

**Submission  
No 447**

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

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**SUBMISSION TO GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE  
No. 5 Inquiry into MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN  
NEW SOUTH WALES**

**From Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc. (CBOC) – August 2012**

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**Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales. CBOC is a community organisation with about 600 members, dedicated to the conservation, observation and study of birds in New South Wales and further afield. We are affiliated with BirdLife Australia and cooperate with other bird clubs in Sydney and regional areas of NSW.

This CBOC submission has some general introductory comments and then follows headings as per the Inquiry's terms of reference.

**General Introductory Comments**

Two hundred and thirty-eight taxa (types) of Australian Birds (that is about 19% of all taxa) are extinct, threatened with extinction or near-threatened (*The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010*, CSIRO Publishing 2011). The threats to birds and other native animals and plants in this country as a whole are mostly still increasing. In New South Wales (NSW), biological diversity is in decline as indicated by the following excerpt from the 2009 *State of the Environment Report*:

“The sustainability assessments show that 64% of all fauna species that are assessable and 65% of birds have a moderate or greater risk of extinction. The data for birds, based on 217 species (48% of all species), reflects clearly detectable contractions in range over the past 10 years for a majority of the species assessed. Prospects for the long-term sustainability of many of the bird species assessed are considered poor .....

The establishment of protected areas such as national parks and nature reserves is a key, long-accepted method for protecting biodiversity. These areas are reserved for the specific or primary purpose of nature conservation. While such conservation reserves on their own are not sufficient for reversing the decline of birds and other biodiversity, a comprehensive, well-managed system of protected areas is a vital element of NSW's and Australia's nature conservation systems. It is central to Australia's commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and also underpins the participation of New South Wales in the National Reserve System program, to which NSW subscribes and under which NSW receives considerable Australian Government funding each year.

## Notes under Terms of Reference topics

### **\*Process of conversion of Crown Land, State Forest and agricultural land into conservation reserves, and the assessment of potential operational, economic, social and environmental impacts**

The re-classification of some public land (including forested areas) and voluntary acquisitions of some private land, for inclusion in the State and National conservation reserve system has been and still is a proper, sensible, and balanced part of the land use system of New South Wales.

The establishment of conservation reserves may involve some “opportunity cost”, with curtailment of profit from conventional commercial ventures. If wildlife species are considered worth maintaining in populations above extinct or critically endangered levels, then adequate areas of appropriate natural habitats need to be permanently reserved, including some potentially economically productive areas. With imagination at least some of these areas can be made to “pay”, through carefully planned tourism which uses the natural environment and wildlife as assets. The alternative, of reserving just the roughest, most infertile, or economically “useless” areas (as was the case generally until about the 1960s) would protect only a small proportion of NSW’s biodiversity in the long term.

As areas gazetted as conservation reserves have increased over recent decades, anxiety about public land management is sometimes directed at the reserves, as if gazettal itself had diminished management standards. In fact, gazettal of a protected area is usually accompanied by an increase in land management standards and funding (though often not sufficient funding). Gazettal is most likely to lead to improvements in water quality and soil and wildlife conservation.

#### “Toorale” Station

This station of 91,000 ha was purchased on the open market by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments in 2008, mainly because of its irrigation water entitlement (20 gigalitres per year). About 31,000 ha is National Park and the balance is State Conservation Area. An old dam system at “Toorale” was originally slated for demolition to release water to the Darling River, but has recently created valuable breeding habitat for the threatened Brolga and Glossy Ibis (and no doubt other birds) on the adjacent floodplain, so the dams’ removal is being reviewed (*The Australian* newspaper, May 2012). It appears that these dams should be retained as a primary ecological asset, and employed to water the floodplain for waterbird breeding. They could also be used to release water into the Darling River at times.

Only about 2,000 ha of the property was cultivated, so there may be large areas of fairly intact natural floodplain vegetation previously used for grazing, that could presumably be regenerated, at least in places. There is also a rich Aboriginal history.

The perceived annual financial loss to the local town, Bourke, from the sale of "Toorale" was stated as \$5 million in 2009, mainly due to the cessation of lucrative cattle grazing and cropping. There is a hope that tourism will help to reduce this loss. Some people are advocating continued grazing on part of the property, under lease.

