

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc
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NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc.

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“Fights for fairer access to land in NSW and represents the interests of prospectors and fossickers”

Inquiry into tourism in local communities, June 2013

NSW General Purpose Standing Committee No 3

Submission by the

NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc

That General Purpose Standing Committee No 3 inquire into and report on the value and impacts of tourism on local communities, and in particular:

- 1. the value of tourism to New South Wales communities and the return on investment of
Government grants and funds**
- 2. the value of tourism to regional, rural and coastal communities**
- 3. the impacts of tourism on Local Government Areas, including:**
 - (a) infrastructure services provision and asset management**
 - (b) social impacts**
 - (c) unregulated tourism**
 - (d) employment opportunities**
- 4. the marketing and regulation of tourism**
- 5. the utilisation of special rate variations to support local tourism initiatives**
- 6. any other related matter.**

Introduction



The NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc (NAPFA) fights for fairer access to land in NSW to prospect and fossick for minerals (especially gold) and gemstones; as well as for coins and relics.

The association was incorporated in December 2012 and it aims to represent the needs and views of fossickers and prospectors to government and others who manage access to land and influence our operating environment.

We have around 500 registered members throughout NSW but also carry the aspirations of thousands of unregistered fossickers and prospectors in NSW and the ACT. We are part of an informal national network of like associations in other states who are all struggling with similar issues. We are a not for profit volunteer organisation.

For the purposes of this submission, the words prospectors, fossickers and prospecting and fossicking essentially mean the same thing and are freely interchangeable.

The NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc (NAPFA) congratulates the NSW Government on having this inquiry. Any forum to highlight and address inadequacies in the way fossickers are treated in NSW is to be commended.

Full details about NAPFA can be found on our website at www.napfa.net.



Picture: New NAPFA members at Hill End last December

In relation to tourism, NAPFA is aware of many NSW residents who simply go out of the state to pursue their hobby because NSW has become too restrictive and bound up with both 'red' and 'green' tape.

To date there has been little official encouragement of this activity nor recognition of its benefits by the NSW Government. The needs of prospectors and fossickers have been essentially ignored.

In the view of NAPFA this comes at an opportunity cost in terms of visitations to NSW regional areas, especially those with a golden past.

In comparative terms, NSW is being outflanked by legislative and regulatory support and active promotion by the major gold jurisdictions of Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

From a strategic point of view, NSW is failing to capitalise on its inherent natural and historical advantage – of being a state with a significant gold history.

In NSW NAPFA is especially concerned about the numerous exclusion areas established under the broad banner of 'conservation'. These include hundreds of National Parks and State Conservation Areas where recreational fossicking and prospecting is outlawed.

In NSW our prospecting areas are made difficult to use by complex rules and regulations and failure to recognize that fossicking and prospecting is not an industrial mining activity.



Picture: No-go area on a mining lease. Fossickers not welcome here!

Fossicking has insignificant environmental impact compared to the many other threats against our natural landscape – such as feral species, bushfires, salination, drought, floods, and land clearing that results in the loss of topsoil and damage to the broad ecosystem through increased severity of floods when they do come.

1. The value of tourism to New South Wales communities and the return on investment of Government grants and funds

When one travels through NSW there are many regional towns and villages in auriferous areas that have seen better days.

Their golden pasts may be referenced in the local historical society or museum but in this day and age gold is not seen as a viable economic option unless it is backed by a major listed company with the technical and financial resources to 'put the town back on the map' via a big hole in the ground.

Small timers – prospectors and fossickers – are not important enough to draw the interest of government at any level and are essentially ignored. This is a shame.

To our knowledge there is no investment of government grants and funds to promote fossicking tourism. Therefore discussion of 'return on investment' as a term of reference is somewhat meaningless in the fossicking context. NAPFA would be willing to assist the NSW Government to identify or assess worthwhile projects.

2. the value of tourism to regional, rural and coastal communities

Without access to expert economic advice which is beyond the resources of NAPFA, it is difficult to talk in hard dollar terms, and returns on investment. However, it is possible to hypothesise about the potential return on investment.

This can be well illustrated by an understanding of why fossickers travel.

