

Joint Media Statement from Queensland Environment Organisations - 21 March 2012

Mixed response to environment at this State Election with Impacts of mining and coal seam gas left Unresolved

Queensland's environment organisations have compiled and released an election scorecard for the four main parties contesting the Queensland State Election.

Whilst the Labor party is assessed as having better policies than the LNP on the protection of the environment, both major parties disappoint on two key matters concerning the State's sustainable future. The Green Party came out on top whilst Bob Katter's Australian Party scored better on mining but failed on most other counts.

'In our view, both major parties at this election are failing to meet their obligations on the regulation of mining and coal seam gas,' said Toby Hutcheon, Executive Director of Queensland Conservation (representing Queensland environment organisations)

'The fate of Queensland hinges on this key issue. How do you run a resource economy without threatening agriculture, groundwater, local communities and essential environments such as the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area? '

'It's a question that neither major party appears able to answer.' said Hutcheon

Environment groups identified a number of key priority issues for their scorecard:

- The expansion and management of National Parks and World Heritage Areas in Queensland
- The protection of rivers, forests, wildlife and marine areas
- Effective regulation of mining and coal seam gas activities
- Safeguards on the future of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area as a result of the resource boom
- Guarantees that vulnerable coastal zones are protected and communities kept safe

More...

Scorecard of the Four Major Parties

'The environment is Queensland's greatest economic and social asset and should be protected and sustained. This is a matter of fact, whatever your politics happens to be.' Environment groups provided an election position paper to the key parties in December 2011. This was followed up with specific written questions for the parties to answer. The Greens, Labor and LNP provided

				
National Parks and World Heritage Areas				
Protecting Rivers, Forests, Wildlife and Marine				
Regulating Mining and Coal Seam Gas				
Protecting the GBR from the impacts of the Resource boom				
Protecting Coastal Zones				

 Good  Average  Poor

written answers to our questionnaire. Bob Katter’s Australian Party did not respond to our requests.

Whilst Labor provided significantly more detail, both Labor and the LNP did not directly answer all questions, choosing to answer some questions and not others.

With the exception of the Greens, no party has a convincing set of environment policies. Labor has committed to more nature and special place protection and the LNP to less.

Both major parties missed the boat on regulating mining and coal seam gas and have been playing catch-up ever since. Neither is convincing that they have policies to protect land, water, environment and community from these industrial threats. The Greens and Katter’s Australian Party provide far stronger policy positions.

The future of the Reef is close to the heart of most Queenslanders. We are the ‘custodians’ of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and are obliged to protect the values of the reef. The reef could become classified as World Heritage ‘in danger’ due to the impacts of the resources boom. Both major parties have been slow to act on this. To be fair to Labor they have now supported a comprehensive Strategic Assessment. Only the Greens have supported a moratorium on major new development that affects the reef.

Coastal zone protection, particularly from the threat of sea level rise and storm surge is a significant issue of community safety. Even so, it remains as a point of difference between the major parties; Labor delivered a Coastal Plan to protect vulnerable land and the LNP now promising to review it.

‘The tit-for-tat approach of the two major parties makes essential environmental protection policy a political football rather than being a fundamental platform upon which our society depends.

Without a healthy environment there is no economy and there is no liveable community.’ said Hutcheon

‘At the end of a very long election campaign, voters are none the wiser about the intentions of the next State Government on a number of important questions. Will rural landholders have their land and water protected? Will the people of Gladstone have a healthier harbour? How will the reef be protected from the massive resources boom? Will Queensland have a more resilient and healthier environment? Will Queensland build a future around clean and safe energy?’

Postscript

Environment organisations acknowledge the Bligh Government for delivering upon a raft of significant environmental initiatives. These include the continuation of Wild River declarations, advancing the tenure issues on Cape York, programs to permanently reduce agricultural pollution onto the Reef, progress on the Statewide Forests Agreement, the introduction of a statewide Biodiversity Strategy and Waste Strategy and progress on Renewable Energy and household emission reductions. New National Parks on North Stradbroke Island are being gazetted.

During the last Parliamentary session, environment groups did register some positive shifts by the LNP on the environment. However we remain disappointed that the LNP did not position themselves as the party that would quarantine agricultural land and groundwater from CSG threats or do more on renewable energy or reef protection. For a party seeking to be the next Government of Queensland, the LNP seem to have little vision for a better future for the environment. In many cases, environmental policy is focused on undoing good Labor policy (WR), mimicking policies (CSG) or being silent on the big issues (Reef Strategic Assessment).

The LNP’s much-touted Four Pillars for the future is a case in point. Of the four pillars, agriculture and tourism are entirely dependent upon a healthy environment. Resources (mining) and construction-poorly regulated-threaten a healthy environment. What the LNP have failed to express is their priority when these elements conflict, as they are doing so right now.

Environment organisations and those who care about the environment expect a lot more from a party seeking to be the next State Government of Queensland.

*Joint Statement and scorecard from organisations listed.