We suggest that at least the old system of dams and the floodplain area they can be used to inundate should be managed, and enhanced if possible, to encourage waterbird breeding. There may or may not be a place for limited grazing in parts of the Toorale reserves, offsetting some of the financial losses, but grazing should be allowed only if it is clearly shown to be beneficial for wildlife habitat maintenance or enhancement (such as in Oolambeyan National Park near Hay, where sheep grazing has been used to help keep native grasslands in a suitable state for the Endangered Plains Wanderer).

#### "Yanga" Station

This is an old established working sheep station of 85,000 ha, purchased 2005 for conservation primarily (we understand) due to its extensive areas of river red gum forest and floodplain wetlands, which are a very important waterbird breeding area. These types of environment were previously very poorly represented in the NSW reserve system. The "Yanga" reserves include a 42,000 ha national park opened in 2009 (AKA Murrumbidgee Valley NP) which incorporated 15 small ex-State Forests.

The national park overlaps with much of the Lowbidgee Important Bird Area (IBA). In fact parts of Yanga's wetlands were recognised as ecologically important and designated a Wildlife Refuge as long ago as the early 1960s. It is proposed to maintain the wetlands by water allocations (and occasional natural floods). Other valuable ecological assets include old trees with hollows used for breeding by threatened mammals and birds such as the recently down-listed Superb Parrot. There are 150 species of birds, undoubtedly including several threatened woodland species; also considerable tourism opportunities based on the wetlands and the long aboriginal and European histories, including heritage buildings.

The reservation of "Yanga" has probably had economic impacts on nearby towns (notably Balranald), partly through the cessation (?) of logging of red gums and maybe removal of grazing. Compensatory tourist income has apparently been slow to pick up but hopefully the park will come to be seen locally as an asset.

Certainly the park should be carefully managed (including provision of water allocations) to protect and enhance its special ecological features, notably the extensive floodplain wetlands and large red gum forests; these should be promoted as attractions. “Yanga” is within the historical range of the Plains Wanderer and there might be scope for reintroducing this bird and managing part of the park for it (see notes for “Toorale” above).

**Comment:**

More use should perhaps be made of schemes encouraging private landowners to maintain areas of natural habitats (such as scarce mature woodland or other poorly reserved ecosystems, or wetlands) on their properties “in perpetuity” while continuing to use the balance for primary production. This was the idea behind the earlier Wildlife Refuge scheme in NSW (c 1960s) and later versions of it. Such areas are a valuable **adjunct to (not a replacement for)** formal reserves. This could be a viable way of protecting valuable remnant ecosystems while avoiding Government purchase of whole working farms. However, it does require a firm covenant to ensure habitat protection continues after changes in property ownership.

River red gum reserves

The NSW Natural Resources Commission (NRC) carried out an assessment of river red gum forests in the Riverina Bioregion, in order to recommend methods for long-term management in the face of projected decreasing natural flooding and a drier, more stressful climate – “to determine conservation outcomes and a sustainable future for the forests, the forestry industry and local communities”. **Note that the NRC was established under an Act of Parliament (2003), to provide the NSW Government with reliable independent, evidence-based advice on natural resource management, in order to improve policies, plans and outcomes.** It is not an ad hoc group likely to give prejudiced advice.

Key NRC findings included: managing flooding to increase ecosystem health; active ecosystem management; trans-border national parks (with Victoria) on the Murray; a new funding model for production forests (NRC *Riverina Bioregion Regional Forest Assessment - Recommendations Report*, December 2009). On this basis a forest agreement was made by the Government.

This River Red Gum Agreement protected about 80,000 ha of national and regional parks on the Murray River (mainly near Mathoura); two Ramsar wetlands of international significance (Millewa and Werai Forests); five terrestrial and two aquatic endangered ecological communities, habitat for 50 species of threatened terrestrial fauna – including the Squirrel Glider, Superb Parrot (since re-classified as non-threatened, probably due in part to the recent reservation of significant areas of its habitat) and Regent Parrot; and breeding habitat for local and migratory waterbird

species. Clearly, the reserved areas have a rich and diverse ecology that is worth careful protection and management. With these reserves and counterparts in Victoria, river red gums forests are now well represented in formal conservation reserves in the Riverina Bioregion.

We understand that timber production in this area overall was predicted to be reduced by about 70% (including within forests retained for production), with obvious short-term impacts in local communities. Claims of job losses in the timber industry varied from 200 to 1,000. However, timber production and quality are already declining due to past cutting and drought, and considered likely to get worse with reduced flooding and predicted climate changes. A reorganisation of management was necessary for the long term maintenance of the forests and their biodiversity. Recommendations that "ecological thinning" should be tested to maintain forest health across all tenures may lead to extra timber being available, though this management option needs to be very well researched before any wide application.

