

# Gondwana Rainforests of Australia

## Report on Advisory Committee Meetings



### March 2017

The first meeting of the recently appointed Gondwana Rainforests Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (TSAC) and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) were held on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2017.

The key purpose of the meetings were:

- an induction of the new committees;
- reviewing and providing input into the draft *Gondwana Rainforests Strategic Management Plan and Framework*;
- consulting on two Queensland Ecotourism projects in Gondwana Rainforests reserves (the Green Mountains Campground and the Scenic Rim Trail), and
- identifying matters to include in the development of a strategic agenda for the coming term of the advisory committees.

This report from the joint meetings provides an outline of the key outcomes and direction for the coming term of the advisory committees. Formal communiques outlining matters for consideration by ministers and managing agencies will be provided from subsequent meetings.

### Gondwana Rainforests Strategic Management Plan and Framework

1. The committees welcomed the opportunity to provide comment on the draft Strategic Management Plan and Framework (SMF).
2. The presentations by QPWS on Values-based Park Management Planning and monitoring and the NPWS presentation on the NSW NPWS Planning Framework were welcomed and provided context for the SMF.
3. The advisory committees are keen to be involved with providing further advice as monitoring strategies for the QPWS-managed national parks are developed and implemented.
4. The advisory committees have requested a presentation from NSW Office of Environment and Heritage on the application of the NSW Evaluation, Monitoring and Reporting Framework in the monitoring of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Gondwana Rainforests.
5. The advisory committees participated in round-table facilitated workshops on the key objectives and strategies for the management of the property and also the identification of the key attributes for management and monitoring of the OUV of the property (a selection of notes in Attachment 1).
6. Further consultation with advisory committees is planned prior to the finalisation of the draft for internal agency-wide consultation and public exhibition.

## Ecotourism initiatives within the Gondwana Rainforests

The committees were provided with a presentation by QPWS of the Qld Government Ecotourism Initiative and individual presentations from Ben O’Hara for Gainsdale about the Scenic Rim Trail proposal and Shane O’Reilly about the Green Mountains campground proposal.

The advisory committee discussed the proposals and members provided comment on matters for further consideration in the approval processes (Attachment 2). These matters are important in relation to the potential impacts on the OUV of the property including actual impact on World Heritage values (rainforests and threatened species) and also management of the property, given the proposal is providing for private use under a lease agreement, the monitoring of which and of itself will not result in a reduction of impacts.

## Community Advisory Committee – strategic agenda points

As this was the first meeting of the committees, a strategic agenda was not finalised but rather key areas of interest and concern were identified for consideration. These included:

- Priority to provide advice on presentation matters including:
  - the development of a **communication strategy**
  - enhanced messages and kits for tourism operators
  - enhanced promotion in the educational space
  - enhanced messages about the value of the Gondwana Rainforests to Aboriginal people and use of Aboriginal themes in interpretation.
- Work on enhancing collaboration with local government and neighbours
- Addressing the threat of water extraction as a threat to values
- Extensions to the Gondwana Rainforests – seeking information on the existing proposal
- Advice to address the challenges presented by the use of social media and the increased recreational use of the reserves as well as the opportunities for enhanced promotion
- Provide input and advice for **IUCN Outlook reporting and periodic reporting**

## Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee – strategic agenda

Key areas identified for the coming term of the new committees included:

1. Providing input and advice on the development of the Strategic Management Framework and Plan
2. Continuing to provide advice on monitoring programs for the property including the further development of a monitoring framework for the property
3. Continuing to provide advice about threatened species management in both the NSW and Queensland sections of the property (NSW Saving our Species program and Queensland EHP/QPWS) (building on the work in the previous term of the committee)
4. Advising on research priorities for the property and implementation options including through departmental strategies and the National Environmental Science Program Hubs
5. Growing a better informed community of practice around the whole of the property using strategies that may include development of a research network, an annual newsletter and the introduction of a regular Gondwana Rainforests conference
6. Urging the Extensions to the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area (renomination) be progressed given the significant benefit to the management of the property.

# ATTACHMENT 1: KEY FEEDBACK FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEES ON THE GONDWANA RAINFORESTS STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

## 1. Identification

- Provide clarity around moving forward with the Extensions to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area (currently on Australia's Tentative List)
- Note that the scrutiny applied to a renomination process will include scrutiny and re-assessment of the current listing
- Note that buffers need to be considered as part of renomination process given IUCN concerns over fragmentation and adjoining land uses
- Note that knowledge changes significantly over a ten-year period and therefore progressing the nomination will involve significant work.

## 2. Protection

- Include seeking the addition of areas under different tenure to national parks as a strategy to address the need for management plans for all land parcels in the WHA
- Make it clear that protection is related to WH values and not just those attributes within the boundary of the World Heritage Area
- Include a statement that Environmental impact Assessment is needed to assist with protecting values, noting that impacts will occur and the aim is to avoid and/or mitigate significant impacts
- Add in a new objective: for sensitive and complementary land management to occur on neighbouring lands.
- Add strategies for this objective, including mapping of values, communicating values to neighbours and encouraging neighbours to enter into conservation agreements.

## 3. Conservation

- Include reference to enhanced resilience of the WH values noting that resilience-based assessments can be used to assess species persistence under different climate scenarios
- Include the need for measurable indicators of ecosystem function in assessments and monitoring (e.g. vegetation structure, pollination and dispersal mechanisms)
- There needs to be flexibility in what is being measured and managed to allow for a dynamic system as species and communities change. This is potentially in conflict with the need to maintain the OUV at the time of inscription
- Expand focus to include geological values and note that the range of vegetation communities is an important habitat requirement for the diversity of threatened species.

