

WPSQ POLICY: Conservation of biodiversity in Queensland

Scope:

This draft policy establishes the WPSQ's views on major issues relating to biodiversity conservation in Queensland. It sets out goals, actions and guiding principles to present sufficient and effective management of Queensland's biodiversity.

Context:

WPSQ recognises that Australia is one of only two developed nations among seventeen megadiverse countries in the world. Thus, Australia has a capacity and a responsibility to manage its biodiversity. Additionally, Australia also has extremely high level of endemic species in relation to vascular plants, vertebrates, (mammals, birds, reptiles amphibians and fish) and invertebrates.

WPSQ stresses the need to ensure the survival of Australia's priceless flora and fauna for the future. WPSQ is concerned about the decline in Queensland's biodiversity. WPSQ appreciates that protected areas are the corner-stone of conservation and acknowledges that acceptable human interventions in those protected areas are allowable. In Queensland, there are five world heritage sites and numerous protected areas including national parks. The international standard for protected areas is 10% of land mass and Queensland currently does not satisfy that standard. However, biodiversity cannot be conserved on protected areas alone as significant biodiversity occurs on privately managed lands. Managing the biodiversity values of land must become part of or integral to all human endeavours. Biodiversity cannot be the sole responsibility of the Government. The Government must manage biodiversity protection across the landscape by driving cultural change by all means available to it. What are required are models that use a continent scale in designing and coordinating conservation and compatible land use across millions of hectares to afford biodiversity protection. Such mechanism should not only address the CAR (comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness) but also connectivity and resilience need to be accommodated for the climate change and ecological processes. The current practices and the implementations conducted by the governments are inadequate from WPSQ's perspective. Therefore, a policy is needed to address these issues.

To minimise the threats to its biodiversity, particularly to rare and threatened species and ecosystems, sound management of native bushland including grasslands is believed to be fundamental. This is not only because the bushland has cultural, aesthetic, recreational and commercial imperatives but also because it contains essential habitats, relates to the local ecosystems, limits the weed invasions and prevents land degradation that lowers water quality. Loss of habitat may also trigger stress in wildlife making them more susceptible to disease.

There are three basic components of a successful biodiversity conservation strategy. Firstly, a functional network of connectivity between the large core protected estate areas

is required to support the long-term conservation requirements at all scales. Secondly, land uses in these connecting areas must be complementary to conservation. Finally there is the need to restore and rehabilitate when and where necessary. However WPSQ stresses that essential elements of biodiversity exist everywhere and every human activity must be consistent with ecosystem functioning and biodiversity conservation.

WPSQ is aware of legislation, international obligations, agreements and a framework in relation to biodiversity conservation in Queensland (See p. 9) but these need to be strengthened for effectiveness. A multifaceted approach is needed for an effective conservation strategy for protecting biodiversity.

Goals/objectives

Four major goals and the related principles are listed below.

Protect biodiversity on terrestrial systems

- Increase the existing Protected Area Estate to include all regional ecosystems and rationalise protected area boundaries to ensure viability and cost effective management.
- Improve Protected Area Estate Management and document and assess estate values (flora, fauna, landscape and ecological processes).
- Establish networks that link the protected areas, encouraging land uses and management complementary to conservation in these networks.
- Document distribution of rare and threatened species and Queensland endemic flora and fauna in protected areas.
- Document endangered and of concern ecosystems and protect these areas from threats.

Protect biodiversity in aquatic systems

Freshwater

- Ensure adequate representation of freshwater aquatic systems in the Protected Area Estate.
- Ensure future Protected Area Estate includes aquatic systems wherever practicable.
- Protect wetlands from drainage and modification.

Marine

- Ensure continuous marine parks along the coast of Queensland from the New South Wales border to that of the Northern Territory.
- Adequately protect the conservation values of marine parks in suitably sized green zones.

Enhance knowledge of biodiversity

- Improve knowledge of flora, fauna and of ecological processes.
- Determine best practice for cost effective methods for biodiversity conservation on a variety of land tenures where conservation is not the prime objective.

