



Environment Institute
of Australia and
New Zealand Inc.

2017 QUEENSLAND STATE ELECTION MESSAGE

In the lead up to the coming Queensland Election, the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) urges political parties to do more to facilitate better management of the environment, evidence-based decisions and the role of suitably qualified and experienced environmental practitioners.

The challenges of an expanding global population and the increasing need to reshape the land and sea scapes to meet energy demand, land for agriculture, horticulture and grazing, access to water, and natural resources for export, are placing increasing pressures on environmental resources in Queensland. Priority should be given to the management of the impacts of population growth and resource use, through the wise use of Queensland's natural capital, and the development of communities, industries and infrastructure on a sustainable basis.

As the peak professional body for environmental practitioners in Australia and New Zealand, the EIANZ recognises the links between a healthy environment, a healthy economy, and the wellbeing of current and future generations of Queenslanders. These will continue to be the important pillars for a sustainable Queensland community.

Through knowledge, innovation and effective collaboration, experienced environmental practitioners apply science to the development of good policy and implementation of good practice environmental management. They apply modern technologies and management systems to care for our environment so that it can continue to provide the ecosystem services on which humanity depends.

In industry, community, research, education and public service, environmental practitioners apply their special skills, knowledge and expertise to protecting environmental values through ecologically sustainable development. These environmental services will become more important into the future, to ensure Queensland continues to balance growth/opportunity and conservation.

MESSAGE FROM ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTITIONERS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

The EIANZ seeks a commitment from Queensland's political leaders that they will give priority in governance of the state to the following professional and environmental management matters.

THE ENVIRONMENT PROFESSION

Queensland governments share responsibility with Australian governments to develop, protect and conserve the Queensland environment. Conflict over and uncertainty in implementation of policy direction lead to poor environmental outcomes and investment uncertainty. Priority should be given to building a collaborative relationship with the Australian government to ensure the implementation of robust and stable policies that are aligned in intent for good practice environmental management.

In a world where the management of environmental risks is increasingly complex, special knowledge and experience is required. Environmental practitioners

have emerged as the professionals on whom industry, governments and the community rely for that expertise and trusted advice. Priority should be given to recognising the critical role that environmental practitioners play in good practice environmental management. Where Queensland's environment related legislation requires:

- Documentation to be prepared and authorised by "suitably qualified and experienced persons"; to be so qualified, a person should be a member of or certified by a relevant professional body, with an enforceable requirement that its members practice in accordance with a code of ethics and professional conduct, and be subject to regular peer assessment of their proficiency

- Environmental impact assessments, ecological and other environmental reports, environmental evaluations, audits and investigations, vegetation management plans, and rehabilitation plans, however funded, should be signed off by a “suitably qualified and experienced” environmental practitioner, thereby:
- Attesting to the documentation being based on the best available science, being consistent with legal and policy requirements, and implementing good practice environmental management.

The community will be better served through the involvement, and recognition, of suitably qualified and experienced environmental practitioners in the administration of environment related legislation. Priority should be given by the relevant Minister of the day to encouraging the profession.

SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ISSUES

LAND REHABILITATION

The EIANZ is deeply concerned at the increasing legacy issues that are associated with the disturbance of land for mineral, gas and other extractive industries, industrial waste disposal, and the contamination of land by past land uses. In recent times there have been reports by the Auditor General drawing attention to the weaknesses in the current financial assurance and land rehabilitation mechanisms. Notwithstanding legislative capacity, Queensland governments have not imposed financial assurance obligations on many high risk environmentally relevant activities. The rehabilitation of land when these activities cease is too often ignored, resulting in land ‘sterilisation’, or left as an unfunded burden for the taxpayer. In this modern age, the externalisation of environmental costs is no longer acceptable.

Priority should be given to putting in place an effective financial assurance mechanism that protects the community from the heavy burden of future rehabilitation of land degraded by past land uses. An effective mechanism will be demonstrated by:

- How well it drives process and project design that minimises land disturbance and subsequent rehabilitation requirements
- How well it drives investment in progressive rehabilitation that minimises exposure to rehabilitation liability
- Its focus on accountability for performance against quantifiable targets with increased financial assurance charges and suspension of operating rights for failure to perform
- Its provision of an adequate public financial reserve to cover any default on rehabilitation performance as determined by a suitably qualified and experienced environmental practitioner.

Safety, in an industrial context, has been markedly improved by making the managers of industrial processes personally accountable for achieving safety standards. As a result of environmental incidents and business failures, more stringent legislative measures

have been implemented. Such measures are costly to administer, and are yet to demonstrate that appropriate remedial environmental measures will be achieved. Priority should be given to making the managers of mineral, gas and other extractive industries, industrial waste disposal associated with mineral processing and power generation, and the contamination of land by industrial activities, personally accountable for the progressive rehabilitation of land impacted by these activities.

