



Hon Vicky Darling MP
Member for Sandgate



Minister for Environment

Ref: CTS 18907/11

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

Dear Mr ^{Neil}Laurie

I refer to your letter of 26 October 2011 enclosing a copy of Petition No.1745-11 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The Petition draws to the attention of the House the strong opposition by the people of Queensland to the decision made by the Queensland Government to declare the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park without any public consultation with the people of Queensland with such declaration restricting the recreational use of the area. The Petitioners therefore request that the House reverse the declaration as National Park of the Halifax Bay Wetlands National Park and convert the area to a Recreational Reserve under the control of the Hinchinbrook Shire Council to allow all forms of recreation to be enjoyed in that area including but not limited to fishing, camping, hunting and horse riding.

The Halifax Bay Wetlands contain outstanding conservation values and represents an important addition to Queensland's protected area estate. The Government has had an interest in protecting the high natural values of the coastal lowlands and wetland areas of Halifax Bay for a long period of time, as demonstrated by the gazettal of the Palm Creek Conservation Park in 1994 and Halifax Bay National Park in 1999.

The Halifax Bay Wetlands, including the areas to be transferred into national park, was selected on criteria which identified the area as containing outstanding environmental values including threatened flora and fauna, and the presence of Indigenous cultural heritage, fish habitat and nationally selected wetlands. The estuarine systems and coastal dune forests form a complex and highly productive natural ecosystem, worthy of protection in the national park estate.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management has been involved in a number of discussions with members of the Halifax Bay community and the Hinchinbrook Shire Council in relation to matters associated with the transfer of the lands in the area as national park, including a public meeting in January 2011 organised by the Member for Hinchinbrook, Mr Andrew Cripps MP. The department is also undertaking preliminary discussions with the Hinchinbrook Shire Council regarding planning of access roads and camp sites in the area.

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While national parks in Queensland do not provide for hunting and generally do not allow horse-riding, I can reassure you many other forms of recreation and public enjoyment are able to continue unaffected by the declaration of a national park. These activities typically include, but are not limited to, bushwalking and hiking, wildlife spotting including bird watching, photography, picnicking, cycling, camping and boating.

I would like to confirm that fishing will be unaffected by the declaration of the national park. Officers from the Department of Environment and Resource Management have been working with the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol and officers from Primary Industries and Fisheries within the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation to ensure fishing can continue in places such as Palm Creek, Orient Creek, Cattle Creek, and Brackish Hole.

Based on the Government's long standing interests in securing the area as national park, and the ability of members of the public to continue to undertake a large range of recreational pursuits including camping and fishing, I advise that the proposal put forward in the petition to reverse the decision to declare Halifax Bay Wetlands as national park cannot be supported. However, the department will continue to engage with the community as necessary to provide information on the process for transferring these lands to national park and to clarify the activities supported on national park lands.

Should you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Todd Kelly, Manager Strategic Services of the department on telephone 3330 5213.

Yours sincerely



Vicky Darling MP
Minister for Environment