Since the days of the gold rushes, fossickers and prospectors have always followed the gold. So it is that our members pack their camping gear, trailers and caravans and often head interstate on a regular basis, sometimes for months at a time.

The brutal reality is that they spend their money elsewhere and in doing so provide diversity of economic opportunity for interstate regional towns that often don't have a lot of other attractions.

Unfortunately there is not a corresponding flow back to NSW because as a state it is not competitive when it comes to being 'fossicker friendly'.

Personally in the last 12 months I have made four long week-end trips, totalling about 14 days, to Victoria to the Rushworth, Castlemaine, Dunolly and Talbot areas. On each occasion myself and my prospecting buddy have each spent on average about \$100 per day in the local area on food, accommodation and other expenses, not including petrol which for a 4WD round trip from Canberra is about \$600 per visit. At an estimated \$5,200 that is a lot of money that is not spent in NSW. And that is just two people.

In the same period I have done about 15 away trips in NSW (Hill End, Stuart Town, Windeyer, Mogo, Braidwood) for a total of about 12 nights. Due to reduced travel needs, my daily spend in NSW would be less than interstate, and I estimate about \$50 per day if I am camping and up to \$150-\$200 per day if I am using accommodation and buying meals rather than using my own camping supplies.

In my case I had never before been to any of the areas in Victoria and only a couple of the NSW locations. If it was not for the attraction of the gold and prospecting it is a fair bet that I still would not have visited those NSW areas even though I have lived in the ACT for 30 years.

It is important to realise that money expended by fossicking tourists is spent – *whether they find gold or not.*

My story is but one of thousands in NSW.

At two recent prospecting events: “Go Minelabbing Day” at Windeyer on 17th of May and the Goanna Gold Muster at Mookerawa State Recreation Park on 6 and 7th of April – combined there would have been at least 600 weekend participants.



Picture: Fossickers get some technical support at Mookerawa in April. Many travelled long distances.

In locations like these, such numbers are huge. In fact the Bushlands Caravan Park at Windeyer said it was “just like Easter” in terms of the amount of extra business it brought to town. Except of course it was not Easter, and people like me who had never before been to Windeyer before, were there to enjoy the weekend activities.

Fossicking tourism is also much less seasonal than “school holidays” or the “snow season”. Fossickers visit throughout the year and often make multiple visits to areas that they know.

This is quite different to “passing through” tourism where travellers spend overnights in areas before moving on. However, fossickers also spend money “passing though” on their journey to gold destinations.

Metal detecting on beaches is also a popular pastime that thousands of people undertake and provides an extra reason for people to visit the beach.

Hill End is a good case study for what is not being done to encourage fossicking tourism, and conversely what could be done.

Hill End is well known as a mining village and more lately as a village of ‘the arts’. However even in the Draft Hill End Master Plan that was open for comment in May 2012 (and which has still yet to see the light of day – you really do need to inquire what is happening with that Master Plan) there was no real consideration or encouragement of mining tourism – for example decent maps that show where the diggings are and what the land holding arrangements are in those areas.



Picture: Well-equipped fossicker at Hill End. This person is a regular visitor to Western Australia.

In Hill End a life size Holtermann nugget replica in the main street would give visitors a big kick and be a major talking point.

Possible events like an annual Hill End Metal Detecting Jamboree or Muster or panning championships would really be worthwhile and just as valid as some of the attention paid to the ‘arts’ aspects of Hill End. There would likely be commercial sponsors for such activities and done properly once a year would bring hundreds of visitors, many of whom would be likely to return at other times.

Due to the small commercial sector in Hill End, such an event would need seed money support from government.

NSW's Corner Country is a remote destination for travellers. For decades it has also been a popular place for fossickers to visit – for the starkness of the landscape and for the tiny bits of gold that can be found with metal detectors in places like Mt Brown and Mt Poole.



Picture: Fossicking landscape at Mt Brown, near Tiboburra. Now closed.

However the available land for fossickers to visit has been dramatically cut by the decision of individual property owners to no longer allow fossickers to access those properties. Other areas are under national park rules where it is illegal to fossick in spite of it being a low impact activity.

