



**TOURISM, RAINFORESTS AND WORTHLESS LANDS:  
THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL PARKS IN QUEENSLAND**

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**Abstract**

Alfred Runte has argued that US National Parks were only established where government regarded the lands as worthless for economic development. A number of writers have applied his theory to the origin of National Parks in other regions of recent European settlement, particularly Australia. This article contests this explanation, through consideration of the establishment of National Parks in the rainforests of Queensland. The declaration of these National Parks were the subject of an extensive debate over the period of 1895 to 1915, during which it was strongly argued that they had significant potential for farming and logging.

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## **TOURISM, RAINFORESTS AND WORTHLESS LANDS: THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL PARKS IN QUEENSLAND**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1906 Queensland passed the *State Forests and National Parks Act*, probably the first legislation in the world to establish set procedures for creating National Parks (Hall 1992: 98). In 1908, the first National Park was declared under this Act. It was at Witches Falls on Tamborine Mountain, 65 kilometres south of Brisbane. In assessing the case for the National Park, the opinion of Queensland's Inspector of Forests was sought. After he judged the area, 'unfit for any other purpose', the creation of the National Park proceeded (Groom, 1949: 67; Powell 1976: 114; Hall 1992: 98; Hutton and Connors 1999: 53).

The judgement by the Inspector of Forests seemingly confirms the argument that early National Parks were only established where governments were satisfied that the areas in questions were economically worthless. This theory was set out in detail by Alfred Runte in National Parks: The American Experience (1979). Runte wrote that in the USA:

There evolved in Congress a firm (if unwritten) policy that only "worthless" lands might be set aside as national parks. From the very beginning Congress bowed to arguments that commercial resources should either be excluded from the parks at the outset, or be opened to exploitation regardless of their location. [Senator] John Conness himself opened the Yosemite debates of 1864 with this assurance: "I will state to the Senate", he began, "that this bill proposes to make a grant of certain premises located in the Sierra Nevada mountains in the State of California, that are for all public purposes worthless ... The property is of no value to the Government" (Runte 1979: 48-9).

To explain this emphasis, Runte argued that:

The development of the United States in the midst of abundance could not help but strengthen materialism and the nation's commitment to the sanctity of private property ... A surplus of rugged, marginal land enabled the country to "afford" scenic protection; national parks, however spectacular from the standpoint of their topography, actually encompassed only those features considered valueless for lumbering, mining, grazing or agriculture. Indeed, throughout the history of the national park idea, the concept of useless scenery has virtually determined which landmarks the nation would protect as well as how it would protect them (Runte 1979: 49).

Runte's 'worthless lands' interpretation was widely adopted, particularly for Regions of Recent European Settlement. Studies utilising this theory include those for the USA (Hampton 1981), Australia (Hall 1992: 67-70 & 98; 2000A: 34-5; 2000B: 59-60), New Zealand (Hall 2000B: 60; Star 2002: 278; Star & Lochhead 2002: 124), a comparative study of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Hall and Shultis 1991) and National Parks in general (Butler & Boyd 2000: 4).

However, Runte was criticised for understating the level and range of competing economic interests for lands proposed as National Parks. With such demand, it was pointed out, they could not be described as 'worthless'. As one critic argued, 'the American experience with national parks plainly shows the public's determination to preserve park lands in the face of sometimes immense economic values' (Sellars 1983: 134). Others saw that National Park proposals were, 'met with varying degrees of opposition because lands that could be used for consumptive economic purposes were being withheld from development' (Wright and Mattson 1996: 9). A third stated that:

Many a park came into being only after a long struggle against those who feared a "locking up" of resources. Such objections would have made no sense if the land involved had been worthless, yet the history of the parks movement is replete with examples of parks that were established only after extensive debates over the propriety of doing so (Cox 1983: 145).

