



tasmanian conservation trust inc

Summary
of the
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Conservation
Trust's Policy
Proposals
for the 2010
State Election
and Beyond

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This is a summary of policy suggestions the Tasmanian Conservation Trust has submitted to the Tasmanian Labor Party, Tasmanian Liberal Party and Tasmanian Greens Party over recent months. Further details, including some costings, are contained in the following documents which have been forwarded to the three major parties and are available on the TCT's website:

- 'TCT Submission to State Budget 2010-2011'
- 'TCT input to party policies for 2010 State Election'

When making policy suggestions to political parties the TCT believes it is important to do more than just state goals or long-term visions. In this summary and the above supporting documents, the TCT has articulated clear, costed and achievable processes for implementing our policies in a realistic timeframe.

This summary has been released to the media and placed on the TCT's website to publicise the policies we expect from all political parties in the lead-up to the 2010 state election and beyond. The TCT will be monitoring party policy statements and making comments through the media and on our website in regard to our priority areas. We encourage TCT members and other supporters to do likewise.

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Point of clarification in relation to Environment Tasmania Policy Agenda

On 3 February 2010, Environment Tasmania released the document 'Joint Tasmanian Environment Groups' 2010 Environment Policy Agenda'. The document's title and opening sentence, stating that 'This document outlines the key policy asks of Tasmanian environment groups... to consider as part of the 2010 state election' may give the false impression that the document is endorsed by and contains the 'key policy asks' of all Tasmanian environment groups. The TCT and most environment groups with which we work were not asked to endorse the Environment Tasmania statement, nor provide input to it. The TCT has its own views on environmental priorities and they are contained in this document.



1. Public reserve management

For many years the area of land in formal reserves and managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) has expanded but the resources allocated for protection and active management have failed to keep pace. At the same time, the role of the PWS has become more demanding with new challenges such as climate change, new invasive species and more people visiting reserves. Successive governments have not only failed to provide adequate funding they have pressured the PWS to focus on delivery of visitor services and the demands of developers rather than protection and management of natural and cultural values.

Tasmania's parks and reserves system is slowly eroding due to this neglect: the visitor experience is beginning to be diminished and fixing the problems in the future will become more costly. The injection of substantial additional funding and reorganisation of the PWS as an independent authority (to ensure it is focused on its core conservation objectives) are urgently needed. This is necessary to maintain the parks and reserves system as a world-class natural, recreational and economic asset and to enable it to finally achieve its Tasmania Together targets and meet visitor expectations.

INCREASED FUNDING FROM THE STATE BUDGET

The TCT recommends a dramatic increase in funding for the PWS, especially to expand its capacity for on-ground management and enforcement (as well as the provision of visitor services). As stated in TCT's submission on the 2010–11 State Budget, we recommend an increase in appropriation to the Parks and Wildlife Service of \$28.05 million in year one and \$23.65 million each year thereafter.

PARKS AND WILDLIFE AUTHORITY

The TCT recommends the establishment of the Parks and Wildlife Authority, an independent statutory authority with a mandate to maintain the parks and reserves system in Tasmania as a world-class natural, recreational and economic asset.

RATIONALISATION, COST CUTTING AND INNOVATIVE SOURCES OF FUNDING

While the primary focus for addressing the resourcing needs of the PWS should be increasing the annual allocation from the State Budget, the TCT believes a well-planned program of rationalisation of built assets, services and reserves could significantly cut the cost of managing the reserve system and focus resource allocation on priority areas. Reserves will only

be rationalised where reserve status will not be weakened, land is transferred to an appropriate manager and there is thorough public consultation. Other ways to address the resourcing needs of the PWS include cost cutting through downsizing of upper management and potentially increasing income from other sources such as increased park entry fees and expanding the philanthropic sector's role.

COMPLETION OF THE 10-YEAR PLAN FOR THE PWS

The TCT recommends completion of the 10-year plan for the PWS (currently in draft form) as an important long-term framework for its future development and budgeting.

