

**Submission  
No 401**

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

**Name:** Mr Mervyn Vessey

**Date received:** 29/08/2012

---

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

### GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5

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

##### TERMS OF REFERENCE

That General Purpose Standing Committee No 5 inquire into and report on the management of public land in New South Wales, including State Forests and National Park estate, and in particular:

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

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

c. That the following cases be considered in relation to Terms of Reference 1(a) and 1(b):

River Red Gum State Forests in the Southern Riverina,

Native Hardwood State Forests in Northern NSW,

Yanga Station in Wakool Shire, and

Toorale Station in Bourke Shire.

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

3. Examination of models for the management of public land, including models that provide for

conservation outcomes which utilise the principles of "sustainable use".

4. Any other related matters.

Mervyn Vessey

Dear Sir / Madam

I have been active in outdoor activities for most of my life and am becoming very frustrated by the lack of proper management of our wonderful country. This is very evident when time is spent within our conservation areas especially National Parks.

The basic outline of this submission contains sections on the following headings:-

Staffing ratios

Management perceptions

Recreational opportunities

Wilderness

Feral control

Weed control

APZ

Fire control

Landscape and natural areas

Conservation groups

Science in parks

Legal constraints

Future park experience

State Forests

#### **Staffing ratios**

Some of the very blatant and obvious issues are the level of good and efficient staff willing to do the front line work where the general public are able to see and communicate with knowledgeable staff. Many of the staff are university graduates with little customer service abilities, which translate to little public education of the issues and proper etiquette by the general public. Many parks have staff ratios of far less than that of what a commercial operation would have to do the same area and work load. This is not sustainable for staff or the environment.

#### **Management perceptions**

Most of the public perceive that the park rangers are not interested in having the public use our national parks, which often leads to a free for all and vandalism of infrastructure and in various places removal of natural resources such as bush rock and timber for commercial gain. This can be reduced and stopped when staff are visible and interacting with visitors at all levels. NPWS directors and staff need to become more active in the policing of the vandals and other illegal activities. Be seen and not just in the glasshouse, but get out there and walk and talk to visitors. We don't need any more reports on how the species are being lost we need action and this will lead to species recovery, sorry this is scary stuff and can happen

#### **Recreational opportunities / restrictions**

Opportunities and restrictions of recreation are needed but should be tempered with conditions and responsibilities. Many areas of public land are abused due to no responsible people allowed to access to deter the criminals, general visitors are a very positive and immeasurable resource that combats vandalism.

I have been involved with the pursuit of responsible recreation for over 10 years and the message is still not being looked at properly. There are vandals and irresponsible people in all facets of outdoor activities from bushwalking to serious competitive activities and four wheel driving. My opinion is that those of us who have decided to be responsible and join a 4WD club who are accountable are restricted the most by the actions of the vandals without any real evidence of who is at fault. One perfect example is Limeburners track in the Blue Mountains National Park where some vandals created huge erosion tracks and when the 4WD clubs offered to fix the problem all the legal reasons to ban us from assisting National Parks and Sydney Water were placed in the way and the problem is getting worse every

time it rains. We have done this type of work on private and public land before and succeeded in fixing the issue with some input from the land managers and lots of free labour from the clubs who are responsible, including some equipment at no charge. An example is the erosion control works at the edge of Kanangra Boyd National Park and the private property near Dingo Dell.

Work that can be done and should be considered include

Track clearing of tree debris after storms

Track inspections for emergency vehicle access with reports

Weed mapping

Ferrel animal counts / monitoring

### **Wilderness closures and incorrect information**

I have previously monitored an area that was added to an existing wilderness area and will include the letters to the then minister. The final report and survey was never done as at the time when it was considered to be detrimental to the end cause, this could be tried later as October is the better time to try this particular section of the wilderness.

I will include these letters as they are public documents already from previous campaigns.

Track closures by projecting 100 metres of road into wilderness classification

### **Feral control**

The introduction of shooters in National Parks is the first sign that some government policy makers are serious about limited feral animal control in some of our national Parks.

Many national parks have far too many feral animals that are causing irreparable damage including the destruction of habitat of many threatened species. The reduction and elimination of feral animals needs to become a high priority in all conservation reserves. A programme of shooting hunting and baiting should be active for many months of each and every year not just when a large outcry occurs. All rangers and field staff should have access to fire arms at all times, and this includes carrying them in the vehicles which can be done under our current fire arms legislation. Remove the feral animals and most of our native species will recover and become abundant again. This has been proven at Scotia when it was under the management of Earth Sanctuaries when several small animals were released into feral free areas and flourished with little intervention from man.

