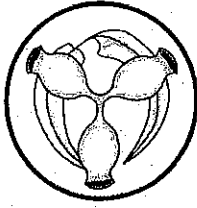


**Submission
No 190**

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

Organisation: STEP Inc

Date received: 30/07/2012



STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978

30 July 2012

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000
Fax: (02) 9230 2981

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: STEP Inc submission to Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales

STEP Inc is a community based environmental group with a membership exceeding 400, who are mostly based in the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai area of Sydney. Our aim is to preserve natural bushland in the local area from alienation and degradation, and to help to protect the remaining natural bushland in New South Wales from inappropriate development.

STEP is concerned that changes in the management of public land arising from the inquiry will lead to further pressure on our remaining natural areas and the degradation of the national park estate by further opening it up to destructive uses such as cattle grazing, logging and access to four wheel vehicles. The recent decisions to open up certain national parks to recreational hunting and horse riding seem to be part of a pattern of behaviour aimed at promoting commercial interests over the original conservation objectives.

STEP believes that our conservation areas are important not only for biodiversity protection, but also for other critical ecosystem services such as fresh water catchment protection, and carbon sequestration.

We are further concerned that landscapes, places and objects in national parks which are significant for their Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural values are being placed at risk.

STEP would like to emphasize that that Australia has signed the International Convention on Biodiversity and committed to conserve biodiversity, and that the NSW Government is a signatory to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment whereby the Australian Government and all State Governments agreed to the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas. STEP believes that while the NSW Government has made significant progress to date in this regard, many biogeographic subregions remain underrepresented. The science is clear that protected areas are the most effective way of conserving biodiversity.^[1]

STEP would like to point out that local communities benefit economically and socially from national parks. NSW Government websites point out that nearly 40 million people visit our national parks every year, and they do so mainly to enjoy the natural environment. Evidence overseas indicates that natural areas which are seen as losing their "wild" status also lose their appeal to the eco visitor, both local and overseas.

STEP believes that the management of national parks is best undertaken by the skilled professional staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, supported by a large number of community volunteers who take pride in these special areas. STEP has many members who provide volunteer

work to their local national parks and we can report a growing frustration amongst many of them at decisions such as the recent change in the recreational hunting laws.

STEP has recently been in touch with the our local member, the NSW Premier, concerning the reduction in the budget for the management of our national parks, while many millions of new money are suddenly found to fund well established venues such as the SCG. The effective management of national parks for conservation is hampered by such budget pressure and demands to manage and provide infrastructure that is associated with commercial development.

STEP and its members urge the Inquiry to act decisively to reinforce the importance of a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system to provide resilience for our natural environment.

Yours sincerely,

Jill Green, President

STEP Inc.

[1] Taylor, M. F. J., Sattler, P. S., Evans, M., Fuller, R. A., Watson, J. E. M., & Possingham, H. P. (2011). What works for threatened species recovery? An empirical evaluation for Australia. *Biodiversity Conservation*, 20(4), 767-777.