

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS IN THE EUNGELLA REGION

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In the first half of the 20th century, the declaration of areas as national parks had much more to do with attracting tourists than with protecting natural resources. Consequently, the early parks were frequently relatively small areas. Initially, Eungella was no different. The first park in 1936 was approximately 405 hectares. That trend was clearly disregarded only five years later when an area of 48,295 hectares was declared as national park over significant samples of rainforest and eucalypt forest along the Clarke Range. It was the largest national park in Queensland to that date, a distinction it held for more than a quarter of a century. Archival records in government files clearly support the contention that nature conservation, particularly the protection of rainforest, was an important factor driving the declaration of Eungella National Park, one of Queensland's most important protected areas.

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NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHMENT IN QUEENSLAND

The framework for the establishment of a State-wide system of national parks in Queensland dates back to 1906 when *The State Forests and National Parks Act of 1906* was passed by the Queensland Parliament. It was a significant statute in a national, as well as State, context in that it was the very first Act in Australia to provide for the establishment and administration of national parks across a whole State jurisdiction.

The other States utilised reserve-making powers in other Acts, particularly the relevant Land Act, to declare reserves for national park, or passed specific acts for individual parks. In most cases, however, these weren't administered by any central authority and were often placed in the hands of government-appointed boards of trustees. By way of example, New South Wales, which declared the first national park in Australia in 1879, did not have jurisdiction-wide legislation for the management of national parks until 1967.

In addition, the national park reserve status in other jurisdictions could, in most instances, be easily revoked by regulation. In Queensland, once a national park was declared under the 1906 statute, it could be revoked only by an Act of Parliament. For the early 1900s, when nature conservation wasn't a major consideration in establishing national parks, this level of legislative protection suggests considerable foresight on the part of certain bureaucrats and politicians.

To illustrate that point, section 4 of the Act read (in part) as follows: "From and after the Proclamation of a State Forest or National Park under this Act, no such State Forest or any part thereof or National Park or any part thereof shall be sold or otherwise alienated in fee-simple or for any less estate, except under the authority of an Act of Parliament."

The State Forests and National Parks Act of 1906 was administered by the Sub-Department of Forestry, which was a semi-autonomous component of the Department of Lands until it gained full departmental status in 1957, and that led to the 1906 Act being replaced by the *Forestry Act 1959*.

This background to national park establishment and administration provides a framework for understanding the process for declaring national parks in Queensland and the reason why a large proportion of the early parks came from land set aside, initially, as timber reserves and State forests. This is particularly relevant to the establishment of Eungella National Park where the bulk of the land dedicated as national park had originally been set aside for forestry purposes.

THE IMPETUS FOR ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL PARK

The impetus for the establishment of a national park in the Eungella area derived from a desire by the Mackay community to attract more people to the region, coupled with the Government's desire to identify areas for settlement, forestry and agriculture.

The national park file (Queensland State Archives R.573) contains a 6 February 1959 memorandum outlining some of the gazettal history. It states that the idea of a national park at Eungella arose in 1932 when a special committee comprising representatives of the Departments of Lands, Forestry and Agriculture, together with a director of the Mackay Butter Factory, was appointed by the Government to investigate, in the Eungella district, (a) areas best suited for settlement, (b) areas best reserved for forestry, and (c) areas that should be retained for national parks and scenic purposes. In relation to the latter, the committee considered it “essential that a compact area containing places of definite scenic value and sufficient in extent to preserve the jungle in its primeval state should be reserved”.

The memorandum also points out that the report was not acted on for some years, during which roads were constructed and settlement progressed.

THE FIRST NATIONAL PARK

The first national park to be declared in the Eungella area was gazetted on 7 March 1936 (*Queensland Government Gazette*, page 938). It was a reasonably small area of “about 1,000 acres” (405 ha) along the banks of the Broken River. At that time, and up until 1992, when certain sections of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* came into force, all national parks were assigned a reserve number. That number related to the parish(s) in which the park was located and placed them in a context with other public land, most of which was set aside under the Land Act. In the absence of a specific name, this small park was known as R.21 Crediton.