The NSW Government has provided considerable resources in setting up the Red Gum reserves including over \$8.5 million in general expenditure and \$5.625 million in capital expenditure. It has also offered \$2.5 million in community grants, money paid directly to businesses to assist them to upgrade and diversify. This funding is on top of Business Exit assistance where sawmill businesses received \$26 million and 177 workers directly paid \$81,360 each (figures from NSW Gov. press release, 24 April 2012). Therefore, displaced workers and disadvantaged businesses have already received some compensation for economic loss due to these reserves being established.

#### North Coast forests

The Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia (CERRA) include c 307,000 ha of remnant rainforest and old growth moist eucalypt forest, mostly reserved in national parks in north-east NSW in 1984. The various reserves were declared World Heritage in 1986. (CERRA also includes a smaller area of 59,000 ha in SE Queensland.) Before this, comparatively little of the remaining rainforest or moist eucalypt forest types of the North Coast was securely reserved, and most was subject to heavy logging.

The Upper North-East Region Forest Agreement (RFA) (1998) and the Lower NE Region Forest Agreement (1999) were made to implement the National Forest Policy of 1992. The agreements were accompanied by Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals designed to guarantee wood supply for 20 years. Additional areas reserved as national park or reserve under the Agreements included about 136,000 ha in the Upper North-East and 246,000 ha in the North-east. A detailed

North-east Regional Forest Agreement between the NSW and Commonwealth Governments , presumably formalising the above intra-State agreements, was signed in March 2000.

We understand that the main conservation aim of the RFAs was to protect remaining mature forest areas of types still poorly represented in reserves (including some rainforest areas outside the earlier CERRA areas, moist eucalypt types, mixtures of eucalypt/rainforest, and some more coastal types like blackbutt and spotted gum). The total areas of dedicated Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) forest reserves under the new RFA were about 586,000 ha in the Upper North-east and about 1,265,000 ha in the Lower North-east. (These figures presumably included the earlier reservations in CERRA and under the 1998 and 1999 NSW agreements.)

Under the RFA process an extensive investigation and justification process for reserving forest land was necessary, involving consultation with various "stakeholders" before decisions were made. This process would have prevented ad hoc decisions by the Governments of the time.

Some areas were logged not long before reservation. Some areas reserved had fairly young eucalypt plantations included. Plantations on edges of proposed park areas were to be harvestable after reservation.

Many rainforest and moist eucalypt forest-dependent bird and mammal species have certainly benefited from these reservations and the cessation of logging in them. A good example is Albert's Lyrebird which was listed as Vulnerable in 2000 but is now Near Threatened (Birds Australia *Action Plan for Australian Birds*, 2010). This species has a very limited range and is sensitive to logging. Nearly all of its range in far NE NSW is now in conservation reserves. Other bird groups likely to have benefited are fruit-pigeons that feed primarily in mature fruit-bearing trees in rainforests, and the many species of birds (e.g. large forest owls, parrots, cockatoos) and arboreal mammals requiring large trees with hollows for nesting. More generally, population declines by many forest-dependent animals are likely to have been slowed or reversed with the reservation of significant areas containing mature and old trees.

We note that only a small proportion of the large North Coast blackbutt (*E. pilularis*) regrowth forests resulting from silvicultural treatment mainly in the 1950s and 1960s – which are a mainstay of the North Coast timber industry – have been reserved under the RFAs. Timber production forests containing significant areas of this regrowth blackbutt include: Kiwarrak, Coopernook, Landsdowne, Burrawan, Lorne, Kerewong, Cairncross, Bellangry, Tamban, Newry, Wedding Bells, and Conglomerate State Forests.

## Comment

From about 1995 to 2010, Forests NSW/NSW DPI managed a medium-sized eucalypt plantation program aiming to supplement declining wood supply from natural forests (due to reservations and previous logging of larger trees). Several thousand ha, mainly of blackbutt, spotted gums and Dunns white gum, were planted on joint venture private property and purchased ex-grazing land. Several of the plantations apparently showed promise. The program was supported by a tree breeding research program. Unfortunately the research component (at least) was mostly abandoned by 2010, which we consider unfortunate.

