

**Submission
No 177**

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

Organisation: Hunter Region Four Wheel Drive Council

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SUBMISSION

Public land managers in New South Wales should be required to meet the access needs of the public at all times when managing public land. Field managers, particularly in the state's Parks & Wildlife Service, should have a greater say in local management than head office based bureaucrats. The Committee should seriously consider cutting the number of management levels in the public service which have been created by this bureaucracy. Field managers know what is required to meet the management criteria for the properties they look after.

The way in which the bureaucracy dictates to field officers can be changed by eliminating all remote management roles, by retrenching redundant staff and re-deploying those capable of supplying expert advice in specialised roles as non-managerial advisers to land managers.

State wide regulations cannot possibly deliver the optimum management outcomes for every site. Such regulations have been developed as a result of influence being placed upon senior levels of the bureaucracy by members of organisations with extreme views which push a narrow, restrictive approach to the management of our public estate. This has resulted in the development of bad policies and regulations which are biased too far towards restricting the public from accessing public lands. The virtual locking up of vast areas within national parks is a major example of this.

The Committee should question why it is even considering transitions of tenures from previously productive public land into the national parks estate. The public and affected industries should be better informed and encouraged to challenge all moves to sterilise any public land which has been used for productive purposes. Private land being bought back to publicly owned status should be embargoed unless it is only to be made available again for purchase by the public or organisations from the Crown.

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When any tenure change is mooted, the total cost to the community should be extensively considered and outcomes predicted precisely. Adverse effects such as real reductions in economic activity should be enough to stop the proposed change in land tenure.

The transfers of tenure in particular from state forest to national park has been commonly regarded as a convenient government move to lock it up and close the public out to save cost. This is a false premise as once sterilised, prudent land management is restricted by macro policies which are frequently delivering adverse results. Examples are:

1. The economic decline of small regional towns dependent upon the timber industry to be closed down by tenure transfer.
2. Increased costs such as fire fighting with heavier and more costly equipment operated under contract because of reduced accessibility than previously available to the volunteers in our Rural Fire Service.

Once under the control of the Parks & Wildlife Service, the parks estate becomes more heavily loaded with fuel on the ground due to ecological restrictions on volunteers carrying out preventative burns. This is another example of too many layers of management in dealing with fires and a single (conservation) minded approach to land management.

The public in general is also restricted from recreational driving through much of the remote areas in by the Parks & Wildlife Service because:

1. Parks and Wildlife Service prefers to provide access roads to large crowded parking and camping areas.
2. Road closures by the device of declaring them management trails, which by regulation, excludes public vehicular traffic for no other reason than to lock out the public.
3. Fire trail abandonment by restricting all traffic until the bush reclaims these roads.
4. Unnecessarily closing roads for safety purposes, when travel by some vehicles is not an issue, e.g. four wheel drive vehicles. Fortunately, moves are under way to classify hazard levels to

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provide drivers with information about road conditions appropriate to their type of vehicle and their own driving skills. It is requested that the Committee fully supports this as an important management tool which will assist field managers in their provision of visiting opportunities to the public while allowing them to manage access.

Apart from the move to provide road information where access is possible, the foregoing measures have resulted in the systematic reduction in roads and tracks through public lands which has effectively eliminated opportunities for time poor persons to travel through and enjoy the bush away from crowded centres. This activity is a part of our heritage and of tremendous value in itself as a therapeutic family or group activity. I submit that land managers should be more welcoming to the public for recreational access, whether by foot or by vehicle.

Our public lands can be kept more open and available to the public through the delegating of real authority to managers in the field and by the greater use of volunteers to assist them.

Recreational associations interested in visiting forests and parks are in general willing to assist in monitoring the landscape and access ways, helping to clear overgrowth and in the provision of amenities when such opportunities arise. Without access, none of these opportunities can be had. Policies which prevent or curtail management implementation of these should be radically changed or removed.

Land Managers should be authorised to:

1. Develop regional policies which allow them to utilise the skills of volunteers to work with their own field crews or when possible on purely voluntary projects.
2. Utilise the services and skills of volunteers to assist them in day to day management activities in areas open to the public and in restricted areas. Examples are controlling camping through

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programs such as Camp Host, or organising functions which would attract visitors to national and forest parks.

3. Consult with regional organisations and the visiting public to improve land management practices on the land under their management.

It is well understood by many recreationalists that public land managers have over many years allowed some organisations to unduly influence land management policies. This creeping influence has resulted in New South Wales becoming the most restricted state in the Commonwealth with an economic loss to the state's economy as a result.

The Committee should consider requiring all branches undertaking management of public lands to demonstrate that their policies and regulations are in accordance with the wishes of the broader general public and not just the views of a few extremists.

Robert Kelly

President

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