans to allow On-Park development of tourism infrastructure are in discord with Global standards of protected area best practice?
 - ii. If no to the above, can references be provided that endorse private development On-Park as a recognised and/or growing standard for global best practice respective to protected area management?
 7. Does the published information attached to the EPBC referral present the sum total of expert and Departmental technical advice collected respective to site selection and to the project's overall development?
 8. Can the relevant Government Department(s) confirm that no development will occur within the Poona Lake catchment basin?
 9. Is the DES, and the Government more generally, willing to engage with ENGO and community input on this very significant matter beyond the currently designated select few, such as Noosa Parks Association?
 10. Within the full history of this project's development has any payment for consultancy services or their equivalent been made to anyone closely associated to Noosa Parks Association?

I request your understanding that this letter is distributed to our many thousands of subscribers in application of our core principles of open consultation and fully transparent and accountable representation.

Yours Sincerely



Greg Wood
Convenor
Protect Our Parks
Ph: 0422 260 169