

**Submission
No 375**

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

Name: Mr Rod Young

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Submission to the Public Land Management Enquiry

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Public Land Management Enquiry.

My submission covers the management, procurement of land for national park and the long term outcome and concentrates on three major aspects, pest animal control the demise of the timber industry and the effect on local communities and fire control.

Pest Animal Control

For the last seven years I have been wild dog control spokesman for NSW Farmers Association. In that time I have traveled extensively along the Great Dividing Range and escarpment country from Delegate to Kyogle and in so doing have developed a network of wild dog affected farmers. I have not had as much coverage of the Western Division but do have contacts there and have had the opportunity through my involvement in the NSW Wild Dog Working Group (WDWG) and Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) to gain some understanding of the wild dog situation in other mainland states.

The huge corridor of public land along the Great Dividing Range provides an ideal breeding ground for wild dogs. As the national park estate has expanded so has wild dog numbers.

I attach a page of introduction which attempts to explain the conflict between the Rural Lands Protection Act (RLP Act) and the National Parks and Wildlife Act (NP&W Act). Due to the hybridisation of the dingo over time any uncontrolled dog in the landscape is now known as a wild dog. Extensive DNA testing has shown there are few if any pure dingoes and the hybridisation has led to a wild dog that can breed twice a year, have bigger litters and are generally much heavier body weight and a more aggressive killing machine.

The RLP Act recognises the wild dog as a pest animal across all tenures, and public land managers are obliged under that Act to control wild dogs on their land.

Due to the public expectation that the dingo be conserved, the legislation creating Schedule 2 Land was put in place, with the proviso that local wild dog management plans cover both the conservation of the wild dog, and provide control of the wild dog keeping predation of livestock to a minimum.

As a result the situation results in the two Acts being in conflict and out of that a number of issues involved with public land management come to the fore. Self interpretation of the legislation, hundreds of wild dog management plans many of them of very little help to wild dog affected farmers, very few of the plans completed and signed off, a small army of shiny backside bureaucrats who develop a career out of attending an endless round of various meetings created by the complex politics of wild dog legislation, a huge

amount of taxpayer finance spent ineffectively, and many areas of productive private land destocked due to wild dog presence and ongoing predation.

I will describe an example of self interpretation of the legislation within NPWS, and how various levels of area and regional staff are allowed to dodge their obligation to prevent wild dog predation on private land.

The first part of the example is a good news story. A farmer with a property north west of Glen Innes, situated between the Kings Plains National Park and Severn River Nature Reserve was losing considerable numbers of sheep to wild dog predation. He eventually contacted the local NPWS pest management officer at Glen Innes who cooperated in organizing additional and effective strategic aerial baiting runs, which fixed up the farmers wild dog problem.

In contrast 50K's east of Guyra in the Wongwibinda district the farmers there have been battling with wild dogs coming out of the Aberfoyle River Gorge which is part of the Guy Fawkes River National Park. This park is managed by NPWS staff from Dorrigo office. Their main response to calls for assistance from the embattled farmers is to hand out a bit more electric fencing gear.

In the baiting program of May 2011, the farmers ground baited with 210kgs and 670kgs aerial baited all on rough private land adjacent to the gorge country as the dogs keep breeding on the public land, and spread onto the private land.

In the same program Dorrigo NPWS ground baited with 10kgs and aerial baited 30kgs of bait. So the farmers put out 880kgs of bait while NPWS put out 40kgs. I consider this an insult to the farmers and their threatened livelihood as they attempt to curb wild dog predation in the area..

A wild dog fresh meat bait is 250gms with 6mgms of 1080 injected into the centre of the bait. This protects small wildlife such as lizards and birds that might peck at the bait, whereas the wild dog will swallow the bait in one action. This is so designed to make the 1080 bait target specific.

The negotiations leading to an effective wild dog management plan can be very complex, and especially difficult for wild dog affected farmers who are not used to debating issues with NPWS staff, who often browbeat farmers into accepting an ineffective plan, restricted to perimeter baiting of Schedule 2 land, or in some cases nothing more than a few bait stations along a fire trail, or a bit of electric fencing gear.

