

Queensland State Forest User Alliance

Submission to the Tourism Industry Reference Panel “Designing Our Tourism Future” consultation

The Queensland State Forest User Alliance (QSFUA) is a campaign that was established to oppose the lockup of Queensland’s native state forests into national parks. The campaign raised 6080 signatures in support of a parliamentary petition at this link.

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/petitions/petition-details?id=3235>

The QSFUA advocates for improved management of Queensland’s state forests to maximise access for recreational and commercial users, while ensuring that our forests are managed in a sustainable manner.

The QSFUA is run alongside the State Forest Hunting for Queensland (SFHFQ) campaign, which lobbies for access for recreational hunters to Queensland state forests. This campaign raised 13,576 signatures in the parliamentary petition at this link.

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/petitions/petition-details?id=3003>

QSFUA has the following concerns about the management of Queensland state forests, as it relates to the tourism sector.

The lockup of Queensland state forests in national parks will destroy sustainable tourism opportunities

The Queensland Government has a policy of locking up 17% of the land area of Queensland in national parks, most of which comes from native forestry. While Queensland have large areas of untouched native forest which should be protected in national parks, much of the forestry that is currently being locked up is regrowth after logging, and therefore not a genuine representation of Queensland’s natural heritage. The forests do however continue to meet the key environmental objective of providing habitat for native wildlife.

From the perspective of forest-based tourism locking up regrown native forests in national parks is destructive for two reasons:

- Sustainably managed state forests can in many cases preserve habitat and mitigate carbon better than national parks, because the management of these forests can be funded from the sustainable harvesting of timber. This money is able to be used to generate revenue, which is spent on, amongst other things, the infrastructure in the forest which is able to be used by forest-based tourists. The New South Wales Forestry Corporation management of NSW native forests is an excellent example of this approach, with community service obligations (CSOs) funding tourism infrastructure, see the link for more details.

<https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/>

In contrast national parks cannot be logged and therefore, the revenue generation

Contact: Rhys Bosley, Campaign Manager – QSFUA campaigns

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opportunity associated with sustainable native timber harvesting is lost to all forest users, including the tourism sector. Queensland has been unable to replace this lost opportunity with public funding.

- The lockup of state forests in national parks usually accompanies limitations or bans on a variety of recreational activities that people enjoy in state forests, such as four wheel driving, motorcycle riding, fossicking and recreational prospecting, mountain bike riding, horse riding and hunting. This appears to result from ideologically-driven opposition from environmentalists, that is not based on evidence about the impacts of these activities, especially if broad access is granted as is the case in NSW state forests.

In contrast in Queensland outdoor recreation concentrated in relatively few locations, which means that in these locations any negative impacts such as erosion from vehicle use, are likely to be magnified and harder to correct than would be the case if these activities were spread out. Furthermore, by forgoing revenues from sustainable logging, the Queensland Government is foregoing opportunities to pay for any environmental restoration that is necessary from the granting of broader recreational access.

Clearly the lockup of Queensland state forests in national parks is damaging to the future of Queensland tourism, while failing to address environmental concerns, and the QSFUA recommends that the Tourism Industry Reference Panel convey this view to the Queensland government.

The current management of Queensland state forests inhibits the growth of forest-based tourism

In addition to the threat posed by the state forest lockup in national parks, Queensland's current state forest management system, represents a significant impediment to the utilisation of Queensland forests for tourism. Specific concerns are as follows:

- **Queensland state forests are not managed in accordance with the spirit of the Forestry Act 1959**

The "Cardinal Principle of management of State Forests" (Forestry Act, 1959 (Qld)(s35)) requires that the forests be managed appropriately, having regard to the possibility of applying the area to recreational purposes, in addition to timber, grazing and environmental purposes. Compared to recreational access to state forests in New South Wales and elsewhere, access to Queensland's state forests for recreation is grossly substandard, suggesting that within the Queensland Government there is a lack of commitment to management of the forests in accordance of the law.

