

**Submission  
No 382**

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

**Name:** Mrs Jane Judd

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## **Submission to General Purpose Standing Committee No 5**

### **Re: Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales**

I have been a resident of the Coonabarabran area since 1976, originally taking part in the owning and running of a farm and recently moving into town on the sale of that farm. I have been a member of Advisory groups to National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) since 1982. I am at present a member of the Northern Plains Regional Advisory Committee (NPRAC) and an alternate on the Macquarie Cudgong Environmental Flows Reference Group (MCEFRG). I have, in the past, been on the NPWS Advisory Council and the Namoi Community Conservation Area Advisory Committee (NCCAC). My interests lie in the environment and I have first-hand experience of State Forests, especially the Pilliga and Leard, and a number of National Park reserves, including the Macquarie Marshes, Narran Lakes, the Warrumbungles and the Goonoo.

It is my observation that NPWS reserves are well-managed with due regard to legislative responsibilities as well as operational, economic, social and environmental impacts, working and consulting with the communities to get the best outcomes. Their primary purpose is, and always should be, nature-centred, not short-term human-centred exploitation for the inappropriate activities of logging, mining, grazing and hunting.

#### **Terms of Reference**

##### **1. The conversion of Crown Land, State Forests and agricultural land into National Park estate or other types of conservation areas, including the**

###### **a. Process of conversion and the assessment of potential operational, economic, social and environmental impacts.**

The process I have most knowledge of was around the Brigalow Belt South (BBS) decision, especially with respect to the Pilliga. This was a very drawn-out process. The consultation involved a significant number of stakeholders from all aspects of the community and generated a large number of reports considering all the impacts listed in 1a above.

It was a very acrimonious process which could have been better managed by limiting discussion to a small number of possible scenarios. Many were unhappy with the decision, having unreal expectations of what would be achieved from consultation. While the consultation process could have been better handled, the outcome was always going to be the setting aside, under NPWS management, of high conservation value land from within State Forests and other Crown Lands.

Forests NSW assured the government that there was enough timber to supply the industry for 20 years in the areas now declared State Forests. If there is inadequate timber there now for industry requirements, the fault lies with State Forests, not with the actual decision. They appear not to have known how much timber was there and to have set harvesting quotas too high.

The current push to exchange already harvested areas of State Forests for less disturbed areas within NPWS reserves would ultimately result in the same situation. And instead of having about half of the Pilliga in good condition (NPWS reserves), all would have been harvested unsustainably. It would no longer be of high conservation value because of different management principles. Silviculture aims to produce even stands of mature trees to harvest. Conservation management aims for mixed stands of mixed ages, including so-called senescent trees which contain the hollows so important for our native fauna.

With respect to acquisition of agricultural land, NPWS does not do this by force but purchases private land from willing sellers. Many landowners prefer to sell to NPWS because they have cared for their land and wish to see that continue. NPWS is not interested in land which has been converted exclusively to farming.

Australia is a big country. There should be room for conservation reserves at a level which ensures the continuation of our plants, our animals and our natural landscapes.

**b. Operational, economic, social and environmental impacts after conversion, and in particular, impacts on neighbours of public land and upon Local Government.**

It must be realised that change is continuous. Declines in economic worth were already under way well before the conversion of significant land to NPWS reserves. The timber industry in Baradine was already in decline as a result of increased harvesting rates facilitated by more efficient machinery. Mechanisms to help redress this impact have been very effective. The community has taken steps to broaden its economic base. The Discovery Centre has been very successful and the Sculptures in the Scrub project in excellent and well-patronised.

A number of studies have shown that conversion to NPWS has resulted in improved economic outcomes for the local community. NPWS policies always stress local sourcing of requirements if possible.

**2. The adherence to management practices on all public land that are mandated for private property holders, including fire, weed and pest management practices.**

As is well-known, NPWS addresses these aspects of land management as a matter of course. Fire plans are in place for all reserves within months of acquisition and even prior to gazettal. Staff training is in place prior to every fire season. Hazard reduction programs are carried out.

Strategic regional plans are written for the control of pest species, whether plant or animal. These are adhered to and reviewed annually. They systematically prioritise and target particular species, and watch out for new outbreaks. As we experienced as landholders, they work well, in a co-operative manner, with neighbours in control of pest species as well as with fencing requirements and with fire management.

All programs are monitored and evaluated to assess their success. The ad hoc method of feral animal control supported under so-called "Conservation Hunting" cannot ever be as effective.

**3. Examination of models for the management of public land, including models that provide for conservation outcomes which utilise the principles of "sustainable use".**

Sustainable forestry does not exist in Australian native forests. The timber industry in the Pilliga and the Goonoo have been in decline for years as a result of over-harvesting. Mills have closed, average log size is getting smaller, thinning for the future is inadequate.

The Biosphere Reserve model assumes a number of zones. These range from having no human interference as in wilderness, through limited management and visitation such as in Nature Reserves, to reservation for conservation, management and visitation such as in National Parks. Only then is sustainable usage for human needs considered as in well-managed State Forests. The first three zones are an essential part of the model. The Brigalow/Pilliga decision followed these principles, including the setting up of broadly-based advisory groups. NPWS honoured its responsibilities to these groups, Forests NSW were far less than committed. To change tenure again or allow access for extraction into high conservation value natural areas would be to squander previous conservation achievements.

**4. Any other related matters.**

Sustainable usage cannot possibly include open-cut mining such as that occurring in Leard State Forest. It leads to complete destruction of habitats and hasn't yet shown any ability for rehabilitation of ecosystems. Rehabilitation costs are astronomical.

Coal seam gas extraction is similarly incompatible, causing wholesale modification of the environment over large areas. From industry figures, 50% of wells leak within a 20 years of drilling. Fragmenting the forest allows pests and weeds to move in.

Public land should be utilised for the public benefit. Private and commercial interests should be met on the 85% of NSW in private ownership.

I would be happy to talk with the committee should the opportunity arise. Unfortunately I am not available between 19 September and 12 October as I will be in New Zealand. I would be willing to take another opportunity should that be possible.

Yours faithfully

Jane Judd