

**Submission
No 485**

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

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PUBLIC SUBMISSION

**INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF
PUBLIC LANDS IN NSW**

**Submission:
Louise Burge**

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

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.

OPENING REMARKS

This inquiry provides an opportunity to consider a new cooperative and cost effective approach to enhancing outcomes for the environment, in particular through the management of public land in New South Wales (NSW).

The evolution of environmental policies over the last twenty or so years in Australia can trace much of their history to when Australia signed the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This set the pathway for a range of policy directions on the Environment, Climate Change, Forestry and Biodiversity.

In addition, there have been a range of other national policies or international agreements on biodiversity, wetlands and the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

It is timely to review policies implemented under these agreements to identify how has NSW implemented policies linked to these agreements and what were the expected environmental benefits.

It is also timely to review progress in the light of changed Federal and State funding arrangements for the environment. Governments have heavily invested in the environment and in relation to public lands management, significant funding has been invested in land use conversion (eg State Forests) or land acquisitions (private land)

Federal funding is generally limited in terms of funding for ongoing management of lands converted solely to environmental use, with much of the financial burden falling to State budgets.

This inquiry could explore aspects of policies implemented under the 1992 Earth Summit to determine an appropriate cost benefit analysis to the State of NSW and to appropriately evaluate how environmental outcomes, can be improved or delivered in the future.

A relative unknown, is how the environment will be managed into the future with reduced public expenditure and a growing public land asset base. This may require the NSW Government to explore new and innovative ways to maximise environmental outcomes while reducing pressure on NSW budgets

A review may also be required on the effectiveness of environmental policies over the last twenty years. In reporting terms, the measure of success primarily is determined by the hectares converted from general, to conservation use. This may be an overly simplistic approach to measuring environmental outcomes or actual environmental gains.

With tight budgetary conditions likely to remain in the future, it perhaps is timely that the management of public lands is reviewed to determine the following:

- The effective measure of conservation outcomes – including measurable and transparent environmental improvement and;

- Is there improved measures to deliver NSW biodiversity and conservation objectives through new innovative policies that deliver positive outcomes for the environment, the NSW budget and rural and regional communities.

It might be argued that the ‘golden days’ of expenditure on the environment will not re-occur in the foreseeable future.

In light of this, the NSW Government may wish to consider how it delivers conservation and biodiversity outcomes in the future in a financially constrained world. This inquiry presents opportunities to develop a new model approach that can deliver a sustainable model for conservation goals in NSW.

This submission encourages consideration of Attachment A, as the contents are also relevant for this inquiry:

NOTE: This submission includes attachments A & B:

1. The Federal Government Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee State Inquiry Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change Measures
2. NSW Boundary Care: A pilot project NSW Farmer’s Association and NSW National Parks

SUBMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- NSW Government reviews the objectives of the United Nations Earth Summit held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, to determine a cost benefit analysis of social, economic and environmental costs of policies implemented in NSW. This should include ongoing management costs.
- NSW Government undertakes a review of bioregional assessments to determine the actual extent of species reserved
- The NSW Government undertakes a review of the social and economic impacts of crown and private land converted to conservation purposes only. This review should include the costs to the state of NSW, to affected towns and include social and economic impacts on a general basis to adjoining neighbours
- NSW Government undertake a comprehensive review of actual environmental improvements as a result of land conversion to sole conservation status
- NSW Government to introduce a new model for conservation based on active management and in some regions multiple use principles.
- NSW introduces a new policy that enables agricultural lands converted to National Park tenure, to continue to pay shire rates
- NSW Government introduces a new policy for the management of national parks to include active management, partnership arrangements to help offset management costs and consider a sub category with National Parks to enable dual community conservation areas.
- NSW Government introduces a new model for community consultation on natural resource management issues, with particular emphasis on the inclusiveness of local communities. The model should include community consultation at the earliest stage of policy development.
- NSW Government introduces a comprehensive approach to assess social and economic impacts of policy change
- NSW Government introduces natural resource management policies to balance economical, social and environmental values
- NSW Government introduces a review of funding to ensure equitable arrangements for environmental groups and community groups. Currently the community sector is disadvantaged through community consultation processes. Formal committee members do attract Government support but broader community consultation may deliver an inequitable burden on private individuals. Conservation groups may be

supported through official channels or through the receipt of Government funding of their core organisations. Their involvement costs are therefore offset, whereas individuals are entirely self funded.

