Submission No 174

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: The Coastwatchers Association Inc

Date received: 31/07/2012

Coastwatchers

Eurobodalla's environment and climate action group

31 July 2012

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Management of public land in New South Wales (Inquiry)

The Coastwatchers Association Inc. is pleased to submit evidence in support of valuing, resourcing and expanding NSW's national park and reserve system. Please refer to the attached submission.

With thanks

President

Hard copy of submission lodged online on 31-7-12

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Submission from Coastwatchers Association Inc.

Management of public land in New South Wales (Inquiry)

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1. Summary

The NSW government is guardian of the biodiversity, geological and heritage richness protected in our public conservation reserves. These reserves have been shown to be the best places to maintain intact native ecosystems supporting the many key threatened species so must be valued, resourced adequately and expanded. This is necessary to prevent or reverse the already alarming decline in these unique species, to maintain biodiversity and with it, the associated 'ecosystem services'[1]. As well as these benefits the national reserve system provides economic and social benefits to the people of NSW as well as nationally and provides a buffer against adverse risks like climate change.

2. Introduction

Coastwatchers Association Inc.(Coastwatchers) notes the Terms of reference for this inquiry:

> 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.

Coastwatchers in this submission addresses most of the Terms of Reference, grouped as follows:

Thus clause 1, '*The conversion of Crown Land, State Forests and agricultural land into National Park estate or other types of conservation areas',* is covered in Section 3 as '*Conversion of public and private land to National parks'.*

Clause 1a '*The assessment of potential operational, economic, social and environmental impacts* and the first part of Clause 1b*" Operational, economic, social and environmental impacts after conversion,'* are covered in Section 4 as '*Assessment of potential impacts of conversion; operational, economic, social and environmental.'*

The second part of clause 1b *"..the impacts upon neighbours of public land and upon Local Government"* is covered in Section 5.

[1] Ecosystem services are defined and explained in the State of the Environment report 2011 page 576-577

Clause 2 is covered in Section6 as *"Fire, weed and pest management in public conservation areas"*.

Clause 3 is covered in Section 7 as " *The management of public land based on the principle of "ecologically sustainable use*"

3. Conversion of public and private land to National parks

- ***There is an urgent need for further conversion of land to public conservation reserves and this is recognised and valued***

Since the European settlement of Australia, the natural environment of NSW has been dramatically modified. Large parts of the coastal lowlands, tablelands, western slopes and central western plains have been cleared of their original native vegetation and much of far western NSW has been heavily grazed by introduced herbivores (sheep and cattle). Many forests were selectively logged for their timber and most larger rivers modified through water extraction or storage. The introduction and spread of many weeds and feral animals has occurred across all landscapes. Most of these changes have caused a substantial and ongoing loss of biodiversity with 75 species of plants and animals now extinct and over 850 more considered endangered or vulnerable in NSW.

Climate change will further modify these threatening processes and in many cases intensify their already significant effects. The establishment and management of a robust public conservation reserve system which includes and protects a wide range of environmental types will be a key element in mitigating these many threats to biodiversity.[2]

- ***The process of conversion is underway in NSW but is still incomplete***

The NSW government has developed objectives for building the NSW park system and includes as a primary objective "..to protect samples of as many of the state's ecosystems and habitats as possible, which in turn will protect the natural processes, plant and animal communities and species that occur within these ecosystems (State of the Parks 2004 NSW) according to the Comprehensiveness, Adequacy and Representativeness (CAR) principles. The CAR principles have long been associated with establishing targets for reservation (Commonwealth of Australia 1999) and are used to guide the park system. However, clearly defined CAR targets are not in place[3] so it is difficult to assess whether sufficient areas of suitably quality lands are being converted to protect critical ecosystems.