RESERVATION OF CLAC RESERVES

The TCT supports the immediate reservation of the 77,513 hectares of land recommended by the Crown Land Assessment and Classification Inquiry.

BAY OF FIRES

The TCT does not oppose the creation of a Bay of Fires national park. However, the recent public consultation process did not allow for public input into the proposed boundaries or other potential uses for the area and left most interested people dissatisfied.

The TCT recommends the public consultation process be restarted, with the State Government seeking the views of the Aboriginal community, local residents and users and other interested people, in relation to the future uses of public land in the Bay of Fires. Through a more thorough consultation process, the TCT believes a broader range of interests can be addressed, including better protection and management of the area.



2. Private land biodiversity

Much of Tasmania's unprotected and most threatened biodiversity values (including threatened species habitats, threatened forest and non-forest vegetation communities and non-threatened wildlife) are found on private land. State Government biodiversity conservation programs must focus on protecting these values on private land. The TCT acknowledges that many private landowners currently perform a vital function in conserving biodiversity, through sensitive management and conservation covenants, and this has both public and private benefits; but more needs to be done as biodiversity loss continues.

To encourage further protection of areas of high conservation value on private land and to ensure that these areas are sensitively managed, landowners will need incentives and assistance from the State Government and other groups. Programs to conserve biodiversity on private land should also seek to foster the economic sustainability of farming, grazing and forestry enterprises to ensure land managers have resources to manage and protect their land. In this and other policy recommendations, the TCT has put forward a range of measures that will assist with conservation of biodiversity on private land, while also:

- reducing the costs associated with agricultural production (control of weeds and feral animals and practical assistance with management of threatened species)
- increasing agricultural output (control of browsing animals)
- providing new income sources for farmers and other rural landowners (Private Land Conservation Fund)

PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION FUND

The TCT recommends provision of \$1 million per year from the State Budget, to be topped up with income from offset payments made as a condition of development approvals, for the establishment of a Private Land Conservation Fund that will provide incentives to private landowners to voluntarily enter into conservation covenants, other agreements and land purchases, in order to protect areas of high conservation value.

PROTECTION OF TASMANIAN LOWLAND NATIVE GRASSLANDS

On 26 June 2009 Tasmanian Lowland Native Grasslands were listed by the Australian Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, on the schedules of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act) as a critically endangered ecological community.

Public criticism of this decision has now calmed down and attempts to have the listing disallowed have failed. We must now ensure that the Australian and Tasmanian Governments implement this decision wisely and that they support and inform landowners to ensure that grasslands are well managed and there is minimal disruption to legitimate farming activities.

Toward this end, the TCT recommends that both the Tasmanian and Australian Governments work with landowners to develop a strategic plan for EPBC Act-listed grasslands, including those in the area subject to the Midlands Water Scheme and other irrigation projects.

VEGETATION CLEARING CONTROLS

Legislative changes recently introduced by the State Government will leave clearing of native vegetation on private land unregulated or poorly regulated in some areas of the state, exposing even the most threatened vegetation communities and threatened species habitats to destruction.

To remedy this situation the TCT has recommend that the Minister for Planning instruct the Tasmanian Planning Commission to work with councils and all other bodies that regulate vegetation clearing to develop a planning directive to set regulatory standards (equivalent or higher than the system which existed previously) in relation to vegetation clearing.

REVIEW OF THE BIODIVERSITY PROVISIONS OF THE FOREST PRACTICES CODE

The TCT strongly supports the completion of the review of the biodiversity provisions of the Forest Practices Code, which has the potential to bring about a very significant improvement in conservation of forest biodiversity on both public and private land.

The TCT supports the independent Forest Practices Code review process and urges all political parties to consider the policy and legislative measures that may be necessary to implement the review's recommendations in full.



