

Submission  
No 41

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
**Date received:** 22/07/2012

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Partially Confidential

\*Give NPWS and other land management agencies more money for the control of weeds, pest animals and fire management.

Conservation reserves have many public benefits and are not a "waste of timber or mining resources"

\*State government to fund local government on a \$/ha basis for crown land in the local government area.

\*State government funding mentioned above is to come via the Minister for Local Government, not from land management agency budgets.

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

### **Submission to the Inquiry into the Management of Public Land**

I wish to make the following submission to the Inquiry into the Management of Public Land.

While the Terms of Reference concentrate on the conversion of land to national park estate, I am concerned that the Inquiry focuses on economic issues of public land management, without considering the beneficial natural, cultural and social aspects of creating conservation reserves.

Indeed, based on the origins of this Inquiry, the Inquiry appears to me be a vehicle for an attack on the concept of national parks, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and protection of our disappearing native flora and fauna in NSW generally. No doubt, those political forces which established the Inquiry and which are opposed to conservation, will attempt to selectively quote from the findings of the Inquiry to publically denigrate conservation efforts in NSW in an attempt to create a political climate which would allow the economic and recreational exploitation of out state's conservation reserves.

#### **Inquiry Term of Reference 1**

Much has recently been made (not surprisingly, very soon after this Inquiry was announced) of the loss of rateable land impacting on local government budgets when private land enters the national park estate. There have been recent calls in "The Land" newspaper for the use of cleared land in Toorale National Park for grazing and cropping. There has also been much moaning and gnashing of teeth about the decline of the local community due to the creation of conservation reserves.

In truth, the loss of workers and decline of local communities is nothing new. Mechanisation and economic globalisation has been the cause of much more significant job losses and community decline in regional NSW than the dedication of all conservation reserves put together.

I would support compensation to local councils where they can prove a significant loss of income from lost rates. However, I doubt that this will be possible as most large properties added to the national park estate such as

Toorale and Yanga would, via their rates, contribute less than 1% or 2% to a local government area's funds.

For many years now (decades), governments have recognised the need to provide industry restructure assistance to companies and individuals who lose their livelihood when new conservation reserves are created. This has occurred in the north east forests, south east forests, Brigalow Belt and River Red Gum decisions. A notable exception has been the Cypress forest decision in central NSW, where many state forests were converted to conservation reserves without any industry restructure assistance.

Furthermore, no additional funds or staff resources were made available to the NPWS for their management. This amounts to a cut across the entire NPWS budget as money and staff resources must be diverted from the management of other reserves in order to try and manage the Cypress reserves. This is a deplorable situation and the government should increase the NPWS budget and staffing to adequately manage those reserves.

Where crown land or state forests are converted to National park estate, there is of course no impact on Council budgets, as government departments do not pay rates.

The state government seriously under funds many rural local government areas. For example, the needs of basic services such as roads cannot be adequately met over large geographic areas which relies in large part on a very small number of rate payers. This model of funding is inappropriate for many local government areas in western NSW and a better way of funding services in these areas is needed. One option would be to make ALL crown land subject to Council rates. This would provide a per hectare income to all local governments and would have the benefit of changing the perception that crown land is a drain on local government budgets.

However in suggesting this, I strongly believe that paying rates on crown land **should not be** part of the individual government department budgets. All state agencies such as NPWS, State Forests and the Lands Department are currently underfunded and to reduce their operating budgets by the amount needed to pay rates will seriously impact on their ability to manage the land under their care resulting in poorer management of fire, pests and weeds. A model is required that compensates local government for any lost rate base from the central state coffers. This could be achieved through an increase in annual funds to each local government area from the state Treasury based on a set \$ amount per ha of crown land in the local government area.

The longstanding aim of successive governments has been the establishment of a Comprehensive and Representative (CAR) reserve system. Currently, national park estate occupies some 8% of NSW. The internationally recognised target to ensure the ongoing survival of ecosystems is to place 15% of land into conservation reserves. NSW is only half way to achieving an adequate reserve system. Western NSW ecosystems have long been under represented in the conservation reserve system. The recent additions of the

River Red Gum reserves, Yanga NP and Toorale NP to the national parks estate has been made to help redress this shortfall.

NPWS has shown it is adaptable in its management of the parks under its care. For example, through the use of sheep grazing to protect plains wanderer habitat at Oolambeyan NP and the ecological thinning trials commencing in Murray Valley NP. This ecological thinning program is necessary because the park was previously managed for timber rather than ecological values and the natural ecological processes have been interrupted. While many may consider the loss of economic benefit from the reservation of the river red gum reserves to be regrettable, it should also be noted that conserving and improving the ecological condition of these areas will have economic and community benefits for the local region and for NSW in general.

