

**Submission
No 373**

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

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Submission to the Inquiry into the management of public land in New South Wales

Australian Forest Growers (AFG) is the national association representing private forest growers. AFG members grow and manage timber for profit on privately held land. As such its area of interest in this inquiry is those activities that occur (or don't occur where they should) on public land that have the potential to adversely impact private landholders undertaking production forestry. In this submission we will comment on the following areas:

- Fire management;
- Noxious plants and animals; and
- Impact of public good conservation on private landholders;

Fire management

One of the great risks to a forest resource, especially a geographically confined one as most of AFGs members have, is the impact of fire entering their property from neighbours. In most cases the worst neighbour to have is the Government and especially where the tenure is a national park or similar.

Fire does not respect cadastral boundaries, it therefore matters little where the fire actually starts and much more on what the fuel load is in its pathway. There are a plethora of inquiries, royal commissions and coronial enquiries gathering dust on the shelves of policy makers across the nation. Almost without fail they have recommended that the best way to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire is to embark on a strategic and managed process of hazard reduction burning, especially across the publicly owned recreational estate. These recommendations need to be taken seriously and implemented. To do so means confronting the hue and cry about fire control upsetting habitat. This attitude simply ignores, at the ultimate peril of the species they are trying to protect, the overwhelming logic of using low heat, controlled and supervised burns to reduce the underlying fuel load so that even on extreme fire days there can be some confidence in on ground response gaining control over wildfires.

Where this is sensibly and time sensitively implemented private landholders can take comfort that their own fire suppression measures, where meddling authorities have allowed them to undertake sensible hazard reduction burning, that their own fire risk is at least addressed.

Noxious plants and animals

Private landholders have an obligation to control listed noxious weeds and other vermin on their own properties. This is often a difficult and expensive process. A process which is not helped if neighbouring landowners do not exercise the same diligence in controlling their own

undesirable infestations. Whether it is blackberries, wild dogs or rabbits the obligations that burden private landowners must also apply at least to the same extent on park managers and the like. This is needed to prevent, for example, the invasion of wild dogs onto farm breeding grounds, or indeed into core koala habitat. It is anathema to private landowners that they undertake control measures on their own holding only to watch reinfestation or reinvasion from 'over the fence'.

Impact of public good conservation on private landholders

In terms of national forest policy there has been an ongoing and at times divisive claw back of production forest into national parks. This is often done on a political whim with little, or at best rushed, reliance on science. As such there are parcels of land in reserves that ought not have been declared. From the perspective of the private landholder there are two things to say about this.

Firstly, that the process of reserving land to protect habitat while admirable and necessary also must be underpinned by a scientific and strategic approach. Such an approach was used under the assessment process within the Regional Forest Agreement framework known as the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) which was a process that sought to ensure that natural assets were appropriately protected then and into the future. Having been through such a complex and difficult process any further reservation considered after the CAR process ought to have had similar scientific and analytical benchmarks to meet. They did not.

Secondly, while the private land owner in general terms expects to do his bit towards public good conservation expecting them to forfeit production rights over significant proportions of their land, as is the case with the application of some Endangered Ecological Communities, without compensation is reprehensible conduct. There is a general acceptance that the burden on a private landholder of public good conservation should not exceed 10%. Interestingly in Finland this has extrapolated itself into a process whereby any conservation over and above a 10% threshold is subject of public recognition in the form of compensatory and stewardship payments. This is an important consideration for current and future 'by stealth resumptions' of private land rights.

AFG has seen a range of examples of how public land is poorly managed, underpinned by disturbing policy drivers, or simply muddle headed and politically expedient thinking. Herein are but a few examples of such misappropriation of resources. AFG wishes the committee well in its endeavours to restore some balance and would be pleased to provide further evidence at your request.

Yours sincerely

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