

**Submission
No 464**

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

Organisation: NPWS Western Rivers Regional Advisory Committee
Name: Mr Bill Moller
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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Land Management.

General purpose Standing Committee No5

From- NPWS Regional Advisory Committee for Western Rivers Region

Overview

The Western Rivers Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) operates under provisions in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act and a Memorandum of Understanding with the NPWS. There are 14 RAC's across NSW aligned with the NPWS departmental management Regions.

RAC members are appointed by the Environment Minister following public advertisement for a 4 year term and represent wide community stakeholder interests. In practice RAC's provide advice on the management of NPWS reserves to NPWS Regional Managers and to the Advisory Council that reports directly to the Minister. The Western Rivers RAC has members representing local government, RFS, LHPA, Indigenous, nature conservation and reserve neighbours with many committee members being rural landholders.

Many Western Rivers RAC members have been involved in the RAC for numerous terms and have provided direct advice on the establishment and management of reserves in the Central West, Riverina and Cobar areas of NSW. The RAC has held many field trips to reserves and engaged with landholders, reserves neighbours and local government representatives during and after reserve establishment periods.

The RAC is providing a Parliamentary Inquiry submission as part of the focus of the Inquiry relates to the River Red Gum reserves and Yanga both of which occur within the Western Rivers RAC region.

Yanga National Park

- The RAC and its members has visited Yanga on many occasions since the reserve was established,
- a number of RAC members are also represented on the Yanga Community Working Group established by the NPWS to advise on reserve establishment and management. The Working Group normally meet 2-3 times a year and has provided valuable community comment on management plans and actions,
- The RAC has met with reserve neighbours and advised the NPWS on proposed management actions, and reviewed the Statement of Interim Management Intent (a pre Management Plan),

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- The RAC has been specifically interested in Yanga establishment related to environmental water, historic heritage, pest and fire, interpretation, tourism, and the planning undertaken to determine how the red gum forest health can be improved,
- The RAC is very supportive of the advances made in:
 - changes to levee banks and improvements to water regulators which have resulted in planned waterbird and frog breeding outcomes. The RAC believes that much care has been taken to ensure that engineering, hydrology, monitoring and consultation with water authorities has occurred. The RAC is pleased that the MDBA has provided environmental water allocations to achieve monitored environmental outcomes,
 - the conservation and adaptive reuse of historic heritage buildings – all building and structures have completed conservation plans linked to a reserve wide conservation plan, and all restoration works have been completed in line with BURRA Charter guidelines,
 - the care and display of purchased movable heritage items – the RAC supported the specific purchase by NPWS of all movable heritage items on Yanga Station older than 15 years and that they have been all catalogued, and that all displays on Yanga NP represent authentic heritage,
 - the extensive fox baiting, rabbit warren ripping and weed programs – the extensive and targeted programs have resulted in significant reductions in feral animals. The NPWS has provided maps to the RAC showing the extent of works. The RAC has advocated that the NPWS develop a close working relationship with the LHPA and neighbours related to weeds and it is pleasing that examples of collaboration exist,
 - the many hundreds of kilometres of fire trail that have been established on Yanga, and that all bushfires since 2005 have been contained within Yanga. Over time the RAC has been provided with updated versions of reserve fire plans, and through both the RAC and membership of the Yanga Working Group, advice has been provided on the training of NPWS staff and purchased equipment ensuring that Yanga is well prepared and better placed to deal with fire that existed on Yanga Station,
 - the interpretation outcomes at the Cook's Cottage and Woolshed touch many people, providing a direct link with people and the past, and promotes the conservation aims,
- Tourism at Yanga is often commented on in the media. The RAC believes that the process of converting a run-down Yanga Station into a well managed National Park takes time. The RAC is

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aware of initial issues such as buildings not meeting building or safety regulations, chemical storage deficiencies, poor roading, unsatisfactory fresh water supplies to dwellings and visitor areas, no visitor signage, and poor fencing and gates. The RAC has supported a deliberate process of review, professional advice and targeted funding to improve the basic amenities and infrastructure needed to develop and maintain good management and to support tourism opportunities. The RAC is aware that monitoring has shown that visitor numbers are increasing year to year and is now well over 15,000 pa from the initial zero when Yanga was a working station.