- NSW Government provides full disclosure on internal policies for the acquisition and expansion of corridor systems across NSW, with particular reference to public and internal policies
- NSW Structural adjustment packages are extended to include all identified business impacts in a local area

1. THE CONVERSION OF CROWN LAND, STATE FORESTS AND AGRICULTURAL LAND INTO NATIONAL PARK ESTATE OR OTHER TYPES OF CONSERVATION AREAS, INCLUDING THE:

The conversion of general use land tenure to National Park estates has had the greatest impact in regional Australia, particularly in rural NSW. However, the growing National Park estate does have impacts on the NSW budget position and thus has significance in relation to the provision of other Government services for general NSW residents.

In particular, Federal and State Government policy decisions to convert crown land, State Forest and agricultural lands into national parks estates, have greater financial and social implications for rural regions.

- Financial impacts on the rate base of Shires – reduced rateable land imposes increased financial burden on remaining ratepayers.
- Future management of National Parks in relation to fire management, feral animal control and weed control.
- Introduction of new land management practises that may deliver third party impacts to adjoining land owners
- Additional financial cost to adjoining landholders who lose the right to shared cost boundary fencing arrangements

A common theme in the introduction of land conversion policies, is that those most affected by the decisions, have the least opportunity to have genuine community engagement in the decisions.

Conversion of land has often been accompanied by conflict, disengagement and the development of generational attitudes towards environmental agencies. This is extremely unfortunate because this is often accompanied by lost opportunities.

Too often, Government's focus on reportable achievements through land tenure change. This can be detrimental and create lost opportunities for smarter solutions to achieve multiple environmental objectives. In short, the process of conversion itself is detrimental to long term public relations in a region. Voluntary involvement in conservation outcomes may become impaired and this extends to the positives that could have resulted had the conversion process been genuinely inclusive and bottoms up. Not the current approach for remote decisions, imposed on a community.

There are numerous examples of adverse community reactions arising from various types of land conversion through out the state. In particular closure of State Forests to National Parks and agricultural land acquisition. The conversion process is markedly different, with some levels of community consultation occurring with closure of related timber industries. However, with agricultural conversion, there is little or no consultation at all.

An important feature of Government policy for conservation, has been that conservation outcomes are only measured in terms of one land tenure type. In reality biodiversity outcomes are not exclusive to national parks estates. Multiple use land also has high conservation and biodiversity values and this is often ignored in the pursuit of measures to achieve conservation on an 'exclusive basis'.

NSW Government is encouraged to look at a new approach to conservation outcomes, in particular opportunities for multiple use. A new model that includes local communities can open up a range of new opportunities to assist with limited future funding.

Innovative options are not just confined to commercial opportunities, but also involve the inclusion of new models that are inclusive of voluntary cooperation. This may require a review of rigid department policies and open up a new spirit of cooperation and participation.

This inquiry may recommend, a complete review of the current NSW Government policies to identify the most effective model to deliver conservation outcomes on a sustainable basis.

Environmental policies leading to conversion

When Australia signed the United Nations Conference on the Environment & Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, it sets the pathway for a range of policy directions:

- Forests
- Climate Change
- Environment
- Biodiversity.

Australia's Forestry policy that arose from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, focussed in the first stage on coastal forests. This submission will not explore coastal issues but highlight several inland conversions.

There have been a range of other international agreements on biodiversity, wetlands and the principles of ecologically sustainable development. It is important to note that this submission is not expressing strong views against all of the principles agreed to, but expresses concern in how they have been interpreted and whether the principles as implemented in Australia, were best for Australia's unique Landscapes.

There is also a presumption that 'locking up' land in conservation reserves is the best pathway for Australia natural environment. History has and will continue to judge this as a fairly simplistic approach to environmental outcomes and the approach ignores traditional indigenous practises that have helped shape Australia's natural landscapes for thousands of years.

This submission and specifically through Attachment A raises components of this 1992 agreement and how they have influenced Natural Resource Policies in Australia and New South Wales.

It is important to note also that the 1992 policy framework set the future policy direction of Governments to conserve components of ecosystems. In delivering this policy framework, Australia may have 'overreached' the original concept of conservation goals.

