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Queensland's Draft Protected Area Strategy 2017

Submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, and the Department of National Parks Sport and Racing

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We submit that any extension to the protected area estate will be to the detriment of that which already exists unless novel ways can be found to resource the additions. We suggest that a user-group, with well-established stewardship credentials, might act as trustee through a not-for-profit, body corporate structure, thereby formalising user buy-in at the local level.

1. The ACAQ applauds the Queensland government's intent to increase the area of the protected estate in Queensland. However, the ACAQ is firmly of the view that this should not be done unless the government also provides the means by which the management of the additional area will be funded.
2. We note funding restrictions are currently impacting the existing protected area estate. A case in point is the Glasshouse Mountains National Park. This iconic park is central to recreational rock climbing in south-east Queensland, yet, in recent years, we have seen its maintenance essentially de-funded. We oppose any move the net result of which is to further withdraw resources from existing parks.

3. We would like to draw the Department's attention to a strong correlation that exists between recreational values and conservation values at a typical climbing crag. Steep rocky landscapes not only favour recreational climbers, but also sponsor substantial biodiversity due to the abrupt disjunctions in microenvironment. In short, there exist many small pockets of land that lack agricultural, or forestry value, but, because of their inherent recreational and conservation values, would be worthwhile additions to the protected area estate.
4. As an example of such an area, we can point to Frederick Peak, located some 16km south-west of Townsville. It sits on unallocated state land at the margin of the outer suburbs. It provides quality climbing in what is, despite its proximity of a major city, a unique wilderness setting replete with thick scrub, stinging trees and venomous fauna. Its cliffs also host the only known occurrence of the Cliff Quandong, a plant whose occurrence has been mapped and preserved by the local climbing community.
5. A second example can be provided by Minto Crag, near the township of Boonah in Queensland's south east. Once again we have a high value climbing resource, which also offers natural values worthy of conservation, sitting on unallocated state land. It complements the other fragments of wilderness that make up the Moogerah Peaks NP, yet it is not held within the protected area estate.
6. We suggest that areas, such as those described in points 4. and 5. above, be dedicated as conservation parks. We further suggest that they be managed by an overall not-for-profit, body corporate, or perhaps individual, crag-specific body corporates, ultimately governed by the climbing community stakeholders. Provided that, for all comers, participation in such a corporate entity is unencumbered, and provided that free and fair access to the estate is guaranteed, then we believe the Nature Conservation Act, as it currently stands could underpin such an arrangement.
7. Thus, we are suggesting that the climbing community is one where a well-developed stewardship ethos might be formalised within the existing legislative framework as a means to meet the government's goal of expanding the protected area estate, all without incurring additional expenditure.
8. The issue of public liability arises. The body corporate, although acting as trustee under the Nature Conservation Act, would nevertheless be burdened with the duty of care for the safety of visitors, and thus would need to be insured. However, the cost to the body corporate of carrying such insurance would far exceed the revenue that could be raised from visitors to any one crag. Furthermore, the point is moot as to whether raising a financial barrier to entry upon public space is constitutional. Because conservation parks are public space, and are open to all, we submit that the state should be the one to either underwrite the specific cost of public liability insurance, or to shield not-for-profit trustees of such parks from the burden of public liability. Not-for-profit trustees could be shielded from public liability by extending the existing exemptions afforded

to the state and officers of QPWS in respect of national parks and conservation parks under the *Nature Conservation Act*. Similar legislation exemptions exist in the *Forestry Act* for holders of plantation licences over state forest, as well as for plantation employees.

9. Finally we would like to point out that, in our experience, handing out parcels of the protected area estate to local councils for them to manage as trustee has a deleterious impact on both the conservation and recreational values of the land so entrusted. As a rule, the council has neither the experience, nor the resources for such a specialised management task. Furthermore, funding will ever be in doubt given the likely low levels of rate-payer engagement. A further issue is that statutory exemptions from public liability afforded to the state and QPWS employees, has not been extended to councils performing identical tasks on the delegated estate. Councils are very risk adverse, and thus they struggle to manage land that provides recreational climbing. As matters stand, we would not want to see an increase in the extent of the protected estate managed by local councils, unless the deed of delegation extended public liability shielding to the delegate.