Achieve stakeholder participation

- Increase the knowledge for private land managers to manage for biodiversity values
- Implement capacity building in the broader community.
- Educate the broader community about the values and benefit of biodiversity protection.
- Facilitate partnerships and incentives such as stewardship payments to protect and maintain biodiversity on private lands.

Actions

To achieve the above goals and the objectives, WPSQ advocates and promotes the following actions.

Protect biodiversity on terrestrial systems

Increase the existing protected area estate

- Ensure regional ecosystems of a viable size to protect all components are adequately represented in the Protected Area Estate by 2020.
- Adopt conservation models that link protected areas to ensure connectivity, resilience as well as the CAR principles (see page1).
- Negotiate with Traditional owners to consider entering into conservation agreements under the NCA over lands under management, ownership or trusteeship.
- Investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of protected area tenure to all stock routes and camping and water reserves.
- Integrate management of appropriate State and Local Government tenure reserves with the protected area estate to enhance connectivity.
- Amend legislation to ensure regional ecosystems or plant associations can be listed similar to flora or fauna species

Improve and assess protected area estate management

- Effective programs that remove weeds and feral animals from all protected estate areas.
- Ensure adequate on-going funding for research in order to evaluate and monitor the assets of protected area estate appropriately.

- Make management strategies adaptable to continuous changes of social, economic and environmental imperatives to enrich collective practices.
- Promote long-term resilience in protected areas to minimise the impact of disasters
- Consider the *National Reserve System* approach and incorporate the *Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia* framework within management arrangements.
- Use appropriate fire regimes to maintain ecosystems and species.

Documentation

- Document all flora, fauna, landscape and cultural values within each protected area.
- Document and integrate indigenous knowledge with conventional management practices.
- Record, appreciate and accept particular qualitative local knowledge and experience.
- Facilitate equitable information exchange among stakeholders.

Protect biodiversity in aquatic systems

Freshwater

Increase representation in protected area estate

- Ensure representative examples of all freshwater ecosystems and intrinsic biodiversity values in Protected Area Estate by 2020.
- Monitor and maintain aquatic environmental flows adequately.

Wetlands protection

- Ensure human interventions do not impact on wetlands.
- Monitor water quality for the survival of wetlands, mangrove and riparian vegetation.
- Provide sufficient buffer zones to maintain quality of wetlands from development.
- Legislate to maintain and rehabilitate adequate riparian vegetation along all watercourses.

Marine

Increase the existing marine protected area estate

- Continuous Marine Park along the Queensland coast by 2020.
- A Coordinated Conservation Area concept to be developed for marine parks and environs.

- Investigate the feasibility of the use of international protocols and treaties such as RAMSAR or CAMBA to strengthen the case for the gazettal of additional marine parks.

Conservation value protection

- Enlarge the green zones to protect the conservation where science indicates such action is necessary.
- Provide adequate buffer zones around the green zones.
- Minimise adverse impacts on sea grass and benthic communities from human activities.

Documentation

- Document flora, fauna, landscape and cultural values associated with aquatic ecosystems.
- Document and integrate indigenous knowledge with conventional management practices.
- Record, appreciate and accept particular qualitative local knowledge and experience.
- Facilitate equitable information exchange among stakeholders.

Enhance knowledge of biodiversity

Knowledge improvement

- Undertake systematic fauna and flora assessment surveys of Queensland making the information available to the land managers.
- Upgrade existing vegetation mapping state-wide with emphasis on the coastal lowland regions
- Document and appreciate indigenous knowledge and experience.
- Consider adaptive management research, which will improve knowledge levels by its learning process.
- Make sure information flows equally among stakeholders.
- Encourage long-term research and monitoring, short term research needs to have an overall strategic direction.
- Fund research to gain additional information on the overall environment.
- Educate the communities to encourage awareness of local biodiversity and the role of protected area estate.

Best practice

- Present scientific research findings in plain English so that the broader community can readily understand and apply the findings appropriately.

