

**Submission
No 319**

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

Organisation: Southern Tablelands Four Wheel Drive Club Inc.
Name: Mr Greg Taylor
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ST4WDC are seeking that the Inquiry considers

1. Increase access to tracks and trails – stop the closures that create exclusive access.
2. Maintenance of tracks and trails – adopt the Victorian Track Classification program.
3. Develop an 'Iconic' 4WD tracks approach in NSW.
4. Camping areas – stop herding/condensing greater numbers into smaller areas.
5. Economic loss to NSW businesses – many four wheel drivers and others are taking their money over the border into Victoria.
6. Increase volunteer cooperation – with user groups. Implement an 'Adopt a track' campaign.
7. Better use of volunteer resources is a win/win situation for all.
8. Review access restrictions to existing wilderness areas – reverse decisions that have locked Australians out of their heritage bushland.
9. Greater consultation with users
10. Stop the discrimination against older, infirm, disabled, unfit, people who wish to access tracks and fire trails.
11. Do not punish those who value and respect our bushlands.
12. Develop new management approaches for our national parks
13. Increase free camping opportunities in national parks and forests.



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The Premier club for four wheel drivers who want to develop their skills in off road driving

29 August 2012

Submission to the Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in NSW

Summary of response:

1. **Increase access to tracks and trails** – stop the closures that create exclusive access to only bushwalkers and NPWS/Forest staff.
2. **Maintenance of tracks and trails** – adopt the Victorian Track Classification program. <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/iconic-four-wheel-drives/track-classification>
3. **Develop an 'Iconic' 4WD tracks approach in NSW.** This can encourage people to stay in their state and spend their money here as well as attracting interstate visitors.
4. **Camping areas** – stop herding/condensing greater numbers into smaller areas. There is room to expand without destroying our heritage bushland. Consider camping areas without facilities for those who are well prepared. More areas without unsightly bollards/cables.
5. **Economic loss to NSW businesses** – many four wheel drivers and others are taking their money over the border into Victoria as the Victorian approach is more considerate of the wide range of users.
6. **Increase volunteer cooperation** – with user groups. Four wheel drivers in clubs are trained and equipped to assist in clearing fallen trees and care for trails and tracks. Implement an 'Adopt a track' campaign with four wheel drive clubs/motorcycle clubs/horse rider clubs etc.
7. **Better use of volunteer resources is a win/win situation for all.** We get the access we seek and the authorities get volunteer assistance to manage our public lands.
8. **Review access restrictions to existing wilderness areas** – reverse decisions that have locked Australians out of their heritage bushland. Examples include: Goobarragandra Wilderness area in Kosciuszko NP (just one of many) which was closed so that people who enjoyed this area for generations were locked out. Or, Broken Cart Fire Trail through Dubbo Flat to Long Plain Rd. This area was closed after continued vandalism. Look for a 4WD club to adopt the monitoring and maintenance of the area. There are many more examples of this lock it up mentality that has prevailed.
9. **Greater consultation** with users when considering access restrictions.
10. **Stop the discrimination** against older, infirm, disabled, unfit, people who wish to access tracks and fire trails in our heritage bushland by means other than walking. There is room enough to cater for all and still adopt low impact and Tread Lightly principles.
11. **Do not punish** those who value and respect our bushlands. Locking out everyone because of the poor behaviours of a few is unjust and repugnant. Better target those responsible for damage using education and specific enforcement strategies. Allowing clubs to adopt trails/tracks will provide additional monitoring for poor behaviour.
12. **Develop new management approaches** for our national parks where clubs/individuals who adopt the appropriate ethical approaches to land usage are not restricted in access.
13. **Increase free camping opportunities** in national parks and forests. Many families are penalised particularly with camping sites now charging on a per head basis.

Response to the Inquiry

Access and Camping

Overall, The Southern Tablelands 4WD Club (ST4WDC) is concerned with increasing trends to reduce vehicle access to large tracts of our heritage bushland. Alarmingly, once a wilderness area or national park is declared, the overwhelming management approach is to greatly reduce or restrict access by the public. Of course, you can access these areas if you are a Park Ranger or an avid healthy bushwalker – but this excludes the majority of the population!

Exclusive management and enjoyment of our public lands in NSW is abhorrent to many of the population who admire, respect and care for our bush. Too often, there is a one size fits all approach when management authorities are responding to bushland vandalism. Seasonal closures are not included in this criticism at the moment, but from year to year we worry that seasonal closures of tracks will become permanent.