In turn, Runte clarified that the US Governments saw worth and worthlessness for economic development in the narrow terms of the traditional economic pursuits of the American frontier, such as logging, mining and farming. Such pursuits were in the national as well as the individual's interest and accordingly were seen as paramount in the development of the West. In contrast, real estate and hotel developments were viewed as only of value to the individual entrepreneurs and therefore not sufficient reason in themselves to prevent the declaration of National Parks (Runte 1983: 135-8).

The purpose of this article is to examine the application of Runte's 'worthless lands' argument to Australia and in particular to the establishment of National Parks in Queensland. It is my contention that in Queensland the decisions to create the first National Parks occurred after extensive public debate about their potential for agricultural and forestry development and that policy-makers consciously chose to create National Parks at the expense of traditional economic development.

The Queensland experience was particularly important as that state has consistently had a reputation for being highly pro-development. Lacking an industrial base, governments have tended to promote schemes based on the primary sector. In particular, the long-running governments of Theodore, McCormack, Forgan-Smith and Bjelke-Peterson championed populist agricultural schemes designed to encourage small family farmers (Brady 1918 & 1924; Fitzgerald 1984; Bonyhady, 1992).

Furthermore, the first National Parks in Queensland were all in rainforested environments (in contrast, the Great Barrier Reef was not declared a National Park until 1975, see Bowen 1994). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Australian rainforests were seen as a prized resource for agricultural exploitation. They were viewed as particularly suitable for dairying, a valuable export industry based on labour-intensive small family farms. For governments, opening up virgin forest for small settlers was often seen as a good vote-catching strategy (Frost 1997).

As such, it seems reasonable to expect that Queensland would have followed a similar pattern to what Runte argued happened in the American West, with economic development outweighing conservation or aesthetic considerations, so that National Parks were only established on lands deemed to have no value for agriculture or forestry. Instead, what occurred was a complex debate over competing uses for certain rainforests. In the end, despite claims for farming and logging, the Queensland Government decided to proclaim a large (47,000 acre) rainforested National Park on the Lamington Plateau. The purpose of this article is to trace this debate and examine these competing claims.

## **THE LAKES OF THE ATHERTON TABLELAND**

The first push for protecting rainforests came from the lesser developed Far North of Queensland. In 1882, the Atherton Tableland near Cairns was opened for farming. However, despite the attraction of fertile soil, cool climate and consistent rainfall, farming was initially not a success. The Great Depression of the 1890s stopped construction work on a railway to the coast and by 1897, of 110 farms only five per cent were occupied by their owners (Queensland 1897: Q. 3988, 4000, 4072, 4101 & 4208).

The 1897 Royal Commission on Land Settlement gave those surviving settlers the opportunity to present a case for encouraging the development of the Atherton Tableland. They argued that completing the railway would open the area for dairying (Queensland 1897: Q. 4219). Yet in addition to boosting development, the local farmers and storekeepers argued for preserving the rainforests around the volcanic lakes of the Tableland. Six 40 acre farms had been established around the shores of Lake Eacham and there was a proposal for a similar release at Lake Barrine. The Royal Commission heard pleas from John Byers (Crown Land Ranger), William Kelly (storekeeper and farmer) and Robert Ringrose (Secretary, Herberton Chamber of Commerce) for the conservation of both lakes. Ringrose exclaimed that Barrine was a, 'most wonderful lake' which, 'had such a quiet peacefulness buried in the scrub [the term at that time for rainforest]' (Queensland 1897: Q. 4147-50, 4247 & 4301-6). No one spoke in favour of clearing. As a result, Barrine was saved and the farms around Eacham were resumed.

The case for the reservation of the lakes on the Atherton Tableland was significant in two ways. First, the land was clearly not worthless, indeed some already had been sold for farms. Second, the case for reservation was made by local settlers from a economically depressed area. This counters the argument of Stevens (1991) that interest in conservation in the far north was stifled by the 1890s depression. However, the local settlers did not argue for a National Park, only a reserve (the lakes were not declared as National Parks until 1934). Nor did they use tourism as a justification. Rather, their intention was probably a local picnic reserve. Ironically, as described by farmer Charles Bryde (1921: 83-4), locals would resort to these reserves as a break from clearing the rainforest on their farms.

