

**Submission
No 107**

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

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5
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GPSC's

SUBMISSION TO

Management of public land in New South Wales Inquiry

My Background

I did own a 66 ha property in the Bega Valley one property removed from a National Park. I ran cattle and did some farm forestry on the land.

Now I am a beekeeper based at Narrandera NSW. The bee sites I use are a mixture of leased State Forest and National Parks sites and private property sites.

Managed Honey Bees On Public Lands

Beekeepers lease a bee site (normally 1.5km square) from the Public Land Managers. The only bee sites that are in National Parks (NP) areas are sites where the site was leased by a beekeeper when the State Forest became a National Park. The bee site was kept by the beekeeper and management was transferred over to the National Park and Wildlife service (NPWS).

Bee sites that were vacant in the State Forest when it became a National Park were lost to beekeepers due to NPWS denying managed bees access to National Parks (other than sites transferred across).

Chemical Effects on Honey Bees

Honey bees are negatively impacted when exposed to chemicals whether they be heavy metals, herbicides, insecticides or fungicides and at very low levels. Research has shown that levels as low as 3-4 parts per billion have a negative effect on honey bees.

Public Land Management Concerns from a Beekeepers Perspective

Public Land Access

Our members have experienced difficulty accessing leased bee sites in State Forests, National Parks, Travelling Stock Reserves and Crown Land. Access problems relate to issues such as:

Locked gates,

Locks on gates changed,

The building of large spoon drains that trucks cannot negotiate,

Permanent barricades across tracks/roads, and

Bridges and roads not maintained for truck access.

In emergencies and bush fire these maintained tracks can be used by emergency and fire vehicles as well as act as a potential fire break.

Overgrown Bee Sites in National Parks

Over time bee sites can become overgrown due to natural regeneration. Beekeepers are not allowed to clear bee sites in National Parks. This becomes a safety problem for the beekeeper trying to place bees down on site and work the bees. A clear bee site has less risk of a fire from a bee smoker.

In times of bushfires these bee sites would be useful for:

Helicopter landing pads,

Turn around points for vehicles,

A vehicle bypass area on narrow tracks,

Rest areas for fire crews, and

Water tanker replenishment areas.

Over Logging in State Forests

State Forests logging coups are heavily harvested to less than 5% canopy cover. The biggest and best formed trees are harvested. Left are the poorly formed and/or stunted trees (that have the lowest timber yield) to become the gene pool for regeneration. For bees the biggest trees are the most beneficial.

After harvesting operations the bee site (which is often used as a log dump) is left in a mess. This includes ripped up bee sites and/or harvesting debris left on the site.

Changing the Forest Tree Species Mix

In mixed forests current logging practices combined with the timing of hazard reduction burns are changing the tree species mix/ratio in State Forests. If there is an autumn hazard reduction mix this year then science has shown that it should be a spring hazard reduction next burn. This ensures a mix of species germinating and surviving to grow.

Currently the focus is on autumn hazard reduction burns. Continual autumn burns will change the forest species mix.

Different forest species flower at different times of the year and it can also be during different years. Many marsupials, butterflies, moths and birds rely on this staggered flowering for their survival.

Before approval was given to the Eden woodchip mill in the 70's a survey of the forest species/mix was undertaken. Another survey was supposed to have been taken 25 or 30 years later to see if logging was impacting the species mix. To date forest users have not seen the results of this later survey.

Poor Timing for Harvesting

Background – Most Eucalypts that are beneficial for beekeepers only flower approximately every 3- 4 years. It can be much longer than this between each species flowering. These trees can carry their buds anywhere from three – 24 months depending on the species. Beekeepers pay their bee site lease monies every year and only use the site when the trees are flowering.

The Problem – it is a common occurrence for timber harvesting to take place as a species of tree is about to or is flowering. The beekeeper is then requested to move his bees off the site. The beekeeper has paid his money every year waiting for the species to flower then is told you cannot harvest the pollen and nectar.

It is as if the State Forests land managers do not know what is going on in the forests they manage. Given it should be 20 years (but seems to be less than 10 years)

between harvesting on sites there should be more flexibility on harvesting times. Beekeepers, seed collectors and timber harvesters are all valid users of the forest.

