

with contributions as noted

Queensland Park System - draft Master Plan released for discussion

A discussion paper outlining proposals for the management of Queensland parks over the next 20 years has been released by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Public comments are sought, with submissions closing on 30 May 2001.

Over seven million hectares of land are included in the Queensland park system. The *Nature Conservation Act 1992* is the basis for the cardinal principle of national park management - "to provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and protection of the area's cultural resources and values". The discussion paper states that the parks system will be protected vigorously into the future.

The paper emphasises three elements of the parks system:

- The parks are a vital part of a sustainable ecosystem, protecting biodiversity and protecting threatened and endangered plant and animal species. The parks system must maintain and restore ecological processes and dynamics of ecosystems in their landscape context.
- The Queensland Government has recognised that native title interests may exist over a number of national parks, and this will require significant changes to the management and operations of some parks. The discussion paper proposes agreements between government and traditional owners regarding tenure, use and management of these areas to achieve the shared goal of maintaining the natural condition and indigenous cultural heritage of the areas.
- Parks are community accessible resources, providing recreational use, environmental education and economic benefits (as tourist attractions) to the community. However, accessibility and increased tourism may result in overcrowding of parks, posing significant management challenges. It is possible that visitor numbers may be limited, as already occurs overseas.

Clearly, there is considerable potential for conflict among these three principles, and their balancing will provide a significant challenge for the future, and one worthy of considerable public discussion.

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Vegetation Management

Many local governments in Queensland have used "tree preservation" or "vegetation protection" local laws and ordinances, in an endeavour to protect significant trees and habitat. Typically, these operated either by mapping areas of vegetation considered significant, or by protecting all trees over a certain height or girth. There have been numerous practical difficulties with this system, including:

- accidental protection of the wrong allotments;
- purported protection of vegetation which was required to be kept clear under State legislation, eg for fire safety, workplace health and safety or dangerous goods management purposes;
- incomplete transitional provisions; and
- fundamental doubt as to the validity of such local laws, as being inconsistent with the development assessment process under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

This system is now gradually being overtaken by the new *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, together with the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. However, the transition to the new regime appears somewhat awkward.

Section 854 *Local Government Act* essentially prohibits local governments from passing local laws establishing a process about development, if the process would be similar to or duplicate the processes under the *Integrated Planning Act*. Recently, this section has been amended to provide that, until 1 July 2001, "development" does not include the clearing of vegetation on freehold land. A reasonable inference is that clearing is intended to be a type of development after that date, and that this will invalidate future local laws establishing processes about vegetation clearing. Naturally, a number of local governments are currently rushing to amend their current local laws before the deadline of 1 July 2001, in an endeavour to maintain local control for as long as possible. However, local laws are required to be regularly reviewed, and those governing tree preservation will eventually be phased out.

The remaining local laws would not appear to be consistent with the existing provisions of the *Integrated Planning Act*, which already provides that clearing vegetation on freehold land is a type of "operational work" and therefore a type of development, and that certain types of clearing are now already assessable development (ie. requiring development approval).

A series of "regional ecosystem maps" are being prepared under the new *Vegetable Management Act* and clearing rights will depend on designations on these maps. However, these maps are not yet ready, and the current versions appear difficult to use, with boundaries not aligning properly.

The transitional position for vegetation management is one of some confusion, with terms not yet defined, maps not yet ready, and many local governments continuing to apply existing local laws inconsistently with the *Integrated Planning Act*.

Draft State Coastal Plan

Almost 85 percent of Queenslanders live in the coastal zone of this state. Management of the coast and its resources is likely to have a significant impact on the future of the state's economy, our lifestyles and our unique environment. The draft State Coastal Plan describes how the coastal zone is to be managed as required by the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*. The plan proposes policy directions for major coastal issues such as:

- coastal use and development;
- public access to the coast;
- water quality;
- cultural heritage;
- coastal landscapes; and
- coordinated management

and defines how these policies should be implemented by government, industry and the community.

Following a public review period, submissions by community, peak industry organisations and government agencies will be considered by the Coastal Protection Advisory Council as well as other State Government departments and peak stakeholder groups.

Submissions on the draft State Coastal Plan are expected to be finalised by mid 2001.

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