Although no documentation explaining the stimulus for this declaration has been unearthed, it is likely to have derived from the aforementioned special committee as well as the same source that lobbied two years later for further declarations. A letter dated 10 October 1938 to the Premier, the Hon. W. Forgan Smith, from the Secretary of the Mackay Chamber of Commerce was headed “EUNGELLA NATIONAL PARK” and stated, *inter alia*: “Further to prior correspondence in this matter we have to advise that the Chamber undertook an aerial survey of the area designed for reservation as a National Park, in particular reserve No. 97.” The letter sought the Government’s commitment to the gazettal of the national park and also to “the building of trails and tracks, particularly to the summit of Mt Dalrymple”. The title of their letter is one of the first references to the name Eungella National

Park, though it may have been used in earlier unsighted correspondence.

With reasonable road access now available up and over the Clarke Range, the Chamber was very active in attracting tourism to the region. National parks were seen as tourist drawcards, particularly if facilities such as picnic areas, camping facilities and walking tracks were supplied. Being administered by Forestry meant that a workforce with the necessary skills for such facilities was generally available if production forestry activities were being undertaken nearby.

THE SECOND NATIONAL PARK

Following representations by the Mackay Chamber of Commerce and a reasonably new public organisation (the National Parks Association of Queensland) established in 1930 to advocate for new national parks, the second national park in the Eungella area was dedicated in 1941.

The President of the National Parks Association, Mr Romeo Lahey, wrote to the Minister for Public Lands, Mr P. Pease, on 12 February 1940 requesting that he give favourable consideration to the reservation as a national park of “a large area of the Eungella Range”. He refers to three contiguous areas of differing characteristics being included: “1. The area along the upper waters of Broken River adjoining the existing National Park; 2. The area on the eastern face of the Eungella Range down to the existing selections of coastal plain; and, 3. The area on the western fall of Eungella Range extending to the western edge of what is known locally as Dick’s Tableland.” In relation to the first area, the letter refers to the swimming pool and “the adjoining ‘bald’ or natural area of grass surrounded by scrub, as this seems to be the only one of its kind in the district”. The ‘balds’ of Bunya Mountains National Park were well known at that time.

In relation to the second area, the letter refers to the rainforest, gorges and waterfalls, as well as to the necessity to protect the area from fire to prevent it becoming a mass of lantana, as had already happened on the side of the Barron Gorge. The third area includes rainforest and eucalypt forest, plus the comment: “the evidence of bears being particularly pleasing”.

Romeo Lahey was one of the two prime movers in the establishment of Lamington National Park in 1915, taking what was a small original proposal and converting it into a substantial and well-considered proposal of 22,500 acres (Ogilvie, 2006). He was

also the founder (in 1930) and first president of the National Parks Association of Queensland. Lahey had undertaken an inspection of the Eungella area prior to his letter.

The Premier, William Forgan Smith, had written on 15 March 1940 to the then Minister for Public Lands, Mr P. Pease, referring to his recent visit to Mackay when he was approached “in regard to the reservation of a large area in the Eungella Range as a National Park”. He goes on to say, “I recommend that the necessary action be taken at an early date to gazette a suitable area as a National Park.”

The reference to Eungella Range is interesting. It undoubtedly refers to what is now known as Clarke Range. There is little doubt the range was named after the Reverend Branwhite Clarke, a Sydney-based clergyman and geologist who has been referred to as ‘the father of Australian geology’. Clarke was a friend of Ludwig Leichhardt, and it was Leichhardt who, on his 1844–45 expedition to Port Essington, named a branch of the Burdekin River in Queensland after Clarke. Leichhardt’s journal entry for 22 April 1844 (Leichhardt, 1847) placed him at 19°12’S and states: “I called the south-west branch the ‘Clarke’, in compliment to the Rev. W. B. Clarke of Paramatta, who has been, and is still, most arduously labouring to elucidate the meteorology and the geology of this part of the world.”

