



Hon Kate Jones MP
Member for Ashgrove

Ref: CTS 3142/11

18 MAR 2011



**Queensland
Government**

**Minister for Environment
and Resource Management**

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 17 February 2011 enclosing a copy of Petition No. 1530-10 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The Petition requests that the House ensure that there are no permits or changes on ordinary Queenslanders' access to the environment, by not imposing a vehicle access permit in the Cooloola Recreation Area.

Cooloola is one of Queensland's most popular areas for nature based recreation including four wheel driving, camping and fishing. Over the years there has been increasing concern about public safety, environmental impacts and increasing pressure from high visitation and various recreation activities. In particular, impacts from vehicle access, and visitor behaviour in the area has been a growing concern.

The Cooloola Recreation Area and the requirement for vehicle access permits to access the beach and some vehicle tracks in the recreation area was announced on 22 September 2010 with the recreation area commencing on 17 October 2010. I note the strong support for a vehicle permit system from the Mayor of the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, Cr Bob Abbot and the LNP Member for Noosa, Glen Elmes who both joined me at the announcement.

Similar to other iconic recreation areas such as Fraser, Moreton and Bribie islands, the declaration of the Cooloola Recreation Area and the introduction of vehicle access permits provides a mechanism to manage safety, vehicle access, visitor numbers and behaviour and activities across various land tenures including, national park, beach, esplanade and other lands right down to the low water mark.

The declaration of the recreation area and the introduction of vehicle access permits is the result of over two years of extensive community and stakeholder consultation. The consultation process included the publishing of the Cooloola Strategic Directions Document and the release of the Regulatory Impact Statement for the proposed Cooloola Recreation Area. This process provided the mechanism by which the Government's policy and intentions were clearly documented and subjected to public scrutiny. These documents outlined the bases and framework for the proposed recreation area and the introduction of vehicle access permits.

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During the recreation area consultation process, over 270 submissions were received. The wide variety of views and recommendations received were taken into account when developing the framework and boundaries for the recreation area and the vehicle access permit system to be implemented.

The vehicle access permit system implemented is designed to provide a variety of value for money options and alternatives for visitors whilst regulating access, vehicle use and visitor behaviour, to protect and preserve the area for all to use now and in the future. As a direct result of the consultation process, a variety of vehicle permits have been introduced based on use and access requirements with permits available for one day (\$15 or \$10 if purchased over the internet), two to seven days (\$25), up to one month (\$39.35) or up to one year (\$197.20). Fee exempt vehicle permits are available for residents, landholders and workers that need to traverse the recreation area to access their property or place of work free of charge. The decision to include the Noosa North Shore in the recreation area and to apply vehicle access permit requirements to all beaches within the recreation area was also a direct result of requests received during the consultation process.

The introduction of a vehicle access permit system also creates a user pays system whereby users of the area contribute to the management of issues, facilities and activities in the area right down to the low water mark. Revenue raised from permits is re-invested back into the area to improve safety and conservation outcomes and to provide better visitor facilities and services. This is guaranteed by law. Examples of priority projects that will be funded in the first instance by the revenue raised includes, upgrading the Freshwater Camping Area, providing toilets and day use facilities on the Noosa North Shore, improving waste management practices, improving the Leisha Track and upgrading signs and visitor guides.

Should you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Alan Dyball Project Manager of the department on telephone 07 4197 4001.

Yours sincerely



Kate Jones MP
Minister for Environment and Resource Management