

Forest Facts

South-East
Queensland

No. 3.7

This information is mainly derived from Comprehensive Regional Assessments carried out for the SEQ Regional Forest Agreement.

prepared by

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for

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Wilderness in SEQ

Under an RFA both State and Federal Governments are required to protect 90%, or more where practicable, of high quality wilderness.

However, even before the RFA assessment of wilderness forests began the Joint Scientific Advisory Group established by the Commonwealth and State governments to look at the Interim Management Arrangements to protect High Conservation Value forests until the reserve system was finalise noted a number of issues requiring further consideration. The issues included:

- “the merit of relaxing the wilderness thresholds (both wilderness index and minimum area) given the highly fragmented nature and thus relative scarcity of wilderness in the region”, and
- “the fact that wilderness can only be protected by explicit exclusion of logging”.

Reflecting this concern the formal RFA ‘wilderness assessment’ project was required to examine the potential for restoring areas of forest to high quality wilderness over a reasonable time frame.

In forested areas wilderness quality is a very good indicator of overall ecosystem integrity and viability. Moreover, Conservation biology promotes the idea that, all other things being equal, areas which are remote from modern industrial impacts, large and predominantly undisturbed are preferable for protecting the full range of species and ecosystem functions to small, fragmented highly disturbed landscapes.

Forested wilderness is critically depleted in SEQ. Only 10 high quality wilderness areas have been identified: (Fraser Island North, Kroombit Tops,

Cooloola East, Blackdown Tableland; Bania; Mts Huntley & Roberts, Pine Creek, Mt. Molangul, Lamington Plateau and Mt. Barney); and a further 8 have the potential to be protected as natural landscapes (Blackdown Tableland, Fraser Island, Cooloola, Bunya Mountains, Main Range, Mt. Barney, and the Conondale and D’Aguilar Ranges). It is important that management arrangements allow for the restoration of wilderness in many of these areas.

Undisturbed catchments are an uncommon if not rare component of the Australian landscape. Undisturbed catchments are identified by analysing impediments to river flow and the naturalness of the catchment. Using the datasets in the Wilderness and Wild Rivers unit of Environment Australia, undisturbed catchments were only identified in the Blackdown Tableland, Kroombit Tops and the north of Fraser Island. This work is currently being re-assessed in the light of new disturbance data. Clearly the same principles of restoration should apply to rivers and catchments in SEQ.

Given the scarcity of high quality wilderness it is hardly surprising that wilderness recreation opportunities are extremely limited. While assessment of the significance of forests to the recreation and tourism industries of SEQ indicated that demand is likely to increase substantially for passive nature based tourism and recreation, no analysis was conducted of likely demand for wilderness recreation experiences.