

**Submission
No 374**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Liberal Party of NSW
Primary Industries and Regional Affairs Branch

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Date received: 31/08/2012



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**Liberal Party of New South Wales
Primary Industries and Regional Affairs
Policy Branch (“PIRA”)**

**Submission to the
INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF
PUBLIC LAND IN NSW**

**By the
NSW Legislative Council General Purpose
Standing Committee No.5**

Term of Reference 1: Decision process for declaring National Parks

Inadequacy of NPWS Resources

PIRA believes the National Parks and Wildlife Service (“NPWS”) is not resourced adequately to manage existing National Parks to a standard that meets community expectations.

In particular the NPWS is not resourced adequately to undertake sufficient:

- Fire risk management
- Feral animal control
- Invasive weed control

PIRA believes that inadequate fire management, in particular an inadequate level of controlled burn-offs, constitutes a significant public safety risk, risk to private property and environmental threat. The Victorian, NSW and ACT bushfires of recent years provide an example of the devastating consequences of inadequate fire risk management.

Feral animals and invasive weeds are managed more successfully by private landholders than by NPWS. Feral animals and invasive weeds do not recognize boundaries between public and private land so private landholders are impacted by the lack of public land controls and effectively subsidize land management of National Parks. Councils and the LHPAs enforce control on private lands but have no authority over public lands.

Two stage process for declaration of new National Parks

In considering existing the declaration of National Parks there should be a two stage analysis:

1. Environmental Study
2. Economic and Social Impact Study

An Environmental Study currently takes place with NPWS identifying the conservation values associated with land. This Environmental Study should however be augmented by consideration of whether these conservation values can be maintained under private ownership. If that is possible then the environmental outcomes will be achieved at substantially lower cost to the State.

Suggestion 1: Prior to creation of a National Park the existing Environmental Study should however be augmented by an independent report into whether the conservation values of the land can be maintained under private ownership.

An Economic and Social Impact Study should include:

- Full costing and provision for the capital and recurrent funding needs of National Park/s
- What opportunities exist to add to National Park estate from within the existing Public Land pool rather than converting more agricultural land to National Park, eg. State Forests land
- Can productive agricultural land and sustainable forestry land be excised from the proposed National Parks or leased to farmers
- Analysis of the social and economic impacts on local communities
- Analysis of the social and economic impacts on the immediate neighbours of the proposed parks

Suggestion 2: Prior to creation of a National Park there should be:

- **full costing and provision for the capital and recurrent funding needs of National Park/s**
- **investigation as to whether these conservation outcomes can be achieved on existing public land**
- **minimization of the conversion of productive agricultural land and sustainable forestry land to National Park**
- **analysis of the social and economic effects on local communities and neighbours**

National Parks to require Environmental Zoning

In relation to considering the impacts on local communities and neighbours, one existing simple mechanism for considering such matters is the NSW Planning System. This could be implemented by requiring a rezoning application to the Local Council to create an Environmental Zone for a new National Park. Currently applications for other change of uses commonly require planning approval and Local Environmental Plans now include Environmental Zones. Clearly National Parks would be permissible within an existing Environmental Zone but if proposed for a Rural Zone then a rezoning application would have to be made and the public consultation system would then kick in.

Suggestion 3: Unless proposed in an existing Environmental Zone, as part of the process for establishing a National Park, a rezoning application to an Environmental Zoning must be undertaken.

Term of Reference 2: Management practices on Public Land

Environmental audit and reporting on environmental performance of NSW land

- An Environmental Audit of NSW should be conducted in relation to the performance of the NPWS and other public land management agencies in managing threatened species, feral animals, invasive species and other key environmental indicators
- The Audit should consider evidence of public land being managed in an inferior way to private land , e.g. acidification of Bottle Bend Lagoon at Monak in Western NSW circa 2007 due to Government neglect
- The CMAs do environmental monitoring for the whole catchment so it should be possible for them to do more detailed assessment of the Public Land within their catchments

Suggestion 4: An Environmental Audit of NSW Public Land should be conducted to benchmark the environmental performance of public land management against private land management.

War on feral animals and invasive plants

- Land management of feral animals and invasive plants should be at a higher standard than on privately funded land yet it lags behind
- Hunting in National Parks should be allowed pursuant to Victorian model whereby the hunters are under Parks Victoria supervision
- NSW needs active management of public land
- A “War on feral animals and invasive plants” should be promoted on public and private land in NSW and should be put on the national stage by NSW at COAG. CMAs could manage this for each catchment.