### **\*Fire, weed and pest management practices on public land**

#### Fire management

Fire management in conservation reserves is a complex topic, complicated by poor knowledge of “natural” fire regimes, the variability of these according to vegetation types, and the overall threat of occasional extreme fire weather. Ideally, prescribed fire regimes in areas of conservation land would be tailor-made to allow substantial areas of all vegetation types to develop to maturity before re-burning, and be applied on a patchwork basis (maybe at a level of a few ha to a few hundred ha per “patch”) so there were sizeable patches of each vegetation type at different stages of post-fire recovery. **Deliberate burning in all cases should be avoided in the breeding season of most birds (August-October).**

A “one size fits all” approach to prescribed or fuel reduction burning is very inappropriate for conservation reserves, which usually contain a diversity of vegetation types and ecosystems.

Frequent broad area fuel-reduction burning (e.g. at or below 7-yr intervals) may be relevant for protecting some prime timber production forests against wildfires (*Effectiveness of broadscale fuel reduction burning in assisting with wildfire control in parks and forests in Victoria*. Research Report No 51, Gregory J. Mc Carthy and Kevin G. Tolhurst, 2001). However, if applied successfully to most vegetation in reserves, after a few cycles it would probably have very deleterious effects including major simplification of ecosystems, loss of plant and animal species, and a tendency towards more flammable (grassy) vegetation.

For example, coastal heath vegetation is adapted to survive fairly frequent wildfire (intervals as low as c 10-12 years). Large *Banksia ericifolia* stands in parts of these heaths are very important in providing nectar for several species of Honeyeater in autumn/winter. *B. ericifolia* plants die when burnt and regenerate from seed, but they only produce plentiful seed when aged 8-10 years or more. Burning more frequently than this interval (c 10 yrs) would largely eliminate the banksia (and render the honeyeaters rare) within a few decades.

Frequent fuel reduction burning is sometimes thought to be a reliable means of protecting human property from wildfires in extreme fire weather. Research in Victorian forests found: "The highest probabilities of a previous fuel reduction burn being helpful to subsequent [wildfire] suppression operations occur in the first four years following the burn .... surface fuels appear to re-accumulate to pre-burn levels within the first 4 years" (*Effectiveness of broadscale fuel reduction burning in assisting with wildfire control in parks and forests in Victoria*. Research Report No 51, Gregory J. Mc Carthy and Kevin G. Tolhurst, 2001). The protection period would be even less in the face of extreme fire weather such as in February 2009, in Victoria. Thus broadscale protection against wildfire by frequent fuel reduction burning does not appear to be possible without maintaining virtual scorched earth over large areas. This would be both impractical and most undesirable in conservation reserves, from ecological, aesthetic, soil conservation, and water quality viewpoints.

Carefully applied, fairly frequent burning in narrow (< about 100 m) zones is appropriate in conservation reserves in certain instances, such as around edges of some areas of very fire-sensitive vegetation, to protect them (e.g. rainforest patches), and on some private property/park borders ("asset protection" zones). However, such burning regimes can be difficult to apply consistently due to "gazumping" by wildfires that may occur every few years in drought periods (often caused by arson near cities). Wildfire plus prescribed burning could cause many areas to be burnt too frequently to allow the vegetation to mature between fires, causing it to degrade and lose plant and animal species.

#### Feral animal control

Effective feral animal control in order to aid wildlife conservation and recovery is most important across all land tenures in NSW including conservation reserves and other public land. Foxes, cats, pigs, goats, rabbits, and deer all pose serious threats to native animals and/or natural vegetation. Additionally, wild dogs can be a menace to farm stock near some borders with Crown lands. CBOC considers that too few resources have been applied to the feral animal problem in NSW and in Australia generally. However, there are several examples of effective programs.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) conducts many programs of feral/pest animal (and weed) control, actively working in cooperation with other agencies, CMAs, landholders and community groups; also with research groups to develop innovative control methods, including biological controls. Programs in reserves are targeted in particular to control threats to rare species, with priorities identified in Priority Action Statements and individual Threat Abatement Plans (TAPs). NPWS Regional Pest Management Strategies detail priorities for each region. For

example, under wild dog management plans priorities are set for cooperative control with neighbouring landholders. Eighty-one (81) priority sites for fox control have been identified, providing recovery actions for many threatened species under the NSW Fox TAP. The central feature of this plan is collaborative control programs across all land tenures at these 81 sites, with monitoring to measure success (OEH website, August 2012).

The many and diverse NPWS pest control programs and some results as at 2006 are outlined in *Protecting our National Parks from Pests and Weeds* (NSW DEC, 2006). This documents many successes, at least at that time. There have also been recent successes from expanded baiting and trapping of dogs near private property, with losses of sheep in some areas such as Brindabella and near Glen Innes, falling by 65-75% (OEH website, Oct 2011).

