

**Submission
No 365**

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

Organisation: Outdoor Recreation Party

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Submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No 5

Inquiry Into The Management Of Public Land in New South Wales

Issue 1

The creation of most National Parks since 1995 was at the behest of former Premier Bob Carr in order to attract the votes or preferences of city-based, environmentally-oriented voters, especially Greens supporters.

As a consequence NSW has more land devoted to National Parks than is required for the conservation of unique environments and fragile ecosystems.

It has also lost valuable forest industries and productive agricultural land.

Recommendation 1

Former State Forests which were converted to National Parks since 1995 should be returned to State Forests and used for renewable forestry unless they contain unique environmental values not present in other National Parks.

Former agricultural land converted to National Parks since 1995 should be returned to sustainable agriculture unless it contains unique and fragile ecosystems not present in other National Parks.

Issue 2

The size and number of National Parks is too great to allow proper and affordable management at public expense.

Current National Parks are neglected and have become havens for introduced flora and fauna, at the expense of native species and environmental values.

Recommendation 2

All National Parks should be actively managed to preserve unique environmental values. Locking up public land in the belief that humans are the greatest threat should never occur.

All options for managing National Parks should be available for consideration, assessed on a cost-benefit basis.

Volunteers should also be used to the greatest extent possible, coordinated by government if necessary. For example, 4WD enthusiasts (individuals and clubs) can maintain fire trails and monitor and remove weed incursions. Trail and mountain bike riders, bushwalkers and horse riders can provide similar assistance. Volunteer hunters can help reduce feral animals.

Issue 3

National Parks are currently managed by NSW public servants, making it expensive and inefficient.

Recommendation 3

The management of National Parks should be out-sourced to commercial operators as much as possible.

In the first instance this should include camp sites, huts, fishing areas, recreational areas, etc.

The creation of property rights associated with the parks is the best incentive to ensure they are well managed and maintained.

Issue 4

Publicly owned land is being locked up and its owners (ie the public) excluded, with access limited to public servants.

Recommendation 4

There should be a presumption in favour of public access to all public land. The onus should always be on those wanting to exclude the public to prove the need.

With rare exceptions, current restrictions on access by 4WD vehicles, quad bikes, trail bikes, mountain bikes, horse riders and bushwalkers should be removed.

Issue 5

The bushfire management of National Parks generates confusion and unclear accountabilities, with both fire prevention and fire suppression.

Current advice is that those who see the lighting of bushfires should report it to the nearest NSW National Parks office or to the NSW Police. Those who see smoke or fire should report it to NSW National Parks or the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Such optional arrangements carry an inherent risk of failure to manage fire as quickly as possible.

Poor arrangements for fire management in National Parks contributed to the 2009 Victorian bushfires. The Royal Commission Report outlines - in its chapter on the organisational structure for fire management - how the arrangements involved ambiguous leadership, poor specialisation, poor coordination and duplication.

The Report also outlined how bushfire management in National Parks was the shared 'responsibility' of a committee of five government agencies. Such arrangements are a recipe for a lack of accountability.

Recommendation 5

All responsibility for fire management in National Parks should be taken away from NSW National Parks and placed in a single specialist body, in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

However, as noted in the Royal Commission's Report, this is not sufficient to remove problems associated with the distinct status of National Parks. A specialist fire management body would still need to coordinate with National Parks officers. The additional fire risks associated with National Parks can only be minimised by minimising their number and area.

Issue 6

Public ownership of land is not required to preserve environmental values.

Indeed, better environmental outcomes are achieved when assets are privately owned, as was obvious from a comparison of the situation on either side of the iron curtain. When land is owned by everyone, it is owned by no one.

Recommendation 6

To improve long term environmental outcomes, public land should be either sold to private owners or transferred to private sector management.

Where required the government may impose covenants requiring owners or managers to preserve unique environmental values.

Private owners or managers should be at liberty to manage the land on either a commercial or not-for-profit basis.

Private owners and managers should be exempt from state taxes subject to performance measures (objectively determined) regarding preservation of environmental values.

Contact

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