

**Submission
No 242**

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

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

SUBMISSION TO

Management of public land in New South Wales Inquiry

Please find the following submission from Council to the Management of public land inquiry:

Public Land Access and Resource and Cost Impost Upon Council

Council raises the following difficulties with leased sites in particular Crown land where Council are trustees:

- Gates – responsibility for security, risk management and subsequent insurance issues;
- Cost impost to maintaining internal roads, particularly following flood events;
- The issue of endeavoring to control illegal activities such as trail bike riders etc
- Control of Rubbish and provision of bins

Rates

Public land managers should pay land rates. National Parks, Fauna and Flora Reserves increase tourism and visitors in an area. These tourists and visitors generally all drive to these Parks and Reserves which increases wear and tear on Council roads and other infrastructure. Council is expected to maintain roads to/or through National Parks and Reserves where no funds are provided to Council by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) or by Lands.

In many cases rubbish is also left at sites which Council is expected to maintain and provide services for rubbish and toilet facilities.

Similarly Council is expected to maintain roads and bridges around State Forests and Crown land with no funds provided from the State. Traffic movements increase road deterioration which has to be repaired by Council.

As an example, Farm Forestry is at an unfair disadvantage to State Forest as farm foresters have to pay land rates on the land they use. The same should apply to the Crown.

Feral Animal Control

Public land managers should have to control feral animals (as responsible land managers) just like all other land owners. Feral animals include cats, foxes, rabbits, goats and wild dogs. As the largest land owner in some areas, the Public Land Manager should be the one to co-ordinate the wild dog baiting as well as fox baiting. This rarely happens. The science has shown that a coordinated baiting program over large areas has a far greater impact than baiting many small areas.

There is insufficient feral animal control in National Parks and State Forests. Feral cats and dogs are destroying native animals. Narrandera has a Koala colony at risk due to feral animals. Better feral animal control is needed to reduce this event.

Fire Management

There is very limited hazard reduction burning being conducted in National Parks and State Forests in the Murray Darling Basin. After the floods of December 2010 and March 2012 hazard reduction burns are more important than ever.

There has been a large number of river red gum seeds germinate after the floods. At the current density of these young trees they will only grow approx 4.5 m tall and be very thin as they crowd each other out. Historically forest wild fires would thin these young trees by killing a large percentage of them and allowing the surviving trees to grow into large trees.

It is the large trees that develop holes and hollows for marsupials and nesting birds. These large trees also have the bark suitable for a lot of beneficial insects thus helping to maintain the biodiversity of our forests.

Under State Forest management, harvesting operations with an aim to reducing the tree density was carried out. This allowed the remaining trees to grow to their potential. A lot of State Forest area has now become National Parks in the Murray Darling basin.

Under current NPWS land management practices wild fires are quickly extinguished and thus the heat from these fires will kill minimal young trees. The current hazard reduction practice is to have low intensity burns. Low intensity burns do not kill trees over approx 3 m tall. It is considered extremely important to have hazard reduction burns within two years of a flooding event (flooding causes the most river red gum seed germination). Even a low intensity burn will kill a good percentage of these very young trees.

Without low intensity burns thinning the small river red gum trees, density on the floodplains becomes very high. Once the trees are over 3 m tall all these trees act similar to a dam wall during the next flood event. These trees slow the water down which in turns raises the water level upstream from the trees just like any other obstruction to the water flow. The trees will also keep the water height near its peak for a longer period of time as the water slowly travels through these high density trees on the flood plain.

Poor public land fire management will negatively impact on local government infrastructure and individual infrastructure as water heights are raised by the high density trees. This increased water height will affect more local government roads and private properties.

Road and Bridge Maintenance

Public land managers should budget for road maintenance throughout the year, in particular the National Parks in the Murray Darling Basin. After heavy rain gravel entry roads need maintenance even if the road was graded just before the heavy rain.

It is suggest that NPWS have a website which clearly shows which access roads have been affected by rain and an approximate time that vehicles can access the National Park by those access roads. This website needs to be communicated and advertised.

Noxious Weed Management

Public land managers should be maintaining the land they manage the same as is required by other land holders. Re blackberries for instance, rabbits and foxes use the blackberries as a harbor. Science has confirmed that both rabbits and foxes have a negative impact on Australia's native fauna.

Many public land managers do not have a budgeted noxious weed management plan. Noxious weed control should be coordinated with the neighbouring properties. This rarely happens.

Floodwater often brings new noxious weeds onto the floodplain. It would be less expensive for all landholders to eradicate the new noxious weeds before they become well established. This requires vigilance by all land managers on the floodplains after a flooding event. Greater education and assistance is needed in this area.

Farm Forestry is at an unfair disadvantage to State Forests as farm foresters have to control noxious weeds on the land they use.

Fencing

Currently, a landholder who shares a boundary fence with a National Park is responsible for removing trees that fall over the fence from the National Park. The shared fence landholder is also responsible for repairing fences due to fallen timber or damage caused by native animals such as kangaroos.

This is a shared fence line. It is a financial impost to be responsible for damage caused by National Park flora and fauna.

The ploughing of a firebreak on the National Park side of the fence line would help reduce damage to fences caused by falling limbs.

Conclusion

Improved communications by public land managers with all public land users and bordering properties would very much be appreciated.

Public land is there for everyone to enjoy, public access and minimal restrictions on access for the public is considered to be essential.

Council thanks the General Purpose Standing Committee for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours faithfully

Ray Pluis
General Manager