3. Water management

Many of Tasmania’s rivers, wetlands and riparian vegetation communities are under increasing threat and the existing reserve system and management programs are inadequate to protect them. Major threats include climate change and degradation resulting from forestry and agriculture. The State Government’s Drought-proofing Tasmania Program (a series of major irrigation dams and water pipelines) has the potential to further degrade rivers already under great stress.

PUTTING THE DROUGHT-PROOFING TASMANIA PROGRAM ON A SUSTAINABLE FOOTING

The TCT believes that some of the State Government’s irrigation projects could be acceptable with significant alterations, but proposals such as the Meadstone Dam on the St Pauls River, and seven in-stream dams proposed for the far north-east of Tasmania, are unacceptable and should be stopped.

The TCT supports the establishment of a Publicly Funded Irrigation Development Consultative Committee to review the Drought-proofing Tasmania Program and develop a state-wide strategy for major irrigation projects that are funded substantially by the State and/or Australian Government and provide ongoing oversight of the strategy implementation. The strategy would review current and future irrigation projects to ensure that they are environmentally sustainable, address the key priorities of the farming community and take into account the likely effects of climate change, including incorporating the Tasmanian Sustainable Yields research.

WATER MANAGEMENT PLANS

The TCT recommends that, for all Drought-proofing Tasmania irrigation projects, Water Management Plans are in place prior to approvals being sought.

REINSTATEMENT OF NORMAL ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESSES

Third party rights – The TCT recommends reinstatement in full of third party rights of appeal under the Water Management Act 1999 (in relation to dam construction permits and water management plans) and not attempting any further restriction of such rights.

Assessment of threatened species and vegetation communities – The TCT recommends that all dam work permit applications that may result in destruction of threatened species or clearing of threatened vegetation communities be required to be assessed by an independent and appropriately qualified group of scientists, rather than by the Assessment Committee for Dam Construction.



4. Wildlife

The attitude of the Tasmanian community towards native wildlife has improved enormously over the last decade. Through community pressure the amount of 1080 poison used for controlling browsing native animals has dramatically dropped, fewer people are choosing to hunt native animals for so-called 'sport', the community is demanding solutions to the problem of roadkill and persecution of wildlife is now less common.

Despite this change in community feeling, so much more must be done. The TCT believes it is time for the State Government to catch up with public opinion. We now have a historic opportunity to take Tasmania in a new direction in its treatment of native animals and the State Government should act accordingly.

BANNING POISONING OF NATIVE ANIMALS

The TCT wants an immediate end to the use of 1080 poison to control native species in Tasmania and to ensure that it is not replaced by any other poison.

CONTROL OF BROWSING ANIMALS

The TCT wants provision of funding to continue the Alternatives to 1080 Program for on-going development and application of non-lethal options to control browsing animals, including the roll-out of a fencing assistance program for farmers.

ENDING RECREATIONAL HUNTING OPEN SEASONS

The TCT wants an end to all recreational hunting open seasons because of the unavoidable animal cruelty and because killing animals in the name of recreation or sport is abhorrent and unjustifiable (it promotes a culture of killing and disrespect for wildlife and animals generally).

The TCT recommends an end to recreational hunting open seasons for the following native species:

- *wild duck (black duck, grey teal, chestnut teal, mountain duck, wood duck)*
- *short-tailed shearwater*
- *Bennett's and rufus wallabies*
- *brown quail*

REDUCING PERSECUTION OF PROTECTED WILDLIFE

The TCT supports an increase in funding for the Wildlife Management Branch of DPIPWE to enable a satisfactory level of monitoring, education and enforcement to reduce the incidence of persecution of protected wildlife.

ROADKILL

The TCT recommends development of effective strategies to reduce roadkill at hot spots, including reduced speed limits and a general improvement in driver behaviour that leads to reduced roadkill.



5. Feral animals and weeds

GENERAL FERAL ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Feral animal management in Tasmania has always been somewhat ad hoc, normally targeting individual species at specific locations (usually offshore islands) and often dependent on Australian Government funding, which fails to enable completion of the projects. Also, very little effort has been made to engage the community and private landowners in active management of feral animal species.