Management of public lands need to also recognise four wheel driving as a legitimate recreational pursuit that can also benefit management resources. We have witnessed increasing installation of locked gates to restrict public land access in parks and forests. Unfortunately, this approach also increases the pressure on available roads and camping areas. This can be frustrating to many who wish to enjoy their bushland without being herded into small areas of the available park or forest. Again, not everyone is capable of walking through these bushland areas. ST4WDC preference is to enjoy the bushland on established fire trails and tracks. Moving through the bushland at a sedate pace allows our members the opportunity to better enjoy the natural flora and fauna of our bush. This pace is also much safer for fauna.

Creating more two wheel drive roads for general access is not the answer either as many of these roads are fast moving and do not provide the true bush experience of trails and tracks. There is a vast difference between the two modes of transport through the bush.

Our members prepare and set up their vehicles to negotiate trails and tracks and this includes a focus on vehicle based camping. Many NPWS camping areas now have bollards or cables restricting camping space to specific areas away from vehicles. This approach reduces our members to either camping in the car park which leaves fewer spaces for other vehicles or, finding more suitable camping areas elsewhere. This is increasingly an issue for our members with the somewhat 'over management' of camping areas. Many camping areas also do not cater for the increasing numbers of people now towing camper trailers. Again, looking around the immensity of the areas involved leaves people wondering about the management approaches being adopted.

Our preferences include enjoying secluded bushland settings largely with or without toilet facilities – bollards, rails and cables somewhat destroy the appearance of the natural environment. Where these devices are seen as necessary to reduce encroachment by humans in popular camping areas then perhaps more camping areas can be created or the area be increased to cater for the demand. Overall, these areas are a miniscule portion of any of the parks visited. We can accept that in some cases where there are very popular sites these measures are needed. However, we also believe that another model needs to be implemented to cater for the more adventurous off road (two wheel drive road that is) users of parks.

Camp fires / collection of fire wood

Increasingly, more and more parks are moving towards banning the collection of firewood for campfires within the parks. This approach makes sense when there are environmental concerns for threatened species or a distinct lack of dead wood. However, we are witnessing increased use of this policy as a tool seemingly to abolish the humble campfire. Where dead wood is in abundance often collection and controlled burning (in a campfire) may reduce the fire risk at track side. Fire is used for warmth and cooking and promotes the social aspect of camping in our natural heritage completely. We oppose moves to restrict or abolish the use of campfires in parks and forests as a general policy measure. The exception of course is the declaration of fire bans

due to weather extremes and the seasonal fire ban period over the summer months. Our members are responsible in their use of campfires.

Discrimination must stop

Currently, large areas of public land have been restricted to park's staff and bushwalkers with the stated intention of preserving flora and fauna for future generations. This is blatant discrimination against the current generations who are denied access to these areas due to gates being installed across existing tracks and fire trails. If you are not able bodied then you are in a group who are denied access through these parks and declared wilderness areas. You are only entitled to travel on established two wheel drive tracks and roads if they exist. This is not how many people like to access and enjoy their bushland.

Is this just preserving our bushland/flora/fauna for future generations of bushwalkers and park's staff? Something that may not be used by the wider population may become a thing that is not valued and something that is not valued can be more easily lost for good. This would be a tragedy. It is our flora and fauna that we wish to see enjoyed by our current and future generations – but inclusively please.

Economic loss to NSW

Annually, the ST4WDC delivers approximately fifty trips and events for its members. One third to half of these would include travel through or to a NSW park or forest. Increasingly, we are leading more and more trips over the border into Victoria. For example, this year our club ran four, four day trips and two, one week long trips in Victoria. The reason is Victoria has a better balance where it comes to managing its public lands – in particular, the Victorian High Country. Victoria embraces the simple notion that they are managers of public land for public enjoyment.

Victoria recognises the needs of four wheel drivers and other recreational groups and their love of the Australian bush. Parks Victoria have implemented a Track Classification Scheme jointly with the Victorian 4WD Association. Victoria has also recognised and promoted 'iconic' tracks that interest and attract four wheel drivers. Overall, the level of cooperation and understanding is greater with increased benefits to all parties. <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/iconic-four-wheel-drives/track-classification>

So, increasingly our club members take their expenditure on accommodation, food, fuel, repairs, accessories and general items over the border into Victoria. This is an economic loss to NSW businesses that should be recognised.

About our Club

The Southern Tablelands 4WD Club (ST4WDC) was established in 1976 and is the largest four wheel drive club in the region. We currently have 538 members in our club and we welcome approximately fifty new members each year. The club's members largely reside in the greater Canberra region including Queanbeyan and Yass. However, we also have members from Goulbourn, Mittagong, Bungendore, Braidwood and the southern coastal and inland areas of NSW. Our memberships are held by individuals and families.