For example world standards for biodiversity conservation, may suggest the retention of 15% of each ecosystem as a measure of protection for biodiversity. In NSW in particular, policy implementation may have far exceeded the world wide standard for species protection and thus imposed a far higher regime of protection.

The social and economic costs of additional reserve targets, may then contravene Australia's own policy for ESD- Ecologically Sustainable Development. For long term sustainability, the concept of a balance of social, economic and environmental goals is deemed to be the benchmark for wise use of resources and development.

Australia' national policies do recognize the principles of ESD, but both Federally and in NSW, the balance has shifted to the environment. Conservation goals in themselves may not be the issue, it becomes a question of how the goals are obtained and can we deliver greater outcomes through a new model of application.

Process of conversion:

RACAC: period 2000s

In July 2000 the establishment of the NSW Resource and Conservation Assessment Council (RACAC) provided the framework for assessment and land conversion of crown land into national park reserves. It involved a coordinated assessment with Government agencies and noted 'as well as local and regional stakeholders'.

The first region was the Brigalow Belt bio region, followed by the Nandewar Region. The conversion period involved extended community consultation over a number of years but consultation although lengthy in time, did not result in affected communities supporting the decisions determined by RACAC.

This process of conversion gave the appearance of genuine community consultation. In reality though, most involved community members were aware that consultation was not meaningful and the result had already been predetermined. Local and regional stakeholders felt alienated and ignored during the consultation process. A common complaint was that environmental interests external to the region, appeared to have greater influence than communities who were to be affected by the decisions.

A common theme was that genuine consideration of the social, economic and community impacts did not occur. There has been continued criticism of Government reliance on

structural adjustment packages to resolve the economic fall out of industry closures associated with land conversion to National Parks estate.

Structural adjustments are a political solution not a community solution. The close linkages between businesses is more highly experienced in rural areas, so the loss of one business or an industry will have flow on effects to many other businesses in the areas. Structural adjustment programs have limited effect on containing the broader economic fallout of government policy decisions.

Structural adjustments packages did provide some short term level of compensation to directly affected industry and associated workers. However the compensation packages were diminished in a short time, particularly given the total costs of job losses in the region and the associated devaluation of regional housing. For individuals the losses on housing prices substantially reduced the short gain from the structural adjustment payout. Examples of this are in the towns of Nandewar and Gwabegar.

At the time, the social costs of community participation in consultation was borne unevenly.

It was not uncommon for environmental groups to be receiving government support through various forms of government programs or their government supported organisations.

For individual community members who were not part of an official Government appointed committee, the costs were significant on individual businesses. Attendance at consultation meetings meant time out of a business and the costs were substantial.

At the time it was not clear what if any actual environmental outcomes would be achieved through the conversion of the Pilliga Forest to National Park Estates. The present stands of forest were regarded as not being representative of pre European intervention. Early descriptions identified a much open land or forest area. The modern Pilliga forest of more recent years is symbolic of human management and intervention.

It is hard to identify what environmental outcomes can be derived when tree density is so tight that it restricts any opportunity for growth of understorey species. The forest preserved are often monocultures of single species that over time will fail to thrive.

There has been little monitoring and accurate evaluation of additional environmental outcomes derived from change of land tenure.

NRC – Natural Resources Commission 2003 onward.

The NRC was established as part of the NSW Native Vegetation Act in 2003. In relation to land conversion for conservation purposes, the NRC replaced the role of the earlier RACAC.

The change of name and process for assessment did not result in improved rural stakeholder involvement. Consultation time was reduced and the community participation showcased through RACAC was avoided by the NRC. This possibly was to avoid the protracted

negative community reaction that resulted from decisions to close much of the timber industry down in the Brigalow and Nandewa region.

The NRC managed the assessment and consultation for the River Red Gum industry in Southern NSW. Unlike the RACAC process, consultation delivered by the NRC was very individually based. Several larger public meetings were held but community concern expressed both during the meetings and through various submissions was largely ignored.

It is worth noting, that the local community of Deniliquin, Mathoura and Barham took particular time to work with the NRC, especially Dr John Williams. Explanation of the unique forest considerations occurred however this did not change the end result.

Some recognition of the concerns were noted in the NRC final report, issues such as the requirement to thin unnaturally high densities of river red gums that have resulted from over 150 years of harvesting. However today, the National Park policy still only permits thinning trials in a limited location/s.

