

**Submission
No 215**

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

Name: Mr Lindsay Auston

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The Government policies of the management of State Forest areas must be altered to value not only the timber income but to put a value on recreational facilities for all people. Please engage with these users and allow them the recreational areas they desire and need for a healthy life, within a controlled framework.

Submission regarding the Management of public land in NSW
General purpose Standing Committee No.5
To the Hon Robert Brown MLC

Dear Sir,

Over the past 46 years I have been fortunate to live in the Morisset area, adjacent to the Watagan and Olney forest areas. I have been a visitor and user of the forest areas from age 10 and have witnessed many changes in the area, some improvements and some very poor decisions. My perspective is very widely spread, over the past 28 years after getting a car licence I have been a bushwalker, camper, horse rider, and now, in the past 2 years find myself as a motorcycle rider. Over these past years I have witnessed a loss of public amenities in the forest area, for example, where once there was "Forest Headquarters" a place where you could call in and speak to Forestry staff, enquire about road conditions, report illegal activities etc., there is now only a barren patch of earth and you could visit "Heaton's Lookout" with visitors, and make use of the supplied firewood and Brick BBQ's, there are the collapsing remnants of the BBQ and no timber.

The road network was expansive, allowing the recreation motorcycle riders and 4wd drive enthusiasts to experience the bush and not see another vehicle in their afternoon. There was no need to enter sensitive areas; there was respect for the "Closed for logging" signs as there were plenty of options.

The handing over of State Forest or Crown Land to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the wrong reasons has resulted in a lack of access as NPWS seem to be unwilling or unable to install and maintain the infrastructure needed for access. The current policy seems to be, lock the gate and then eventually people don't bother trying to visit these areas.

This is not only a forest issue, I have observed local waterfront land in the Morisset hospital grounds passed back to NPWS, to either relieve the health department from the costs or as part of a political campaign to secure green votes, I am not sure what the reason was, I do know that that land itself, was partially developed by the Hospital staff social club which provided a user pay access to the site that included volunteer built picnic shelters, BBQ's and running tank water, this facility could be accessed by registered vehicle or boat, and was a popular water skiing and social function venue.

The land was semi cleared and was operating as the cattle grazing grounds for the Morisset Hospital; home to local kangaroos a, native parrots and lightly wooded by eucalypts. In this area both recreation users and the environment existed together, now the area is over grown with kikuyu grass, the shelters, tanks and BBQ's all within 15 m of the shore are in disrepair, and the water skiers can no longer visit as there is no safe clear place to access the land.

Whilst this may seem like a minor inconvenience, the fact is that now this area is not available to use for water sports, it has the effect of concentrating the people on the lake into a smaller area, and is known to be one of the factors that contributed to the fatality at Shingle Splitters point and several near misses.

Too many people in not enough recreational space, as more areas get closed off and more people are accessing recreational activities for their health and wellbeing means the risk of user group conflict increases as does the risk of accident.

Suggestions for consideration

The Government has a mandate to manage the resources of the State for the financial success of the people and I believe they can do this and still provide access to recreational facilities. Review the state forest area and the value of the NPWS area and consider returning some NPWS land back to forestry control for the use of sustainable logging, as some NPWS land has little or no significant ecological value. The NPWS should only take on high value land and manage it well. There are many varied user groups that have a vested interest in having access to these wonderful areas and due to their own personal, and sometimes different beliefs, they will not agree with other groups, the motorcycle riders do not like the 4WDers ripping up the roads in wet conditions, and I guess that bushwalkers don't like their serenity being interrupted by a motorcycle. The correct approach here is separation of the user groups and an understanding of each.

So what I suggest is to allow Forests NSW to run the forest for the harvesting and replanting of forest timbers. Forest NSW will also manage and control access to selected areas of the forest for all user groups, this can be done on a user pays scheme or via community based organisations.

For example, with respect to motorcycles, the minimum requirement is for a registered vehicle to be ridden by a licenced rider, additionally the riders seeking access onto single lane trails or designated areas are possibly required to complete and pay for a "recreational rider" endorsement, possibly motorcycle clubs are best placed to deliver the training and administer

the scheme? To obtain access requires the rider to complete and agree to terms and conditions of entry into these areas, these terms and conditions will cover environmental issues (weeds and wash-down), how to access information as to off road rules, etiquette and accessing road closure info. Forest NSW allows the construction and use of "off road single trails" in the appropriate growth phase of the forest, that causes no loss of trees, this area remains open until the logging is to commence. Once logging commences the area is effectively closed to all off road traffic. In addition to the temporary single lane tracks, there is a semi-permanent network of one-way tracks that join riding areas, complimented by the major road and logging trail / fire trail system.

For horse riders, I would suggest that a different approach could be taken, once again the area of use can be defined, and I would imagine that a more sparsely vegetated area may be suitable? The current horse riding fraternity would be best placed to offer their opinion in this matter.

Finally review the state forest area and the value of the NPWS area and consider returning some NPWS land back to Forestry control for the use of sustainable logging, as some NPWS land has little or no significant environmental value. The NPWS should only take on high value land and manage it well.

A suggested implementation plan would be:

- 1 Review current maps to identify past, current and future logging areas, NPWS area's and Permit holder areas.
- 2 Identify the time lines needed for each of the activities, i.e. how soon after harvest / replant. Can the different users access the compartments for different purposes. i.e. No horses and vehicles whilst trees are re-established to 2m height?
- 3 Establish the user group size and frequency of use, current and projected. In the case of motorcycles, the data I am aware of shows a growing trending towards registered off road motorcycles, i.e. away from unregistered motorcycles.
- 4 Investigate the liability issues and establish the cost per user group to provide the service required i.e. most of all activities require water, however if vehicle wash-down bays are deemed necessary then the 4wd'ers and motorcyclists may have to bear some of the cost, whilst bushwalkers may not.
- 5 From this a user pay model that is supported in addition by the income from the logging activities can be formulated.

In summary

There is an ever decreasing amount of land that is accessible and available in the local populated areas on which to ride registered motorcycles off-road. The access to areas historically used is effectively controlled by the current practice of closing roads for maintenance or safety concerns. The maintenance never seems to be done and the road is closed for good. There is an increasing amount of registered motorcycles and licenced riders wishing to access forest or bushland areas for adventure riding, along with the rise in popularity of the SUV markets see additional persons using the forest for social outings and camping.

The effect of squeezing more riders into less space has resulted in a higher chance of accident or injury due to the increased volume of traffic and the unmaintained and now overused trail system. The enjoyment of riding in the bushland is also somewhat diminished when the fear of an accident or conflict with other users is taken into account.

Excluding people and ignoring the problem is not managing the issue, don't use the legal liabilities issue as a reason to say no, provide conditions of use like indemnity agreements.

The Government policies of the management of forest areas must be altered to value not only the timber income but to put a value on recreational facilities for all people. Please engage with these users and allow them the recreational areas they desire and need for a healthy life, within a controlled framework.

Regards
Lindsay Auston