In order to provide for community oversight of performance with respect to the rehabilitation of land, priority should be given to putting in place a public reporting mechanism that identifies annual changes in the area of disturbed land requiring rehabilitation, and the amount of land that has been rehabilitated to the required standard. An effective mechanism will require:

- The assessment of rehabilitation performance to be reported on by a suitably qualified and experienced environmental practitioner
- Require assessment reports to be part of the “public register” and the relevant Minister to inform the Parliament of the reports provided or not provided.

Priority should be given to evaluating successful examples of rehabilitation practice, showcasing such examples, and using them as the basis for setting minimum standards of practice.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

There is clear science based evidence that, as a result of policy change, the rate of woody vegetation clearance has increased. Rather than being a mechanism for the conservation of ecosystems and habitats, protection of catchments, the retention of environmental values, reduced delivery of sediment to local and regionally sensitive aquatic ecosystems, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; vegetation management has become politicised in a way that frustrates good practice environmental management and sustainable agricultural/horticultural and grazing practices. The EIANZ considers that collaboration with responsible rural landholders is the most effective approach in the long term.

The EIANZ regrets and is concerned that the science based evidence that supports good practice environmental management, and the long term goals of responsible land owners and managers, have fallen victim to divisive politics. This is interfering in the success of programs such as the improved management of land in catchments that deliver water and sediment to the Great Barrier Reef. Community division over “tree clearing” cannot be allowed to stand in the way of effective collaboration and good practice environmental management.

Priority should be given to ‘de-politicising’ native vegetation management and re-establishing a consultative process (in effect starting over again) aimed at a long term evidence-based approach to the management of habitat, catchment runoff and landscape environmental values.

Priority should be given to establishing a process for

and undertaking strategic environmental assessments (including the sustainability of rural communities) that identify broad scale environmental values, current and potential land uses, and good practice environmental management guidelines that can inform rural land and water management at the property scale.

Priority should be given to developing and implementing a strategy to end net loss of native vegetation, and restore over-cleared landscapes. Robust biodiversity assessments should be the basis for decisions about the clearance of woody vegetation, and unavoidable losses of native vegetation, should require robust and transparent offsets that improve biodiversity outcomes.

Rebuilding trust between agricultural/horticultural and grazing landholders, government and the community in the operation of a regulated framework for the management of Queensland's native vegetation must be a priority.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Over more than 20 years environmental impact assessment has become the established process for predicting and evaluating the environmental consequences of site-specific development projects. Although this process has become heavily regulated and increasingly comprehensive, there remains uncertainty as to its efficacy in identifying, avoiding, mitigating, remediating and offsetting environmental impacts, and monitoring the outcomes predicted. The environmental impact assessment process has resulted in the collection of a large amount of data about the environmental values of the Queensland landscape, yet little of that data is readily accessible other than in finalised reports.

Notwithstanding the need to improve the impact assessment process, the EIANZ supports it as a cornerstone of project environmental evaluation. However, it is rarely applied on a strategic basis to evaluate the environmental consequences of policies, plans or multiple developments in a geographic area. Priority should be given to widening the application of the process to include strategic and cumulative environmental assessments.

The environmental impact assessment process should remain a threshold element of good practice environmental management. Priority should be given to improving the efficacy of the process by:

- Working collaboratively with the Australian government to review legislation, policies and procedures to provide for a high level of protection for Matters of National Environmental Significance with a view to Queensland entering into an approvals bilateral agreement and removing duplication in environmental impact assessment and approval processes
- Consolidating the multiple state based environmental impact assessment processes into a single statutory process
- Ensuring that scoping identifies the key issues based on potential impacts and hazards associated with known environmental values, and leads to project relevant targeted terms of reference

- Developing standards for the collection and management of data acquired through the process, to ensure that it is held in public databases for the long term benefit of the community
- Including in the process a statutory, independent, post commencement of operation audit, to determine compliance with the conditions of approval, whether predicted environmental consequences were as stated, and whether there are unforeseen environmental consequences
- Establishment of a state based process for strategic environmental assessments.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Queensland has a number of vulnerabilities to climate change including sea level rise, storm surge, and changes in the distribution, intensity and duration of rainfall and cyclonic weather events (changed drought and wet conditions). The EIANZ supports action by governments to implement the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including actions to:

- Commit to substantial cuts in carbon emissions to the atmosphere
- Introduce strong economic measures to reduce carbon emissions, including the pricing of carbon and the removal of disincentives for achieving carbon reduction targets
- Support investment in climate change mitigation and renewable energy, and scientific research that improves understanding of climate change challenges and sustainable environmental, social and economic responses
- Support programmes that deliver on policies which facilitate the adaptation of communities, industry and infrastructure, and building resilience to climate change

Priority should be given to ensuring that climate change policy is robust and stable, providing a sound basis for business and community decision making and risk management. Adaptation and building resilient communities will require significant changes in investment that can only be successfully facilitated by a long term stable focus. Many coastal local government authorities are developing or have developed, climate change strategies. These need to be acknowledged and supported by action at the state level.

PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

Queensland has a rich legacy of protected areas ranging from World Heritage Areas to important scientific reserves. The Nature Conservation Act 1992 provides the framework within which protected areas are designated and managed.

A key objective associated with protected areas is the presentation of their values. Visiting Queensland's protected areas is an important feature of the state's tourism industry. Relying on that industry to be the principal presenter and interpreter of protected areas means that the focus is on the values that are of

immediate importance to tourism businesses. Much less attention is given to the general presentation of the values of protected areas.

Priority should be given to recognising protected areas as key assets belonging to the whole community, and that the investment that governments make in their management and presentation facilitates the sustainability of communities associated with such areas.

More needs to be done to present and interpret Queensland's protected areas. The Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service was once a leading practitioner in the field of protected area presentation and interpretation. Priority needs to be given to investing in an effective protected area interpretation program conducted by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. An effective program would:

- Involve specialist uniformed staff developing, presenting and maintaining protected area interpretation initiatives
- Engage the tourism industry in developing guidelines and setting appropriate standards for the interpretation and presentation of protected areas
- Enhance public understanding of the values of Queensland's protected areas.

The engagement of first peoples in the management of protected areas has evolved to the benefit of those areas, and the people on whose country they are located. While successful Land and Sea Ranger programs are in place in the Great Barrier Reef catchment areas, Torres Strait and Gulf of Carpentaria catchments; funding is limited and short term.

Priority needs to be given to removing the barriers to the ongoing success of these programs by providing stable long term funding support.

World Heritage Areas, as places with universal cultural and natural heritage values, are key assets that help make Queensland a unique and special place.

Priority needs to be given to continuing and expanding the initiatives for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Areas, and for the funded involvement of first peoples in their management and interpretation. Implementing the Reef 2050 Plan must remain a key priority for investment by Queensland.

Priority also needs to be given to enhancing the protection and presentation of the Fraser Island, Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, and the Australian Fossil Mammal Site (Riversleigh) World Heritage Areas so that they become premier heritage assets that maintain their World Heritage values in perpetuity, while at the same time supporting local communities based on tourism and hospitality.

Priority should be given to supporting the preparation of further nominations of places in Queensland worthy of being inscribed on the World Heritage List. Such places might include the Coolooloa Coast; and in conjunction with first peoples, environmentally sensitive and culturally significant areas of Cape York.

More should be done to ensure that the lessons of good governance learned in the regulation and management of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area, are established for other Queensland World Heritage Areas through appropriate legislative and policy measures that engage communities and are founded in good practice protected area management.

CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

Queensland's sense of its roots, for its first peoples and those arriving later, is grounded in its unique cultural heritage. Despite early enthusiasm, the identification and protection of Queensland's cultural heritage places has languished. The nature of Queensland's historical cultural heritage means that it is threatened by loss through abandonment, fire, decay, and land use change. Queensland is not making the most of the opportunities to adapt, conserve and present its cultural heritage places.

Priority needs to be given to re-energising the identification, conservation and presentation of Queensland's cultural heritage places. A revitalised cultural heritage program will provide another layer of interest for visitors to Queensland. A revitalised cultural heritage management program would:

- Engage communities in an accelerated program to identify and conserve cultural heritage places
- Provide technical services and financial assistance to support the adaptation, conservation and presentation of cultural heritage places
- Regularly review threats such as abandonment, fire, decay and land use change have on the conservation status of identified cultural heritage places
- Establish a centre of excellence in the conservation of timber buildings and structures, with a view to Queensland becoming a world leader in this field.

ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION

Queensland has the opportunity to be a leader in innovation in good practice environmental management. Projects in the priority catchment areas of the wet and dry tropics are developing new ideas and technology specifically aimed at delivering improved water quality for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef. Just as governments have given priority to the encouragement of innovation in the primary production, technology and manufacturing sectors; the opportunity exists for Queensland to be an incubator for innovation in the development of good practice environmental management across environmental assessment, monitoring, and rehabilitation, natural resource management, and the management of protected areas.

Priority should be given to providing stable ongoing financial and other support for programs that are innovating in the area of good practice environmental management, and encouraging the emergence of an 'environmental management innovation incubator' that supports a community of practice in this field.

ABOUT THE EIANZ

Founded in 1987, the EIANZ is the peak self-governing professional association for environmental practitioners in Australia and New Zealand.

It is a member based organisation that:

- Regulates the activities of its membership through a code of ethics and professional conduct
- Certifies the proficiency of environmental practitioners
- Advocates for good practice environmental management
- Accredits academic training for those seeking to enter the profession, and
- Publishes a respected academic journal dealing with environmental management.

Its membership is drawn from all areas of environmental practice, and includes practitioners with industry, government, community and academic careers.

It is represented in Queensland by the Far North Queensland and South East Queensland Divisions.

The EIANZ is a prescribed organisation under the Queensland Environmental Protection Regulation 2008 for determining a "suitably qualified person" for performing a regulatory function under the *Queensland Environmental Protection Act 1994*.

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