### **Weed control**

Weed control is one of the most important issues on most public land.

Private land holders are guided and coerced into programmed and co-ordinated co-operative control measures when next to the boundary fence is total chaos. Public lands should be involved in the control of weeds in and around boundary areas when private land holders are organising weed programmes, this is especially important when a national park is created from pastoral and farming land. Many of the botanically trained staff need to be out in the field assisting the field staff with weed control, and this includes handling a herbicide sprayer and other tools to remove the weeds. The other method of reducing the weed threat when a new park is created from grazing / farming land is to slowly reduce the stock over a few years until the whole area is weed free or at least under manageable quantities. Other issues of future thought are to reintroduce the smaller marsupials back into the new park area as the grazing stock are reduced to keep the cropping of the grass and forbs at a reasonable level. This will achieve a great outcome in two levels, firstly the animals will repopulate the area very quickly and the savings made from the reduction of special breeding programs in the zoos around the world would be enormous. A practical and current tat is concerning the residents of Kangaroo Island is the over population of Koalas from when some understanding persons transported them to the island at the time of the fur bounty. The current policy of NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service is that the Koalas are not to be transported back to areas from where some of the parent stock were removed from and are currently being classified as vulnerable or endangered. I believe that the Koalas that are being desexed should be transferred in family groups to areas that need more Koalas. Two problems are solved with a positive outcome with little or no extra expense in saving the Koalas and the environment on Kangaroo Island. This type of repopulation needs to be

looked at rather than just keeping the last few in cages in a zoo to have the same result as the Tasmanian Tiger

Contract directing when and how work is to be done not the contractor doing the best for the environment and using best practice

*Poor wording but some office jockeys are not knowledgeable enough to direct contractors on how and when some weeds should be treated (winter is not a suitable time for most weed control) at the end of a budget allocation to spend the last of the finances. Some of the budget should be able to pass over the June dead line when timing is more critical than wasting chemicals and time not killing the weeds sprayed at the incorrect time*

Many of the public sector contracts are directed by inexperienced university graduates that have an intimate knowledge of the environment and how the theory works but lack the on ground workings and limitations of some of the great options available. Many of these contracts are released close to the end of the financial year and are required to be finalised before the end of financial year. This practice boosts the slow end of the environmental workings but does not necessarily have any real impact on the outcomes that are pro ported in the contract due to slow or no response when herbicides are used.

### **APZ legislation**

APZ (asset protection zone) is becoming a major issue within the Australian bush / urban interchange. I am currently employed as a bush regenerator which is supposedly aimed at repairing and encouraging the bush to regrow instead of the feral weed population. My complaint is that the current reasoning of removing the middle storey of the natural bush canopy and leaving the leaf litter on the ground as a perfect fire buffer is fraught with extreme danger. The dangers are firstly that the bush is extremely compromised and will quickly fill with weeds and become a fire hazard, secondly people will think that they are safer after we have removed many shrubs that may retard the fire in properly maintained APZ. The other issue with APZ is the removal of threatened species as the specification of most APZ is the removal of all standing flammable material to a height of 3 metres and mulch it onto the ground, this is unsustainable as the natural regeneration of the shrub layer and some of the tree canopy are not permitted to grow. This is also against the native vegetation legislation which is enforced in rural areas and over looked when in major cities such as Sydney. One law two rules = total confusion

### **Unrealistic fire control**

With the above APZ problems the issues of fire control are significant. When a fire is started and gains enough intensity in the ground fuel it starts to climb the trees and scrubs, until it finally reaches the tree tops and becomes a crown fire. Crown fires are impossible to control or extinguish. My personal opinion is we need to reinstate the controlled ground fires that have happened in years past. The type of fire we need is similar to what happens in Northern Territory and Queensland, which is a low slow burning grass and leaf litter fire which does not need to have personnel constantly attending the fire. I know of several properties that use this form of fire to conserve the ecology and reduce the fire risk and as a result weeds are not able to establish as the natural grasses and herbs are rejuvenated and kept vigorous as was in the Aboriginal days of the dreaming. Let's rescue what is left of the Aboriginal knowledge of fire stick farming before all is lost forever. We do not have to have the huge fire storms that Tim Flannery is predicting if correct land management is adhered to and continually practiced. There are other scientists that have similar views as i have but are not of the correct view to have media time or space

### **Landscape architect versus natural area managers**

Recently i have been involved with two different contracts where the first was to repair the area to a better quality of trees and shrubs of the natural environmental then a second contract to plant some of the species of trees we previously removed as weeds. This happens when a landscape architect has more influence and seniority than a natural area manager due to the university degree. We need to integrate some of the tertiary education curriculum to include the various types of landscape especially the higher end of the system. The ground needs to relate to the master plan.