By the end of 2004 there were 661 parks, covering almost 6 million ha or 7.4% of the area of NSW. According to the OEH web site on 30 /5/2012 "…over seven million hectares of NSW are managed and protected for conservation by NPWS. This network of over 860 reserves covers more than 8.8 per cent of the State[4]. Sometimes land is transferred to the NPWS from other government agencies. At other times, it is purchased from private landholders[5]. However, it is pointed out that " ***the job is still unfinished***. Many of the State's ecosystems, especially those west of the Great Dividing Range, are poorly represented in the reserve network. For the conservation of these ecosystems, and

2 CSIRO 2008, Implications of climate change for the National Reserve System, report by CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems to the Australian Greenhouse Office, Commonwealth Scientific, Industrial and Research Organisation, Canberra

3 http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2011/index.html

4 (http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/acquiringland/index.htm

5 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/conservationprograms/ -page last updated 5/7/2012

to improve the management configuration of existing reserves, we need to acquire more land for the reserve system."

- ***The NSW government has developed a plan for the continuing conversion of land to protected status***

Acknowledging that the area protected is inadequate the NSW Government has committed "…to building a fully comprehensive, adequate and representative public reserve system and increasing the community's opportunities to experience nature-based recreation in a more diverse range of environments across the State…." based on a National Parks Establishment Plan[6]. This plan "….identifies priorities for building the NPWS terrestrial reserve system in each biogeographic region of NSW over 10 years. It recognises that this will be part of a longer term mission that may take up to 50 years to achieve".[7]

- ***Further conversion of land to conservation status is needed to protect the growing list of threatened species***

Despite the growing number of threatened species and Australia's terrestrial protected-area system (89million ha, 11.6% of the continent), Watson *et al* (2010)[8] found that 166 (12.6%) threatened species occurred entirely outside protected areas and that target levels of protection were met for only 259 (19.6%) species. Critically endangered species were among those with the least protection; 12 (21.1%) species occurred entirely outside protected areas. Taylor *et al* (2011)[9] showed that NSW was the worst of all Australian jurisdictions[10] in terms of halting the decline of populations of threatened species.

- ***Further conversion of land to conservation status is needed to create connectivity***

In common with other Australian jurisdictions, NSW has "…appropriate goals in high-level plans, these are often not matched with implementation plans or levels of resourcing that are capable of achieving the goals."[11]

Some protected areas have become isolated islands in the landscape, reducing their capacity to maintain biodiversity conservation and resilience responding to future threats, eg. climate change. The Draft National Wildlife Corridors Plan[12] builds on the Great Eastern Ranges (GER) Initiative[13] and aims to build connections between protected areas and other private and public lands in the surrounding landscape.

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6 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/protectedareas/0852npestplan.pdf

7 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectedareas/npestabplan.htm-updated 2/4/2012

8 Watson et al. (2010)The Capacity of Australia's Protected-Area System

to Represent Threatened Species, Conservation Biology

9 Taylor et la. (2011) What works for threatened species recovery? An empirical evaluation for AustraliaBiodivers Conserv (2011) 20:767–777

10 Except ACT which wasn't included in the study

11 http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2011/report/biodiversity/key-findings.html#key-findings

12 http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-corridors/publications/pubs/draft-wildlife-corridors-plan.pdf

13 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/ger/

The Office Of Environment and Heritage, NSW "…supports the unique catalysing, connecting and coordinating role of enterprises such as the GER…" and aspects of the draft plan but recommends consideration of "…purchase and establishment of new protected areas within wildlife corridor zones …"[14] . The NSW Government has committed $40 million "..to develop a network of 'green corridors' across the state which includes provision for strategic reserve acquisitions, …".[7]

4. Assessment of potential impacts of conversion

a. POTENTIAL OPERATIONAL IMPACTS OF CONVERSION

- **Operational impact is an estimate of exposure to adverse risk**

The term 'Operational impact' can be defined as the "Effect of an accident or disaster on a firm's operations which (while not quantifiable in financial terms) may be among the most severe in determining the firm's survival and continuity".[15]

- **Conversion of land to National Parks reduces adverse risk**

If the local region is considered to be "the firm's operation" then conversion of land to national parks provides a significant buffer against the effect of adverse conditions, such as pollution, water scarcity and adverse weather events. The recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report[16] warns that "…Continued degradation and erosion of natural environmental capital is expected to 2050, with the risk of irreversible changes that could endanger two centuries of rising living standards."[17]

b. POTENTIAL ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CONVERSION

- **Conversion of land to National Parks contributes to increase business investment and employment in rural and regional NSW**

Regional and local economies benefit from the government expenditure on reserve management through capital works and the provision of jobs for local people, as well as the expenditure by visitors to reserves.[18] Economic case studies of National Parks show that they contribute positively to local and regional areas. For example, the Grampians National Park contributed $174 million to its local economy and $398 million to the Victorian state economy in 1994. Similarly in far west New South Wales, Sturt, Kinchega and Mutawintji National Parks combined, contribute $9.6 million to the far west region economy per year[19].