Public consultation did not extend to formal arrangements to meet with adjoining landholders. Often when the NRC had arranged visits to the region, the only advice that adjoining landholders received was through local newspaper reporting after their departure.

Governments may overlook the importance of genuine community engagement and this is a tragedy for Australia in general. Too often, without genuine engagement of stakeholders at the beginning of a process, the process becomes more costly for Government and often requires a series of amendments due to ongoing community concerns or failure of actual policies over time.

It is common also, that decisions made remotely by Governments or their agencies often result in adverse community reaction, leaving a legacy of poor relationships. This then limits or completely removes, the possibilities of mutually beneficial arrangements that could have been developed if relationships had been built in the beginning under a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

Conversion of land tenure to national parks has invariably created more negatives than positives and has often ended up destroying the voluntary opportunities that could have arisen with closer engagement and genuine decision making with the communities most affected.

The long term legacy of the NRC decision on the Barmah Millewa Forest remains unknown. The forest itself had over 150 years of human management and interference. Images of a pristine forest untouched, did not reflect historical records and local knowledge.

Today's forest is denser in nature with greater stems per hectare resulting from an actively managed forest for timber production. The removal of harvesting will deliver a range of scenarios for the forest environment itself and for surrounding landholders. It is likely given time, that tree health will decline due to the nature of red gum species where in dry climates, too many trees per hectares cannot be sustained.

It was unfortunate also that close associations between the NRC and the Wentworth Group, meant that the community knew from the outset that genuine involvement in the decisions would be unlikely to occur. This is because members of the Wentworth group had been instrumental in much of NSW natural resource policies over a lengthy period.

This raises the question of independence of adjudicating bodies.

The NRC's approach for consultation in the Barmah Millewa was not inclusive.

Apart from general public meetings in which limited opportunity arose for specific questions, direct consultation was restricted to the timber industry. From all accounts this in itself was highly unsatisfactory despite the genuine attempts by the industry to work constructively with the NRC to highlight the unique aspects of red gum forest management.

For adjoining landholders there was no meaningful dialogue at all. This is unfortunate as many opportunities arise between National Park managers and local landholders.

This submission will explore some of those opportunities in question 3.

Agricultural land conversion:

Federal and State Government objectives under a range of policies have guided goals for the acquisition of private land for conversion to conservation purposes. Public participation in awareness or input into the decisions is limited.

Social and economic impacts are greatest in the local economies. Generally large properties removed from agricultural have considerable flow on effects for agricultural service industries, contractors and also for other agricultural enterprises which lose the opportunity to acquire scales of business as acquisition of additional land may be impeded by the entry of the Governments in to the land market.

A major impact is the loss of rateable land to regional shires with associated cost flows being passed onto remaining ratepayers.

National policies such as the Great Eastern ranges Corridor (previously Atherton to Alps project), a national approach to linking patches of retained bushland and policy areas such as the Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (2010-2030) all have implications for regional economies.

Added to this are the NSW State policies and in particular the acquisition of conservation outcomes via a system of corridors over the state, primarily the North South Corridor and the East West Corridor plans.

These objectives have been implemented via a range of measures, including national parks conversion, the Native Vegetation Act and through environmental policies such as the Threatened species Act.

Internal NSW National Parks policy documents also identify long term objectives for the conversion of land tenure for conservation purposes. These policies are not publicly

available and therefore there is no associated community participation in either the drafting of these policies or activation of the policies. There is no local stakeholder input into the decisions to convert agricultural land to national parks tenure.

This submission encourages the committee to investigate where these policies are at and how will these continued policies, affect the future total national parks estates.

It may be useful to explore the 30:40:30 internal environmental policy. This internal policy particularly applies to the Western areas of NSW but also was apparent in a coastal Catchment Plan. The 30:40:30 policy sets the overall objectives for how much land would be converted for primarily conservation purposes, how much would be retained for low level grazing and how much would be utilised for more commercial purposes.