The TCT recommends creation and funding of a new unit within DPIPW responsible for implementing a broad Feral Animal Control and Eradication Program. The program should follow the prioritisation process used in Feral Animals of Tasmania, with the highest priorities being to prevent new feral species establishing, or eradicating those that have recently been introduced and are not widely distributed. The program should also be planned in consultation with the community and, where possible, the community should be given an active role in monitoring, reporting and controlling feral animal species.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAT MANAGEMENT ACT

The Tasmanian *Cat Management Act 2009* received Royal Assent in December 2009 and the commencement date is expected to be July 2010.

The TCT recommends that significant additional resources be provided in the State Budget for 2010–11 to implement the Cat Management Act, for purposes including:

- *a subsidised cat de-sexing and microchipping program*
- *a dramatic increase in capacity of cat housing facilities for abandoned cats*
- *a four-year educational program*
- *expanded scientific expertise to monitor cat numbers and impacts, including providing technical support and assistance to community cat control programs*

FOX ERADICATION PROGRAM

The TCT is a strong supporter of the State Government's Fox Eradication Program, including the continued careful use of 1080 poison, and believes the program must have an immediate increase in funding to ensure successful eradication of foxes from Tasmania. We are firmly of the view that the new strategies being pursued by the Fox Eradication Program (following the independent review) have the potential to eradicate foxes but inadequate resourcing is slowing down their implementation and may reduce the thoroughness of the actions taken.

The TCT recommends an increase in funding for the Fox Eradication Program, to maximise the probability of successful eradication of foxes from Tasmania.

WHA INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

The TCT recommends completion of the Western Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Invasive Species Strategy as a matter of urgency, and provision of resources for its implementation.

EXPANSION OF BIOSECURITY AND WEED MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

The TCT recommends increased resources for DPIPW to enable:

- *expanded capacity for rapid response actions to eliminate new introductions into Tasmania*
- *expanded monitoring and surveillance programs to increase the chance of early detection of new introductions into Tasmania*
- *the introduction of a plants 'permitted list' that forbids interstate movement of plant material unless a positive finding has been made that the risk of weed invasiveness is acceptably low*
- *establishment of a widely available weed hygiene training and monitoring program in high risk areas and workplaces*
- *research to identify the likely impacts of climate change in relation to potential new species that could be transmitted and established in Tasmania (through natural or human processes)*



6. Marine reserves and wild fisheries

The TCT has been a strong supporter of the way Tasmania's wild marine fisheries have been managed, and we still believe that this system has much to offer. However, major problems in the marine environment and wild fisheries have been allowed to develop and are not being properly addressed.

The Tasmanian rock lobster fishery suffers severely from localised overfishing, recruitment failure and habitat change, despite being well resourced and managed. In particular, localised overfishing means that significant areas of the east coast have been completely fished out for all practical purposes and the removal of large rock lobster has resulted in the population explosion of *Centrostephanus rogersii* urchins and consequent proliferation of urchin barrens. Habitat change related to urchin barrens and the decline of giant kelp forests on the east coast has become widespread and can no longer be dismissed as a cyclical event.

These issues have all been discussed during Fishery Advisory Committee meetings and were identified as problems years ago, but still no real progress has been made towards developing solutions.

Some obvious first steps towards dealing with these problems would include further reducing the total allowable catch (TAC), introducing a maximum size limit to protect rock lobster large enough to prey on *Centrostephanus* urchins, and creating mechanisms that would investigate ways to increase numbers of large rock lobster and deal with localised overfishing.

Instead, no practical steps have been taken and, in fact, it appears that a significant proportion of the commercial rock lobster fishing industry is unwilling to accept the obvious need to reduce catch. Also, many, and probably most, recreational fishers are unaware that these problems even exist.

