

**Submission  
No 463**

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

**Organisation:** National Party of Australia (NSW)

**Name:** Mr Mike Blake

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**Legislative Council**

**GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5**

**Inquiry Into The Management of Public Land in NSW**

**Natural Resources & Energy Policy Committee of Central  
Council**

**The Nationals NSW**

**SUBMISSION**

**TO**

**The Chairman**

**General Purpose Standing Committee No 5**

**Parliament House**

**Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2001**

**Niall Blair**

**Chairman**

**National Party of Australia (NSW)**

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**Mike Blake**

**Chairman**

**Natural Resources & Energy**

**Policy Committee**

**National Party of Australia (NSW)**

## Abstract

This submission does not attempt to comment on the host of Land Management issues affecting all areas of NSW.,but looks in brief at a handfull of major issues revolving around and embracing National Parks, Forests NSW, LHPA and Item 1. (c) of terms of reference.

The Nationals took policies into Government in 2011 that were aimed at rectifying a range of political decisions made by the Labor Government that did not instigate or embrace Socio Economic impacts on rural communities . Nor was the historical evidence or years of practical experience within industries taken into consideration.

### 1. Preface

The complete lack of research and understanding of the historical aspects of the Forestry Industry in NSW and in many instances legislative lock out by the introduction of zones in State Conservation Areas administered by NP&WS has had devastating impacts on communities.

Existing Policies fall short of satisfying the test of 'triple bottom line' effects on environmental, economic and social issues which are assessment criteria that have crept into our everyday business culture required for satisfying business decisions. The triple bottom line effect is a charlatan test that has been created for the purpose of giving credence to some feel good policies that do not satisfy any of these triple bottom line areas. This is particularly the case for environmental considerations and the following examples demonstrate and give testimony to that.

#### **It is worthwhile keeping in mind the following;**

- Contrary to what is often stated, dense forests did not cover large areas of Australia pre European settlement. Most country was woodland, grassland, savannah or open forest.
- Ernest Giles explorer wrote: "The natives were about, burning, burning, ever burning: one would think they were of the fabled salamander race, and lived on fire instead of water" Flannery, T. 1994 **The Future Eaters** ( Reed Books, Melbourne)
- Flannery (1994) in part concludes from the journals of Joseph Banks Botanist ( with James Cook) ,  
'As remarkable as it may seem, the altered fire regime of the last 200 years had seen rainforest and dense eucalpyt forest establish on what in Bank's time was clearly an open woodland'

- Allan Cunningham on 5 April 1817 with Oxley's first expedition stood beside a swollen Lachlan River near Forbes and beckoned to a group of 13 natives on the opposite bank: 'Although they swam across the river, in which they had to contend with strong current, they had brought fire in their hands...'
- Mitchell, Cunningham and other explorers make extensive comments in their journals of the natives fires and the openness of the country extending from the Macquarie to the Gwydir rivers and includes the Pilliga area et al. Rolls, E. 1984 **A Million Wild Acres**. (Penguin Books Australia).
- Please note the extensive historical evidence presented to the Committee by Russell Douglas re the development of the Red Gum forest in Southern NSW and in particular the immediate area surrounding Deniliquin.
- A summary of the historical background re Forestry development, National Parks and associated Public Land Management across Australia is provided by Blainey, G.1982.

"Thousands of years of burning could not fail to affect the landscape and all that lived on it. The sheep owner who came from Britain did not have the faintest idea of how long the aboriginals had occupied the land but they had a sound idea of the botanical effects that came within a few years of the cessation of burning. If five or ten years that experienced few fires could alter the vegetation of Australian forests and grasslands, it would not be surprising if thousands of years of fires had also altered the previous vegetation..."

Without those fires the grassy woodlands that occupied much of the fertile crescent in south-eastern Australia would have been scrubland or forest. A period of fifty years was probably sufficient to change the character of that savannah country if no fires burned..."

Blainey, G.N. 1982 **Triumph of the Nomads**. Chapter 5 'A burning Continent, p 67-83' (Macmillan, Melbourne)

- There are a host of Socio Economic issues emanating from the lack of understanding and use of historical documentation, plus so little consideration given to the hundreds of rural communities that have established around the renewable natural resources of our landscape.
- The decisions of the previous NSW Labor Government and the current Federal Government did/do not consider the 'triple bottom line' i.e. the economic, social and environmental effects in total and not in isolation. The political philosophy over sixteen (16) years of the NSW Labor government was dominated by environmental considerations.