Key Points:

- A review of the original 1992 Rio Earth Summit Framework to determine whether NSW has exceeded the targets set for the protection of nature.
- A review of the NSW Government approach to world recognised standards for ecologically sustainable development. In particular an evaluation of how NSW has delivered in terms of world standards for protection of ecosystems and species, including the International Union for the Conservation of Nature objective of 15% of each ecosystem. In determining this, it may be prudent to identify which areas of the state or ecosystems that have exceeded accepted thresholds and how rural communities may have been exposed to greater social and economic impacts arising from policy targets that may have exceeded world wide standards for protection.
- That the general public is made aware of the total objectives in relation to land conversion in NSW, including location, areas marked for conversion and there is an analysis of the total costs and anticipated environmental outcomes.
- The NSW Government reviews its policy for future acquisitions of additional national parks based on a new model for conservation delivery in NSW
- Introduces a new policy for community consultation based on prioritisation of local and regional stakeholders
- Develops a framework for the development of natural resource management policies directly with regional/rural communities. Policy development is redirected to regional /rural involvement at the onset of policy development. This is developed within a framework of mutual cooperation and respect
- Community engagement/involvement is commenced at initial policy development level rather than community consultation after the policy has been developed remotely from the community in which it is implemented
- Land changes being considered for the sole purpose of conservation outcomes particularly where substantial economic change is likely to occur, should undergo a full cost benefit analysis. Examination should include a full environmental assessment to determine what actual environmental changes will occur as a result of change of land tenure. These changes should be measurable and have prescribed reporting standards for transparent public reporting.
- Land acquired for national parks be subject to Shire rates

B. OPERATIONAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AFTER CONVERSION, AND IN PARTICULAR, IMPACTS UPON NEIGHBOURS OF PUBLIC LAND AND UPON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This submission will focus on the conversion of the Barmah Millewa State Forest to National Park tenure.

There are a range of issues that have arisen after conversion, these include but are not limited to:

- There has been no model for effective community engagement in the management of the Barmah Millewa National Park either during conversion or post conversion
- There were limited social and economic assessments of the broadscale impacts on regional towns impacted by the change of land tenure and new management. Issues not included:
 - The impact on private native forestry arising from the loss of forestry scale and expertise to the region
 - The economic impacts on neighbouring properties arising from additional risks of fire and flood events arising from new policies for environmental flows
 - Closure of the Deniliquin Gulpa Sawmill on the broader local economy
 - Impacts on agricultural/farm/industry's ability to source wood products
 - Flow on effect to town services arising from associated job losses and economic activity
 - Broader impacts arising from the closure of associated industries that previously relied upon the forestry industry or related firewood industry (eg chainsaw outlets/repairs shops)
- There was no consideration of Deniliquin's reliance on wood for home heating, over 70% of residents are reliant on wood heating for home heating
 - Promises of wood resources have been slow or the green tape associated with sourcing wood supplies is extensive and either time or cost prohibitive, particularly for older generations
- There are significant elevated risks of local and regional wildfires:
 - as a result of policies to retain % tonnes/per hectare of forest debris on the forest floor
 - Loss of early intervention fire control methods as on site heavy forestry machinery is no longer available
 - Reliance on volunteer fire brigades who have already publicly stated concerns about fire fighting in the new national park
 - Misconceptions about the role of the Rural Fire Service which are primarily provide bureaucratic services and do not directly provide human resources for onground fighting
 - Travel distance to major towns for fire services & associated waiting periods to obtain external contracts services for heavy equipment (eg graders/dozers/trucks)

- Policies that may limit maintenance of fire trails or forest tracks that would serve in emergency situations
- Ability to effectively maintain irrigation/human water supplies through natural or artificial water supply features that are/or partly within the boundaries of a national park
- Ability to manage and future replacement costs of boundary fencing for adjoining neighbours. National Parks tenure means in general the full cost of boundary fencing becomes entirely borne by the adjoining landholder.
 - Under previous State forest arrangements, fence posts could be supplied from State forest timber resources and cooperative arrangements enabled the development of mutually effective fencing options.
- National Parks policies impose more stringent native vegetation controls on boundary fencing adjoining a national park than would apply if the fence adjoined private land/or other crown land tenures.
 - The Native Vegetation Act 2003 and regulations permit various activities under routine agricultural activities. Clearing for boundary fencing is permitted to set standards (note these vary across the State). National Parks have a specific fencing policy that is different to those normally required for farmers under the Native Vegetation Act 2003
 - Limitations on native vegetation control means that boundary fencing is more likely to be impacted by falling limbs with continued repairs cost borne by the landholder
- National Park policies in conjunction with the Murray Darling Basin Authority are likely to introduce new water management regimes for environmental flows.
 - There is no assessment plans to resolve future risks to the ecology of the Millewa Forest as a result of over-watering which will be a consequence of the goals for 2750 GL with the greater proportion to flow down the Southern basin.
 - There is no process for adjoining landholder involvement in decision making. This submission encourages greater consultation on forest watering events
 - New staffing arrangements, may not have sufficient historical knowledge on water flows in the Millewa Forest. Preferred internal policies for increased environmental flows may have adverse ecological impacts on the forest, however the lack of historical knowledge may cause incorrect decisions to occur
- Elevated risk to adjoining landholders from increased forest watering events (environmental flows).
 - Boundary fencing impacts from steel fence posts standing for extended periods in water (rusting out)
 - Internal property access issues – elevated local creek systems.