Other issues relating to fisheries include inadequate size limits for striped trumpeter and the almost complete lack of representative no-take marine protected areas that can be used as reference areas to assess fishing impacts and climate change, as a source of brood stock and as insurance against unexpected events.

The protection of biodiversity and other natural values is as important in the marine environment as it is on land. Unfortunately, the State Government has rejected its own Marine Protected Area Strategy and the recommendations of the former Resource Planning and Development Commission made during its recent *Inquiry into the establishment of marine protected areas within the Bruny Bioregion*.

As a consequence, Tasmania will miss out on the benefits that should flow from the establishment of a system of underwater marine national parks that are protected from fishing activities.

We also believe that it is inappropriate to allow recreational fishers to use gillnets and drop lines with more than two hooks, as this type gear was developed for commercial fishers and is being used to target already overfished species. Use of this gear results in a huge waste of undersized and unwanted fish. Recreational gillnets also pose a great threat to protected species such as little penguins, dolphins and other seabirds and marine mammals.

Wild fisheries are an important recreational and commercial resource for Tasmanians and the marine environment is an important part of this state's natural heritage. These values are increasingly being threatened by commercial and recreational fisheries, particularly on the east coast and in the south-east.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

The TCT recommends a marine protected area inquiry be instigated for all remaining Tasmanian marine bioregions and funding be provided for these inquiries.

MARINE FISHERIES

In addition to the existing fisheries management planning processes, the TCT recommends a strategy be urgently developed to address the problems we have identified in wild fisheries and the marine environment.

RECREATIONAL GILLNETTING AND OTHER UNSUSTAINABLE FISHING METHODS

The TCT wants the use of gillnetting and drop lines to be restricted to the commercial fishery, to reduce wastage and help protect marine mammals and seabirds.



7. Threatened species

REFORM OF THE SAVE THE TASMANIAN DEVIL PROGRAM

The TCT has serious concerns about the performance of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program. We believe the species is doomed to extinction if the program does not change its current strategy and in particular focused on delivering an insurance population for the species.

The TCT believes that the serious failings of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program should be addressed through:

- *making a commitment to achieving an insurance population of 1500 animals by December 2010, ensuring that all necessary resources are dedicated to this goal and regular reports on progress toward it are released publicly*
- *establishing new and effective consultative structures and processes that provide the Tasmanian public with full access to information relating to the STDP's achievements, current operations and future plans and involves them in key decisions regarding these*
- *developing an agreed strategic plan that clearly articulates the goals and objectives of the STDP and how they would be achieved.*

PROTECTION OF SWIFT PARROT NESTING HABITAT

To provide full protection of swift parrot nesting habitat, the TCT supports:

- *Forestry Tasmania being compelled to designate confirmed breeding habitat areas off-limits to logging and to instigate moratoria on logging of areas of potential habitat until they are thoroughly assessed*
- *providing incentives to private landowners to protect important habitat on their land*
- *providing resources for survey work and research to complete the body of knowledge of swift parrot breeding habitat*

ON-GROUND MANAGEMENT OF THREATENED SPECIES

The TCT supports a drastic increase in funding for on-ground implementation of threatened species recovery plans, greater practical support for land managers and community groups to manage threatened species, improved capacity to provide information and advice through development of a web-based threatened species advice tool and improved prioritisation of where resources are directed.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT ON THREATENED SPECIES MANAGEMENT

The TCT recommends implementation of the recommendations of the 2009 Auditor-General Special Report No. 78 Management of Threatened Species.



8. Forests on public land

The TCT does not take a high profile in the Tasmanian forestry debate (which focuses primarily on public forests), but has instead focused on working to protect forests on private land, improving forest practices (See '2. Private Land Biodiversity') and improving protection of threatened species (see '5. Threatened Species').

The TCT acknowledge that considerable areas of Tasmania's public forests are under threat and deserve reservation, including areas with World Heritage value, high biodiversity, freshwater ecosystems and value as carbon stores.

