



Hon Dr Steven Miles MP
Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and
Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
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Dear Mr ^{Neil}Laurie

I refer to the Agriculture and Environment Committee (the Committee) Report No. 3 of the 55th Parliament 'Subordinate legislation tabled between 28 October 2014 – 26 March 2015' and specifically the two recommendations made in relation to the Recreation Areas Management Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2014 as outlined below:

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommended the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef advise the House on what measures are in place to ensure that only genuine residents whose primary place of residence is Rainbow Beach have been granted fee exemptions.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommended that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection undertake a review of vehicle access permits issued for the Cooloolo Recreational Area at 12 and 24 months following the commencement of the Recreation Areas Management Amendment Regulation (No.1) 2014, to ensure fee exemptions are not leading to unsustainable vehicle access or any public safety and environmental impacts and that I report the outcomes of these reviews to the House.

My response to the Committee's two recommendations regarding vehicle access permit fee exemptions is enclosed.

I hope this information has been of assistance to you. Should you have any further enquiries, please contact Mr Philip Halton, Chief of Staff in my office on telephone (07) 3719 7330.

Yours sincerely


DR STEVEN MILES MP
Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and
Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef

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Response to Committee's recommendations regarding vehicle access permit fee exemptions

Recommendation 1 is accepted and the measures in place to ensure only genuine Rainbow Beach residents are granted fee exemptions are outlined below.

Consistent with 54A and Schedule 3A of the Recreation Areas Management Regulation 2007 (the Regulation), the chief executive of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (the department) may grant a fee exemption for a vehicle access permit within the Cooloolo Recreation Area (CRA) if satisfied the person's principal place of residence is in Inskip or Rainbow Beach. The Regulation is complemented by the department's policy 'Fee exemptions for vehicle access permits on Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) managed recreation areas', which (in addition to other exemption category requirements), stipulates that the following documents must be provided with an application for a fee exemption:

- a current drivers licence showing residential address details and
- the vehicle registration certificate for the vehicle to which the permit will be attached and one of the following documents for the property listed on the drivers licence
- an electoral enrolment card, a property lease agreement, property valuation certificate rates notice or utility account.

The requirement to supply copies of these documents is to ensure a person applying for a fee exemption can demonstrate their principal place of residence is in Inskip or Rainbow Beach consistent with the Regulation. The policy is available on the department's website www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/assets/documents/activities/areas-facilities/permits/vehicle/op-pk-cvs-vap-exemptions.pdf.

When seeking a permit fee exemption, a person may apply either over the counter at a QPWS office, or through the online ParksQ booking system. In both instances, the applicant must provide their supporting documentation as part of their application to demonstrate their eligibility.

If a person applies for a fee exemption over the counter, the documents are examined by a QPWS officer for eligibility. The online system is a self-assessment system and the applicant is required to load the documents into the system when applying. The department has the ability to conduct audits of fee exempt permits granted through the online system as an additional measure to check compliance against the requirements of the legislation and policy. Under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*, it is an offence to provide false or misleading information when applying for a permit or authority.

A recent audit of fee exempt permits granted to Rainbow Beach residents during the November 2014 to April 2015 period that constituted the period covered by the Committee report has shown that of the 257 permit exemptions granted to Rainbow Beach residents, 88% met the eligibility requirements. Of the remaining 12% of permits (all lodged online), there was insufficient documentation provided through the online application to determine if they were legitimately eligible for a vehicle access permit fee exemption.

In these cases some people have not loaded the full suite of required documents (for example providing only their drivers licence), others may have misunderstood the eligibility criteria (for example they hold property in Rainbow Beach, but it is not their principal place of residence). The department will make further enquiries in relation to these permit holders, requesting additional information to support their vehicle access permit fee exemption.

At present, the online system provides a self-assessable model for the grant of vehicle access permit fee exemptions. However, the department will replace the existing online ParksQ booking system in 2016 and the new online system will require review of documentation provided in the online application before fee exempt permits are granted. This approach is expected to completely eliminate the situation where insufficient documentation is provided as outlined above.

Until the new online system is implemented, QPWS will conduct regular audits of applications received to ensure documentation has been received and in cases where further evidence is required immediate action will be taken to ensure compliance.

I consider that the current legislative and policy requirements, compliance audits and the introduction of a new booking system with greater functionality as outlined above are measures which will result in a high level of compliance with the requirements of section 54A of the Regulation. The audit results demonstrate further work is required to ensure online applications are compliant and there will be further follow up by the department to clarify the applications identified as currently being deficient.

Recommendation 2 is not supported. As outlined in the department's advice to the Committee, which is reflected in the Report, the Cooloola Recreation Area is an extremely popular location with visitors from many locations other than Rainbow Beach. In addition to the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park being a destination itself, the beach is actively promoted by tourism bodies for use as part of the Great Beach Drive - a thoroughfare between Tewantin and Rainbow Beach and further onwards to Fraser Island. The volume of vehicle use is far greater from the broader community than from the relatively small population of Rainbow Beach residents.

For example, over 70 000 vehicle access permits were issued for the Cooloola Recreation Area between June 2014 and June 2015. Rainbow Beach vehicle permit fee exemptions only equated to 0.4% of the total number of vehicle access permits issued for the area. This suggests that any impacts from Rainbow Beach exemptions is negligible and I do not believe that these exemptions would have led to any discernible increase in beach use, to unsustainable vehicle access, or any public safety or environmental impacts in the Cooloola Recreation Area. Also, many Rainbow Beach residents would have previously used the area under a paid permit, so any increase in vehicle use from the same residents as a consequence of the new exemption is likely to be negligible.

With the ongoing popularity of the Cooloola Recreation Area continuing, the department, through QPWS, will continue to actively manage the area, including by implementing erosion control measures and upgrading and maintaining signage, walking tracks, roads and access tracks, day use areas, toilets and campsites to facilitate the community's enjoyment of this special place.