- Environmental flows through the recognised natural Murray River system constraint of the Barmah Millewa Forest will increased risks of moderate to major flooding
- Adverse environmental impacts will arise from the change in management from a forest with a 150 year history of timber production, to an area converted to conservation use only. (note: *In a forest with a protracted history of active management (forests grown for timber), a new regime of management based on conservation only may lead to an unnatural density of trees per hectare. As tree health declines from overcrowding, an incorrect assumption might be that trees need more water at the expense of thinning programs.*)

2. THE ADHERENCE TO MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON ALL PUBLIC LAND THAT ARE MANDATED FOR PRIVATE PROPERTY HOLDERS, INCLUDING FIRE, WEED AND PEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.

Weeds:

The management of agricultural land carries a set of mandated requirements for weed and feral animal control. Government controlled land is not subject to the same policies and this is largely assumed to be because Government cannot afford the cost burden.

The Noxious Weeds Act, (WONS) National Weeds of National Significance and other policy areas may pose different management regimes for private land as compared to public land tenure.

This submission encourages effective weed management across all land tenures and the options of joint management to reduce costs.

Arguably, it seems inadequate, that weed control in national parks or other crown reserves may only be required in specified boundary areas. A different rule applies to adjoining private land.

It may be prove difficult to apply mandated management practice across all land tenures, but equally some policy areas should apply to all regions regardless of ownership. Consideration should be given to the individual circumstances.

An example of this could be that agricultural land converted to national parks be subject to the same mandated policies as would apply to the land if still used for agricultural purposes.

It may also be mutually beneficial for the NSW Government to investigate options for adjoining landholders to be contracted to undertake weed spraying services for national parks lands. This would be particularly valuable in remote areas, or areas where access issues may be difficult. Mutually beneficial arrangements either on a contractual or voluntary nature may mean that some weed spraying may be undertaken by adjoining landholders for specified areas. For voluntary spraying, this could involve the provision of suitable chemicals in areas of mutual interests eg around boundary fences

As on private land, some weeds are both costly and difficult to control. In areas managed for conservation weed control bears a significant cost burden. It may be prudent to review in particular, issues of mandated early intervention, prior to weed dominance of an area. This is cost effective for future long term prevention and limits unmanaged seed transmission through wind or waterways.

This issues is further explored in question 3.

Pest management practices:

There are various requirements for pest management that are beneficial for the environment and agriculture.

In terms of mandated practices this submission does not seek to explore in depth this issue due to time constraints. Issues such as the requirements to control rabbits or other yet to be introduced alien species should mean that every effort is undertaken regardless of land tenure.

Certain remote locations may mean that some flexibility is required for national parks, however the similar location on private land should be subject to the same standards. It seems inequitable for private land holders to be subject to one set of rules, when over the boundary fence Government imposing the rules on private landowners, are not subject to the same impositions themselves.

This submission encourages appropriate pest management practices that aim specifically to eradicate or markedly control pest species regardless of tenure. This may bring into conflict national parks policies with the effective options for pest management . In this situation, if national parks policies mean that a less effective option is through choice, then this may need review in order to ensure that National Parks policies are effective and carefully balance the more strategic benefits of effective control.

Fire:

The issue of mandate policies for fire management may be seen through the responsibility required for safety and protection of both the National Parks estate but also broader community and local interests.

It is the duty of care and relevant occupational health and safety considerations that may mean fire prevention becomes a more mandated policy across all land tenure.

National Parks may be encouraged to introduce strong policies for cool burning and revisit current policies that prescribe the amount of debris on the forest floor.

