

Beattie Honours Commitment To Protect SE Qld Forests

Press Release

More than 215,000 hectares of land will be converted to national parks and conservation parks as a result of the Queensland Government honouring its commitment under the South East Queensland Forests Agreement.

Premier Peter Beattie and Environment Minister, John Mickel, detailed the areas to be protected at Mt French, in the Moogerah Peaks National Park south-west of Brisbane today.

"By honouring this commitment, new national parks and conservation parks will be created near Monto, Biloela, Calliope, Bunya Mountains, Biggenden, Gayndah, Agnes Water, Beerburrum and Boonah.

"Our announcement today confirms my Government is well on its way to achieving a world-class conservation reserve system under the South East Queensland Forests Agreement.

"It covers just over half the total land area identified for future protection under the SEQFA.

"The new parks will not only protect a diverse range of habitats but will open up new economic opportunities and create jobs in regional areas.

"My Government will assist local councils and organisations with making the most out of ecotourism opportunities which will arise," Mr Beattie said.

Mr Beattie said the 2001 Queensland Parks Master Plan estimated that spending from 12.5 million park visits each year contributes more than \$1.2 billion to the Queensland economy and supports more than 6,000 jobs.

"About 400 commercial tour operators and 40 near-park resorts rely on national parks for much of their business. Today's announcement will strengthen parks-based ecotourism," Mr Beattie said.

Mr Mickel said Mt French was chosen for today's announcement because it overlooks the Main Range National Park which is fragmented at present, but will become an almost continual national park following the gazettal of these additional areas.

"The addition of these areas will increase the size of the Main Range National Park by about 50 percent to just over 48,000 hectares.

"This area is an important recreational zone, particularly for people living in south east Queensland.

"The region is coming under increasing pressure because of rapid population growth and it is vital that we protect these areas of open space for the

enjoyment of current and future generations.

"The Main Range National Park is an outstanding example of the earth's evolutionary history where flora and fauna of universal scientific and conservation value survive.

"Grazing will be gradually phased out to preserve the conservation values of the lands, but graziers with existing leases or permits will be able to continue to operate until the expiry of their lease.

"An independent panel will assess any claims of hardship to provide advice on whether some individual graziers affected by the decision may require extensions of time to their existing arrangement," Mr Mickel said.

The Queensland Government is also working to ensure the viability of the beekeeping industry in Queensland.

A study to investigate the development of suitable alternative resources off areas of national park will be undertaken in consultation with industry and conservation groups.

To allow adequate time for these resources to be developed, the beekeeping industry will still be able to utilise the lands proposed for gazettal until no later than 2024.

The government has conducted extensive community consultation with all stakeholders as part of the process involved in meeting its SEQFA commitments.

The gazettal of the areas announced today are expected to be undertaken by the end of this year. The additions to the Main Range area are:

- Alford Forest Reserve	126.15 ha
- Burnett Creek Forest Reserve	2776.44 ha
- Emu Vale Forest Reserve	3155.29 ha
- Gambubal Forest Reserve	2412.18 ha
- Gilbert Forest Reserve	752.94 ha
- Goomburra Forest Reserve	3498.66 ha
- Mount Mathieson Forest Reserve	124.78 ha
- Palen Forest Reserve No.1	474.48 ha
- Palen Forest Reserve No. 2	237.25 ha
- Palen Forest Reserve No. 3	816.01 ha
- Spicers Gap Forest Reserve	646.43 ha
- Teviot Forest Reserve	638.23 ha