Beekeepers are well aware of the requirement to harvest State Forests so that an economic return can be obtained for State Forests. We are not saying do not harvest – just conduct the harvesting at a suitable time to have minimal impact on beekeepers and the fauna that rely on the flowering.

Many marsupials and birds also go to this flowering to gather nectar and pollen. These birds and animals require access to pollen as it is very high in protein and the nectar is used for energy.

Poor Timing on Hazard Reduction Burning

When trees are budded a hazard reduction burn that is not a cool burn will most times cause the tree to drop its buds. It is as if the land managers do not know what is happening in the forest. Given that burns are done in a mosaic pattern there should be flexibility to have the burn after flowering or conduct the burn the following year.

Again many marsupials and birds also go to this flowering (if the buds did not drop) to gather the nectar and pollen.

In Victoria some public land managers release a draft hazard reduction timetable to beekeepers for comment. Sometimes the beekeepers request the burning be brought forward or delayed due to trees budded and/or flowering.

Beekeepers are well aware of the benefits and the need for hazard reduction burning in public lands. We are not saying do not burn – just conduct the burn at a suitable time to have minimal impact on the flowering of trees.

Lost Bee Sites

Many Australian agricultural systems are using the new neurotoxin systemic pesticides. These neurotoxins affect the brain. They are a pesticide that remains in the soil and can be used by the next crop or leached out into any surface water. Bees working these crops are exposed to these neurotoxins. Research in both France and the USA has proven that at a very low level exposure to these chemicals (3-4 parts per billion) is detrimental to the bee and ultimately the hive.

It is important for beekeepers to build their beehives up again after pollinating or exposure to these crops. It is normal during most pollination for beehives to run down (gradually lose bees). The best and quickest way to build the beehive up so that it is suitable for pollinating again is to move the bee hives. Beehives need to be moved to sites where there is quality nectar and pollen with minimal exposure to chemicals.

State Forests and National Parks are such places. The bee sites lost from National Parks in the past are now negatively impacting on the ability of the beekeeper to provide quality hives for pollination. This ultimately can result in less food security for Australia. There were many bee sites lost when the Kosciuszko National Park was declared and or expanded.

Currently NPWS management are very much against allowing managed honey bees in the National Parks.

Feral Animal/Insect Management

There is insufficient feral pig control in National Parks and State Forests. Feral pigs destroy beehives to get the honey. Better feral animal control will reduce this event.

To our knowledge european wasps are not controlled in either National Parks or State Forests. European wasps kill honey bees to steal the pollen and honey from the hive. European wasps kill all insects in an increasing circle centred on their nest. This has the potential to reduce insect diversity in European wasp areas.

One large European wasp nest in New Zealand had no insects – including ants within 300 m of the wasp nest.

General Concerns over Current Public Land Management

Rates

Public land managers should pay land rates (even if at a reduced rate). We are told that National Parks increase tourism in an area. Tourists in regional Australia all drive to National Parks which increases wear and tear on local government roads. Our local government is expected to maintain roads to/or through National Parks with no monies provided to local government by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Likewise local governments are expected to maintain roads and bridges around State Forests with no monies from State Forests (I am aware of one road in the Bega Valley Shire that State Forest maintain). Logging trucks rapidly increase road deterioration which has to be repaired by Local Government. Tumut and Bega Valley shire are two shires where this logging has a great negative impact on road quality.

Farm Forestry is at an unfair disadvantage to State Forest as farm foresters have to pay land rates on the land they use.

Feral Animal Control

Public land managers should have to control feral animals (as responsible land managers) just like all other land owners. Feral animals include cats, foxes, rabbits, goats and wild dogs. As the largest land owner in some areas the Public Land Manager should be the one to co-ordinate the wild dog baiting as well as fox baiting. This rarely happens. The science has shown that a coordinated baiting program over large areas has a far greater impact than baiting many small areas.

Farm Forestry is at an unfair disadvantage to State Forest as farm foresters have to control feral animals on the land they use.

Fire Management

There is very limited hazard reduction burning being conducted in National Parks and State Forests in the Murray Darling Basin. After the floods of December 2010 and March 2012 hazard reduction burns are more important than ever.

