

**Submission
No 262**

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

Organisation: Shoalhaven City Council

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7 August 2012

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GPSC's

Dear Ms Foley

Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on public land management in New South Wales. Council offers the following comments for consideration:

Access and easements for infrastructure

The need for full consultation with Local Government during the process of land conversion to ensure that appropriate easements are in place prior to execution is essential given the range of assets held in these areas. Previously, land has been transferred without appropriate easements being factored in which has caused a range of practical and legal issues for Council.

The ideal scenario, for example, for Shoalhaven Water (Council's water and sewerage utility provider) is to acquire land for its pipelines, and also access tracks where necessary. For existing infrastructure a master agreement has been proposed for licences over pipelines/facilities within separate National Parks.

A current example of difficulties faced by our water utility, Shoalhaven Water can be demonstrated by the proposed acquisition of land over a trunk water main that passes through Currumbene State Forest. When the acquisition of land was refused by Forests NSW an easement was agreed as a compromise. However, Forests NSW have since revoked that decision and insisted that an Occupation Permit (OP) continue. The annual OP fee has increased from an original \$155pa to \$320pa in 2011 to \$1,000pa in 2012 (plus GST). The OP can also be terminated by Forests NSW at only six weeks' notice. This is not an acceptable situation for essential community infrastructure and warrants review.

Council also has a range of practical issues and unresolved matters that arose during the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process that took place in the late 1990's and led to large areas of Crown Land or State Forest being transferred to National Park.

Social and economic considerations

Economic and social considerations also need to be thoroughly considered in any land conversion process. Agricultural land being transferred to National Park can also have unexpected implications for neighbouring properties. The longer term planning needs of local communities also need to be given close consideration to ensure that future infrastructure requirements or logical expansion opportunities are not lost or closed off.

Environmental considerations

The National Parks and Wildlife Service needs to be properly resourced to manage feral pests and weeds on land they receive to prevent incursion onto private land. Environmental impacts can also be an issue following conversion of agricultural land to National Park. In Shoalhaven, landholders have reported that the environmental values of the northern end of Brundee swamp have been degraded following its transfer to the National Park estate.

Once the area was no longer actively managed, weeds became an issue – leading to a decrease in favourable habitat for the Green and Golden Bell-frog, a threatened species listed both nationally and in NSW.

National Parks must be properly resourced to manage the areas they take on and cope, for example, with feral animals and weed issues. Surrounding landholders need to be given the assurance that these issues will be managed and not impact on their land. This issue is evidenced by research being done by Queensland University Professor Hugh Possingham. He suggests that scarce conservation funds could be better spent in stewardship agreements with farmers under which they would be paid to reduce grazing pressure and change fire regimes. Too often there are too few rangers and not enough funding to manage feral pests, weeds and fire regimes. This then causes issues for adjoining or neighbouring landholders.

I trust these issues will be considered by the Inquiry and we look forward to your findings.

Yours faithfully

Russ Pigg
General Manager