

**Submission
No 513**

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

Organisation: Walcha Council
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WALCHA COUNCIL

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15 November 2012

The Chairperson
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

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COUNCIL

Dear Committee Members

Re: Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in NSW

On behalf of Walcha Council I would like to thank the Committee for allowing Council to provide input to your enquiry.

The Walcha Shire has an area of approximately 6270 square kilometres, within this area there is a National Parks Estate of 1700 sq km and State Forests of 521 sq km, approximately one third of the Council area is non-rateable public land.

Over the last ten years there has been approximately 16,500 hectares of freehold land converted to National Park. The annual rates on this land are approximately \$60,000 per annum. The annual rate burden is now spread across the remainder of the rate base.

Walcha Council maintains an extensive local road network that provides access to both private and public land. As local roads, the 148kms of sealed roads and 628kms of unsealed road receive no NSW State Government funding and Council ratepayers fund the full cost of their maintenance and improvement.

Council's local road network has been designed and constructed to cope with the movement of light vehicles and heavy vehicles associated with the agricultural activities of cattle and sheep farming. Council's network has not been designed to cope with the heavy vehicle movements associated with more intensive commercial activities including forestry, feed lots and mining.

The conversion of private agricultural land into National Park should not lead to an increase in the movement of heavy vehicles on local roads that access these areas. However the conversion may lead to an increase in light vehicles driven by tourists accessing the National Park. As more traffic use the local roads, Council will need to provide more frequent maintenance and will come under

increasing pressure to upgrade these roads. This cost will have to be met by the remainder of Council's "rate paying" landowners.

The conversion of State Forests into National Parks could well have a significant benefit for Council's road network. Over the past few years, NSW State Government's forestry operations in the Walcha LGA has caused over \$500,000 worth of road damage that has had to be repaired at Council's expense. However this benefit would be far outweighed by the economic effects to the community from any reductions in the forestry industry. A more equitable outcome would be for the owners of the public land to pay a voluntary contribution in lieu of rates.

Council makes extensive use of road building materials e.g. gravel, sand, crushed rock sourced from private and State Forest land. As has already happened, conversion of land containing these materials excludes Council from gaining access and Council is forced to haul materials longer distances and at greater cost.

Council is also concerned at the lack of transparency in the conversion process, there appears to be little if any public consultation before the purchase and transfer of freehold land to National Parks.

Council believes that guidelines should be developed for the management of the National Park estate specifically regarding fire, weed and pest management strategies and practices. Public Land Managers should have the same accountability as private land holders.

Yours faithfully

JACK O'HARA
GENERAL MANAGER