**CBOC hopes that all these NPWS pest control programs will not only be continued but expanded in future. However, the effective control of feral animals will become increasingly difficult to achieve if governments keep cutting staff numbers and programs in their parks, wildlife and land management departments.**

“Recreational” ground shooting as a primary method of feral animal control in conservation land and other public land might be perceived as cheaper, but it is not likely to be an effective (or necessarily cost-effective) solution. It also adds further potential problems for management, such as guaranteeing the safety of native animals and visitors in reserves from “rogue” shooters. We note that amateur ground shooting in NSW State Forests over the past 6 years is unlikely to have eliminated high enough proportions of any type of feral animal to achieve control (based on NSW DPI research). The cost to taxpayers has apparently been very high: said to be \$264 per animal killed, including rabbits – or about \$14 million to mid-2011 (*Recreational hunting NSW – Claims v Facts: Invasive Species Council Fact Sheet*, June 2012).

If any amateur shooters are to be employed in NSW conservation reserves, they need to be skills-tested and only utilised to help with well-organised, professional feral control programs which have a defined purpose and are properly managed by the NPWS and/or other responsible Government departments. Such programs are currently often carried out in conjunction with reserve neighbours and generally use a range of appropriate control techniques, of which shooting may be but one. The expected benefits of each control program in terms of eradicating feral animal populations should be definable at the outset, and the results measurable.

**Amateur “recreational” shooters, other than those employed in properly organised feral animal control programs as described above, should never be allowed access to any conservation reserves in NSW.**

Rapidly expanding deer populations in parts of NSW are an emerging threat to many rare flora species, especially in moist forests. Environmental degradation by deer has been listed by the NSW Scientific Committee as a Key Threatening Process, and they can also spread foot-and-mouth disease like wild pigs. CBOC believes no free-roaming wild deer species should be considered as "protected" in any way. They need to be classed as invasive feral animals and controlled on all Crown lands, especially in reserves.

#### Weed control

Exotic weeds also cause widespread problems across many land tenures, the nature of the problems varying with locality. In Sydney sandstone bush areas, weeds are mainly associated with creeks that originate in settled areas or near boundaries with urban areas – privet in particular. Weed eradication in these situations is often slow but can be achieved over small areas by using careful tried and tested bush regeneration methods. It often relies on volunteers working for years, so ongoing Government support for these volunteer programs is very important.

Geographically wider problems are caused by other weeds such as blackberries, lantana, bitou bush and Scotch broom, across all land tenures. NSW has a Bitou bush TAP, with 169 priority sites (82 in reserves) identified along the coast. Control at these sites aims to target all weeds. There are several areas where Bitou bush has been eliminated after much hard work by Government agencies and volunteers working cooperatively over years.

Blackberries have been controlled in parts of the Warragamba catchment by inter-departmental aerial and ground spraying, involving NPWS, Sydney Water, CMAs and landowners. Scotch Broom is a severe local problem in Tableland areas, with biological and spraying programs run by NPWS with local councils and landowners. Lantana is regarded as a widespread problem in many north coastal and tableland areas, including many State Forests. One of its main effects is preventing ground access to extensive areas, and increasing fire risk. Successful NPWS control programs have been carried out in Guy Fawkes River, Nymboida and Oxley-Wild Rivers NPs (*Protecting our National Parks from Pests and Weeds*, DEC Oct 2006). Ecologically lantana can be a mixed blessing: it provides a useful habitat for some understorey-dependent birds in lieu of thick native understorey. Complete removal of lantana over extensive areas, rather than its gradual removal while encouraging native understorey to replace it (applying bush regeneration methods), will rob dependent small birds of habitat.

**As in the case of feral animal control, weed control needs to be ongoing to be effective. Lack of support for programs like those outlined above will cause programs to lose momentum and allow weeds to reinvade areas where they were under control.**

## **\*Models that utilise principles of “sustainable use”**

### Principles for management of National Parks and Nature Reserves

The prime purposes of these types of conservation reserves in NSW are clearly defined in the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974:

“... to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features ... that provide opportunities for public appreciation ...”.

The purpose of Nature Reserves includes “... protection of areas containing unique or representative species, communities ...”.

Importantly, these definitions were worked out carefully and have been adhered to fairly consistently by successive NSW Governments for over 35 years.

The documented management principles for these reserves under the NPW Act include the wording:

“... the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecological function”, “ ... the conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value.”