The visitor's centre at Milparinka and businesses in Tiboburra have all had a decline in trade since fossickers have crossed the area off their destination list.

Government needs to work with local landowners and other stakeholders to identify ways that enable fossicking tourism to once again become an important part of the economy there. Tiboburra, due to its geography, gets a lot of drive through traffic. But fossickers can stay in the areas for week or even months and contribute to the local economy during that time.

Linked below are some examples of how private properties in Queensland work with regional tourism authorities and do a good job in managing prospecting visitors and providing adequate information and a proper booking system.

These properties are visited on a regular basis by NSW prospectors. The area is twice the distance at least of 'Corner Country' from the main NSW population centres.

http://www.longgullygold.com/index.php?p=1_7_Conditions-of-Entry

<https://www.youcamp.com/properties/76>

<http://www.flatcreekstation.com.au/>

3. the impacts of tourism on Local Government Areas, including:

- (a) infrastructure services provision and asset management
- (b) social impacts
- (c) unregulated tourism
- (d) employment opportunities

The most important infrastructure requirement for fossickers is suitable land that can be easily accessed, without having to jump through administrative hoops or relying on the generosity of private landowners.

Limitation of access goes to the heart of the cause of NSW prospectors and fossickers and a major impediment to growing fossicking tourism.

Fossickers consider that NSW National Parks is not a good manager of the fossicking land resource because it is more concerned about restricting access and activity than encouraging fair and reasonable use of this resource. Fossickers experience the 'discrimination of exclusion'.

Active fossickers enjoy many social, mental and physical benefits from their activity. They make friends across a wide cross section of the community – linked only by the common bond of interest in prospecting.

The increased physical activity is good for health in a society that is 'battling the bulge.' Fossickers enjoy the restorative benefits of the natural environment, of being self reliant with the occasional thrill of a find or two.



Picture: Petrol stop at White Cliffs service station on the way to Tiboburra.

Fossicking tourism is mostly an unregulated activity that requires very little input from government to support.

Prospectors are not looking for hand outs of government money – we just want better access to state land resources, and regulations that support our hobby and make it easier rather than always more restrictive.

Fossickers are users of general tourism infrastructure but there is a great deal that could be done at fairly minimal cost to specifically encourage fossickers.

At a local level, signs and maps to show fossickers the different land zones around towns that have a fossicking history would be an excellent start.

Practically it is very difficult for average citizens to identify tracts of Crown Land and to be sure of access arrangements. Information at the local level is extremely poor.

This has led in the case of Nundle to a very poor outcome whereby prospectors have been reportedly verbally challenged and abused due to 'local rules'. Many fossickers don't go to Nundle because of this.

If you could use your NSW government resources to draw together a package of online maps about key gold prospecting areas of NSW – showing in detail where the NPWS areas are, Crown land, mining leases, private land and Commons, this would be of great help to encouraging fossicking tourists.

This would be a very small investment for government but one that would have an excellent return with virtually no ongoing cost beyond some pages on a website.

In some areas – such as Tiboburra – fossickers and prospectors make a strong contribution to the local economy and in so doing, support local employment. The key is for government to support fossicking areas in regional areas by good rules and encouragement. Prospectors will follow, and employment will come.

4. the marketing and regulation of tourism

How would you market fossicking tourism?

If you take an area like Hill End, for example, invitations to expert prospectors and metal detector operators in the same way the arts community is feted would be potentially useful. The likes of Jonathan Porter from Queensland is very well known in the metal detecting prospecting community and could be a useful advocate for visiting the area. Doug Stone from Victoria has also produced his own commercial maps of the Hill End area and is a major identity for the fossicking community.

Invite the Editor of *Gold, Gem and Treasure* magazine to spend time at Hill End to write stories about the place and how good it is for fossickers.

Some effort to woo the Sydney media to the delights and rewards of visiting the golden kingdom at Hill End would also encourage new visitors from Sydney and elsewhere.

Practically, you also need some ‘big nugget’ discoveries announced just before the main holiday periods. That really gets them going in Victoria!



Picture: Gold specimen found with metal detector in Central NSW.