NSW Farmers has carried out a survey of wild dog affected farmers and the following are the major points –

- The overwhelming message from survey respondents is that not enough is being done to control wild dogs in NSW, with 88% of respondents saying not enough is being done; 11% saying that they were unsure and only 0.7% reporting that enough is being done. Whether perception or reality, the challenge for all key stakeholders is more

effectively communicating just what is being done on the ground to address what is clearly a significant wild dog problem in NSW.

- 54% of respondents reported that their properties are adjacent to land managed by the Government (eg National Parks, State Forests etc). In the South East 80% of recipients reported that their properties are adjacent to land managed by the Government.
- On average between 2000 and 2012 63% of respondents annually reported losses to their sheep flocks and 34% losses to their cattle herd.
- 91% of respondents to date have had dogs on their property before, 58% of which first noticed dogs on their property more than 10 years ago, indicating that the problem is well-established.
- 54% of respondents reported that they keep photos/diary records to document the problem, and to assist in reporting to authorities.
- Alarming, 89% of respondents reported that wild dogs have had an impact on their stock (mostly sheep and cattle), with some reporting more than 100 stock lost in a single year.
- Baiting and aerial baiting (83%) is the most commonly reported control method, closely followed by trapping (66%) and other (50%) (eg shooting, relocating stock). 46% of respondents reported that they have made change in stock numbers/patterns as a control method.
- A massive 88% of respondents have noticed an increase in wild dog numbers in recent years. Respondents indicated that the main causes of recent increase were believed to be insufficient/ineffective control on public land (77%), insufficient resources (49%), baiting patterns (44%), lack of coordination (41%) and seasonal conditions (37%), highlighting a key area of opportunity for the State Government, LHPAs and all key stakeholders to work more collaboratively on wild dog prevention, eradication and management strategies.
- 85% of respondents indicated that they report sightings to the LHPA or Wild Dog Management Advisory Committee.
- 46% of respondents indicated that they are a member of a Wild Dog Management Advisory Committee.
- Only 54% of respondents indicated that there is a wild dog management plan for their area, with 28% reporting that they are unsure. This highlights another area of opportunity for all key stakeholders.

In many cases NPWS have contractual arrangements with the local LHPA to carry out wild dog control work. I have witnessed a case where the finance was used for administration rather than delivering effective wild dog control on the ground.

Another funding stream is from AWI. Some finance from this source has been used beneficially for wild dog control while substantial amounts of woolgrower levy funds go to the IACRC (Invasive Animal CRC) for chemical research.

We well know the huge budget OEH receive. On good authority I have been informed that NPWS spent \$30 million on pest animal and weed control in the last financial year.

This all leads to a substantial amount of taxpayer finance spent in a very fragmented manner. I believe these various funding streams should be made transparent, bought together and spent in an effective system. To control wild dogs both on public and private land the main weapons are strategic aerial and ground baiting and trapping. Over the years the south of the State have concentrated more on trapping while in the north aerial baiting has been the main weapon.

In the South East LHPA, of which 53% is public land, pest animal controllers (PAC's) are full time employed and kitted out by the LHPA, and financed via the contractual arrangements and/or government funding. These PAC's work in cooperation with the farmers and are allowed to work across all tenures. If a farmer is losing livestock to a killer dog, the PAC can pursue that dog back into National Park if necessary. These PAC's can also eliminate such pest animals as wild pigs, deer, foxes and wild cats. the south of the State does have an aerial baiting program but in many cases it needs to be more strategic and more of it.

In the north of the State the effectiveness of the aerial baiting program is being adversely affected by the purchase of more private land for national park and the resultant cutback of the baitrate from 40 baits per K to 10 baits per K. There is a shortage of full time PAC's in the north of the State.

Due to the lack of management of wild dog numbers on public land, a lot of productive land next door becomes permanently destocked. Inevitably this land gets sold to lifestylers and absentee landowners who basically vegetate, and often refuse to participate in wild dog control programs. As a result of public land mismanagement these lands become a harbour and breeding ground for wild dogs which then start to predate on the next chain of productive private land.