There has been a huge number of river red gum seeds germinate after the floods. At the current density of these young trees they will only grow approx 4.5 m tall and be very thin as they crowd each other out. Historically forest wild fires would thin these young trees by killing a large percentage of them and thus allow the surviving trees to grow into large trees. It is the large trees that develop holes and hollows for marsupials and nesting birds. These large trees also have the bark suitable for a lot of beneficial insects thus helping to maintain the biodiversity of our forests.

Under State Forest management, harvesting operations with an aim to reducing the tree density was carried out. This allowed the remaining trees to grow to their potential. A lot of State Forest area has now become National Parks in the Murray Darling basin.

Under current NPWS land management practices wild fires are quickly extinguished and thus the heat from these fires will kill minimal young trees. The current hazard reduction practice is to have low intensity burns. Low intensity burns do not kill trees over approx 3 m tall. I do agree with the reasoning behind low intensity burns however it is extremely important to have hazard reduction burns within two years of a flooding event (flooding causes the most river red gum seed germination). Even a low intensity burn will kill a good percentage of these very young trees.

Without low intensity burns thinning the small river red gum trees, density on the floodplains becomes very high. Once the trees are over 3 m tall all these trees act similar to a dam wall during the next flood event. These trees slow the water down which in turns raises the water level upstream from the trees just like any other obstruction to the water flow. The trees will also keep the water height near its peak for a longer period of time as the water slowly travels through these high density trees on the flood plain.

Poor public land fire management will negatively impact on local government infrastructure and individual infrastructure as water heights are raised by the high density trees. This increased water height will affect more local government roads and private properties.

Road and Bridge Maintenance

Public land managers should budget for road maintenance throughout the year, in particular the National Parks in the Murray Darling Basin. After heavy rain gravel entry roads need maintenance even if the road was graded just before the heavy rain.

I would suggest that NPWS have a website which clearly shows which access roads have been affected by rain and an approximate time that vehicles can access the National Park by those access roads. This website needs to be advertised.

Noxious Weed Management

Public land managers should be maintaining the land they manage the same as every other land holder. State Forest pine plantations in the Tumut region have ten blackberry plants for every pine tree. It normally follows that there are many rabbits and foxes as they use the blackberries as a harbor. Science has proven that both rabbits and foxes have a negative impact on our native fauna.

Many public land managers do not have a budgeted noxious weed management plan. Noxious weed control should be coordinated with the neighbouring properties. This rarely happens.

Floodwater often brings new noxious weeds onto the floodplain. It is a lot cheaper for all landholders to eradicate the new noxious weeds before they become well established. This requires vigilance by ALL land managers on the floodplains after a flooding event.

Farm Forestry is at an unfair disadvantage to State Forests as farm foresters have to control noxious weeds on the land they use.

Fencing

Currently if I have a boundary fence with a National Park I am responsible for removing trees that fall over the fence from the National Park. I am also responsible for repairing fences due to fallen timber or damage caused by native animals such as kangaroos. In some areas I know that wombats wreck havoc on fences as well.

This is a shared fence line. I am happy to repair fences damaged by my livestock or trees growing on my property. It is a time and financial impost on me to make me responsible for damage caused by National Park flora and fauna.

The ploughing of a firebreak on the National Park side of the fence line will help reduce damage to fences caused by falling limbs.

Access to Foreshores & Beachfronts

All too often it is impossible to access estuary foreshores or some coastal beaches due to the public access having being bought or closed by a developer. Any coastal development should include a public access pathway down to the waters edge.

Closing of Public Lands for Extended Lengths of Time for Commercial Ventures

This primarily applies in Sydney. Areas of the Domain closed off over summer due to stages and scaffolding being left up for shows 14 days apart or more. This also applies to areas near Mrs Macquarie's chair.

Conclusion

Beekeeping is a legitimate user of public lands as are timber harvesters and seed collectors. Beekeepers would like our needs to be considered when making decisions on timber harvesting and hazard reduction burning timetables.

Improved communications by public land managers with all public land users and bordering properties would very much be appreciated.

Public land is there for everyone to enjoy, public access and minimal restrictions on access for the public is paramount.

*I am prepared to present before
the Board if required.*

Yours Faithfully //