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Breaking National News

'No need' for eco lodges in national parks

- by: By Marty Silk
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PROPOSED law changes to open Queensland's national parks to ecotourism operators are extremely weak and could pave the way for large-scale high-impact developments, a parliamentary committee has heard.

Griffith University's Professor Ralf Buckley told a parliamentary committee in Brisbane on Wednesday he can't understand why laws need to be changed to allow ecotourism operators to set up accommodation in parks.

He says Australia is full of successful ecotourism businesses, but very few are inside national parks.

Clusters of accommodation providers and other ecotourism businesses already exist as close to park borders as they can get, and tourists can already take part in many ecotourism activities inside parks, Prof Buckley said.

"The issue is, do they need to stay inside parks to do these activities?" he said.

The professor told the committee he didn't believe demand was strong enough for accommodation inside parks.

"I don't think the market conditions exist," he said.

He warned the proposed changes could also possibly pave the way for large-scale developments.

"This legislation is extremely weakly drafted," Prof Buckley said.

He called for much more stringent laws, heavily regulating the size, operations and impacts of any developments.

Dr Aila Keto, from Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, told the parliamentary committee national parks exist primarily to protect nature, not to entertain tourists.

She believes it's important to keep "infrastructure outside and experience inside" parks.

Dr Keto, who runs two ecotourism businesses herself, says about 85 per cent of public submissions to the committee are against allowing more commercial developments inside parks, but all tourism advocates are for it.

She believes that going ahead with changing the laws shows the committee is pandering to private interests.

"There is a difference between tourism advocates and the general public on this issue," Dr Keto said.

"The role of a parliamentary committee is to protect the public interest, not private interests...changing the laws will sow the seeds of unsustainability."

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