- This approach has resulted in an enormous increase of Crown Land i.e. Forests NSW ( with some instances of agricultural land) converted to National Parkes and/or State Conservation Areas.
- This conversion to NP's and SCA's has had a twofold outcome. The decimation of the Forestry industry and the NSW Government's own forestry agency ( Forests NSW) through the loss of real estate coupled with demoralization of all concerned.
- The Management of the States renewable natural resources require a Practical, Pragmatic Management approach to provide an ongoing sustainable long term outcome. Hence the necessity of the 'triple bottom line' approach.
- Please note the extensive socio economic evidence presented by Russell Douglas pre and post 2010 political decisions locking up the Red Gum forest in Southern NSW.
- The Red Gum lock up and conversion to National Parkes was pre-empted by similar outcomes to the South and North Coast areas plus the Brigalow Bio Region embracing the Goonoo, Pilliga and Nandewar forest areas.

**The following areas are of concern that directly relate to issues briefly outlined in the Preface.**

## **2. Local Government**

The conversion of land into National Parks and State Recreation Reserves has resulted in Local Government unable to collect rates for this land. This forces the Shire Councils and Provincial Municipalities having to increase rates enormously on remaining land to make up the shortfall.

This obviously has become a huge burden on all concerned. Local government rates are regulated by the owners of the National Parks and State Recreation Areas i.e. the NSW State Government through rate pegging.

When land is locked up for National Parks, local government does not collect rates from that National Park. So the shortfall of rates is then added to all other ratepayers resulting in a hefty increase in rate levies. A decision by a State government therefore results in higher local government rates for the rest of the Shire.

## **3.Green Agenda –Agenda 21,**

Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment. Includes atmospheric protection, combating deforestation, protecting fragile environments, conservation of biological diversity

(biodiversity), control of pollution and the management of biotechnology, and radioactive wastes.

The National Parkes Association is one of numerous bodies in this State that influence the political debate disproportionately to their numbers, in particular the left of politics. Many people in the wider community easily confuse this organization with that of NP&WS and it is believed to be intended as such. Hence any message promoted by a conservative government can easily be misread by the general public by the rhetoric of this and other environmental organisations .

In the case of the previous Labor Government the 'greens' involvement in the direct and outrageous policy decision to lock up the **Red Gum Forests of Southern NSW** on the eve of the March 2011 was nothing short of scandalous. The Labor Government's decision was based on securing votes (environmental) in a preference deal prior to the upcoming election.

The triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental issues was a congo line all the way to the Labor –Green preference deal. This totally unethical and immoral approach to the assessment and implementation of a realistic, pragmatic and sustainable use of renewable natural resources must be stopped and rectified.

There are numerous other instances of the 'green' influence and that includes the **Brigalow Bio Region**. After many years of community meetings and a final hearing in Dubbo the Labor Government and Premier Bob Carr 'amazingly ' had the outcome they had planned. A host of State Conservation Areas were established. Forests NSW relinquished the majority of their real estate to National Parks.

In the following years massive out of control fires in the Pilliga and then the Goonoo emanated from lightning strikes. The Labor Government had always starved Forests NSW of funding and hence contributed to the build up of fuel loads which in many cases 'control burns' may or would have prevented.

NP&WS having taken over these huge areas were not equipped or experienced to handle such conflagrations without the support knowledge of the former Landlord Forests NSW and other support volunteer organisations and professional agencies.

#### 4. Social Economic and Environmental Considerations

The rhetoric of the green movement never mentions the materials utilized to produce the mass of products society will not shed and nor will the Greens. Such as our and their personal means of transport e.g. pushbike, motor vehicles, the bitumen road, public transport, mobile phone, the refrigerator, the TV and the list goes on. ***All comprise or use 99% of the world's non renewable resources.*** We must then consider the manufacture of the equipment to obtain these resources and then the manufacturing process to produce the products we use.

The Forest industry is one renewable natural resource that NSW has. Where the industry is still permitted to operate it has the ability to function in a productive and sustainable way given the unbelievable environmental restrictions they have to work with.