In 1906, Walter Paget, a Queensland Member of Parliament argued for National Parks on the Atherton Tableland and the Whitsunday Islands off the coast. He foresaw that, ‘when these places are better known we shall have tourists in tens of thousands coming to see them’ (Queensland 1906: 1551). The writings of the ‘Beachcomber’ Edmund Banfield (1908) further promoted the coastal islands and their rainforests. However, the tendency was to see these northern rainforests in terms of their agricultural potential, as in the writings of the influential booster Edwin Brady (1918 & 1924). Instead, the push for National Parks became focussed on the rainforests to the south of Brisbane.

## **ROBERT COLLINS AND THE LAMINGTON PLATEAU**

The Lamington Plateau is located on the Queensland – NSW border, 120 kilometres south of Brisbane. The eroded remains of a gigantic volcanic crater, it ranges from 600 to 1,150 metres (2,000 – 3,700 feet) high. Rather than a single plateau, the area is actually a series of small plateaus and ridges cut by steep valleys and waterfalls. It is primarily clad in dense sub-tropical rainforest, though at its highest altitude it contains a cool temperate rainforest of beech (*nothofagus*) trees.

The idea for declaring the Lamington Plateau as a National Park is generally credited to Robert Collins, who raised it in a paper read to the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographic Society of Australasia in 1896 (Groom 1949: 63-4; Powell 1976: 115; Hutton and Connors 1999: 33; Hall 2000A: 33). Collins was a wealthy pastoralist and member of the Queensland Parliament. In 1878 he had visited the USA and his ideas were supposedly based on his experiences of National Parks there (Groom 1949: 63; Hutton and Connors 1999: 33; Hall 2000A: 33).

However, Collins did not call for a National Park or use that term in his 1896 speech. Nor did he refer to National Parks in the USA (Collins 1897). Indeed, on his 1878 trip to America he did not visit Yellowstone National Park (declared 1872 and at that stage the only National Park in the world). He did make a quick excursion from San Francisco to Yosemite (Perry 1923: 212). However, at that time Yosemite was a State Park (1864) and would not become a National Park until 1890, though Runte (1979: 30) persuasively argued that, ‘in fact, therefore, if not in name, Yosemite was the first national park’. It seems likely that Collins’ American connection is a later exaggeration, probably due to alliterative confusion between Yellowstone and Yosemite.

Collins’ vision was of the economic development of the Lamington Plateau. He commenced his paper by considering its potential as a health resort:

Who does not long to get away from the moist heat of Brisbane ... in summer-time ... It is no wonder that people really needing rest and change in a cooler and more invigorating climate go to New Zealand and Tasmania, or to the mountainous regions of Victoria or New South Wales ... [Yet] within sight of Brisbane is a fine area of habitable country, and with a climate more equable than perhaps any New Zealand town enjoys – volcanic soils of surpassing richness, shady forests and scrubs, cool running streams, and splendid, bold mountain scenery (Collins 1897: 21).

In order to, ‘attract attention to an undeveloped source of wealth’, Collins read a long account of a recent expedition to the Plateau by an artist, G.H. Taylor. Taylor described, ‘a rich soil capable of growing every kind of English fruit and vegetable’ and, ‘thousands of acres of land offering a perfection of climate, of

scenery and of soil'. If opened for settlement, like nearby Mount Tamborine, 'these mountains must as they become known, attract a large number of visitors from Brisbane' (Collins 1897: 22-24).

Over the next few years, Collins refined his proposal. In 1898, he gained publicity through a visit by the Governor of Queensland, Lord Lamington. From around 1903 onwards, the area began to be referred to as the Lamington Plateau, commemorating that visit. From around this time the term National Park was also beginning to be used (Jarrott 1990: 3 & 7). In 1900, Collins and his relatives applied to select 960 acres. They did this to prevent the land being selected for farming or cut for timber and promised that they would withdraw their claims when the National Park was declared (Perry 1923: 324; Jarrott 1990: 11).