Clarke, in a letter to his mother in England (Grainer, 1982), refers to Leichhardt’s expedition and tells her that “he has paid me the compliment of naming a river after me which you will see on the next map of New Holland. It runs into the Burdekin which enters the sea on the east coast near Cape Upstart.” That still doesn’t explain the naming of the range which is the headwater for streams that ultimately join the Burdekin.

In a letter dated 27 September 1940, the then Minister for Lands, E. J. Walsh, advised the Premier, Mr Forgan Smith, that the Director of Forests and the Surveyor-General had collaborated and recommended an “area of about 120,000 acres on the Clarke Range and in the vicinity thereof be set apart for the purpose of a National Park”.

The area included all of the features highlighted by the Chamber of Commerce – Finch Hatton Gorge, Massey Gorge and Mt Dalrymple – and was extracted primarily from previous Timber Reserves, some of which had been gazetted as far back as 1901.

A memorandum of 26 July 1940 from the Director of Forests, Vic Grenning, to the Chairman, Land Administration Commission, outlined the national park

proposal and referred to its tourism and conservation potential. The memo includes the following:

After considering reports furnished by Forest Officers from their knowledge of the locality, I recommend that the area shown on attached map be reserved for National Park.

This will embrace a wide variety of scenery, including the commanding heights and ramparts of Mt Dalrymple and adjacent mountains, the palm and vine jungles of the eastern slopes and the great gorges and eucalypt forests of the western fall of the Clarke Range, including Dick’s Tableland.

The area so recommended embraces about 109,000 acres and includes parts of Timber Reserves 6 and Crown lands, parishes of Cauley and Gamma, 394 Lacy and 97 Pelion.

It should be understood that no intensive investigation has been made; to do so would be costly and require a considerable amount of time.

At a later date sections of these timber reserves will be subjected to closer examination and steps could then be taken, if necessary, to reserve as National Parks any further areas of special scenic value revealed by such investigations.

This time there was a serious area of land involved – 119,340 acres (48,295 ha) to be precise. The proclamation of the national park was published in the *Queensland Government Gazette* of 25 January 1941 (pages 173–174). It extended across two counties (Carlisle and Hillalong) and four parishes (Lacy, Mia Mia, Pelion and Gamma). It was allocated two reserve numbers: R.573 and R.44. Part of its south-western boundary was adjacent to National Park R.21 Crediton on Broken River.

It was the largest national park in Queensland at the time, surpassing Bellenden Ker National Park (declared 1921; 79,000 acres) and Hinchinbrook Island National Park (declared 1932; 96,700 acres).

There were some strong local objections to the national park by people who saw it restricting their capacity to carry out timber extraction. This included requests that permission be granted to remove timber from the park.

FOUR MORE NATIONAL PARKS

The January 1941 declaration seems to have triggered four more park gazettals in the Eungella region less than six months later. Four new national parks were published in the *Queensland Government Gazette* of 19 July 1941 (page 103).

Two of those parks were actually assigned a name in the *Gazette* notice – Broken River National Park. Both of them were contiguous with the first park, R.21 Crediton. They were modest areas, 615 acres and 240 acres respectively, exclusive of any roads within the defined boundaries. The third park was tiny and involved a single portion (portion 26) with an area of 11 acres 2 roods.

The fourth park (R.30) was even smaller (portion 53) with an area of 10 acres 2 roods. It was also assigned a name in the *Gazette* – Long Creek National Park.

THREE MORE PARKS

A seventh national park (R.51) was published in the *Gazette* of 13 March 1948 (page 826). It was also a single portion (82 Parish of Eungella) with an area of 4 acres 8 perches, having been a special lease forfeited for non-payment of rent and was located across the road from the big park, R.573. Another single-portion park (R.55) was gazetted on 11 March 1950 – portion 69, of 9 acres 1 rood 4 perches. And on 26 August 1950, the *Gazette* (page 1166) announced the declaration of a national park (R.52) of 200 acres over land that was a Scenic Reserve.

