



Martin Taylor  
WWF-Australia  
17 Burnett Lane  
Brisbane 4000  
[mtaylor@wwf.org.au](mailto:mtaylor@wwf.org.au)  
1 July 2016

---

## National parks and tourism in the rangelands

**Keywords:** *National Parks, Protected Areas, Ecosystem services, Biodiversity, Wildlife, Tourism, Queensland, Rangelands*

National parks (and to an increasing extent, also non-government protected areas) make a vital contribution to the future economic growth of the rangelands. Areas of intact natural ecosystems protected inside parks and reserves contribute real economic value to human society, by conserving useful plants and animals (like wild macadamias, pest-eating birds or pollinating insects), by moderating climate extremes, and by providing clean water and clean air. These values are impaired by excessive human use, ecosystem degradation or conversion to developed land uses. Protected areas by permanently re-orienting land management exclusively to the conservation of nature and maintenance of ecosystem services, rather than production, represent the best option for conserving those services. The terrestrial National Reserve System, consisting of national parks, private and indigenous protected areas nationwide, conserves *non-tourism* ecosystems services worth at least \$37 billion a year to Australian society (Taylor et al 2014 and Appendix).

Wild nature tourism (also known as eco-tourism) is also a natural ecosystem service, but one which is relatively easier to put a dollar value on. All wild nature tourists, whether international or domestic, overnight or daytrippers, spent \$23.6 billion in 2012/13, a level of spending that doubled since 1999/00. Half of this spending is accounted for by international wild nature tourists, which represents 60% of all spending by *all* international visitors. The wild nature share of international visitor spending has been increasing steadily among Asian visitors as they become more familiar with wild Australia (Taylor et al 2014). These estimates using Tourism Research Australia statistics, cover spending on any and everything during visits to Australia, but are also underestimates because vehicle spending or packages and flights paid for overseas before arriving are excluded.

An obvious question is “Wouldn’t they have come and spend the money anyway, park or no park?” Ballantyne et al (2008) set out to answer that question for visitors to Queensland national parks. They found that in the 2006/7 period, visitors to national parks in Queensland spent \$4.43 billion on their trips. The tropical north of the state had the largest regional share, 30% of all visitor spending. At least \$749 million of all spending by parks visitors could be strongly attributed to the parks, meaning that they would not have taken that holiday or spent that money if the parks were not available to visit (Appendix).

National parks benefit tourism at multiple levels. First, they provide desirable destinations tourists can visit on their holidays (“destination value”). The national parks system is a fundamental asset of the tourism industry, as much as Sydney airport is, but one that is largely for granted. More of that below. Second, parks underpin the international image of Australia (or regions within Australia) as a wildlife or nature destination of global standing (“attraction value”). Visitors are attracted here using nature imagery that mostly comes from national parks. Even if they only visit Taronga Zoo, that wild nature image is what brought them here. Finally, by saving our unique wildlife from extinction, parks ensure that visitors can still get to see native animals which otherwise would already have disappeared (“wildlife value”). This works at both the destination and attraction levels.

There has been a lot of praise for, or complaints about, the “grey nomad” phenomenon: praise for them as keeping small regional towns alive with the money spent on fuel, groceries, meals, souvenirs and sometimes also accommodation; and complaints because they tend to travel in caravans and RVs and so don’t spend much on accommodation, and try to camp free whenever they can! Although only about 1/3rd of all caravanning and camping travellers are 55+ in age, and although their daily spending might not be huge, they

make up for it by spending long periods on the road, spending as much as \$16,000 per annum on their trips, all of it sprinkled throughout regional Australia (Economic Development Committee 2011). These figures are a decade old now, and are likely to be much greater as the Baby Boomers hit retirement age. Some parks on the grey nomad trail in Queensland like Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill), attract 150 visitors a day in the peak dry season, mostly grey nomads (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service 2013).

The point of all this, is that without those parks, there would have been few publicly accessible destinations to visit in regional Queensland, particularly when you consider that the dominant motivation for caravanning and camping travellers is “experiencing natural beauty and bush experiences”. Without those parks, it is unlikely we would have seen quite the volume of grey nomads passing through and spending their superannuation in the regions as we do now!

New businesses have sprung up in areas where cattle used to be the only option. Undara Experience is one telling example. The Collins family saw the tourism potential of the strange lava tubes on their station back in the 1980s and pushed for creation of Undara National Park. Their lodge and tour business at the edge of the park is now a prime tourist hotspot, which doesn't just benefit Undara Experience, but all the other small towns in the region that see visitors passing through and beyond, attracted by the natural beauty of Undara and the other national parks of the region.

Parks have grown substantially in Queensland (including the additions of Undara and Boodjamulla). But there has also been strong growth of private and indigenous protected areas. Although these do not traditionally have the same “tourism pull” of national parks, because they are not usually open to the public, there are now a growing number of “nature refuges” (the official type of private protected area in Queensland), that include a tourism enterprise. Cobbold Gorge is one example to the north of Rungulla National Park, and Gilberton Outback Retreat another to the south. Rungulla National Park, on the Gilbert River south of Georgetown, is one of our newest additions, gazetted as recently as 2015.