- The RAC has been provided with numerous updates by the NPWS on the mapping of red gum forests on Yanga and other red gum reserves. It is of enormous interest to see and comment on the evolving science and technologies used to review and monitor forest health, and to develop specific management programs. The RAC is supportive of programs such as ecological thinning and degraded area restoration to allow previously manipulated forests to become sustainable and healthy. The RAC believes that Yanga forests have been impacted by decades of silviculture and landform changes which when coupled with poor water management have resulted in stressed and dying forests. The RAC fully supports the programs developed by the NPWS,

River Red Gum Reserves

- As with Yanga staff recruitment, where former Station employees were employed, the RAC supports the NPWS approach to recruit former employees of Forest NSW, to manage the red gum reserves. Such outcomes ensure that retained knowledge and capacity continue to be utilised,
- The RAC fully supports the development of the Red Gum Tourism Plan. The NPWS has undertaken extensive business and community consultation to ensure that proposed tourism facilities fits in with researched and confirmed demand. The RAC believes that once the works are completed, community support for the reserves and actual visitation will increase,
- The NPWS has regularly advised the RAC of the developing ecological thinning trial and supports the project. Involving scientists in the project, ensures it will meet the target of obtaining a scientifically valid outcome. The use of a NSW and Victorian scientific committee is a positive government initiative,
- The RAC is regularly updated on progress with aboriginal communities in achieving joint management and supports the development of a Memorandum of Understanding for the Yorta

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Yorta Nation over the Millewa. The RAC has been advised that local traditional owners have been employed by the NPWS to undertake field inspections and provide advice on protecting cultural heritage,

- The RAC also supports the transfer of some red gum lands (Taroo and Werai) to aboriginal people. The RAC understands that traditional owner negotiating teams have been established by the NPWS and that legal arrangements are being clarified that would result in land transfers. The RAC has provided advice to the NPWS that the process needs to be slow to ensure that widespread community support exists for any land transfers,
- In relation to business transition, the RAC is concerned that some forestry businesses that have been paid to exit red gum forestry from crown land, have been advocating a return to forestry within the new reserves. The RAC understands that some businesses have received multiple payouts from different red gum transition funding areas. The RAC also understands that the remaining businesses now have longer term resource security and in some cases have been attempting to employ staff over and above previous staffing levels,
- The RAC has been provided with advice from the NPWS that all bushfires that have occurred on the new reserves have been contained and that in most cases the RFS has been involved. As with Yanga, the NPWS has purchased new equipment and trained all staff so that the bushfire capability exceeds other national park levels,
- The RAC does not support a continuation of the firewood program as it understands that collection is occurring from areas previously logged but where commercial firewood collection did not occur. It would appear that once this temporary resource is removed no supplies will exist on the reserves and the community will need to look elsewhere – probably from private lands,
- The RAC also does not support a continuation of stock grazing in the reserves. The RAC believes that
 - the argument that stock grazing reduces fuel load is incorrect, and that ongoing concerns with elevated nutrient levels (from urine & manure) entering water courses causes weed problems on-site and problems downstream,
 - Grazing by stock is a major source of and spread of weeds throughout the reserves,
 - The presence of cloven hoofed animals is a major cause of erosion, leading to local soil degradation and silting of waterways,

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- Grazing by stock is highly selective and results in considerable degradation of the vegetation communities.

Reserve Establishment and Management

- When the original RAC was established covering the Riverina (in the 1990's) NPWS reserves covered about 1% of the Riverina landmass. Even then the RAC met people on field trips who said the reserves were too big. The RAC understands that in the Riverina region the status is now about 3.5%, and that it is lower in the Cobar area and in the Central West,
- The RAC has supported a planned reserve establishment, focussed on new reserves sampling vegetation types and landforms not in the reserve system. The RAC fully support government and NPWS actions aimed at achieving a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system,
- With Red Gum and Yanga reserves, the NPWS has provided details to the RAC on measures to ensure that management funding is prioritised to local businesses. The RAC understands that in places like Hay and Balranald, some local people have attempted to generate public petitions over the lack of local spending by the NPWS but the petitions have failed as businesses have recognised they were substantially benefitting from local spending greater than when the acquired properties (now reserves) were operating as a commercial enterprise.

Conclusion

The RAC considers -

- That the land under management by NPWS is well managed for the preservation of its natural values,
- The NPWS is a leader in the management of fire and feral plants and animals on land that is under it's control,
- That there are still several threatened ecological communities that are either not represented or are under represented in the reserve system and that further expansion of the reserve system will be necessary to approach adequate representation of these ecological communities.

Bill Moller
Chairman – NPWS Western Rivers Regional Advisory Committee
30 August 2012