- **National Parks provide opportunities to develop new biochemical products of economic and social value**

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14 Draft national wildlife corridors plan, Submission by the office of environment and heritage NSW

15 http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/operational-impact.html

16 OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050: The Consequences of Inaction http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/6/1/49846090.pdf

17 http://www.smh.com.au/national/death-stalks-us-in-the-air-says-oecd-in-its-outlook-20120316-1vaya.html#ixzz21VzsHNvU

18 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/protectedareas/0852npestplan.pdf

19 New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Contribution of Sturt National Park, Kinchega National Park and Mutawintji National Park to Regional Economic Development, 2001

National parks preserve the genetic diversity of the species they protect.[10] Some species, including those not yet discovered, may yield valuable substance which could be exploited in the future. If not protected in parks and extinction results, this opportunity is lost.

- **National parks have economic value calculated in diverse ways**

The economic value of National parks can derive from direct use, eg. recreation, medicine, education, ecosystem services, eg. nutrient cycling, air pollution reduction, maintenance of biodiversity, preserved genetics and ecosystems or indirect use, eg. bequest value (habitats, prevention of irreversible change) and existence value (habitats, species, genetics, ecosystems) [20]

- **National parks provide ecosystem services**

Public conservation areas provide a range of amenities for local communities and support their economic and social wellbeing. Among other things, these benefits can include rural and regional employment opportunities in natural resource management and tourism, as well as the protection and enhancement of ecosystem services such as water supplies that benefit agricultural productivity[21].

- **Public conservation reserves protect water catchment quality**

Additional cost may be incurred by regional councils to process water to potable standard if this ecosystem service provided by conserved landscapes is not available.

c. ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL SOCIAL IMPACTS

- **Public conservation reserves protect historic heritage buildings and sites as a lasting legacy**

Public reserves connect people from diverse cultures with their heritage and provide a historical legacy for children. "The primary purpose of the NSW park system is to provide security in perpetuity for the state's natural and cultural heritage. Specialist management of the park system by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) ensures a lasting legacy for the people of New South Wales. The conservation of natural and cultural heritage is important for its intrinsic value and for the satisfaction that communities gain from the knowledge that these values are adequately protected and managed for present and future generations."[22]

- **Public conservation reserves protect aboriginal cultural heritage sites and artefacts**

Aboriginal culture is recognized and maintained by providing or restoring access to places and resources for cultural and spiritual practices.

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20 http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/abstract/337.pdf

21 http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-corridors/publications/pubs/draft-wildlife-corridors-plan.pdf

22 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sop04/sop04ch2.htm

- **Public conservation reserves protect geological heritage**

Geological and geomorphological formations, including karsts reflect major geomorphic events and processes. These represent important values, closely linked to the soils and landscapes found within New South Wales.[22]

- **Public conservation reserves protect resources for scientific study and education**

Research is enables the development and implementation of effective environmental, cultural and natural resource policies, and informs public education programs. Geological research includes the scientific study of karsts to better understand the complex interactions between surface and below-ground environments.

- **Public conservation reserves provide public access to diverse landscapes.**

The community has access to most areas of protected lands, often with the provision of facilities for outdoor recreation.
As most private land is not normally accessible to the general community, the purchase of private lands by DECC for inclusion in its reserve system in all regions of the state increases the public's ability to access and enjoy many more areas of NSW[23].

- **Public conservation reserves protect vegetation leading to cleaner air and progress on reducing greenhouse gases.**

The 2011 Australian State of the Environment report recently concluded that ambient air quality in the nation's major urban centres was generally good. But it also concluded that the health impacts of air quality was still of concern, with one source quoted finding it accounted for 1 per cent of deaths and illness in Australia, with about 3000 deaths in 2003 attributable to air quality.

