

Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW

Draft Management Plan – Meroo National Park

Final Draft

Introduction

The following comments are provided on the Draft Plan of Management (DMP) for Meroo National Park (MNP) following advice from Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) DPI(F) that National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) propose to close roads into the two Lakes contained within the Meroo National Park (MNP), they being Meroo and Termeil Lakes. An inspection of the Meroo Lake was recently undertaken.

Meroo – Recreational Fishing Haven

The DPM for MNP does not enhance opportunities for recreational fishing activities within the Park. This is particularly disappointing as Meroo Lake is a Recreational Fishing Haven (RFH) and since its creation has proven to be a great success with increased fish identified by local regular users.

Current road concerns

Unfortunately two wheel drive vehicles can no longer access the NMP Lakes because of the lack of maintenance to access roads. Poor road maintenance appears to be a deliberate strategy which has resulted in under use and can be classified as “shut out by stealth”. Since the creation of the RFH’s some six years ago the standard of the road access has significantly declined to that when State Forests managed the land portfolio. NPWS should be ashamed of the access road conditions considering they are responsible manage and maintain public land assets. There appears to be no maintenance road program in place, roads are losing top soil, road shoulders are collapsing and trees have fallen over roads and left to discouraging further vehicle access by park users.

Some access roads are actually dangerous and need immediate repairs before a roll over occurs. Recreational fishers have had to tow inexperienced young drivers out of deep bogged potholes full of water because of the poor road maintenance. This lack of maintenance only creates further damage within the Park and provides an excuse for NPWS to close roads based upon unsafe conditions.

The proposal to close the majority of access roads within the DMP and to limit others to a point some distance from the waters edge, the Lakes will be effectively closed. The distance proposed will be too great to carry small water craft. Land based opportunities are not possible unless fishers slash the riparian vegetation and create their own tracks. This is unacceptable and is not the preferred option.

Something special

Both of these Lakes provide something very special to recreational fishers both to those who live locally and to those who travel to fish such peaceful areas. Many fishers have canoes and like to enable them to access such areas to enjoy the tranquility and to see the wildlife that these Lakes support. They also provide great opportunities for those who undertake photography as a hobby. The fishers who use these areas are not cowboys and in fact are exactly the opposite. They want to see these areas maintained, looked after and enhanced. They are in effect “de-facto keepers” as they have a strong local interest and commitment in their fishery to which they have a financial interest and linked to their passion together with strong conservation views. This type of thinking is being promoted by Catchment Management Authority’s and CMA’s are excited to learn of such commitment from recreational fishers.

Creation of RFA's

When RFA's were created it was hoped that since recreational fishers would have a financial interest in their fishery their attitudes and commitment would change, this has certainly occurred, these Lakes are an example of such commitment.

This assumption has proven to be correct and there has been a significant shift towards this way of thinking by thousands of recreational fishers. It is about education, involvement, commitment, caring for the waterways, working with Government Agencies and providing workable solutions that do not alienate community groups who have alternative views - not lock outs.

Commissioner's comments

I note that contained within the Commissioners (Peter J Crawford) summary of the Healthy Rivers Commission Report he states among other things that the decisions should be made on the basis of better information.

The issues of *Caulerpa taxifolia* possibly occurring in the two Lakes where the Green and Golden Bell Frog is reported to live does not sound feasible yet this has been raised as an issue by NPWS in the DMP. This species of frog can only tolerate a very low salt content of 6 parts per thousand. It is my understanding that *Caulerpa* won't grow in such a low level of salt content!
So where is the "better information" from NPWS as recommended by Commissioner Crawford?

Lakes - Condition

It is pleasing to note that the DPM advises that the Lakes are in good condition, so why the need to effectively close them from recreational fishing? If recreational fishers were doing the wrong thing then there may be an issue to address, but no evidence to that effect has been provided.

The only areas that are not in good condition are the access roads. If it was not for Local recreational fishers actually clear fallen trees on a needs basis to enable access. If these trees were not removed alternative tracks are then created to get around the obstacle. This is not the preferred option.

Cultural issues

Enquiries have been made with two original landowners to establish if there were any cultural issues that needed protection or were a concern to them and the communities they represent. They had no concerns and saw no reasons for the proposed road closures. However they both recommended that to be 100% sure a check with their Queenbeyan Office would be appropriate. To date I have not seen the need to take this enquiry any further.

Riparian vegetation

The existing shores of both lakes are very well covered in riparian vegetation and it would be preferable to leave it that way. The type of vegetation clearly indicates that the Lake is mainly freshwater; there are no mangroves or similar vegetation that needs significant salt content to survive.

The vegetation is well established around the perimeter of the Lakes and in very good condition, there is no suitable land based areas to fish. These Lakes need to be fished by small boat, canoes or the like or small punts type boats when fly fishing is preferred.

Land Based Fishing

If land based fishing was to be considered then fishing platforms similar to those provided at alternative locations in the Shire would need to be provided together with perimeter walking trails around the Lakes and perhaps some boardwalks – these do not currently exist and would prove to be an expensive project due to access, material handling issues, topography, plant access, etc.

Potential issues

Speed restrictions should be considered on both Lakes because of their size, depth and nature. Alternatively limit could be placed on the size of motor 2-6hp which addresses any potential wakeboarding, skiing, aqua planning, jet skies and similar craft/activities. Preference would have to be given to canoes, kayaks and small craft using electric motors but not limited to other small suitable platform craft to support family participation.

This could be a negotiating issue with NPWS if some compromise had to be found.

Road Access

Considering both Meroo and Thermeil Lakes are both available for recreational fishing road access should be available to both lakes particularly Meroo because it is a RFH.

Road access should desirable provided to both ends of each Lake to increase safety opportunities to get to shore in windy conditions which can occur at short notice. This is particularly so for children who can be expected to frequent the lakes during school holidays and weekends.

Emergency vehicles

If roads were closed and or not provided to the respective Lakes this only reduces the response time for assistance and traveling time to hospital in the case of an emergency. Why impose this restriction when the closures are unnecessary?

Funding

On the off chance of funding being an issue which prevents NPWS maintaining the access roads I made preliminary enquiries regards funding availability at a recent meeting I attended with the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (SRCMA). SRCMA confirmed that the two Lakes in question are within their boundaries. I was also informed that the CMA does fund projects within National Parks. Funding is committed for the current financial year 07/08 however any project can be considered for inclusion and would be considered as part of the normal assessment process. Sediment control and erosion was considered to be an acceptable project by the SRCMA. To date I have not informed CMA of the nature or location of such a possible project as road maintenance should be funded by NPWS.

Conclusion

I would hope the outcome of this will be that NPWS will be directed to be more responsible and to realise they are part of Government and that trying to slip around the back door to achieve their own aims is inappropriate behavior and puts them in a very poor light with the community.

It would seem appropriate that if a Memo of Understanding does not exist between NPWS and DPI(F) perhaps enquiries should be made to determine if one can be prepared. Contained within the MoU could be the issue of Recreational Fishing Havens and access to same. Hopefully it is unnecessary to go through a similar process to this every time NPWS put forward a DMP.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment on the Meroo National Park Draft Plan of Management. I would also like to thank Alistair McBurnie for meeting me on site to examine and discuss the local issue and options with local concerned fishers and Council representatives.

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