Society relies on this resource for a host of products, such as structural house framing, flooring all forms of joinery, house and office furniture, the architraves and skirtings to kitchen cupboards, the paper of your tabloid ,the paper for your 'printer' the napkins at your dinner table.

***The iron ore, bauxite, the worlds minerals all fossil fuels, that we are so dependant upon are non renewable. Yes we do have an obligation to utilize these resources in a sustainable way for future generations.***

***"The forests are renewable. A resource society is able to harvest in a sustainable way. "It is truly a natural resource driven by the sun."*** Blake, M.E. 2012

The socio and economic utilization of this resource within a regional rural community is immense. It directly affects the rural community members employed in the industry plus all the service providers for machinery, parts, servicing, fuel, housing clothing, food and hospital services. The list is endless.

Then there are the huge benefits the State and the Nation receive as a whole. The utilization of the produced timber product, taxes etc that flow through Federal and State Government.

The management of our forests in a productive, pragmatic and sustainable way will benefit the environment and continue to enrich our society.

Some 15-20 years ago Australia was importing over one (1) billion dollars of timber from North America, and then increasingly from developing countries e.g Indonesia, Borneo, Malaysia etc. This has increased dramatically since the locking up and shutting down of a huge percentage of the forest industry.

This has had a disastrous effect on the native forests of those countries, where rules and regulations if they do exist are totally disregarded. By importing the majority of our timber requirements the Nation continues to support the illegal world timber trade and the destruction of all associated flora plus fauna that rely on the forest ecosystems for their survival.

*So the hypocrisy of the 'green movement' beggars belief.*

## **5.Tooralle Station**

Tooralle was purchased by the State and Federal labor governments sight unseen on the eve of the public auction for \$24 m. It is acknowledged by the people of Bourke and in fact most people in western NSW that the purchase of this property was akin to environmental voyeurism.

To quote the Australian newspaper 16 May 2012 "the purchase of Australia's Biggest Birdbath."

Converting this highly productive working property to a National Park displaced some 14 permanent workers plus casuals (to be replaced with 5 permanent NP&WS personnel) was a huge social and economic 'blow' to the local community.

Over 100 years ago Sir Samuel McCaughey constructed water diversion structures on Tooralle to harness, retain and utilize the water of the Warrego River , 'River of Sand'.

The aim was principally to spread the water across the riverine plains to enhance the growth of grasses for stock feed. Historically substantial flows from the Warrego only reached the Darling River on seven occasions from 1950 to 2010.

On taking possession the State Government, the NP&WS was handed the management role with the stated aim of allowing the Warrego River to flow freely once more to the Darling River.

NP&WS planned to demolish the said infrastructures, But surprise-surprise the major retention pond (a modified billabong) has developed its own ecosystem which included



an amazing rolecall of bird life, a range of fish species other aquatic invertebrates and terrestrial vertebrates.

After calling in the 'experts' NP&WS have decided to leave this amazing artificial aquatic habitat in place and hence the Warrego River will on rare occasions reach the Darling River.

Is this good policy ? There is growing concern within the community that our new State Government appears to be maintaining or adhering to the same philosophical approach as the former Labor Government with the allocation of some \$40m for the establishment of new National Parks.

## Summary

- The NSW State Coalition Government must adhere to its pre election policies of not establishing new National Parks in the short term without rigorous scientific research and extensive community consultation.
- Any deliberations pertaining to the establishment of National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Conservation Areas etc must apply the 'Triple Bottom Line' of Social, Economic and Environment outcomes to each and every proposal.
- The Red Gum Forests of South Western NSW demands of the State Government a reappraisal of the method in which the then Minister Frank Sartor and the Labor Government converted these areas into National Parks. This means that many areas be handed back to Forests NSW and the sustainable harvesting of timber to continue.
- Previous Labor-Green policies has cost jobs, shut down mills and affected ancillary industries. If forests continue to be locked up, fire will eventually destroy them and that is NOT conservation.
- Similarly State Conservation Areas of the Brigalow Nandewar Bio Region must be reassessed. At least zone classifications 2-3-4 should revert to Forest NSW management and where sustainable, timber harvesting to be reestablished.

***The Natural Resources & Energy Policy Committee of Central Council The Nationals Australia (NSW) seeks approval of the Chairman of Committee No 5 to appear before it and to offer its testimony in support of this SUBMISSION.***

**Mike Blake**

**Chairman**