Key benefits of membership include learning how to drive safely off-road, gain experience on trips with other members, use and enjoy the club's 770 hectare property near Bredbo NSW and participate in a range of social activities.

Our club prides itself on the quality of its driver training and education. We deliver basic driver training, supplementary sand driving and water crossing courses, winching and recovery exercises and advanced driver training. Our basic training course is presented over a weekend at our club property and then all participants must complete a follow up day to complete the course. In addition, we deliver navigational training, first aid, chainsaw operation and certification, photography, bush skills and other courses for our members.

ST4WDC is a member of the NSW and ACT 4WD Association and we have a code of ethics adopted from the state and national associations.

Code of Ethics

1. Obey the laws and regulations for Recreational Vehicles that apply to public lands.
2. Respect the cultural, heritage and environmental values of public/private land, by obeying restrictions that may apply.
3. Respect our flora and fauna. Stop and look but never disturb.
4. Keep to formed vehicle tracks.
5. Keep the environment clean. Carry your own, and any other, rubbish out.
6. Keep your vehicle mechanically sound and clean to reduce the environmental impact.
7. Adopt minimal impact camping and driving practices.
8. Seek permission before driving on private land. Do not disturb livestock or watering points, leave gates as found.
9. Take adequate water, food, fuel, basic spares and a first aid kit on trips. In remote areas travel with another vehicle and have Royal Flying Doctor Service, or equivalent, in radio contact.
10. Enjoy your recreation and respect the rights of others.
11. Plan ahead and lodge trip details with a responsible person.
12. Support four wheel driving as a responsible and legitimate family recreational activity.

Our Club Property 'TALOOGE'

ST4WDC owns a 770 hectare property near Bredbo named TALOOGE. Why that name? It means To Always Look Over Our Great Environment which indicates our members' respect for the bush.

We use our property for training and recreation and we have added facilities including secluded and group camping areas. Our club follows a conservation ethic and we have an active program of weed eradication and revegetation that has been partly funded by an Envirofund grant. Recently, we joined in with Cooma Council in an aerial weed spraying program.

Purchase of this property was seen as necessary to 'future-proof' our activities due to increasing track and trail closures of public lands in NSW. Other four wheel drive clubs have also similarly purchased land.

Community Service

Because of the keen interest club members have in our natural environment, the club has a strong commitment to conservation while advocating that access to National Parks, State Forests and other areas of scenic, historical and cultural value must be maintained for responsible use.

We undertake community service activities including:

- Recovery of derelict vehicles from bushland – a club exercise retrieved two wrecks from the Jerrabomberra Bushland Mountain Reserve on behalf of the Queanbeyan Council. Both wrecks were removed from bushland to points where commercial operators could access and remove the vehicles.
- ST4WDC supports the National Balloon Festival in Canberra by crewing and retrieving balloons for visiting and local pilots.
- Raising money for charities. The club joins with other 4WD clubs to organise and run the biennial 4WD Spectacular in Queanbeyan. This major activity not only promotes four wheel driving but raises significant amounts of money for a variety of charities. Major recipients of charity funds from the 2012 4WD Spectacular were:
 - Snowy Hydro Southcare Helicopter Rescue Service
 - Royal Flying Doctor Service, Broken Hill
 - VKS -737 4WD National Radio Network
 - State Emergency Service, Queanbeyan

- ST4WDC clears fallen trees from fire trails and roads. This has been at times on behalf of NPWS (NSW). This can be critical in times of high fire danger to keep fire trails accessible for fire fighters.
- Arrange and conduct working bees in parks on behalf of NSW authorities.
- Pick up rubbish in the bush and clear up camping sites.
- Assist lost or injured people in the bush. This includes assisting fallen motorcycle/bicycle riders, 4WDDrivers, horse riders, walkers and others we encounter on club trips.
- ST4WDC assisted distressed members of the community with clearing debris around and in their homes following the devastating Canberra bushfires. This was using member's recovery equipment including winches and our expertise. The club then assisted property owners in the Brindabella Valley including clearing destroyed fences and removing fallen trees.

Current Public Land management practices need review and overhaul. A better business model needs to be developed that is more inclusive of other groups of people. These are people who also care for our heritage bushland and so the model needs to increase access opportunities.

I have included information about our club to provide you with our conservation and bush credentials. Many other four wheel drive clubs exist in NSW with similar skills, commitment, resources and the desire for increased access to our bushland.

Currently, we see an approach to the access of public lands dominated by extreme environmental views. We seek and advocate for a balanced approach that recognises and regards other users who also care for our flora and fauna in our natural heritage bushland.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Taylor
President

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