In the case of National Parks (NP), there is a principle of “ ... provision of sustainable visitor use and enjoyment that is compatible with the [park’s] natural and cultural values”.

For Nature Reserves (NR) the emphasis is more on “promotion of public appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural values.”

Again, these principles have been largely adhered to by NSW Governments for over three decades, and they are growing ever more important as the reserves increasingly become refuges or “arks” for threatened species. **CBOC considers it is very important, in any consideration of the management of conservation reserves, that the purposes and principles outlined above should be firmly kept in mind.**

### Public access to conservation reserves

The paramount aim of protecting the ecological and cultural values in the great majority of National Parks and Nature Reserves can only be satisfied by park management directing public uses to defined areas, roads or tracks so most of the reserve areas remain as undisturbed as possible. NPWS has detailed documented policies governing vehicle access in various circumstances, which aim to ensure vehicle use is in accordance with the management objectives of each reserve and also meets the needs and expectations of visitors, appropriate to the management objectives (*Vehicle Access – General Policy*, 2010).

It is elementary that public vehicular (including trail bike) and horse-riding access needs to be carefully controlled to prevent irresponsible people going wherever they like and damaging or disturbing soil, vegetation, fauna, creeks etc, as well as spoiling the enjoyment of other visitors. A proliferation of unplanned roads/tracks in undisturbed areas may also promote the spread of feral animals and weeds to new areas. A “free for all” type of policy would obviously violate all

principles of sound land management, and would threaten not only the ecology of reserves dedicated to protecting it, but also soil and water quality in many important catchment areas.

What constitutes “reasonable” access can be fairly worked out individually for each reserve, depending on the primary values it aims to protect. As a rule, we think Nature Reserves should be subjected to much less public vehicle and recreation access than National Parks. It is reasonable that qualified and responsible bush tour operators should be allowed periodic access to some otherwise “off limits” roads, if their operations do not have harmful impacts on the ecology or landscape; but this would need to be monitored.

Horse-riding presents particular challenges. Horses are likely to cause soil erosion and spread weeds in dung, especially if there is concentrated horse activity. We agree riding should continue to be prohibited from Nature Reserves and wilderness areas since it poses a threat to natural ecosystems. Horse access off formed roads or trails in should not be allowed in any reserve if it will damage ground or understorey vegetation. Extensive use of formed trails or dedicated bridle trails in less sensitive areas seems fair, especially by responsible tour operators and if there is monitoring of impacts on soil, plants etc.

That said, horse-riding opportunities should be provided mostly on land other than that set aside primarily for nature conservation (i.e. the NPWS reserves) – lands such as other Crown Land, State Forests, and private land.

A perceived “heritage” value of horses should not be allowed to outweigh the value of natural or cultural heritage in the management of any national parks or reserves.

#### Beach access

Reserve management needs to ensure that vehicles (and horses) are prohibited from sections of beaches or behind beaches where threatened shorebirds (e.g. Hooded and Red-capped Plover, Little Tern, Oystercatchers) are breeding, to avoid destroying or disturbing their nests or young. NPWS staff and volunteers have successfully protected nests of these birds over several seasons, up and down the NSW coast, by temporary fencing, signage, and educating the public. **This work needs to be continued.**

#### **Concluding comments**

CBOC considers there is a need for greater priority, staffing, and funding to be provided for the sound management of conservation reserves and other public land in NSW, and urges the Committee to make recommendations for increased investment in this area. Resources are needed for a wide range of on-ground and organisational management tasks, including on-ground

conservation work, feral animal and weed control, discussion and cooperation with landowner neighbours, supervision of public use, provision of recreation facilities for the public, guiding and ranging, fire protection and management, ecological research and monitoring, and much more. Without careful and professional management, our public lands would suffer degradation of water quality and soils, loss of biodiversity, increasing invasion by feral animals and weeds, and reduced ecotourism opportunities.

Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves (TSRs) in the Central Division of NSW deserve particular mention. These reserves contain many thousands of hectares of natural vegetation, often in good condition. Although linear, some of them hold practically the only sizeable remnants of scarce woodland and other vegetation in some very over-cleared districts. They form priceless habitat for declining bird, other animal, and plant species, and in some cases they form links between reserved blocks of habitat, helping to maintain the biodiversity in these blocks. **It is most important that the natural values of TSRs with significant native vegetation are protected and enhanced, and not destroyed by selling them or clearing large easements through them for pipelines, roads etc.**