

**Submission
No 10**

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

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This submission contains an expression of concern regarding the inquiry itself and an explanation as to why we value our protected areas, which includes having areas that minimise human impact. Approximately 11% of Australia is protected land but that doesn't mean that we currently have adequate protection of the unique flora and fauna we are blessed with caretaking. This leaves much land available for other uses such as harvesting be it commercial or recreational. Our natural sites are the cornerstone of Australian tourism - reducing the quality of our national parks endangers this sector of the tourism industry. We need to facilitate a life rich in quality for the present generation, as well as for our children and our children's children. We believe we also have a moral obligation to not be the cause of another species extinction.

Inquiry into the management of public land in New South Wales

We are writing to express concern about the parliamentary inquiry itself and make clear why we value our protected areas. We are aware that the Minister for the Environment has released a press release reaffirming the State Government's committee to National Parks, a response we support. The issue is of such importance to us that we will continue to take this opportunity to outline why we value national parks and our concerns about the inquiry.

Our concerns are:

The task of reviewing the creation of national parks seems to be a surrogate for limiting the number of parks and reducing the level of protection that they offer. Australia has approximately 11% of land currently protected – this is after having lost 60 species of flora and 50 of fauna; it seems to me that we need to accelerate, in a thoughtful manner, the protection of flora and fauna not reduce its protection.

We are also concerned that the Chair of the inquiry is Mr Robert Brown MLC of the Shooters and Fishers Party who has been lobbying for a moratorium on the establishment of national parks, and has lobbied to hunt in national parks. Chairs need to be non-biased members of a committee and so his position of chair actually calls into doubt the worth of the outcomes from this inquiry.

Should the Shooters and Fishers Party begin to determine the direction of NSW parks (and Australia's parks – NSW parks are not protected just for people of this state but for all Australians) by stopping the protection of ecological zones that are so far unprotected, or by allowing hunting, then a recent scenario in Africa might well be found here – of the four remaining giraffes in one national park two were shot by hunters as a demonstration of their hunting prowess. The majority of land in Australia is not in national parks – there are vast tracts of land where hunting is possible. In addition there are many feral animals that are available to be hunted. The recreational hunters and fishers have more areas available to them than not.

We want continued funding and support for national parks. We believe that we need to ensure that these special areas are resourced with personnel, equipment and money so that they can be managed appropriately and provide maximum appropriate visitor access. Did you know that across the 12 main tourism markets in Australia the main motivation (reason for visiting) for 10 of these 12 is to visit nature in Australia. The market that ranks nature least (at number 3) is New Zealand whose main reason for visiting is to undertake Australian journeys. Sixty four percent of international visitors participate in nature tourism but there are also 25 million domestic visits to nature tourism each year. The most popular type of nature activity for international tourists is visiting national or state parks; the most popular type of nature activity for domestic tourists is visiting national parks, and bushwalking or rainforest walks. Reducing the level of protection for

these areas is likely to reduce their status in the eyes of visitors and impact on Australia's vital tourism industry.

As such we also call on you to object to any call to revoke national parks, to allow logging, grazing, shooting or horse riding in national parks.

Why do we have national parks and reserves and why do we value them? Because as a society we haven't found any other way to date of ensuring that unique landscapes, plants and animals survive, and can be enjoyed by future generations; they are also a key tool in dealing with climate change and managing water resources.

If we don't set aside areas, ie protect them, we will use them. We will use them until they're gone because at an individual level we can't see the big picture. We will chop the trees down until there are no more or until they are not able to regenerate and they will have long stopped being viable homes for birds, reptiles, bees, possums and so on. The aim of this reserve system is to 'protect examples of the full range of ecosystems, with their distinctive flora, fauna and landscapes, in protected areas across the continent'. We value this goal. We want future generations to have access to the same experiences and resources that we do now. The problem with 'sustainable use' is that the task of 'policing' then becomes much greater – ensuring that any harvesting is done according to the guidelines laid out. In addition, although we know much my understanding is that we have only just 'touched the tip of the iceberg' as far as understanding the ecosystems which surround us and upon which we depend. This means that in reality we probably don't know what 'sustainable use' is.

If we don't protect our natural areas we are also in danger or impacting on the valuable ecosystem services that they provide us. It is healthy vegetation and algae from healthy oceans which provides us with oxygen; it is vegetation which provides soil stability and water filtration; it is the millions of insects that pollinate our food crops; it is the trees and grassed areas that provide micro-climate in our urban areas; trees filter pollutants from our air ... and the list goes on.

We also value national parks and reserves because of the experiences that they provide us – recreational and tourism experiences. They provide rare opportunities to be in a non-urban environment- to experience the full effect of nature: wind, smells, sounds, and living organisms. We now know access to nature and green spaces is important for human health – it provides stress amelioration; opportunity to exercise, important learning and self-development opportunities. This growing body of research suggests that we would be wise to, at the very least, adopt the 'precautionary principle' with respect to our natural world.

And so we view national parks and other forms of protected areas as incredibly important to a healthy and vibrant community and call on you to strengthen their status.