- **Tourism in Queensland forests is subject to unnecessary fees and regulations**

Camping - In many Queensland state forests users pay to camp in a limited number of campgrounds or are not allowed to camp at all, with only some forests allowing bush camping. By comparison camping in nearly all NSW state forests is free, with campgrounds being funded by Forestry Corporation CSOs. The provision of wide-ranging free camping is likely to be the cornerstone which would facilitate far greater use of Queensland state forests by people from all income brackets and which would spread out activities to mitigate

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any impacts from recreational activities.

Four-wheel driving and trail-bike riding - In Queensland state forests four wheel drives and trail bikes are limited to gazetted roads. The potential for erosion to fire trails is given as the reason for this, but as noted above, spreading out users out by broadly improving access (for example with free camping), is likely to mitigate this sort of damage. Four-wheel drive clubs have also reported long wait times for approval of permits for group events, from some forest managers.

In contrast in NSW four-wheel drives and trail bikes are able to use fire trails. In Victorian forests trail bike riders enjoy the added advantage of being able to ride cheaper motorcycles that are not eligible for full registration under a “recreation registration”, which allows those motorcycles to be used on rural roads such as in state forests.

Limited recreational prospecting and fossicking access - In Queensland recreational prospectors and fossickers are limited to a small number of forests, with state forest graziers having being given the right to waive access in the many accessible forests upon which they hold leases in the 1990s. In contrast there are large areas of accessible forest for recreational prospecting and fossicking in NSW under permit. In Victoria the miners right still exists, which allows recreational prospectors to use other types of crown land such as pastoral leases, upon purchase of a permit.

- **Poor management of interactions between recreational users, grazing and timber lease holders**

Grazing Leaseholders -There is significant disagreement over the rights of grazing leasees using state forests to exclude recreational users, which undermines the ability of recreational forest users to enjoy the forests, and which creates stress for grazing leaseholders. This is an unsatisfactory situation which the Queensland Government should commit to resolving.

The QSFUA position that our forests should be managed for the benefit of all Queenslanders in accordance with the Forestry Act, that is that no lease can exclude other lawful uses of the forest including recreational use, However, the QSFUA position is also that lease holders are entitled to be assured of being able to operate their businesses, without unreasonable inconvenience. The major issues that grazing leasees have related to the QSFUA regarding improved recreational use are:

- that under current lease arrangements they are required to upgrade and maintain forest infrastructure, that would then be expected to be shared by recreational users.
- uncertainty about graziers public liability for users on their leases.
- biosecurity issues, especially weed management.
- dealing with bad user behavior.

In addition to these practical concerns, it is clear that many of Queensland’s 200 or so state forest grazing lease holding families have a long history with and a strong emotional

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connection to the leases which they hold, which makes them valuable sources of knowledge and important stakeholders. However, the QSFUA position is that this needs to be balanced against the rights of the other 5 million Queenslanders to access their state forest.

QSFUA considers that these matters could be largely addressed within a NSW Forestry Corporation style forest management system, with most or all aspects of shared forest management being centralised and funded by timber CSOs, freeing up graziers to focus on management and infrastructure that is exclusive to their cattle. Advances in technology, such as GPS maps which show areas of forest that are closed to recreational use due to commercial activity, have made this sort of shared use of forest far easier to manage than in 1959, when the Forestry Act was written.

Timber leaseholders - QSFUA also understands that there have been disagreements between promoters of group activities such as four wheel drive rallies in forests and private timber leasees, about access and the extent of community service obligations, with commercial in confidence leases being a barrier to resolving these disputes. QSFUA also considers that this could be managed within a NSW Forestry Corporation style forest management system.

Lost economic opportunity

Both the ongoing state forest lockup in national parks and the poor management of Queensland state forests, represents a lost economic opportunity for the state and in particular for the regional and rural communities that would benefit from more forest-based tourism. Forest-based tourism has potential as a diversification opportunity, which could reduce a community's reliance on cyclic rural industries and on government programs.