To overcome this expanding problem I believe both the pest control order and the RLP Act need to be strengthened. If landowners are not prepared to participate in coordinated and intergrated wild dog control then PAC's need to be able to enter that land and do the job required, with the owner sent a bill. In this way the dogs could be eradicated off private land and restricted to the public land where they could be kept at a compatible level living on their native food chain instead of farmers livestock.

To achieve such an outcome I believe 40 full time PAC's would need to be attached to the LHPA system. \$7 million would currently cover the cost of the 40 PAC's (120,000 per year) plus finance for aerial baiting, helicopter hire. As I have already said this could be achieved by redirecting finance that is being spent in an ineffective fragmented manner. The proposed system would not cost Government any additional funds.

The bureaucratic gravy train within NPWS and their public land management system is astonishing. I have witnessed multiple numbers of NPWS employees at various meetings such as Pest Animal Council and Pest Management Conferences when one representative would have sufficed.

The theories of wild dog management within NPWS would be humorous if not so serious. Their representative on the WDWG is a great fan of their mesopredator theory. This is based on the idea that wild dogs should be released across the broad landscape to control foxes and wild cats. Never mind the wild life and the domestic livestock!

NPWS recently conducted a review of their pest animal and weed control strategies. After a number of regional meetings the outcomes were to be announced at a peak stakeholder meeting in Sydney. The DG commented that wild dog control was a major issue to come out of the review and what they were going to do about it. I asked the question that seeing wild dog control was a major issue for them why were some staff members allowed to promote the mesopredator theory. The DG's immediate response was "we must look after the dog"!

When discussing wild dog control on public land it is amazing how the inhumanness to domestic livestock by wild dog predation is basically ignored. Please take a close look at the photos attached.

The IACRC was at one stage promoting a humaneness model which was obviously aimed at eliminating the use of 1080 and trapping. NPWS has pursued the use of M44 ejectors and cyanide as an alternative.

Public land managers often promote the opinion that replacement of sheep with cattle will overcome wild dog predation. It is only a very temporary fix as the dogs will kill the calves and they learn to work in packs to pull adult stock down. Attached are figures of reports of livestock lost in the Kempsey RLPB area in 1999 to 2008. Losses have only got worse since.

Wild pigs can have a population explosion in favourable conditions. This is what occurred in the Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve after recent flooding rains. Attached is an email covering huge financial loss of lambs when the increase in wild pig numbers was not realised until the damage at lambing was done.

This is a case that supports the establishment of a permanent workforce of PAC's. If a PAC had been dispatched to the Macquarie Marshes to investigate on an across all tenure approach, the alarm could have been raised to eliminate the huge feral build up in numbers prior to lambing starting on the adjoining private land.

A major issue with public land management is that while the reserve system continues to grow, management for pest animals and weeds is falling behind. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considers the reserve system in NSW is only halfway towards being of a size and diversity to be considered a fully CAR reserve system (comprehensive, adequate and representative). The reserve system in NSW currently takes up 8.84% of the land mass. If the IUCN gets its way, that will go to 17%. Pest Management over such an area will become a huge cost to the taxpayer and under the current conduct of NPWS will become uncontrollable, leading to the demise of our domestic livestock industries.

It is obvious the green bureaucracy and conservationists are keen to enlarge the national park system in the Western Division as they claim the area is currently under represented in the reserve system. A significant increase in reserve area will lead to more harbour for wild dogs and pigs. In such broad acreage enterprises predation has the potential to be disastrous to Western Division graziers especially those running browsing livestock such as goats and dorpers in INS (invasive native scrub) dominated landscape.

Such an increase in national park area will put an unsustainable strain on Local Government due to the decrease in Shire Rates. This was well illustrated in the Bourke Shire when Toorale was bought for national park. The social and economic life of Bourke suffered as well due to loss of employment. This will be an ongoing issue in the Western Division of NSW if successive Governments, State and Federal continue to supply finance to buy more private land for national park.