The same gazettal notice of 26 August 1950 also announced the inclusion of nine Scenic Reserves (R.20, R.46, R.47, R.33, R.34, R.35, R.28, R.29 and R.40) into the large Eungella National Park (R.573), resulting in an additional 1020 acres. The total area of the park was now 120,360 acres (48,708 ha).

AMALGAMATING THE VARIOUS NATIONAL PARKS

A 6 February 1959 memorandum on the R.573 file outlines some of the gazettal history and highlights certain components of the park considered to be relevant to its establishment. The following quotes are extracted from that memo:

The terrain of this National Park is generally very rugged and is intersected by the Clarke Range which has a height from 3000–4000 feet. The eastern fall of the range is extremely rough being interspersed with numerous peaks. Some of these are Mt. Dalrymple, 4190 feet, Mt. William, 4082 feet, Mt. David, 3990 feet, Bull Mountain, 2770 feet, Mt. Omega, 2750 feet, Mt. Margaret, 2020 feet, Mt. Consuelo, 1870 feet, Mt. Lilian, 1680 feet. The western fall comprises Dick's Tableland, which is also very rugged country, falling away in the south to a sheer drop of 1000 feet to the Massey Gorge.

In this section there is situated a set of waterfalls 300–400 feet deep.

The nature of the country lends itself to magnificent panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and to the islands dotted off the coastline. It has been described by a former Governor, Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, as one of the magnificent views in the world whilst a former Premier, Mr W. Forgan Smith, was led to remark that the scenic beauty of Eungella makes it one of the most valuable tourist areas in the State.

On 9 March 1961, the Executive Council decreed by Order in Council that “Scenic Areas R.55, R.51, R.30, in the parish of Eungella, National Park R.57, in the parish of Crediton, National Park R.44, in the parishes of Gamma and Eungella, shall be, and are hereby amalgamated with the existing contiguous National Park R.573, parishes of Lacy, Mia Mia and Pelion”. It was formally designated as National Park R.573 Counties of Carlisle and Hillalong, parishes of Lacy, Pelion, Mia Mia, Eungella and Gamma, with an area of “about 122,600 acres” (49,614.5 ha).

DISCUSSION

The early establishment of Eungella National Park involved the declaration of a number of small areas that were ultimately amalgamated with the large area set aside in 1941. While the initial stimulus for establishing such a park had a strong emphasis on attracting visitors to the Mackay region, there was also a clear and commendable intent to preserve substantial samples of the rainforests and eucalypt forests residing on and adjacent to the Clarke Range.

The area of land involved clearly supports the latter contention. No earlier national park involved anywhere near such an area of land. The recreational uses envisaged at the time did not need that sort of area. It is a tribute to the foresight of certain officers in the Forestry Sub-Department that such an important area was given national park status which, as mentioned earlier, had much stronger legal protection than it has today.

The park's value to the tourist and to the protection of natural resources was highlighted in the October 1948 issue of the *Road Ahead*, the RACQ magazine. An article entitled *Eungella National Park* included the following comments:

The reservation of this area during the war years did not receive the widespread notice it deserved, although local interest had been drawn to the necessity for preserving the magnificent area concerned.

This mountainous area which includes one of the largest mountains in Queensland, in size if not in height, will stand as a memorial to the wise policy of preserving features of the original Queensland, and will, at the same time, enable the many and not the few to holiday and learn from these national parks.

The 1961 amalgamation produced an area of 49,614 hectares. There have been further additions, and at least one subtraction, since then. The total area of Eungella National Park is now 59,865 hectares (Department of Environment and Science, *pers. comm.*). It is one of the great national parks of Queensland and Australia.

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