- **Nature in public conservation reserves enhances health and well-being**

Recreational opportunities can improve community wellbeing and contribute to meeting the State Plan Priority E8 target of an increase in visits to parks and reserves.
Surveys have shown that nature is important to people, and the numbers of people seeking nature-based recreation are increasing[24]. Parks and other natural environments are a fundamental health resource, particularly in terms of disease prevention. There is ample evidence documenting the positive effects of nature on blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life and stress reduction. An extensive literature review[25], found well over two hundred respected journal articles reporting research that indicated the human health benefits of contact with nature. The Australian National Health Priority Areas of 'mental health' and 'cardiovascular disease' recognize the value of exposure to nature. [26]
"These funds do just that, and will help fund more landholders to improve and conserve the environment on their own land."[27]

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23 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/protectedareas/0852npestplan.pdf

24 http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/313821/HPHP-deakin-literature-review.pdf

25 http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/313821/HPHP-deakin-literature-review.pdf

26 http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/strategy/Healthevidence.pdf,

27 Thursday 12 April 2012 RED TAPE REMOVED FROM PERPETUAL LEASE CONVERSIONS, Media release, The Hon Andrew Stoner MP Deputy Premier of NSW Minister for Trade and Investment Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services

d. ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

- **Biodiversity is conserved in national park and nature reserves**

The State of the Environment report (2011) states as a key finding that "Although we can reliably establish recent trends in distribution or abundance for only a small proportion of species, data on these suggest that population size, geographic range and genetic diversity are decreasing in a wide range of species across all groups of plants, animals and other forms of life" and that, "Most pressures on biodiversity that arise directly or indirectly from human activities appear to still be strong". [28]
A central role of public conservation reserves is to conserve this biodiversity.
Biodiversity is valued because of the ecosystems it sustains, the economic worth of its products, its intrinsic and aesthetic values, and the contribution it makes to our cultural and spiritual lives.

- **National park and nature reserves conserve threatened species**

By protecting 17.8% of Australia, all threatened species could reach target levels of representation, assuming all current protected areas are retained (Watson et al 2010).

- **National park and nature reserves conserve native vegetation**

Protecting high-quality native vegetation is crucial; once it is gone it can not be replaced. High-quality native vegetation contains all the species typical to a particular area with few, if any, weeds, and little, if any, human disturbance. Its protection and enhancement is vital for biodiversity, as it provides habitat for fauna and underpins the functioning of a healthy ecosystem (ANZECC 2000).

5. Impacts upon neighbours of public land and upon local government

- **National parks and other public conservation reserves improve the amenity of adjoining lands**

The scenic value of towns and regions is enhanced by proximity to nature reserves. These places also provide increased recreational opportunities for the locals.

- **The local community has the opportunity to be involved in the management of National parks**

The community through regional advisory committees and catchment management authorities can have a say in the management planning or local reserves. National parks in particular, provide a focus and reference point for building and strengthening conservation partnerships between government and the community.

- **Proximity to a national park benefits rural communities through tourism**

National parks and other protected areas also provide rural and regional economic benefits stemming from the jobs created both by management agency expenditure and by the spending of visitors who come to the parks[29]. "Nature tourism is a key driver of

[28] http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2011/report/biodiversity/key-findings.html#key-findings
[29] http://adl.brs.gov.au/data/warehouse/pe_abarebrs99000679/PC11974.pdf

economic activity and sustainable employment particularly in regional New South Wales" [30]. This contribution can be particularly important given that many communities in rural Australia have suffered declines in traditional resource-based industries like agriculture and forestry.[31] Many small towns and rural regions located near national parks, sites of historical interest, and scenic areas have seen an increase in business associated with tourism.[32] As example, in the Wimmera district of Victoria, the near-by reserves of the Grampians and Little Desert National Parks are significant tourism assets. The region attracts 1.2 million visitors a year, who contribute $220 million to the economy.[33] In Bermagui, NSW "..Tourism remains an important part of the local economy with the area's beaches, national parks and fishing spots attracting a regular influx of visitors". [34] Similarly a study of National parks in Queensland demonstrated the economic benefit to regions adjoining national parks.[35]

National Parks in New South Wales and Victoria receive respectively 22 million (Department of Environment and Conservation, State of the Parks, 2004) and 25 million visits (Parks Victoria, Visitation Statistics, 2004) annually, and so constitute an important part of tourist activities.