In 1903, the still largely unexplored Plateau, was investigated by Gilbert Burnett of the Queensland Public Lands Department. He reported that the, 'soil: cannot be surpassed for depth and richness, and the land is easily cleared'. However, he did qualify his support for settlement by stating that the dense vegetation limited his explorations, Burnett recommended that 650 acres be declared a public reserve and 4,500 acres be opened for farming (Perry 1923: 333; Jarrott 1990: 5). To facilitate easier access, Collins paid for a track to be cut up the Plateau and asked the Queensland Government to decide on its, 'suitability for ordinary settlement, the purposes of a National Park or health resort sanatorium or what not'. Utilising this track, Burnett made another inspection in 1906 and judged the area suitable for a, 'public park, sanatorium or for agricultural purposes' (Groom 1949: 64-5; Jarrott 1990: 6-7).

It is important to understand that Collins and his supporters were not arguing that the whole Lamington Plateau be declared a National Park. Rather, they saw its potential for economic development encompassing a range of uses, including agriculture and tourism. Farming was integral to their plan, for a critical mass of settlers was necessary in order to justify the roads which tourists would need. The National Park would be limited to a small area, either the 650 acres which Burnett recommended or the 960 applied for by Collins. It probably was not intended to be contiguous, for in 1905 Collins suggested that the Government build a road linking a number of scattered scenic lookouts (Perry 1923: 334).

The emphasis on farming suggests that Collins' motives may not have been entirely altruistic. At this time there was growing support for *closer settlement*, in which governments purchased large grazing properties and subdivided them into smaller family-owned farms (Frost 1997: 35). As a Member of Parliament and a large landholder, Collins was a consistent critic of closer settlement (Perry 1923: 338-341). It may be that he was interested in deflecting settlement towards the crown land of the Lamington Plateau and away from privately owned land.

## **NATIONAL PARKS LEGISLATION**

In 1906 Queensland passed its State Forests and National Parks Act. This allowed the Secretary for Public Lands to declare State Forests and National Parks by regulation rather than through individual legislation enacted by parliament. The focus of the bill was primarily on encouraging forestry, with the creation of National Parks comprising only a minor section. This is reflected in the extensive parliamentary debate over the bill, which barely touched on National Parks.

The bill was introduced in the lower house by Joshua Bell, Secretary for Public Lands. He saw National Parks being created in:

Areas which, either from a climatic or scientific point of view – or from both – are localities that are likely to become popular resorts as the population grows larger – places to which those who desire to take a holiday may like to go from time to time, and know that they will get pure air, good scenery and country life (Queensland 1906: 1541).

In the upper house, the legislation was introduced by Andrew Barlow, Secretary for Public Instruction. Whereas Bell had stressed the importance of tourism, Barlow focussed on conservation:

This measure simply follows in the wake of the southern States [of Australia] and the United States of America in attempting to create a national park. We all know what the great national park of the United States is – where the gigantic trees are. It is very desirable that a small bit of nature should be reserved before it is all destroyed and cultivated and broken up (Queensland 1906: 1930).

There was some discussion of potential sites for National Parks. An interjector suggested that Bell might nominate the Bunya Mountains, as they happened to be in his electorate. Bell replied that while the Government was not yet proposing sites, ‘there is one place on the southern border which would be a very suitable locality for a National Park’ (Queensland, 1906: 1541). Walter Paget suggested the Whitsunday Islands and the Atherton Tableland and George Gray called for a large urban park for Brisbane (Queensland, 1906: 1551 & 1930). Robert Philp, Leader of the Opposition, voiced his in principle support, but warned that National Parks needed to be near centres of populations and had to be carefully managed so that they did not become harbours for noxious weeds (Queensland, 1906: 1542).

