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Queensland

An inquiry has heard that new National Parks legislation so lax that developers face few restriction in parks than out

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AN INQUIRY has heard that legislation to allow tourist resorts and infrastructure in national parks is so poorly drafted that developers will face fewer restrictions within reserved areas than outside them.

International Centre for Ecotourism director Ralf Buckley told a State Parliament inquiry yesterday that under the draft laws, the Government could - without an environmental impact study, public inquiry or further legislation - grant access for large-scale development in parks.

"One has to worry if the aim of the legislation is, in fact, to make it easier for large-scale corridors across parks," Professor Buckley said.
(<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/newman-government-plan-to-open-national-park-areas-to-logging-and-grazing/story-e6freoof-1226429460287>)

The inquiry by the health and community services committee is looking into a rewrite of the Nature Conservation Act and associated legislation.

It came under criticism yesterday, with Prof Buckley arguing that parks were set up for conservation, not tourism.
(<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/breaking-news/no-need-for-eco-lodges-in-national-parks/story-e6freono-1226555131617>)

Professor Buckley, of Griffith University, said other states such as NSW and Victoria and countries such as South Africa had similarly tried to incorporate tourism into national parks but they largely had failed.

African tourism developments attached to parks were on private land and some charged \$2000 a night, an unworkable cost structure in Australia.

The best way for the Government to invest in tourism was with simple things such as park access, maps, toilets and signage. This attracted tourists and tourism operators benefited.

Queensland Tourism Industry Council spokesman Daniel Gschwind said Prof Buckley's arguments that private ownership in parks brought bad outcomes was not borne out by evidence.

Tourism delivered community benefits and an example was that elephants would have been wiped out without protection which was driven by tourism.

"Some people want to be inside a park to witness an experience," Mr Gschwind said. "Tourism and the environment have a symbiotic relationship."

He said more than half of all international tourists came to Australia to visit its national parks.

Ecotourism Australia spokeswoman Kym Cheatham said tourists listed the top five Australian attractions as beaches, wildlife, the Great Barrier Reef, rainforests and national parks.

Rainforest Conservation Society president Aila Keto said the Bill abandoned the cardinal principle under which parks were set up to protect flora and fauna. The Bill replaced this role with one in which parks were provided to indulge people.

This put private development before public interests, she said.

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