## **Inquiry Term of Reference 2**

The NSW NPWS has good record on the management of fire, pests and weeds, indeed, it is the only land management agency that takes all these matters seriously.

State Forests, Crown Lands Department, LHPA (Travelling Stock Reserves & routes) have all been negligent in the management of these issues on the lands under their control to a lesser or greater extent. This is partly due to the lack of financial resources, but also in part due to narrow land management objectives as well as a lack of organisational interest and commitment.

To pretend that private landholders are the paragons of good management when it comes to fire, pests and weeds is to completely and deliberately dismiss reality. While there are many good farmers and landholders who manage their land very well (I have met quite a few), there are many more who do not have the understanding, the inclination or the financial resources to properly manage fire, pest animals and weeds on their properties. Weeds, and feral animals occur on all land tenures and management of these pests requires the dedication and continued attention of all land managers.

When it comes to fire management and hazard reduction burning, NPWS and State Forests have led the way when compared to private land holders. A quick look at the annual ha's burnt in hazard reduction burns on all land tenures containing bushland shows that private property landholders fall well behind the efforts of the government agencies. The argument put forward by some private landholders that grazing is an effective fire management strategy has been disproved by scientific research and practical experience during bushfires. Grazing has proven time and again to have virtually no impact on the rate of spread and controllability of bushfires.

Despite their high conservation values, many areas of both public and private land, which come under the management of NPWS are inherited with considerable existing pest and weed issues because of ineffective management by the previous land managers. If you were to listen to the

farming lobby groups and new park neighbours, you would believe that all feral animals and weeds spontaneously come into existence as soon as the new park is reserved in the government gazette. The reality of course is that these problems have existed for many years under the stewardship of the previous land manager, be they public or private. The NPWS is then in the position of having to repair the environmental degradation caused by weeds, feral animals and inappropriate fire regimes which was the legacy of previous land managers and is subjected to bad publicity and political harassment for its troubles.

I am the first to agree that NPWS and other land management agencies should do more, however they are limited by the level of funds and resources given to them by government. The NPWS budget and staffing levels should be vastly increased to improve the management of our parks. Despite already doing a terrific job, I'm sure all staff within NPWS would love to have the extra resources to improve the ecological condition of the parks and improve protection to neighbours from fire, pest and weed problems.

Instead, we currently have a government which is undertaking deep cuts to public sector staff and budget levels which will only make it harder for all government agencies to effectively manage fire, weeds and pest animals. One would think that part of the natural constituency of the current government (farmers and graziers) would be very upset that government resources in these areas are being drastically reduced. Furthermore, the current government has a policy of opening up parks to more recreation and tourism opportunities. Add to this calls from the Shooters and Fishers Party to ban all pest animal poisoning so that shooting becomes the only method of controlling animals and you can see a worrying trend to further reduce the NPWS's capacity to manage fires, weeds and pest animals.

### **Inquiry Term of Reference 3**

This Term of Reference into "sustainable use" appears to me to be a thinly veiled disguise to roll back environmental protection of national park estate for the economic gain of a few. You don't need to be Einstein to see that conservatives such as the Shooters and Fishers Party and the National Party would like to see logging, mining, grazing, cropping, four wheel driving, horse riding, motorbike riding, etc on all land tenures including wilderness areas.

Opening up the national park estate to mining and logging will not enhance protection of conservation reserves as suggested by the Shooters and Fishers Party. Rather, it will directly and adversely compromise the conservation values that the parks were established to protect.

How can the felling of trees that are the homes to many native species be compatible with conservation? How can clearing the vegetation, soil and land to allow the mining of minerals be compatible with conservation of native flora and fauna? Obviously, these types of activities are incompatible and should be recognised as such.

## Conclusion

In conclusion to my submission, I believe the Inquiry should make the following recommendations;

- 1) The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and other land management agencies should have their budgets and staffing levels significantly increased and maintained to enable them to more effectively manage and control fire, weeds and pest animal species.
- 2) A system should be introduced to annually adequately fund local government areas from the state Treasury based on a set \$ amount per ha. This would have the benefit of changing the perception that crown land is a drain on local government budgets.
- 3) Any such funding identified in 2 above, should not come from the budgets of the land management agencies such as NPWS, State Forests, Lands Department, etc, but rather should be administered through the Minister responsible for local government.

Yours faithfully

22 July 2012

## References

Should "Toorale" be returned to grazing ?

<http://theland.farmonline.com.au/news/state/property/general/should-toorale-be-returned-to-grazing/2612574.aspx>

Shooters and fishers Party - Position Statement and Action Plan on: Natural Resources

<http://www.shootersandfishers.org.au/files/3/3386103552/position-statement--natural-resources-version-3rd-february-2011-.pdf>