6. Fire, weed and pest management in public conservation areas

- **Fire management is a key priority in National parks**

Understanding the ecological effects of fire is a major priority in NSW National parks[36] and the NPWS is responsible for managing fire on all lands it controls. Most of the NSW parks have a fire management program in place that protects natural and cultural values.

- **Weed and pest management are important aspects of NSW national park management**

NPWS has feral animal control programs. These established programmes are not compatible with recreational hunting as it interferes with the programmes, creates additional work and responsibilities for park rangers and decreases the number of other park users such as hikers and campers.[37]

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[30] Draft Executive Summary – 29 October 2008 May 2008 Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks in New South Wales was established by the New South Wales Government

31 Australian Farm Surveys Report: Financial Performance of Australian Farms, (2000) Country Australia: Influences on Population and Employment, Garnaut, Jayne; Lindsay, Ray; Connell, Peter; Curran, Bill

32 Rural Businesses - percentage, Characteristics of rural businesses http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/small/Qu-Sm/Rural-Businesses.html#ixzz21FuLG1rS; New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service [NSW NPWS] (1999). The Contribution of National Parks to Sustainable Rural and Regional Development, Hurstville, NSW.

New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service [NSW NPWS] (2001). The Contribution of Sturt National Park, Kinchega National Park and Mutawintji National Park to Regional Economic Development

33 http://www.hrcc.vic.gov.au/council/44-general-council-information/83-about-horsham-rural-city-council

34 NSW Bermagui "http://about.nsw.gov.au/view/suburb/Bermagui/

35 http://www.crctourism.com.au/wms/upload/resources/bookshop/Lindberg41009_RuralEconsQldNP.pdf

36 http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/fire/

37 Neil Perry The Conversation 4 June 2012

- **Weed and pest management can be compromised by properties adjacent to NSW national park**

Adjacent lands can be a source of pests, weeds and pollutants, can reduce the water flowing into wetlands and occasionally be the source of fires escaping into park[38].

- **Pest management is compromised by inadequate resoucing**

The State of the Parks report 2004[39] notes that "Inadequate resources and poor direction of resources (for example, where resources target pests that are unlikely to have significant impacts)" represent a challenge for the NPWS in implementing a more effective pest and weed management programme.

7. The management of public land based on the principle of "ecologically sustainable use"

- **Sustainable use ensures protection of biodiversity for future generations**

'Sustainable use' as defined in the *Convention On Biological Diversity* (1992)[40] " means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations."

- **The NSW government has endorsed the principles of sustainable development**

The National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) was endorsed at the Council of Australian Governments meeting in Perth in December 1992 by all Heads of Government. A core objective is to 'protect biological diversity and maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems'. The strategy stresses the need to consider in an integrated way the long-term economic, social and environmental implications of our decisions and actions for Australia.
This strategy highlights the specific need to continue research to develop and implement national integrated policies for biodiversity, including research into natural ecosystems and the development of indicators of ecological sustainability. National parks are the appropriate places to practice and research ESD.

- **"Sustainable use" must not be used as a euphemism for exploitation**

It has been noted that the use of the phrase "sustainable use" in the inquiry's terms of reference is "….a nebulous concept which could reasonably refer, amongst other meanings, to financial sustainability. A better phrase would surely be "ecologically sustainable management" which is used by the NPWS and even Forests NSW."[41]

- **National parks can be managed to be "Ecologically sustainable"**

Human use is not always consistent with ecological goals because grazing, thinning, firewood collection, mining and burning interfere with complex ecosystems, causing damage which cannot always be reversed. Management of parks can allow for human

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[38] http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sop04/sop04ch5.htm
[39] http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sop04/sop04ch5.htm
40 http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/1993/32.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=sustainable%20use

[41] Neil Perry The Conversation 4 June 2012

use, but in an ecologically sustainable way, ensuring biodiversity and other park values are protected.