Parks and protected areas should have more growth to come in Queensland, where only 25% of ecosystems are protected to a minimum standard, and less than half of nationally listed threatened species, leaving significant gaps to be filled (Taylor 2017). Further strategic growth of parks and nature refuges in Queensland, with carefully chosen and well-justified additions like Rungulla and its neighbouring nature refuges, can only be good economic news for regional Queensland.

The economic future of the rangelands can be a diverse and sustainable future, and national parks have an important contribution to make in securing that future.

## References

- Ballantyne R, Brown R, Pegg S, Scott N, 2008. *Valuing tourism spend arising from visitation to Queensland national parks*. Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, Gold Coast.
- Economic Development Committee of the Queensland Parliament, 2011. Inquiry into developing Queensland's rural and regional communities through grey nomad tourism. Report No. 5.
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, 2013. Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park & Resource Reserves Management Statement 2013.
- Taylor MFJ, Fitzsimons JA, Sattler PS, 2014. *Building Nature's Safety Net 2014: A decade of protected area achievements in Australia*. WWF-Australia, Sydney.
- Taylor MFJ, 2017. *Building Nature's Safety Net 2016: State of Australian terrestrial protected areas 2010-2016*. WWF-Australia, Sydney.

# Appendix

**Table 1.** Estimates of total value of ecosystem services secured in Australia's National Reserve System in 2012 (AUD billions).<sup>63</sup>

Service	Example of what protected areas do	Marine		Terrestrial	
		Australia/High Income countries minimum values	Global avg	Australia/High Income countries minimum values	Global avg
07 Air quality	Protected forests near cities filter air pollutants			\$0.08	\$0.06
08 Climate moderation	Protected seagrass beds or forests soak up carbon	\$69.92	\$76.74	\$0.13	\$15.93
09 Disturbance regulation	Protected mangrove forests buffer storm or tsunami damage	\$94.24	\$109.84	\$0.16	\$12.05
10 Water flows	Protected forests soak up and slow down otherwise excessive runoff			\$2.34	\$23.79
11 Waste treatment	Protected wetlands filter pollutants from water flowing through	\$0.44	\$105.41	\$2.62	\$13.55
12 Erosion prevention	Protected riverside forests prevent soil erosion	\$961.77 <sup>a</sup>	\$3,313.25 <sup>a</sup>	\$1.50	\$11.94
13 Nutrient cycling	Protected semiarid forests prevent soil salinity	\$198.05 <sup>b</sup>	\$0.03	\$0.46	\$7.66
14 Pollination	Protected habitat near cropland harbour natural pollinators			\$5.71 <sup>b</sup>	\$1.80
14 Biocontrol	Protected habitat near cropland harbour insectivorous birds	\$5.43 <sup>b</sup>		\$0.94	\$6.14
16 Nursery habitat	Protection of key breeding habitat of fish species that are consumed	\$21.09	\$24.87	\$27.38	\$72.43
17 Genetic diversity	Protection of habitats of wild relatives of commercial crops	\$11.12	\$124.28	\$0.11	\$38.64
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$196.84</b>	<b>\$441.16</b>	<b>\$37.51</b>	<b>\$203.98</b>

a) These estimates were so much higher than all other estimates, and based on just one study for Caribbean coral reefs. Accordingly they are considered unreliable and excluded from totals.  
 b) These values are substantially higher than those based on global averages and so are replaced in these cases by estimates using global average values.

Table 1. From Taylor et al 2014 cited above.

**Table 13 Direct tourist spending related to Queensland national parks**

Region	National Park Tourist Spending: Simulation Mean Values by Region (\$)			
	Best Estimate Scenario		Maximum Estimate Scenario	
	NP-associated	NP-generated	NP-associated	NP-generated
Gold Coast	676 618 526	82 392 662	873 698 262	106 391 301
Brisbane	680 620 213	82 879 952	1 114 798 965	135 750 428
Sunshine Coast	464 362 394	56 545 974	563 068 517	68 565 539
Mackay	94 071 809	19 351 915	124 044 083	25 517 640
Whitsundays	219 896 562	45 235 864	455 817 492	93 768 170
Capricorn	94 849 122	17 592 962	137 809 425	25 561 428
Carnarvon	23 410 598	4 342 288	26 789 573	4 968 034
TNQ	1 330 952 874	273 796 020	2 090 053 773	429 953 919
Outback	59 810 172	11 434 298	75 600 998	14 453 132
Townsville	209 005 953	38 767 233	354 356 790	65 671 824
Toowoomba	108 571 250	20 323 700	140 946 943	26 143 385
Wide Bay	181 614 974	37 360 795	267 080 562	54 942 287
Great Sandy	288 447 312	59 337 733	467 094 227	96 087 955
<b>Total Queensland</b>	<b>4 433 231 758</b>	<b>749 361 416</b>	<b>6 690 859 608</b>	<b>1 147 776 038</b>

Table 13 reproduced from Ballantyne et al 2008 cited above.