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# Queensland's State forests

## a multi-use tenure policy statement

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## Introduction

Queensland has around three million hectares of State forests and timber reserves.

The native forests within these reserves have historically been an enormous asset to the state as a major source of timber, quarry resources and other forest products; and for being available for grazing, watershed protection, conservation, recreation opportunities, beekeeping and fossicking, as well as the sites of built infrastructure and resource exploration and development.

State forests were designed to be a multi-use tenure that allowed for a broad range of activities, using permits, leases and mining tenements to authorise use and to manage competing or conflicting interests. Timber reserves are a historic interim holding tenure, used to enable the future land use of particular areas to be resolved at a later date, with only nine timber reserves remaining, totalling 67 559 hectares.

The previous government, through a number of policy decisions, placed a premium on conservation at the cost of other uses. Significant areas of State forest, some with minimal conservation value, were set aside as national park, limiting access to the resources and opportunities they contained.

Our vision for State forests is to bring back the balance – to recognise that these areas of State land should be used for a broad variety of purposes – whether they are commercial, recreational and/or conservation.

To achieve this outcome, the Queensland Government is undertaking the following initiatives:

- Identifying areas that are currently forest reserve that can be returned to State forest.
- Supporting the continued use of State forests as a source of timber production, apiary sites, quarry material, native foliage, wildflowers, propagative material and grazing.
- Providing opportunities for increased security for graziers on most State forests while recognising that shorter term and more responsive grazing may be required in some circumstances, such as within privately-owned plantations on State forests and subject to the plantation licence.
- Encouraging and promoting the use of State forests for recreational uses and eco-tourism opportunities, subject to their consistency and compatibility with other uses, particularly in regard to occupational health and public safety.
- Supporting the appropriate use of State forest for extractive purposes through quarrying and resource exploration and development.
- Managing State forests to actively support multiple uses, balancing the need for conservation with other priorities.

The Queensland Government will not vary any existing national park to allow for commercial timber harvesting.

## Our vision

The Queensland Government's vision for the future of State forests is to bring back the balance and allow these areas to be used and accessed for a broad variety of purposes, returning them to the multi-use tenure they were originally designed to be:

- State forests are a resource for timber production. Areas previously identified to be transferred to forest reserve and then to protected area status are being reassessed, and areas of forest reserves are being reviewed to identify areas that can be returned to State forest and made available for native timber production. Plantations on State forest within the plantation licence will remain in place to support the long term viability and sustainability of the timber industry.
- State forests provide many other products. These include quarry material, native foliage and wildflowers and propagative material that will remain available from State forests.
- Environmentally responsible and safe harvesting is required. All harvesting operations in native State forest areas will continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with relevant codes of practice to ensure that their environmental integrity is maintained and public and worker safety is not compromised.
- Many State forests have been grazed for decades. Previous policy decisions to reduce the length of grazing leases on State forests will be changed to provide graziers with a certain future on native State forest areas. Under the new policy, the term available for leases on State forests will be increased from the current 10 year term to up to 30 years upon renewal where consistent with native title.

- Short term grazing will continue on some State forests and State plantation forests in recognition of the need for greater management flexibility, the investment made in the establishment and management of plantation forests, and the requirements to exclude cattle grazing at some stages of the plantation management cycle.
- Broadscale clearing is not envisaged, as this activity is not considered to be consistent with the primary purpose of State forests, as set out in the Forestry Act 1959 (the Forestry Act).
- Conservation will remain a priority within State forests but it will not be the only priority. It will be balanced against other uses and a sensible approach will be adopted as to how these areas will be managed to protect their environmental values.
- State forests provide a vast and diversified resource to recreational users – whether it be for mountain bikers, horse riders, walkers or motor enthusiasts (among others). State forests will be managed to maximise the opportunities they provide for all of these user groups and support the Queensland Government’s commitment to the ‘Healthy Parks Healthy People’ initiative, subject to their consistency and compatibility with other uses, particularly in regard to health and safety.
- As a part of the DestinationQ priorities, the Queensland Government will identify and support the tourism industry’s access into suitable parts of State forests for ecotourism.
- The beekeeping industry has long relied on the extensive vegetation in State forests for supporting honey production. By reversing the decision that many areas of State forest will become national park, the areas of State forest where apiary sites were in jeopardy will continue to be available for beekeeping.
- State lands, including State forests, often provide critical corridors for built infrastructure such as powerlines, pipelines and communication towers. The current limits on the size and length of Occupation Permits for such infrastructure on or through State forests have been reviewed to support contemporary infrastructure needs and reduce red tape. As a result the 10 hectare and seven year time constraints have been removed.
- The Queensland economy needs mining and some resource exploration, and development opportunities exist on State forests. The Queensland Government will continue to support the resource sector’s access to State forests, where it is considered to be appropriate, for exploration and development and for the construction of associated limited essential infrastructure. The Government has clearly stated its preference that resource companies maximise the salvage and use of commercial log timber to be cleared as a part of resource extraction and/or associated infrastructure operations.

## A reform agenda

The Forestry Act will be retained as the key piece of legislation that determines what activities are permissible on State forests. When this Act was introduced 50 years ago it was designed to allow State forests to be used for a broad variety of purposes and to meet a range of needs. This requirement still exists today.