## 4. Presentation

- Suggest the word *connection* be reflected in the goal, to strengthen the purpose of promotion and education in the strategies. Current wording is focused on 'information provision' which tends to be one way, not two-directional
- Interpretation is needed at key locations and also in various forms (e.g. different media, online delivery, signage)

- The term ‘nature-based’ requires further definition and thought – some recreation uses may not be nature-based but would still be appropriate and low impact (e.g. art displays at Dorrigo NP)
- Include a performance measure for the number of visitors and the quality of their experience
- Consider the role of citizen science to partner and connect with, to support the protection of the property along with other volunteer involvement.

## **5. Governance**

- Include a performance measure stating that there is effective oversight of coordinated strategic and transparent management of the Gondwana Rainforests
- Clarify the role of local government in the management and protection of OUV
- Enhance the transparency of reporting on the management and condition of OUV.

## **6. Attributes contributing to OUV**

- The committees engaged in robust discussions about attributes to be included as the focus for monitoring and management. The information and sharing of views was invaluable in assisting the QPWS and NPWS planners to develop clarity of purpose in the development of the strategic plan
- Threats to individual species, populations, vegetation communities and ecosystems were discussed and management strategies identified. Key matters included:
  - current and projected change to rainfall and mist patterns, and the major threat posed by these to relict plants in montane forests
  - invasion and competition by native species migrating upslope in response to climate change, and the impact on species turnover and creation of novel ecosystems
  - the increasing scale, intensity and frequency of severe storm events, resulting in more canopy gaps and erosion of creek-beds
  - changes to fire regimes, which are difficult to predict and manage
  - impact on integrity of protected areas by intrusions such as powerlines, roads and other infrastructure, resulting in changes to microclimate with particular impact on refugia and buffering capacity
  - insufficient knowledge of where the values are located
  - the need to identify genetic diversity and the significance of evolutionary divergence
  - hydrological changes due to water extraction, which is an existing and emerging threat.

## ATTACHMENT 2: Ecotourism initiatives within the Gondwana Rainforests- MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

### Spicer's Scenic Trail matters

#### Concern about **impacts on OUV**.

- Significant concern about an **expected increase in use** beyond the numbers currently used in the Environmental Impact Assessment, particularly given that **social media is resulting in increased public use** when places are shared on social media.
- Servicing of high-end clients can be a significant issue and **may change the mode of service** (e.g. helicopters to provide supplies and transport during rainy periods).
- The importance of the one-way walk was noted; however, **public demand is not yet clear** and the provision of a shuttle service by QPWS or Spicer's Group has yet to be determined.
- More **information needs to be sought to justify building permanent facilities** in a park, particularly given that there are many precedents that a **small permanent facility becomes a large permanent facility over time**.
- Concern about **non-compliance with conditions**, for which there are many precedents.
- Concern that **monitoring is not outlined** in the document and that this needs to be made **available for mitigation and for transparency**.
- Concern raised that the proposed work may involve the removal of **Nature Conservation Act (NCA)-listed species**; need to **seek clarification** on this point and what is intended to be done.
- **Need for a revised or renegotiated lease if the program expands and develops**. And that these **details are specified in the lease**.
- QPWS noted that there will be a threshold and that **significant changes can't be made without triggering additional approvals**. **Ongoing monitoring will demonstrate if there is a problem**.

#### Concern about meeting the **public interest criteria under the Qld Ecotourism Initiatives program**.

- **Concern was raised about the precedent, and that an exclusive right was being given to a public place for commercial purposes**. Public resource being used for private profit.
- Concern that the Gainsdale proposal is **not in the public interest but** in the interests of Gainsdale and Gainsdale clients.
- A suggestion that the **proposal presents a great opportunity, if it were to be led by the Queensland Government**, that there appear to be great opportunities for enhanced signage, fire management and monitoring, but that it **needs be led and managed by the Qld government to ensure the public interest**.
- It is understood that significant state infrastructure spending is tied to the project but details were not clear.
- In order to make a valid assessment, **further detail needs to be provided about the facilities that will be made available to the public through the project** including QPWS-managed campsites and potential shuttle services for one-way walkers. These need to be included in the Environmental Impact Assessment.
- A summary comment that there needs to be **more statutory control over precedence** and more **detail and transparency on the monitoring and how the monitoring would contribute to addressing impacts**.
- Concern that **QPWS has not yet formulated clear policy and effective guidelines** to manage the impacts and address the requirement for the proposal to be in the public interest.
- Additional note that, although EcoCamps had been moved into the rainforest to reduce risks of wildfire, **rainforest camping sites are not preferred**; recent studies have identified that

where there are alternative available campsites out in the sun, rainforest sites had less than 2% occupancy per year.

#### Green Mountains matters

- Generally seen as less of a concern as there appear to be no changes in numbers, and the proposal is to upgrade existing facilities.
- Advice to **monitor water use and potential risks from sewerage.**
- **Traffic management** could be an increased challenge for QPWS.
- Concern that the provision of **fire pits** will encourage people to **scavenge for firewood.**
- Also concern that fire pits tend to encourage **big rowdy groups**, which would be inappropriate in such a small area (user-conflict, diminished experience).
- Concern that O'Reilly's is **profit-making and this may exclude members of the public** from use of the site. This may be particularly the case for **scientists and students undertaking research**, who have been reliant on the campground facilities.
- Concern that the **Queensland Government is providing significant funding** to support the work of the private operator. A figure of \$750 000 was suggested. This is significant use of public resources to benefit private interests.