Suggestion 5: NSW should target control of feral animals and invasive plants on public land at a higher or equivalent standard than that on privately controlled land.

Term of Reference 3: Models for Management of Public Land

One agency or Inter-departmental Committee for management of public land

The NSW Government should consider the creation of an Inter-departmental Committee or a single Public Land Management Agency to manage Forests, Lands and NPWS. Currently there are numerous categories of Public land in NSW - National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Conservation Areas, State Recreation Areas, Regional Parks, State Forests, Term Leases, Perpetual Leases and Western Lands Leases.

There is a need to review the management of public land in NSW to make management more consistent, simpler and more flexible, particularly with regard to the interaction of crown land management with private landholders and other stakeholders.

For this to happen there should be:

- An overarching classification of all public land with a land use table identifying permitted and prohibited uses for each type of public land (NPWS, Forests and Lands still manage one or more of the revised categories, but as divisions of the one agency, with overarching co-ordination across all three).
- Selection of land for its best use, having regard to all the competing interests. Conservation is one use, agriculture another and sustainable timber production another
- Comparable standards of land management for weeds, fire control, feral animals, etc. (Currently NPWS is provided with resources for this but little for State Forests and other Crown Land)
- Consistent methods for environmental assessment across Public Lands.
- Consistent methods for Plan of Management development with community consultation.
- Effective engagement with the community by consultation with affected interest groups in development of Plans of Management rather than the "top down" and "elitist" approach adopted by NPWS currently, as groups feel disenfranchised by the "lock out" mentality in the name of conservation. The District Advisory Committees need to be broadened to include other stakeholders.
- End the silo approach of splitting up lands into conservation, recreation and economic uses – strong argument that all public land should be managed with triple bottom line approach
- It is crazy to have the LHPA's and National Parks having separate Pest Control Management, particularly in remote areas of the State

Eastern National in the US takes a very active involvement in the commercial management of National Parks and takes some of the burden off Government. Eastern National is an association with some similarities to the National Parks Association but it has a greater focus on promoting National Parks and managing the commercial activities within them.

Suggestion 6: NSW should consider the creation of an Inter-departmental Committee or a single Public Land Management Agency to manage Forests, Lands and NPWS and classify all this land for its best use, having regard to all the competing interests. The US model for managing commercial operations within Parks should be considered.

NPWS management of Historic Houses Trust and Sydney Harbour Trust

- In the US, Historic House estates, e.g. Adams Family Estate in Quincy, are managed as National Parks
- This is more efficient and the same type of executive overview/management is relevant to the Historic Houses Trust, Sydney Harbour Federation Trust (Federal body so land transfer would be required) and NPWS. These bodies all manage heritage assets and there is significant duplication.
- From a marketing perspective this also tends to give the Historic Houses and Sydney Harbour Federation Trust more prominence

Suggestion 7: NSW should incorporate Historic House Trust and Sydney Harbour Federation Trust properties as National Parks and consolidate operations of these bodies with NPWS.

Term of Reference 4: Any other related matters

Community access to national parks

- There is a shortage of suitable locations for schools and community sporting groups in some parts of the State. Where it will not cause major environmental impacts and organized sport and community should be allowed to use National Parks. In particular some Schools have inadequate open space for some activities, eg. Rowing.
- The US Government does a much better job of community involvement in National Parks and encourages attendance through National Parks Passport and other activities.

Suggestion 8: NSW should allow increased use of National Parks by school and community groups where it will not cause major environmental impacts. NSW should consider the US model of non-profit management of some National Parks operations.

Exchange of land

- NSW Government should consider exchanging privately owned high conservation areas that are not productive land for low conservation areas of crown land that are productive – that would be a win win for conservation and the economy

Suggestion 9: NSW should consider exchanging privately owned high conservation areas that are not productive land for low conservation areas of crown land that are productive

Tourism

Many rural and regional communities could greatly benefit from the economic opportunities that could be enjoyed if National Parks made more effort to incorporate tourism experiences

and they were treated as the community assets that they truly are. Governments at all levels cannot continue to simply 'take' from these communities without giving back opportunities that will help build both the long term sustainability of the National Parks and the communities adjacent to them.

Suggestion 10: NSW should encourage tourism in National Parks as this will strengthen local communities.

Submitted by

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Primary Industries and Regional Affairs Branch, Liberal Party of NSW

31 August 2012

NB. A representative of PIRA will be available to make oral submissions to the Inquiry if requested.