The Forestry Act also identifies a number of secondary purposes for State forests. These include: grazing, conservation, recreation, apiary sites, infrastructure and resource exploration and development. The Queensland Government intends to use State forests to promote all of these uses.

To manage the different uses of State forests, the Act employs a permitting framework, with the underlying applied principle that where an activity has been permitted to take place, any new use must be consistent and compatible with the existing uses and safe to jointly undertake. This common sense approach to the multiple uses of State forests will be retained.

Key legislative and policy changes required to realise the Queensland Government’s vision for the future of State forests are outlined below. Necessary changes to the Forestry Act, and the Nature Conservation Act 1992 where relevant, will be made to enable the Queensland Government’s new policy direction.

## Occupation permit conditions

The removal of unnecessary restrictions to permit conditions was a first priority of this government. Some of these restrictions were a reflection of historical circumstances; for example, when the Act was written in 1959 the type of infrastructure being built on State forests could be accommodated within a 10 hectare area and its life was limited. In these circumstances a seven-year term for an occupation permit was appropriate.

These conditions are regarded as antiquated. We live in an age where infrastructure has a life of significantly longer than seven years, where there is a need to build pipelines and electricity easements, and where investors want certainty.

The Forestry Act has been amended to allow occupation permits to accommodate contemporary needs to enable the building of long-term public linear and other key infrastructure where no other feasible option is available.

It is noted that provision of built infrastructure corridors or sites within the plantation licence area on State forests may require compensation being paid to the licensee.

## Return of areas to State forest

Many of the constraints that currently apply to using State forests are the result of previous policy decisions which resulted in the South East Queensland Forests Agreement and a number of other forest transfer processes, including those for the Western Hardwoods region.

These forest transfer processes prioritised conservation outcomes while seeking to transfer the native forest timber industry to future hardwood plantation based resources.

While the Queensland Government recognises that protecting areas that hold unique environmental values is valuable, the forest transfer processes delivered conservation outcomes at the expense of a balanced approach to the use of State forests.

Around one million hectares of State forest have been included in the protected area estate as a result of the forest transfer processes, with approximately 193 000 hectares of land still in a special holding tenure (forest reserve) for proposed transfer to protected area.

The Queensland Government is undertaking an audit of this land to evaluate an appropriate tenure for its future. Following this assessment lands will be either returned to State forest tenure, or in limited circumstances added to the national park estate.

## Managing activities on State forests

Queensland Government agencies responsible for managing activities on State forests will work to implement policy changes to support this new approach to State forests and ensure they are refocused to promote multiple use rather than making conservation outcomes the first priority.

Legislative and policy changes for key activities on State forests will include:

- Grazing

Previous policy decisions to reduce the length of grazing leases on State forests will be changed to provide graziers with a certain future on native State forest areas. Under the new policy, the term available for leases on State forests will be increased from the current 10 year term to up to 30 years upon renewal where consistent with native title.

In addition, the interaction between the Forestry Act and the Land Act 1994 will be examined to seek opportunities to streamline the administrative process and reduce red tape in relation to the grant of grazing leases. Grazing within the plantation licence area on State forests will continue under existing arrangements in recognition of the level of investment made in the establishment and ongoing management requirements of these forests.

- Timber and other forest product production

Removal of the constraints on the use of State forests for the production of log timber and other forest products and retain the on-going production of log timber from both native forests and plantation areas consistent with the Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Plan that has been considered by the Queensland Government and relevant codes of practice.

The Queensland Government will not vary any existing national park to allow for commercial timber harvesting.

- Quarrying

Ensure on-going access to quarry resources on State forests to support regional requirements for infrastructure development and maintenance.

- Resource exploration and development

It is well understood that in some cases resource extraction and mining cannot co-exist with other uses of State forests, for example open-cut coal mining and recreational activities. It is important to carefully manage the co-existence of resource activities and State forests, an outcome that can be achieved through appropriate application of the Land Access Framework, through negotiation of Conduct and Compensation Agreements for

State forest access. This will provide an appropriate mechanism to enable resource companies to negotiate with the State about conduct and compensation arrangements and minimise the impact of their operations on other forest values.

- Tourism and recreation

The Queensland Government considers State forests to be a suitable resource for recreational activities and eco-tourism development. The Government will actively support the use of State forests for a broad variety of recreational activities, provided these uses maintain the primary values and uses of the State forests. It will look at strategies that support private investors to create commercial recreational opportunities.

The Queensland Government will also continue to support volunteerism as an approach to managing and maintaining facilities on State forests where appropriate.

The Queensland Government has already begun work with the tourism industry to support ecotourism opportunities throughout the state, including on State forests. This process is being developed through DestinationQ, which brings together Government and tourism operators and investors to deliver outcomes for the industry.

Ensuring public safety and protecting the safety of forest workers and other users will be a key consideration in expanding options for recreation, tourism and increased public usage in State forests.

- Incompatibility of uses

In those circumstances where there is a proposal to use an area of State forest in a manner that is incompatible with the uses outlined in the Forestry Act, and it is demonstrated that this use is essential, then a revocation process will be undertaken. Where appropriate, compensation will be required to be paid to the State.

The Queensland Government will deliver these reforms to bring back a balance to the way in which State forests are managed for all Queenslanders to use and enjoy.