

Protecting Queensland's natural icons

Statement by leading tourism and conservation organisations

Leading tourism and conservation organisations support the Queensland Government's vision of a world class protected area system¹ and a vibrant and sustainable nature-based tourism industry,² and have come together to call for increased investment to support expansion and effective management of the state's protected areas.

Queensland's national parks, marine parks and other protected areas sustain a highly valued nature-based tourism sector and play a vital role in conserving the state's exceptional wildlife and wild places.

The signatories to this statement welcome the Queensland Government's commitment to double the extent of the state's protected areas from 8 percent to 17 percent. Delivering on this commitment will provide new opportunities for tourism, recreation and regional development across the state, while providing improved protection for the state's unique natural and cultural assets.

"Over the next ten years, we plan to ... become world leaders in the way we protect, conserve, present and harness Queensland's natural areas for their environmental, cultural and economic values."

Protected Areas Strategy 2020-2030, Queensland Government

Fulfilling the state's vision of a world-class protected area system requires an urgent and substantial increase in investment to support:

- establishment of new national parks and private protected areas;
- new opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation and cultural tourism;
- effective management of the natural and cultural values within protected areas; and
- exceptional visitor experiences, including nature-based and cultural tourism activities.

The undersigned organisations call on the Queensland Government to commit significant additional resources in the 2022 state budget to accelerate the expansion of Queensland's protected areas and to support effective management, Indigenous co-stewardship and exceptional visitor experiences.

Nature underpins Queensland's tourism industry

Taking care of nature is essential for Queensland's tourism industry. Tourism in Queensland is worth \$23 billion per year,³ with a significant share of this directly attributable to nature, including the \$6.4 billion value attributed to the Great Barrier Reef⁴ and the \$3.7 billion associated with national park visitation.⁵

¹ Department of Environment and Science. 2020. *Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030: Protecting our world-class natural and cultural values*. Brisbane, Queensland Government. URL: www.parks.des.qld.gov.au/management/plans-strategies/protected-area-strategy.

² Tourism and Events Queensland (2021) *Tourism and Events Queensland's Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021–2024*. URL: <https://teq.queensland.com/industry-resources/industry-sectors/nature-based-tourism-2021>.

³ Tourism and Events Queensland, 2021, Queensland Tourism Economic Key Facts. <https://teq.queensland.com/research-and-insights/economics-and-specialised-reports/economics>

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, 2017, At what price? The economic, social and icon value of the Great Barrier Reef.

⁵ Driml, S., Brown R., Moreno Silva, C. (2020). *Estimating the Value of National Parks to the Queensland Economy*. School of Economics Discussion Paper Series 636. School of Economics, The University of Queensland. <http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/abstract/636.pdf>.

Travelers are seeking a strong connection to nature, genuine immersion in the natural environment and experiences that connect people on a deeper level with the world around them. This trend is growing, global, long-term and expected to be even more relevant in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent surveys indicate that nature and wildlife are the first or second most important factor influencing travel plans for our key international markets. Furthermore, the third most important criteria for domestic travelers when choosing a destination is ‘world-class natural beauty and wildlife’.⁶

In our bid to secure a larger share of the ecotourism and nature based tourism market, the Queensland Government has developed a range of policies and strategies. But without investment and practical action to expand and manage the protected area estate, Queensland will continue to lose ground to other states who are increasingly active in their efforts to promote sustainable nature-based tourism.

‘Our Vision: A vibrant and sustainable nature-based tourism industry that delivers transformative experiences and supports the conservation of Queensland’s natural and cultural assets.’

Tourism and Events Queensland’s Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021-2024

Valuing Indigenous connection to country

For millennia, Indigenous people have cared for country, fulfilling important cultural responsibilities and maintaining intimate connections with land, water and wildlife. Queensland’s landscapes are rich in living cultural heritage and we welcome the emphasis on opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation in the *Protected Areas Strategy*. We support increased collaboration with First Nations people in expanding and managing Queensland’s protected areas and fostering Indigenous-led cultural tourism.

Protecting Queensland’s exceptional natural diversity

Queensland supports an exceptional diversity of species and habitats. Our state is home to 85 percent of Australia’s native mammals, 72 percent of native birds and more than 11,000 plant species. Many of these species are under threat. There are more than 1,000 threatened species in Queensland, including the northern hairy-nosed wombat, cassowary and the Cooktown orchid, Queensland’s floral emblem.

Well managed protected areas provide a vital haven for native species threatened by habitat destruction, feral animals, noxious weeds and the impacts of climate change. Unfortunately, many of Queensland’s species and habitats remain unprotected, with only 8.2 percent of the state protected. More protected areas are needed to safeguard our native species and to provide a focus for conservation management.



Figure 1. Queensland has the lowest percentage of protected land in Australia.⁷

⁶ Tourism and Events Queensland, 2021, Queensland Tourism Economic Key Facts.

⁷ Australian Government, Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database (CAPAD), www.environment.gov.au/land/nrs/science/capad.

Investing in nature and people

Government expenditure on protected areas delivers multiple benefits for people and nature, including tourism opportunities, regional development, local employment, recreation, health benefits, species and habitat conservation and protection of carbon stocks and ecosystem services.

We welcome the recognition of the multiple benefits of protected areas in the *Queensland Protected Areas Strategy 2020-2030* and call on the Queensland Government to match their vision of a world-class protected area system with commensurate levels of funding in the 2022 budget and forward estimates.

The undersigned organisations call on the Queensland Government to fulfil the promise of the *Protected Areas Strategy* by committing substantial additional funding in the 2022 budget to support:

- 1. establishment of new national parks and private protected areas;**
- 2. new opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation and cultural tourism;**
- 3. effective management of the natural and cultural values within protected areas; and**
- 4. exceptional visitor experiences, including nature-based and cultural tourism activities.**

Together, the Queensland Government's *Protected Areas Strategy* and *Nature-based Tourism Strategy* outline an inspiring vision for nature conservation and tourism in our state. To make this vision a reality, the Queensland Government must embark on a focused and strategic program of implementing actions underpinned by adequate funding and supported by the highest levels of government.

We stand ready to assist in this work and commend the Queensland Government for outlining a positive vision for protected areas and nature-based tourism in Queensland.

This statement is supported by leading tourism and conservation organisations, including:



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