Hunting in NSW state forests was estimated to be worth \$119 million in gross state production 2017¹, which equates to at least \$80 million in Queensland when adjusted for population and inflation. Furthermore, recreational prospecting for gold was estimated to be worth \$54.3 million² in Queensland in 2020. It seems likely that all potential recreational forest uses could represent a half a billion dollar a year industry, if Queensland can get the management of state forest-based tourism right.

As it stands Queensland's forest management puts our state at a significant competitive disadvantage to other states, particularly NSW with its close proximity to South East Queensland. It is even likely that many potential forest users may make the trip to New Zealand, with its extensive public land access, in the absence of improved recreational access to Queensland state forests. It would seem to only be a matter of time before these competitors start actively exploiting Queensland's mismanagement of recreational forest access.

Government handling of recreational forest access issues

¹ https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/723454/economic-impact-of-recreational-hunting-in-nsw.pdf

² https://www.prospectingaustralia.com.au/forum/doc/member-docs/4485/1617237217_minelab_survey.pdf

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During the QSFUA campaign two matters have emerged, which do not inspire confidence in the Governments understanding of recreational forest access issues:

- The previous Queensland Environment Minister's response to the petition opposing the lockup of Queensland state forests, did not provide a strong justification for the lockup of national parks from the perspective of the tourism sector. In particular:
 - The response highlighted usage and economic activity resulting from Queensland national parks, without acknowledging the limitations that Queensland forest users face compared to other states.
 - The minister also failed to acknowledge that state forest based recreational benefits are different and additional to national park-based activities and are not necessarily substitutable. That is, a four wheel driver, trail bike rider, recreational hunter or fossicker is unlikely to take up bushwalking because they cannot undertake their preferred activity in a Queensland state forest, they are more likely just to travel interstate or overseas to undertake the activity that they love. In some cases they may undertake less healthy outdoor activities with the associated loss of health and wellbeing benefits.
 - Finally the Minister's response cited increased national park use while Queensland's borders were locked shut near the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic, as evidence of the value of national parks. At the time there was very little else Queenslanders could do other than go camping in a national park, so it was clearly a flawed argument which undermined the Minister's credibility.

QSFUA recommends that the Government commits to improving the standard of debate, engagement and hopefully policy on the tourism impacts of different public land tenures, by being more rigorous in its own analysis.

- The Queensland Government has recently convened a Native Timber Advisory Panel to advise on the future of Queensland state forests. which the QSFUA has been advised was the result of a whole of government consultation. However, the panel is dominated by timber and environmental stakeholders without including tourism or grazing representatives. QSFUA considers this to be a failure of the relevant Ministers and Departments to understand the interdependent nature of forest usage and the need for all stakeholders to be present in negotiations. QSFUA and encourages the Tourism Industry Reference Panel, to recommend that both outdoor tourism and grazing representatives be included on the Native Timber Advisory Panel, to maximise the possibility of negotiated solutions that benefit all stakeholders.

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Recommendations

Therefor the QSFUA proposes the following recommendations for the Tourism Industry Reference Panel to make to the Queensland Government, in relation to the role of Queensland's state forests in Queensland's tourism future:

- The lockup of Queensland state forests in national parks is destructive to tourism and from the tourism industries perspective, should not continue.
- The Queensland Government should commit to only providing the public with thorough, non-ideologically driven analysis of the impacts of different public land tenures on the tourism sector.
- The Queensland Government should commit to reforming the management of Queensland state forests along the lines of the NSW Forestry Corporation model, to allow extensive liberalisation of recreational access to Queensland's state forests, would be the approach that would best serve the Queensland tourism sector.
- The Queensland Government should ensure that outdoor tourism and grazing industry representatives should be represented on the current Native Timber Advisory Panel

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