There were a number of surprising omissions from this limited debate. Robert Collins, no longer in parliament, was not mentioned. The discussion of potential sites was very brief and it was strange that Bell referred obliquely to a site on the border rather than simply naming the Lamington Plateau. Most importantly, no one asked whether National Parks would be only sited on worthless lands or whether they could be created at the expense of agriculture or forestry. The only hint of this, was in Barlow’s introduction, where he spoke of nature being preserved from cultivation.

## **TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN**

The first application for a National Park came from a group of farmers on Tamborine Mountain. In June 1907, six months after the legislation became effective, the Tamborine Shire Council petitioned for Witches Falls to become a National Park. In March 1908 a small 324 acre National Park was established.

While this small area has generally been characterised as worthless, such a view is contradicted by the wording of the Shire’s petition. It asked for,

a National Park for the preservation of the flora and fauna, as owing to the way the land in the vicinity is being cleared it would seem that in the near future such an action would prove its necessity (quoted in Groom 1949: 66).

The main justification for the National Park was that clearing for agriculture would soon claim the area. These local farmers, having cleared rainforests to establish their farms, wished to retain some of the original vegetation (for farmers appreciation of rainforests, see Frost 2002). In their view, the rainforests would soon be cleared for farming, but instead they wanted it preserved as a National Park.

## **FARMING THE LAMINGTON PLATEAU**

While the Queensland Government used its legislation to declare National Parks at Tamborine Mountain and Bunya Mountains (created in 1908 to protect stands of Bunya Pines and Aboriginal sites), it did not immediately establish one on the Lamington Plateau. Whereas there was little opposition at Tamborine and Bunya, in the case of the Lamington Plateau:

Objections to the National Park idea commenced to come in. People suddenly realized that a large area of fertile country existed in an around the McPherson heights [Lamington Plateau]. There were valuable forests of timber (Groom 1949: 66).

It is unclear as to who was objecting to a National Park on the Lamington Plateau. One effect of the Queensland legislation was that it stifled public debate. Proposals and counterproposals were not discussed in open parliament. Rather they were considered by the Secretary of Public Lands, who was not required to release the reasons for his decisions.

It is most likely that a push for farming the Lamington Plateau resulted from the successful opening of other rainforested mountain areas. As noted earlier, the settlement of the Atherton Tableland in the 1880s had been regarded as a failure. However, following the 1897 Royal Commission on Land Settlement, construction of the railway from the coast was restarted. In 1903 it finally reached the town of Atherton. With a transport connection in place, the Atherton Tableland was rushed by a flood of settlers, primarily dairy farmers from the increasingly crowded 'Big Scrub' of northern NSW (the Big Scrub was initially subtropical rainforest, but by the early twentieth century was completely cleared). Another land rush occurred in 1905 to the Dorrigo Plateau of northern NSW (Frost 1997: 34-5). These successes probably encouraged ideas that the Lamington Plateau could be developed in a similar way.

Collins and his supporters were further hamstrung by the lack of local government for the Lamington Plateau. The petition for a National Park on Tamborine Mountain came from a local shire council comprised of farmers who already lived on the mountain. In contrast, the Lamington Plateau had no settlers to initiate a proposal.

In 1910 Collins was able to convince Digby Denham, who had succeeded Bell as Secretary for Public Lands, to visit the Lamington Plateau. The strategy backfired. Denham was unconvinced:

Certainly my experience yesterday was not a happy one in getting up to and down from the plateau ... I appreciate the thought of a national park, but for anyone to regard the Lamington Plateau as a national park, is under the circumstances, an extreme view. One cannot get away from the track cut, the vegetation is so dense, and I think public interest would be served much more by having some 30 to 50 families located on the plateau and the altitudes [scenic lookouts] retained, especially those spots where tree ferns luxuriate, than by having a nominal national park which is practically inaccessible except to those who will undergo great hardship, and which is yielding no results (Denham 1910).

