

**Submission
No 120**

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

Name: Mr Brendan Mulhearn

Date received: 2/08/2012

Submission to the Inquiry into Management of public land in New South Wales

July 30th 2012

Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the management of public land in NSW. I am an avid user of the bush in NSW for the last 35 years. My passions are spending recreation time in the bush relaxing, camping, fishing and touring by vehicle with my young family. Over the last fifteen years I have witnessed a systematic lock up of the national park estate in NSW that continues unabated to this day. My local areas that I travel to and spend my valuable recreation time in are Barrington Tops National Park and State Forests, Dingo Tops, Yengo, Myall Lakes, Goulburn River National Park and the forests south of the Oxley highway like Mummel Gulf National Park and Riamuka State Forest. All of the National Parks in these areas now have significant no access areas with gates on trails and signs from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) advising that this public land is no longer accessible by the public. When it comes to an inquiry into management of public lands in NSW please investigate just how it came to be that there is permanent no public access to what is public land?

What I have experienced has also been experienced by the general public at large. It's not just me but many tens of thousands. Unfortunately whilst the general public have had enough of being locked out of their own land the environmental lobby groups are well organised. I am very concerned that when it comes to Wilderness area nominations for both new Wilderness and additions to Wilderness the same names just keep on popping up:

- The Colong Foundation for Wilderness
- The Wilderness Society
- The Total Environment Centre
- The National Parks Association of NSW
- The Nature Conservation Council of NSW

How is it that these groups have had such a disproportionate voice in NSW when it comes to public land management?

I am also very concerned about the ongoing conversion of State Forest areas to National Parks. Who is it that is behind these conversions? Is it to appease the minority groups mentioned above? I have noted many State Forest areas that have been converted to National Park. In turn the NPWS releases a plan of management (POM) and up go the gates or the area is subsequently declared wilderness. State Forests provide an essential community service allowing vast recreational opportunities which have a positive social impact on the community. Occupying approximately 13% of NSW the states National Parks should be providing the same level of recreational opportunity but this is far from the reality. It would require a cultural change within the NPWS management for this to change. The majority of forest recreation is sustainable with good management, education and community involvement

I have observed over the last twenty years what a devastating effect the NSW Wilderness Act has had on public access to National Parks once they are converted to Wilderness Areas. Often persons who had had been visiting an area all of their lives or for generations were suddenly locked out by a NPWS gate. I have first hand experience with the public submission process for responding to NPWS plans of management (POM) for National Parks. My experience is that the submission process is a farce and largely ignored by the NPWS. I have attached documents to my submission which is proof of my claim. The attached documents are my submission to a POM for the Mummel Gulf national park including letters received back from the minister. To this day the process defined by the Wilderness Act has not been followed and this is a classic example of many peoples experience when it comes to Wilderness lock ups and National Parks plans of management.

The effect I have observed from this type of poor management of public land is the loss of access to tracks and trails, to stunning areas that a family could go bush camping to and loss of access to our states history like huts and other historical areas. Trails become overgrown and in many cases they are former fire trails that have now been served useless in the event of a bushfire.

I have called National Parks offices over the years to complain about locked off trails. The responses have included

1. It's a wilderness area and that is good because it's an extra layer of protection
2. That track is steep so it has been closed for your safety. (even though the trail has been open for the last 40 years long before the Wilderness Act existed)
3. It is for park management only (even though the trail is now covered in large fallen trees and not maintained)

I ask that this inquiry into the Management of Public Lands consider that the definition of solitude and self reliant recreation in the Wilderness Act be expanded to include other types of recreation including, but not limited to, access by vehicle. I sincerely believe that this type of recreation can be well managed and sustainable in National Park and Wilderness areas with better land management practices.

My travels to the Victorian High Country have bought home just what a basket case NSW is when it comes to management of National Parks and Wilderness areas. Whilst the bush is accessible and well managed in Victoria one comes to an abrupt halt at a large locked gate when the trail they are travelling on crosses the border into NSW. Welcome to NSW.

Sincerely

Brendan Mulhearn