

Proposed Changes to Zoning Rules

Please note: The following background information should be read in association with the *Wet Tropics Plan Review Information Booklet – January 2009*.

Existing rules for generating management zones

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WHA) is divided into four zones. These statutory management zones are depicted on 1:50,000 Wet Tropics zoning maps held by the Authority. The zones are currently established according to the integrity, the remoteness from disturbance, the intended physical and social setting and the management purpose of different parts of the WHA.

The four Zones that currently make up the WHA are outlined in **Part 2** of the Plan and include:

Zone A Comprised of land that is of high integrity and remote from disturbance.

Zone B Comprised of land that is mostly of high integrity but not necessarily remote from disturbance.

Zone C Comprised of land on which, or adjacent to which, there is disturbance associated with community services infrastructure.

Zone D Comprised of land on which there are, or are planned to be, developed facilities to enable visitors to appreciate and enjoy the WHA.

The existing zoning is based on a “distance from disturbance” model. The model is based on the following wilderness quality indicators:

- *Remoteness from access* – how remote a site is from established access routes (e.g. roads)
- *Apparent naturalness* – the degree to which a site is free from permanent structures associated with modern technological society (e.g. telecommunication towers)
- *Biophysical naturalness* – the degree to which a site is free from signs of biophysical disturbances caused by modern technological society (e.g. past logging).

The derivation of existing zones is described in the table below:

Zone	Existing Rules
A & B	Currently derived using different distances from a range of disturbances (e.g. community services infrastructure, existing clearings), and must include a minimum area. Signs of disturbance over the last 40 years (e.g. past logging) are also taken into consideration.
C	Currently derived using a number of set distances (between 50m and 250m) around community services infrastructure (roads, dams, powerlines, pipelines and cableways) based on the minimum required for essential management practices associated with the disturbance. In some cases, set distances were determined based on the presence/absence of rare, threatened, or vulnerable species or communities. Clearings associated with existing use rights (e.g. quarries) are also included in Zone C.
D	Zone D comprises lands where developed visitor facilities exist or are proposed. The criteria used to generate the size of Zone D lands are based on the presence/absence of rare, threatened, or vulnerable species or communities and range from 75m radius to 150m radius. Zone D lands are currently only generated within Zone C lands.

Proposed changes to zoning rules

The proposed new rules for generating zones are outlined in the table below:

Table 1 – Amended zoning system

Zone	Management Purpose	Basic Zoning Rules
A	Land to be used only for conservation and presentation of the Area; and to the greatest possible extent— (i) to protect and enhance the integrity of land in the zone; and (ii) if the land is disturbed—to restore the land to its natural state.	Zone A to comprise lands at least 50m from infrastructure sites and dams; and at least 500m from linear infrastructure.
B	Land to be used for conservation and presentation of the Area; and to the greatest possible extent— (i) to protect and enhance the integrity of land in the zone; and (ii) if the land is disturbed—to restore the land to its natural state; but (iii) for the land to be the subject of rezoning under Schedule 1.	Zone B to comprise lands between 50m and 500m from centreline of linear infrastructure.
C	Land to – (i) accommodate community services infrastructure and community facilities; and (ii) for land that was cleared before the commencement of the Plan, to accommodate activities permitted in zone C, but to the greatest possible extent— (iii) to ensure any adverse impact of activities carried out in the zone on the Area’s integrity is minimal and acceptable under this Plan; and (iv) to otherwise protect and enhance the integrity of land in the zone.	Zone C to comprise: – lands within 50m of the centreline of linear infrastructure. – lands within a 50m radius of infrastructure sites. – lands within 50m from the edge of dams (100% capacity level). – selected areas of cleared land identified as being associated with existing use rights
D	Land to accommodate facilities for— (i) presenting the Area to visitors; and (ii) enabling visitors to enjoy land in the zone and in nearby parts of the area; but to the greatest possible extent— (iii) to ensure any adverse impact of activities carried out in the zone on the Area’s integrity is minimal and acceptable under this Plan; and (iv) to otherwise protect and enhance the integrity of the land in the zone.	Zone D to comprise lands where developed visitor facilities exist or are proposed.
	Note: – infrastructure sites include telecommunications facilities and water supply towers – linear infrastructure includes roads, powerlines, railways, pipelines and cableways	

Why this needs to be done?

The distance-from-disturbance model used to generate existing zones has proved to have limitations with respect to administration of the Plan. The revised zoning approach better reflects the management purpose of each zone and focuses on the future, rather than the past.

Furthermore, the current Plan specifically states that it is intended to include zone B land within zone A once it is sufficiently recovered or rehabilitated. The majority of land currently included in zone B was included on the basis that it was disturbed from past logging activities. Any such activities occurred prior to 1988 when commercial logging was prohibited. As there has been substantial recovery of these forests over the last 20 or more years, it is appropriate they now be accommodated in Zone A.

The simplified zoning rules also means they may be applied with confidence in the field. This will assist infrastructure agencies and land managers alike.

While there were some initial concerns raised by local government during Phase 1 consultation, follow-up consultation with local government indicates that the revised zoning will adequately accommodate all current and any presently foreseeable community service infrastructure requirements.

Management implications

Map 1 provides an example comparing the difference between zoning maps using the existing and proposed rules for generating zones.

Zones A and B

The most obvious change with the application of the proposed new zoning rules is the reduction in the extent of Zone B, and subsequent increase in the extent of Zone A. The main reason for the significant increase in Zone A is that lands which were subject to past disturbances (e.g. previously logged) will now be included in Zone A (and not Zone B as previously).

It should be noted that the Plan includes provisions which specifically relate to Zone B, in particular, provisions for rezoning applications from Zone B to Zone C to accommodate essential community infrastructure (e.g. roads, powerlines). Although the total extent of Zone B would be considerably reduced with the proposed new zoning rules, Zone B will still comprise a significant 1km wide 'belt' paralleling existing linear infrastructure.

Zone C

Currently, Zone C lands are derived using different distances from community services infrastructure. The proposed new rules will see a standard '50m rule' applied (refer Table above). This will decrease the area of Zone C available for the development of new community services infrastructure, but maintains an appropriate distance for the operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure in the WHA. Maintenance operations will still be subject to permit conditions and Wet Tropics codes of environmental practice. This simplified approach will also mean it will be much easier for infrastructure managers and the Authority to establish the boundary of Zone C on the ground without the need for complex zoning map referencing.

Zone D

Zone D currently comprises sites where developed visitor facilities exist or are proposed. The rule constraining Zone D sites within Zone C has at times resulted in odd shapes and sizes which do not truly reflect the management intent with respect to visitor infrastructure design and development. It is proposed that developed visitor facilities (where designated by a Zone D) may now be located within Zones A and B, as well as Zone C. It is proposed Zone D sites will generally be circular and of a radius between 75m and 150m, depending on the management intent with respect to visitor infrastructure development. In some cases Zone D may extend into forested areas. However, the

Plan's principles and criteria for assessing any proposed development must still be applied before any visitor facility development can proceed.

Map 1 – Comparison of existing and proposed zoning scheme.