Denham's model was clearly based on Tamborine Mountain. He envisaged, 'making a portion open to selection [for farming] and reserving the scenic points'. Farms would be small, '160 acres would be sufficient for any man to tackle ... 160 acres should carry 160 dairy cows' (Denham 1910). Once a community was established and roads built, small reserves could be set up as National Parks. While Collins was disappointed in not having immediate approval for a National Park, Denham's vision was not too different to what Collins had been proposing. In 1912 Collins met with E.H. Macartney, the new Secretary for Public Lands, and agreed to selection with the 'beauty spots' reserved (Jarrott 1990: 26).

In 1911 the Lamington Plateau was opened for farming. The first settlers were eight cousins named O'Reilly. Originally from the Blue Mountains in NSW, they had been working in Queensland as agricultural labourers. Unfortunately, accounts of their settling (O'Reilly 1944; Groom 1949: 83-9 and the 1949 feature film *Sons of Matthew*) give no details of how they were recruited or why they chose the Lamington Plateau. Having staked out their selections, they began to clear the rainforest.

## **THE LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK**

The commencement of clearing encouraged a new campaign for a National Park on the Lamington Plateau. It was led by Romeo Lahey, a young university student who was from a family with extensive sawmilling interests. In time Lahey would found the National Parks Association of Queensland and organise numerous successful campaigns for National Parks (Goldstein 1979; Hutton and Connors 1999: 70-2).

In 1911 Lahey opened his campaign in an article in the weekly newspaper Queenslander. Describing a walk across the Lamington Plateau, he emphasised its waterfalls and views and asked:

Why then should this not be Queensland's national park, especially as it would cost nothing in resumption and its status as timber reserve would in no wise be interfered with? (Lahey 1911).

It was a curious piece. Lahey declared that it was a pity that Queensland had no National Park, ignoring the existence of Tamborine and Bunya Mountains. He also ignored the presence of farmers on the Lamington Plateau. Finally, he inferred that even once it was a National Park, logging would still be permitted.

Lahey followed up with a formal submission to the Secretary for Public Lands. This differed significantly from Collins' proposal, for Lahey asked for a large National Park of 52,000 acres (Groom 1949: 78). Prior to this National Parks in rainforested areas had been conceived of as small, Witches Falls was 324 acres, Collins had proposed 960 acres and Burnett 650 acres for the Lamington Plateau, and in Victoria: Tarra Valley was 750 acres, Ferntree Gully 557 acres and Bulga only 49 acres. Put another way, Denham had thought that dairy farms on the Lamington Plateau should be 160 acres. These other National Parks were the size of one to five such farms, Lahey's proposal was equivalent to over 300 dairy farms.

Audacious as Lahey's concept was, it must have had some influence. The Secretary of Public Lands withdrew all further lots from selection, leaving the O'Reillys as the sole farmers on the Plateau (Groom 1949: 78). However, Lahey still faced the same problem as Collins had. Following the pattern established at Tamborine Mountain, the Secretary for Public Lands expected the proposal to be initiated by some local representative group, preferably the shire council. While Lahey protested to Denham (now Premier), 'the Shire Councils will subvert one of Queensland's potencies to greatness to present utility ... a National Park is a matter for the people and not for a Shire Council' (quoted in Groom 1949: 79), he realised he needed to demonstrate local support.

There were two local councils to win over – Beaudesert, to the west of the Lamington Plateau and Tamborine, to the north. Initially, Tamborine opposed Lahey's proposal, despite having sponsored the petition for its National Park. Beaudesert, in turn, would only support a National Park of 1,000 acres. In 1913, after intense lobbying, Lahey was able to gain Tamborine's support for his entire proposal (Groom 1949: 78-80). In addition, Lahey launched a petition amongst local voters.