- Advise stakeholders how to utilise given resources most effectively to reduce wastage.
- Determine area-specific best practice methods for conservational compatible land uses where conservation and exploitation are balanced.

Achieve stakeholder involvement

Capacity building

- Provide long-term incentives to the broader community to increase their participation.
- Determine particular collective goals of the stakeholders to advance collective actions.
- Consult and include local community and relevant indigenous peoples throughout decision-making process.
- Encourage interaction with neighbouring regions and communities to support and learn from each other.
- Implement extension programs only if they are meaningful to selected areas or regions.

Education on biodiversity

- Facilitate regular awareness festivals or events in relation to biodiversity conservation.
- Promote biodiversity education for children
- Ensure environmental subjects are a component of school curricula.
- Educate the community about the principles of conservation and the need for protection of biodiversity including the Precautionary principle.

Partnership facilitation

- Support Landcare, Fishcare and Coastcare and other organisations who can influence or assist individual landowners to protect biodiversity.
- Support active stewardship beyond duty of care for the public good in the form of payment or taxation relief to make private sector land use compatible with biodiversity protection.
- Enhance economic, social and environmental significance by integrating several types of management such as catchments, cultural heritage and ecosystems.
- Encourage new and appropriate institutions to address biodiversity issues.
- Commit to stronger bond and relationship between all levels of government.
- Include as many stakeholders as possible in decision-making processes.

Networks and links

- Negotiate with forest and mining sectors to ensure sustainable development and to help link remnant vegetation areas.
- Repair and rehabilitate previously damaged environmental corridors.

Biosecurity risks

- Facilitate arrangements to attain on-going monitoring outcomes at local, regional, state, national and international levels.
- Produce plain English reports regularly advising of issues.
- Negotiate with neighbouring countries to minimise environmental externalities
- Ensure all government agencies are aware of biosecurity risks.

Approved by Council

Date 27/03/2007

Definitions:

Biodiversity

The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.

Biodiversity conservation

All the processes and actions of looking after a place or biodiversity so as to retain its natural significance and always includes management, sustainable use, protection, maintenance, monitoring and restoration and enhancement of the natural environment.

Megadiverse

It is based on the total number of species in a country and the degree of endemism at the species level and at higher taxonomic levels. The megadiverse countries have less than 10% of the global surface, but support more than 70% of the biological diversity on earth.

Connectivity

A term derived to establish the 'ecological opportunities for movement' rather than viewed in the traditional sense of 'corridors' (ie narrow continuous links between entities). For instance, connections may be enlarged 'islands' of habitat between major natural areas. When these islands are restored to current or recent past vegetation, preferably through natural regrowth, they can create 'connectivity' between larger habitat areas.

Vertebrates

Animals that have a spinal cord enclosed in a backbone. Five traditional classes of vertebrates are amphibians, birds, fish, mammals and reptiles including human.

Invertebrates

Any animals that lacks a vertebral column or backbone. They include sponges, worms, molluscs and arthropods.

Protected Area Estate

As defined under the *Nature Conservation Act* of Queensland, it includes all protected are tenures. These are areas of land dedicated to the protection and maintenance of

biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.

Resilience

A measure of the ability of an ecosystem to withstand and recover from environmental stresses and perturbations. The healthier an ecosystem is (eg absence of exotic grazers, weeds), the greater its resilient capacity — it is dynamic in time but frequently refers to a spatially static environment. With shifting distributions induced by climate change, resilience may also refer to the capacity to shift to other localities. In this action plan the term ‘ecosystem resilience’ is used in both ways.

Relevant Legislation

WPSQ is aware of legislation in relation to biodiversity conservation in Queensland such as:

Commonwealth

- *The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999;*

Queensland

- *The Nature Conservation Act 1992;*
- *The Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995;*
- *The Marine Parks Act 2004;*
- *The Vegetation Management Act 1999;*
- *The Environmental Protection Act 1994;*
- *The Land Protection Act 2002;*
- *The Fisheries Act 1994;*
- *The Land Act 1994;*
- *The Recreation Areas Management Act 1988;*
- *The Integrated Planning Act 1997*