I have not got a problem with a national park that should be a national park due to its unique nature and outstanding terrain etc. for instance the Warrumbungle National Park is a tourist attraction due to its landscape, terrain etc. However the nearby Pilliga which was State Forest, will never be a tourist attraction, and should have been left as a working forest.

Under forestry control the biodiversity, especially the Koala colonies were in much safer hands especially from the point of view of fire control. Forestry have proven time and again to be superior fire controllers than NPWS, as they have a resource to protect.

I have observed NPWS fire fighters and I am not impressed. While ever they are fire fighting they are on triple time, so there is little incentive for them to get the fire controlled and out. I have heard local NPWS staff refer to it as their "Christmas money"!

For some reason, in addition to the above, the NPWS don't seem to realise the need to maintain adequate fire trails. The Pilliga was regularly intersected with a road network capable of handling large loads of logs. A lot of those roads are now becoming overgrown and would be dangerous for fire crews to operate on during a major fire. This is reminiscent of the overgrown fire trails in the Kosciusko National Park that did not allow fire crews to get in and extinguish lightning strikes before they developed into the massive wildfire that took two lives and destroyed hundreds of homes in Canberra.

In the Pilliga and Goonoo there is a huge timber resource of cypress pine and ironbark. Utilised in a long term sustainable manner these forests are a renewable resource that can continue to yield virtually for ever. The same could be said for our red gum forests in the south of the State, as well as our coastal forests. A number of the coastal timbers have their specialty uses such as Turpentine for jetties and bridge timber, Tallowood for decking and flooring, Blackbutt for structural, and Spotted Gum for decking, electricity poles and implement handles.

There would be a lot of commonsense in swapping compartments with NPWS. The Intergrated Forestry Operations Approval should be utilised to achieve such an outcome.

There is a huge wastage of human resources and of timber due to the overbearing influence of OEH and the Threatened Species Conservation Act in forest compartment harvest plans. I know foresters can spend a considerable number of days compiling a harvest plan to comply with NPWS criteria, which dictates a considerable amount of worthwhile sawlogs are left per hectare especially near riparian areas when the stump and root system are all left intact anyway. It seems ridiculous to me that forest staff have to spend hours of a night time sitting in forests with a tape recorder recording calls from such species as the barking owl

There is no doubt over a thousand jobs could be created in forestry operations throughout NSW. This would inject economic life back into a lot of country towns.

I have had the opportunity to represent NSW Farmers Association on the Ministerial Advisory Council for National Parks. I also represent the Association on the Bushfire Management Committee (BFMC) for the Castlereagh zone.

For a number of years I had been pursuing the idea of splitting the Pilliga into two, by developing a Strategic Fire Advantage Zone (SFAZ) along the Newell highway running from Coonabarabran to Narrabri. The idea is to attempt to restrict a major fire to either the east or the west of the forest. The farmers on the eastern side of the Pilliga (Baan Baa Willala Goolhi) are attempting to develop a similar strategy to stop fire from their side entering the Pilliga and vice versa. The SFAZ's would not be cleared but would be a hazard reduced strip burnt on a more regular period and contained within fire trails. Fire issues were being discussed at Advisory Council so I mentioned the idea. I was amused when at the next BFMC meeting national parks people turned up with mapping showing the proposed strategic fire reduced strip.

The Volunteer Firefighters Association (VFFA) has taken the initiative to formulate specifications for fire trails on public land. Internal fire trails to have a 4 metre graded strip with 2 metres on both sides to be clear of timber and scrub to allow fire trucks to pass. Turning bays need to be installed every few hundred yards to allow fire trucks to turn around in an emergency. It is essential that areas of public land can be contained within fire trails, so that lightning strikes can be located quickly and extinguished or an area back burnt within a containment line.

Pest animals and wildfire will always be a liability of public land. Both can be contained sensibly if NPWS is prepared to do its job. I can see no reason for any further expansion of the national park network as the most picturesque and outstanding areas are already within public land.

I would like to appear at the Armidale hearing in reference to Pest Animals and the Coonabarabran hearing in reference to forestry and fire

Regards,
Rod Young