Private land owners in the area could also be encouraged to permit fossicking on their properties. Many prospectors would be prepared to pay to access areas that have been less fossicked. (See earlier content for the example of how some North Queensland properties market themselves.)

At a symbolic level, it is a shame that NSW does not have a Mineral Emblem. We have a range of state symbols – most notably the Waratah.

Given that the Australian gold rushes began in NSW – declaration of Gold as the official Mineral Emblem would help recognise this important historical fact, and be a boost to modern day prospectors, especially if it is matched by some changes to rules and regulations.

5. The utilisation of special rate variations to support local tourism initiatives

No particular comment.

6. any other related matter.

Responsible prospecting

Today's recreational prospectors undertake responsible prospecting. With the odd exception (no different to any other recreational group), prospectors today are people who

care strongly about the environment and wish to leave it in better condition for their children and grandchildren.

Today's prospectors don't leave piles of tin cans and sheets of iron in the bush like the old timers. We don't fire our muskets at night and create lead pollution. We don't pollute waterways with mercury and cyanide. We don't destroy the landscape like the old timers.

Instead we comb through the bush with metal detectors picking up yesterday's junk. We also routinely take our rubbish, and that of others, out of the prospecting areas. For certain there is illegal dumping in areas around towns – but this dumping is not done by prospectors.

We are likely to report illegal dumping if we see it – and alert authorities to other illegal activities in areas that are far from the eyes and the ears of the law.



Picture: Woman detecting in NSW bush.

NAPFA members have agreed on the following 'Code of Conduct' to ensure what we do is consistent with a sustainable future.

'Code of Conduct'

Members of the NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc (NAPFA) should:

- 1. Know and respect the regulations relating to prospecting and fossicking in NSW.**
- 2. Protect the natural environment by disposing of rubbish properly and refilling our prospecting holes.**
- 3. Ensure our own health and safety while in the field.**
- 4. Respect the property and rights of others.**
- 5. Be advocates for responsible prospecting and fossicking.**

In a state that is prone to bushfires, our tracks into prospecting areas ensure that if fire fighters need to go into areas, then there is a good chance that tracks are navigable through use. We can also report any fires that are in areas, so assisting your fire management regime.

NSW prospecting laws are already very prescriptive about how fossicking and prospecting can occur. For example the restriction to using hand tools actually means that holes are never very big and can be easily filled in, as they usually are.

These operating rules mean that prospecting today is by definition a low impact activity with minor and temporary environmental effect.

This reality is not presently recognized by the restrictions on recreational prospecting in national park areas and State Conservation Areas.

The restrictions are based on alarmist arguments that point to eras past when there were no controls or prospecting rules, unlike today.



Picture: Old time surfaced area at Hill End is still recovering from intensive mining.

Effort should be put into the far bigger problems in national parks – like foxes, blackberries, European wasps, feral cats, pigs and goats rather than cracking down on individual citizens who are simply looking for a low cost, low risk, healthy recreational activity.

For the inquiry to better understand what modern day prospecting is like, please check out “21st Century Prospecting”. This is a short film produced by the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria (PMAV) -- NAPFA's sister association in Victoria.

It is about prospecting in Victoria in today's environmentally conscious world. It has received almost 1,000,000 viewings on You Tube!

[21st Century Prospecting](#) was produced to help inform the wider community about the many benefits that prospecting brings to the state of Victoria.

Much of the information in this video is just as applicable to NSW.

NSW authorities could learn much from Victoria's example and the way these have preserved the goldfield as living heritage areas.

Importantly, while the gold fields are being preserved they are also being used. This has provided a steady stream of tourists to regional Victoria and an economic value be placed on the activity of prospecting.

Prospecting – living heritage – not looking for handouts

NSW citizens include the ability to prospect for precious metals or gems as part of our natural mining heritage that dates back to the 1850s.

Prospectors in NSW have a right to be able to explore their state freely with minimal restriction and the law should enable rather than hinder them.

The very act of prospecting in this day and age continues that long tradition of 'having a go' and continuing a traditional activity. Many prospectors today count old timer miners among their ancestors.

The act of prospecting constitutes living heritage that should be celebrated and encouraged like other cultural/heritage activities instead of being pushed into tight, regulated corners.