Success came in 1915. In a state election, Denham was defeated and a Labor Government returned. Presenting his petition, Lahey convinced the new government to establish a National Park of 47,000 acres. Lahey's petition contain 521 registered voters, a sizeable number for a rural electorate. It set down eight reasons for declaring a National Park (the full petition is in Groom 1949: 81-2):

1. A health resort in the mountains
2. Rare flora and fauna, particularly Lyrebirds and Antarctic Beech
3. Traffic for nearby railways
4. Forest clearance will lead to floods
5. Potential water supply for Brisbane
6. Preserving native birds and animals needs a large area
7. Only a small area is suitable for farming and access is difficult
8. Scenery.

The Queensland Government entered into negotiations with the O'Reillys to resume their land and add it to the National Park. However, when the O'Reillys asked for too much compensation, the Government withdrew, perhaps confident that the now isolated O'Reillys could not make farming pay and would abandon their holdings (Frost 2002: 12). In turn, the O'Reillys adopted the argument used by Collins, Denham and others previously, claiming that their, 'few hundred acres of settlement will prove an asset to the National Park in its development as a health and pleasure resort' (O'Reillys 1919). As the number of visitors increased, the O'Reillys turned to servicing their needs, opening their guesthouse in 1926 (O'Reilly 1944: 126-134).

## CONCLUSION

In their study of tourism and National Parks, Stephen Boyd and Richard Butler argue, 'that it is impossible to understand, and hope to resolve, many of the current issues facing national parks in the context of tourism without understanding the origins of the parks and their links with tourism' (2000: 13). Considering the



origins of the Queensland National Parks allows us to better understand the development of National Parks in two ways.

The first is the difference between the Australian and the American 'Experience'. Queensland illustrates just how Australian National Parks followed a very different path to those of the USA and other countries. In America, the first National Park was established by the Federal Government, creating a pattern for future declaration. The Federal Government's involvement was required as Wyoming was still a Federal Territory in 1872 (Runte 1979: 34). Furthermore, the Federal Government, being formed before the main westward movement retained control of extensive lands in the west. In contrast, Australia's National Parks were established by state governments and continue today to be controlled by the states. It is not just that a small number of National Parks were declared before Federation. More importantly, the states refused to hand responsibility for lands over to the Federal Government, for the states saw such lands as their main source of income. Without any land under its control, the Federal Government was never in position to create a US-style national system.

Australia's state-based National Parks are at odds with the 1969 definition of National Parks formulated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It requires administration by, 'the highest competent authority of the country' (quoted in Butler and Boyd 2000: 4-5). Yet not to recognise Australia's system would seem a nonsense. A further variation is that a state-based system, with nominations generally coming from local groups, has resulted in a proliferation of National Parks in Australia. Boyd and Butler (2000: 18-9) identify 49 National Parks in the USA and 12 in Canada. In contrast Groom (1949: 204-5) notes that Queensland had at that time 225 National Parks and lists 35 of the main ones. Clearly, while there are some Australian National Parks which are comparable to those of the USA, there are many which are closer to the concept of State Parks.

The second consideration is that Runte's 'Worthless Lands' hypothesis does not explain the origins of National Parks in Queensland. The rainforested areas which were nominated for National Parks were all under threat of development for agriculture. It was this spread of farming into these areas which stimulated campaigns for National Parks. In the case of the Lamington Plateau there was an extended debate over the best use of a large area. Collins initially proposed a mixed use of farming and tourism. In turn, there was a reaction to his ideas, resulting in a push for opening the whole area to settlement (with no National Park). When the land was thrown open to settlement and the O'Reillys commenced clearing, there was a strong and ultimately successful campaign for a large National Park.

Whether or not National Parks may be established even though there are competing land uses, remains an important issue today. In 2002 the Victorian State Government established a number of Marine National Parks. Their establishment was a long drawn-out process, mainly because the areas in question had significant value for commercial fishing. Similarly, in 2002 the Victorian Government established a number of National Parks in its Central Goldfields region. Again, there was much debate over whether conservation was more important than established industries of mining and timber-cutting. The contemporary value of considering the origins of National Parks in Queensland, is that it demonstrates historical precedents of establishing National Parks where there are other competing resource uses.

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