

**Submission
No 193**

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

Name: Mrs Eileen Day

Date received: 1/08/2012

This submission calls for a change in management of a section of the Murray Valley National Park. I would like to see the 18,000 ha which was to have been retained as a regional forest operated under a RAMSAR multiple use management regime. This would see a return to economic and environmental sustainability and enable local residents to re-connect to the forest which has been part of their heritage for more than 100 years.

Submission into the inquiry into management of public land from Eileen Day of Mathoura

As a Mathoura resident of 35 years, I am writing to give you my views on the change in management of the Mathoura Group of Forests, now the Murray Valley National Park and what it has meant to people here.

The forest had been a major part of the community's heritage for more than a century. Locals loved 'the bush' as they affectionately called it, spending many hours walking, running, riding their bikes or horses, exercising their dogs, fishing, boating, canoeing and camping in their favourite locations throughout the area, or just enjoying a Sunday drive. Council and local groups contributed to the establishment and construction of bushwalking trails, bird hides and other recreational facilities which further enhanced enjoyment for both locals and visitors.

The forest was also the economical lifeblood of the town, providing employment and generating \$70M in wealth which had a flow-on effect throughout the region and beyond. It also provided fire wood to ensure locals – particularly pensioners – were able to keep their homes warm throughout the bitterly cold winter weather at minimal cost. After obtaining the required permits, even the oldies could hook up the trailer and drive out along the bush tracks collecting wood. While firewood collection is still permitted, permits are not readily available locally and collection is restricted to dedicated areas and periods, and at times, access to these areas is impossible due to flooding.

The loss of 'their bush' has saddened the hearts of these people. It's a bit like kicking a point on the siren when a goal would have won a premiership for the local football team. With restrictions imposed by National Parks, they feel disconnected from their beloved bush. They can no longer pack up the kids and the family dog, and head to their favourite camping spots for a weekend. Consequently, many don't even enjoy a Sunday drive as they once did.

Locals are concerned that forest roads are no longer maintained to a satisfactory level, that undergrowth is growing out of control and that debris build-up is at an all-time high. They are all too aware of the 'Flaming National Park blazes which devastated large areas of Victoria and feel that it could all too easily happen here.

The forests need active management to ensure they grow and prosper. Just as a good gardener removes some of his seedlings to enable the others to grow better, so smaller, weaker trees need to be removed to promote more prolific growth of the stronger ones – it's a no-brainer as they say!

The National Parks people have set up camping areas and installed equipment for use by visitors to the area. But the thing is – the beauty of the bush pre-national parks – was that people could camp wherever they wished. It was this freedom which attracted many visitors to the area. They had their favourite spots, and fishing sites, so that's where they wanted to be. And with the local rule 'take only photographs – leave only footprints' – they looked after them.

National Parks' mindset appears to be that areas need to be 'locked up' to be protected, but that style of management is not suitable for this area. Our forests need active management to ensure their survival. Sure they need some water to help with this, but they also need periods of 'drying out'. Planned environmental watering every year will do more harm than good. The RAMSAR Management model for this area called for working forests with multiple use, enabling timber industry operations, grazing and recreational activities to be conducted side by side.

I believe a new class of Public Lands Management should be introduced for this – and possibly other areas – based on the RAMSAR multiple use model which offers

environmental AND economical sustainability for the region now and into the future, and will actually promote the tourism boost so far lacking since the changeover.

While there is a place for National Parks I would ask that the 18,000 hectares of forest which was to have been retained as State Forest be set aside and operated under the RAMSAR management regime, offering multiple use including timbercutting and recreation use.

This way the local area would be unique in that timbercutting would resume, albeit on a smaller scale, and firewood collection would be easier but locals and visitors wanting to again enjoy the bush would have the choice of staying in designated campsites or ‘roughing it’ like they did in the old days.

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1. The conversion of Crown Land, State Forests and agricultural land into National Park estate or other types of conservation areas including the:

(a) Process of conversion and the assessment of potential operational, economic, social and environmental impacts

The conversion of the Mathoura Group of Forests into a National Park was a politically oriented move to try and protect Labor seats in the NSW Parliament. This was reinforced by a statement made by Frank Sartore during a visit to Deniliquin.

There were claims the forests were in poor condition because of bad forestry management, however, the 10 year drought was not taken into consideration, nor was the forests' ability to recover by 'just adding water'. Two wet years since the changeover has proved this.

The Natural Resource Commission was tasked with the role of examining the economical, social and environmental effects of conversion. However, the NRC was not given sufficient time to complete its investigations, with Premier Rees , as a swansong to his political career, announcing the National Park before the report was submitted. Further to this, the NRC was to admit that some of the figures on which it's report was based were flawed, but these figures were not reviewed and the decision was allowed to stand.

Not only has the local community been robbed of its forests but dirty tricks were used by government to achieve its desired outcome.

(b) Operational, economic, social and environmental impacts after conversion, and in particular, impacts upon neighbours of public land and upon Local Government.

The conversion has robbed the Mathoura community of a \$70M industry with associated job losses and the relevant flow-on effect to transport operators, equipment retailers and repairers. The introduction of a National Park which is not subject to council rates, has reduced Murray Shire's revenue by \$This further impacts on the shire community which now has an increased burden to carry. ??????????

While the wet winters since conversion have enabled the red gums to recover, they have also promoted prolific growth of weeds and grasses, which together with fallen debris, have greatly increased fuel loads and raised fears of 'Blazing National Parks', such as those which devastated large tracts of Victoria in recent years. Grazing which was permitted under previous management kept fuel levels under control and could be carried out at all times, no matter the weather which adversely affects control burns.

(c) That the following cases be considered in relation to Terms of Reference 1 (a) and 1 (b): River Red Gum State Forests in the Southern Riverina, Native Hardwood State Forests in Northern NSW, Yanga Station in the Balranald Shire and Toorale Station in Bourke Shire

Comments in this submission relate to the Mathoura Group of Forests in the Southern Riverina in NSW

2. **The adherence to management practices on all public land that are mandated for private property holders, including fire, weed and pest management practices.**
3. **Examination of models for the management of public land, including models that provide for conservation outcomes which utilise the principles of 'sustainable management'**

I would urge the committee to consider exorcising the 18,000 hectares of area, originally designated as regional forest, from the national park and introduce the RAMSAR management model which promotes multiple use forests which enable timber industry operations, grazing and recreational activity to be conducted side by side. This regime would provide environmental and economical sustainability for the region well into the future.