Queensland Conservation Council, Australian Conservation Foundation, The Wilderness Society, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, National Parks Association (Queensland), Friends of the Earth (Brisbane), Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, North Queensland Conservation Council, Mackay Conservation Group, Capricorn Conservation Council, Wide Bay Burnett Environment Council, Sunshine Coast Environment Council, Gecko-Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council, Logan and Albert Conservation Association, Fraser Island Defenders Organisation, Householders Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE), Alliance to Save Hinchinbrook (ASH), Gladstone Conservation Council

Our Questions	Labor	LNP	Greens	KAP
National Parks and World Heritage				
Will you provide National Parks acquisition funds (at least \$15M pa) and annual management budget (at least \$200M pa)?	1/2	?	✓	?
Will you introduce permanent protection and IUCN categories for Nature Refuges	1/2	?	✓	?
Will you prohibit private commercial infrastructure inside National Parks?	✓	✗	✓	?
Will you protect and restore resilience of Queensland's biodiversity through (a) a formal Wildlands Network for connectivity, (b) implementation of the Queensland Biodiversity Strategy and (c) ensuring the planned phase out of native forest logging and transfers to national park?	✓	?	✓	?
Special Place Protection				
Will you commit to completing the existing Cape York World Heritage nomination process, retaining country-based planning, indigenous engagement/consultation and consent mechanisms, to ensure a nomination can be submitted in 2013?	✓	✓	✓	?
Will you retain in full the Wild Rivers Act 2005 and associated Wild River declarations (across Cape York, the Gulf, East Coast Islands and in Western Queensland), and the current Indigenous Wild River Ranger program, and continue to roll out the Wild Rivers initiative into the future?	✓	✗	✓	?
Will you extend current funding of \$35m pa for Reef Plan to 2021?	✓	✓	✓	?
Will you develop new 2020 goals and targets which will meet GBRMPA water quality guidelines for each catchment by first quarter 2013?	✓	✓	✓	?
Will you halt unsustainable fishing practices in the reef region including halting illegal fishing in the Great Barrier Reef green zones with a \$1.5m investment in vessel monitoring equipment?	1/2	1/2	✓	?
Will you impose a moratorium on all new major developments that have an impact upon the WH estate, such as mining and urban development until the imminent Strategic Assessment of the GBRWHA has been completed?	✗	✗	✓	?
Will you introduce overarching World Heritage Legislation that meets Queensland's 2010 Intergovernmental Agreement obligations, incorporates Paragraphs 96-119 of the World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines and includes the provision for all World Heritage Areas to have their own management plans?	1/2	✗	✓	?
Will you provide additional and greater review powers, including veto, under planning laws to prevent development in areas adjacent to World Heritage properties that impacts negatively on their integrity?	✗	✗	✓	?
Will you establish a Save Moreton Bay funded plan with a target of reducing pollution loads into the bay by 20,000 tonnes per year by 2014?	1/2	?	✓	?
Marine Protection				
Will you retain all existing Green Zones in Queensland marine parks, maintaining these as no-take zones where no fishing of any kind is permitted?	✓	?	✓	✗
Will you protect turtle, dugong and coastal dolphin by providing at least \$12m in structural adjustment for net closures in all DPA "B" areas and 4 priority habitats in Cape York?	✓	1/2	✓	✓
Will you employ an additional 30 Indigenous rangers to help tackle illegal poaching and implement priority TO community developed turtle and dugong protection plans for Queensland coastal waters?	✓	✓	✓	?

Environment groups have welcomed the QLD Coastal Plan as a start in protecting coastal zones from unsustainable development and climate change. Will you guarantee that identified HES areas and land vulnerable to sea level rise and storm surge are protected and development prohibited (high vulnerability) and regulated (moderate vulnerability)?	✓	✗	✓	?
Ecological Sustainability				
Will you establish an Office of Sustainability to horizon scan and report progress on State Government sustainability initiatives?	✓	✗	✓	?
Will you confirm your commitment to existing government sustainability policies and initiatives?	✓	?	✓	?
What new sustainability policies and initiatives will you introduce in the next term of Government?	List available	Everyone's Environment Grant	List available	?
Mining and Coal Seam Gas				
Will you introduce a Moratorium on all new Mining and CSG approvals until all negative environmental and social impacts have been fully addressed?	✗	✗	✓	✓
Will you introduce No-Go Areas for Mining and CSG to directly protect prime agricultural lands, connected groundwater aquifers, important environmental habitat and local settlements and communities?	1/2	1/2	✓	1/2
Will you regulate all existing and approved mines and csg operations so that land, water, environment and community are not adversely impacted?	✗	✗	✓	✓
Will you introduce a legislative ban on uranium mining and nuclear waste storage?	1/2	1/2	✓	?
Will you introduce conditions on mining and csg operations to ensure that all domestic greenhouse gas emissions are avoided, reduced or offset?	✗	✗	✓	?
Will you introduce a Government Discussion paper concerning the future of Queensland when global fossil fuel demand declines?	1/2	?	✓	?
Legal Reform				
Will you amend the EP Act to allow public appeal rights on all rather than just some CSG applications? Will you provide better publicised and longer public notice periods (minimum 30 days) for public submissions and objections on proposed environmental authorities for CSG and mining and provide State legal aid for public interest environmental cases?	✗	✗	✓	?
Will you provide concurrence powers to DERM for any projects granted State Significance status?	✗	✗	✓	?
Will you ensure decision making on environmental, planning and resources matters, for example on major projects, is: (a) open and accountable, by making major projects subject to the Judicial Review Act; and (b) subject to open standing provisions for enforcement (as currently in the Sustainable Planning Act 2009).	✗	✗	✓	?