We have heritage buildings, why not a heritage activity?

Prospectors today, both men and women, come from all walks of life. Often for reasons of 'life' they tend to be older people who seek to enjoy a healthy, exciting and potentially rewarding outdoor activity in retirement. But there is also a good sprinkling of younger people as well.



Picture: Fossickers are a diverse lot – recent photo at Windeyer.

As our society struggles with obesity and inactivity, surely anything that encourages physical activity should be encouraged in the interest of public health?

This is especially so when this group is not looking for handouts of government money – just the necessary permission to enter areas that are currently denied and to have our activity supported with basic information.

Conclusion and recommendations

NAPFA believes there is real potential in building fossicking tourism into strategic plans for regional NSW.

The Association is willing to participate in consultation towards such a strategy.

In our view the strategy needs to be linked to a general improvement of the fossicking environment in NSW.

We don't advocate for unrestrained access to genuinely fragile ecosystems in NSW.

However we strongly recommend that the law strike a fair and reasonable balance between the needs of the environment (which are often grossly overstated by the protectionist industry) and the needs of the community to be able to enjoy the experience and bounty of the bush, including national parks.

We recommend the following 'general' changes that will assist the growth of fossicking tourism in NSW.

1. That regular reviews and amendments to the Crown Lands Act, Mining Act, Forestry Act and NPWS Act enshrine and strengthen the right to prospect for minerals/gems/rocks/gold and to provide minimally regulated opportunities to prospect in NSW.
2. That recreational miners who fossick and prospect receive similar consideration in planning and legislation as fishers, shooters and 4WDers who also seek to use public land for their health and enjoyment. Many recreational miners also shoot, fish and drive 4WDs!
3. That NSW government and its ministries consult via online channels and other means with representatives of the fossicking/prospecting community when considering laws and regulations which have an impact on this activity.
4. That fossicking and recreational prospecting is properly classed as a low environmental impact activity which needs to be considered separate to the interests of the broader mining industry. That is to say: a person with a metal detector, a pick, pan or portable sluice, is NOT a mining company and should be exempt from the burden of big miner regulation under the Mining Act.

We also recommend the following specific changes to assist fossicking tourism:

1. That the inquiry funds a comprehensive study into the economic benefits of fossicking tourism in NSW as a way to help guide future strategy for government and industry.
2. That the inquiry recommend to the relevant Minister the establishment of GOLD as the Mineral Emblem of NSW.
3. That local councils and tourism authorities be encouraged to establish fossicking areas (gold and gems) in appropriate areas of their shires as a means to encourage regional and interstate prospecting tourism. (Even with participation of private land owners by agreement).
4. That you establish an online register, with accurate maps if possible, of dedicated areas available for fossicking in NSW to facilitate access.
5. That the NPWS Act be immediately changed to protect and/or restore the right of recreational fossicking/prospecting within NPWS reserves that are currently categorised as State Conservation Areas, State Parks (e.g. Burrendong), travelling stock routes and travelling stock reserves.
6. That national parks be immediately made available to recreational fossicking in a similar way to state forests. In the interests of maximising access, this right of fossicking access should extend to all national parks, except if there are genuinely unique historical or conservation requirements that in the interests of national heritage need to be met.
7. That the current state forest permit system for fossicking be abolished or made much more practical than it currently is.
8. That the NPWS & Crown Lands Acts be amended to retain the right to fossick and prospect on non-urban crown land with a history of previous use by prospectors. Further, where the status of that land has changed since 1970, that fossicking/prospecting rights be restored.
9. That the Mining Act be amended to enable prospecting/fossicking and the taking out of small mining leases on areas under Exploration Lease (excluding the immediate areas of active mining sites) subject only to the permission of the land owner where that is not the Crown (Western Australia has such a law).
10. That the many historic dedicated public fossicking areas in NSW are not closed and sold-off or leased in such a way that excludes fossicking/prospecting. Where that has occurred since 1970, that such rights are restored.
11. That the right to fossick/prospect (with hand tools or detectors) is restored on Western Lands leases in NSW or at least made much easier than it is at the moment.

Stephen Dangaard

President

NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc

28 June, 2013