

## **Wet Tropics Management Authority position statement: Wind farm development adjacent to the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area**

The Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) recognises that lowering emissions is one of the most critical actions to reduce climate change impacts on the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (the Area).

The Authority's Board of Directors (the Board) strongly supports appropriately planned and located renewable energy, including a significant scaling up of renewable energy generation across Queensland.

While the Board strongly supports renewable energy projects, we believe that this should not occur where it will increase the risk of threats to the Area and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

For large-scale renewable energy developments in proximity of the Area, the Authority's position is:

- In order to protect OUV, proponents should demonstrate that clearing, fragmentation and operation of the large-scale renewable energy developments will not:
  - exacerbate fire risk in the Area, which is already at an increased risk as a result of climate change
  - exacerbate weed and pest animal spread and contribute to ecosystem change within the Area
  - impact on species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and other species of conservation significance (including all taxa that are endemic, or are of an ancient lineage, or are globally significant or ecologically rare) that utilise habitat within the project area and move between the project area and the Area (e.g. feeding, dispersal, genetic exchange etc). This includes limiting impacts on wet sclerophyll and adjacent communities.
- As the World Heritage listing for the Wet Tropics recognises that it possesses outstanding scenic features, natural beauty and magnificent sweeping landscapes<sup>1</sup> (as well as its other significant natural features). Any development adjacent to the Area must only occur following detailed landscape and visual impact studies undertaken from viewpoints outside and looking towards the Area, as well as from key vantage points within the Area looking towards the proposed development area. These studies should comprehensively inform the potential impacts on World Heritage-listed scenic amenity. Proponents must also commit to actions to minimise impacts on scenic amenity through wind turbine siting and selection of suitable materials, colour and design.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/486/>

The Board agrees with concerns expressed by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the need to properly consider, and avoid, biodiversity impacts in planning for climate change mitigation actions:

*‘...that previous policies have largely tackled biodiversity loss and climate change independently of each other, and that addressing the synergies between mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change, while considering their social impacts, offers the opportunity to maximize benefits and meet global development goals.’*

Tackling Biodiversity & Climate Crises Together and their Combined Social Impacts Workshop Report (10 June 2021)<sup>2</sup>.

The Board is appropriately concerned about the cumulative scale of proposed developments, as it would involve significant clearing across a large and relatively intact landscape adjoining the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Large-scale development is likely to have significant impacts on high-value biodiversity and ecosystems that contribute to healthy and thriving livelihoods in the broader Wet Tropics region.

There has been a lack of proper regional planning in the current approach to renewable energy. The Board encourages the Queensland Government, in partnership with the renewable energy industry to undertake better strategic planning and assessment of localities for new projects, including considering the cumulative impact of projects. The Nature Conservancy approach developed in the USA (‘Site Renewables Right’) provides a good example of a comprehensive planning and assessment process. It is important that Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples are fully engaged in the suggested planning processes and that proponents are required to obtain free prior and informed consent from Traditional Custodians.

The Authority will continue to provide views to the Queensland Government to inform their assessment processes, and encourages the Queensland Government to review State Code 23: Wind farm development, which is assessed by the State under the State Assessment and Referral Agency process. This review should include performance indicators that encourage proponents to assess thoroughly and carefully to avoid impacts on significant environmental and cultural values, including World Heritage and National Heritage values. Furthermore, the Board is concerned that the current boundary of the Northern Renewable Energy Zone (NREZ) does not consider finer-scale analyses of ecologically sensitive areas that are not suitable for potential large-scale development—the Board encourages the Queensland Government to reconsider the extent of the NREZ and identify appropriate sites and clear no-go zones based on assessment of biodiversity and other environmental values, Indigenous cultural considerations and social implications.

The Authority will continue to engage with the relevant Commonwealth department and provide robust advice into the assessment processes under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* regarding impacts on World Heritage values as a result of proposed large-scale renewable energy developments.

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<sup>2</sup> [20210606 Media Release EMBARGO 3pm CEST 10 June.pdf \(ipbes.net\)](#)