### **Conservation groups**

Some of the extreme conservation groups are miss directed in my opinion and causing great harm to our society and our land management.

Some of the conservation groups are only interested in creating more restrictive conservation areas. One of the real issues is the quality of the conservation rather than the quantity. National Parks are just as good at conserving our heritage and environment as a wilderness area when managed well. My opinion is that a wilderness area under the Wilderness Act can and is left to fend for itself against all the invasive feral animals and weeds which becomes impenetrable and when a fire or rescue happens it is impossible to enter. The better managed national park has some access and this enables staff and volunteers to

### **Science within NPWS**

In my opinion science within our conservation areas is relegated to some basic surveys and species observations and monitoring. The science that needs to be carried out (once did happen) is items like climate change in isolated areas where the influence from outside sources is limited. A study similar to this was being done in Nadgee National Park until it was declared a wilderness area and all research was stopped as it was deemed not part of the core park requirements. There are many research papers that may be useful to all who are involved with natural area management but generally unavailable which is very disappointing as this reduces the effectiveness of the management. Another science based issue is the breeding program that needs revamping to include programs of relocation rather than destruction. This will achieve a great outcome in two levels, firstly the animals will repopulate the area very quickly and the savings made from the reduction of special breeding programs in the zoos around the world would be enormous. A practical and current issue concerning the residents of Kangaroo Island is the over population of Koalas from when some understanding persons transported them to the island at the time of the fur bounty. The current policy of NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service is that the Koalas are not to be transported back to areas from where some of the parent stock were removed from and are currently being classified as vulnerable or endangered. I believe that the Koalas that are being desexed should be transferred in family groups to areas that need more Koalas. Two problems are solved with a positive outcome with little or no extra expense in saving the Koalas and the environment on Kangaroo Island. This type of repopulation needs to be looked at rather than just keeping the last few in cages in a zoo to have the same result as the Tasmanian Tiger

### **Legal constraints**

The legal requirements of all government departments is becoming impossible to comply with the little differences changing sometimes daily. The other issue is the requirement for natural areas to be signed and sometimes fenced to the degree of a construction site is unrealistic. The common underlying theme of natural areas is that the general public should be responsible for their own actions, this should mean that injuries obtained when jumping into water or falling from a cliff is not something that the managers are to be held responsible and taken to court and sued for damages. The case for constructed areas could have modified responsibilities attached within the general public area of toilets roads and buildings only.

### **State Forests**

State forests are the most productive conservation area we have in NSW.

My reasoning for this statement is that if forests are allowed to be managed correctly the coupes are only felled once in every 50 to 100 years, which allows for complete recovery from each logging process. I believe this was one of the aims of the Forestry Commission before the vast amounts of forest were transferred to wilderness to delete the conservation that was happening under the forest. State forests are restricted to harvest timber at an unsustainable rate due to the vastly reduced access to the timber resources locked up in national parks and especially the wilderness areas. Currently there is a huge amount of good timber getting ready to fall in the snowy region after the fires burnt through the mountain ash forests which is untouchable in the park system. This timber could be

recovered in some areas especially close to man made infrastructure for various timber products with a win / win outcome, save the environment and provide income to the conservation of the area. The other outcome is the extra jobs for local towns.

### **The future park experience**

My hope is that future park experiences are more enjoyable than what we have today. The reason for my hope is that the future management will be of the highest quality using all of the knowledge available not just what the fashionable group proposes. This knowledge base should involve the traditional owners farmers botanists animal welfare groups feral hunters and various members of the general public who have knowledge on a topic of concern. With this data and knowledge base the park experience should have interaction with a range of fauna and flora that is currently restricted or discouraged. Seeing Numbats foraging is a pure and amazing experience which I have seen once and possibly never see this again in my life due to restrictions placed on the community that I originally saw foraging.