Under current fire management scenarios in the Southern Riverina, there is a strong reliance on voluntary brigades. With limited fire fighting resources in voluntary brigades and a bureaucratic restrictions to gain additional trucks, the duty of care for fire control in National Parks becomes elevated.

3. EXAMINATION OF MODELS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND, INCLUDING MODELS THAT PROVIDE FOR CONSERVATION OUTCOMES WHICH UTILISE THE PRINCIPLES OF “SUSTAINABLE USE”.

Environmental policies in Australia have largely focused on a model of conservation that is reliant on a singular methodology to measure success. Broadly, conservation in NSW is achieved through legislation and/or through changes of land tenure, that are **then deemed** to have delivered conservation outcomes.

It is a fairly crude approach where outcomes are largely assessed through the scale of land conversion, rather than measurable and transparent environmental differences.

In terms of biodiversity, in NSW there has not been an effective approach to determining the level of biodiversity on private land largely because Government policies have focused on restrictive policies to achieve outcomes. This may have saved some species in areas subject to development pressures, but on the whole there is increasing recognition that opportunities have been lost for more comprehensive data gathering. Threatened species protection measures that rely on a legislative approach have created adverse relationships with many in rural areas. This has led to the loss of opportunity for data collection on private land.

The ability to expand knowledge through on ground data collection and monitoring is lost and assumptions on all aspects of biodiversity may have excluded vital data that is derived from land tenures not in conservation reserves.

The negativities that have arisen from the concentration on legislative approaches, has precluded many new models for conservation success. To explore the benefits of potential new models, Australia's approach to conservation and biodiversity protection will require a cultural shift in attitudes.

By way of explanation, many might share a common goal for individual species protection. A bureaucratic approach might have adopted a singular pathway for species protection, in general this has meant a reliance on legislation to protect an area or a species.

Little thought has been given to finding a new model that encompasses much broader sustained outcomes. By way of comparison, imagine a destination (or species goal), with the Government pathway to that destination only being permitted to travel on a singular road. However, if the same destination could be reached through a variety of roads, would the destination (or goal) have changed. Clearly it would not have, it just becomes a matter of choice which road is taken.

Achieving conservation goals in NSW can be compared to that analogy. Only one pathway for success has been tried.

It can be argued that NSW has tried a variety of incentive and legislative approaches, but little research has been done to identify that the uptake of incentives may still be limited and voluntary involvement may still be impaired due to the adverse impacts of legislation on community engagement.

Examples of conservation models:

Zimbabwe: CAMPFIRE Project.

The term CAMPFIRE means Communal Areas Management Programs for Indigenous Resources which devised a way for rural communities and native wildlife to co-inhabit the same landscapes.

In 1966 a tribal community in Zimbabwe, was moved from its native lands to allow the establishment of the Ghona-re-Zhou National Park. A sustained period of clashes arose as displaced people engaged in poaching for income. Changes to a more permanent European based food production system, also meant that ongoing conflict arose with native wildlife destroying subsistence farming in village locations.

In 1982, a local rancher devised an agreement to enable the traditional Mahenye people to utilize wildlife species within the National Park. This not only reduced poaching but allowed native tribes to become the protector of the species. The conflict was reversed where the poachers became the protectors and the culling regimes acted as a population control measure under limited circumstances.

Conservation based hunting also provide commercial return for native people giving further incentive for tribespeople not to engage in poaching activities.

It is reported that during the 1992 drought, the Mahenye people remained self sufficient and did not rely on aid donations for their survival.

The principle of conservation involving some species culling, also provided a range of community and commercial benefits. The benefits of culling meant that the indigenous tribes received sustainable meat supplies and a component of income from commercial hunting.

In addition to reversing the persistent problem of poaching, commercial safaris led to investments in classrooms, medical services and basic services.

While this example may be specific to Africa and traditional people, the concept is transferable. It becomes a question of how can Governments look for innovative ways to achieve outcomes within the economic realities of life.

NSW Boundary Care Pilot Project: Joint project National Parks and NSW Farmers Association (attachment B)

In 2008, I initiated a project to build relationships between National Park managers and rural communities. The pilot project jointly agreed to by NSW Farmer's Association and National

Parks, was an initial trial to establish collaborative partnerships between agencies and private landholders.

Boundary Care was an innovative pilot project for establishing methodologies to enhance natural resource management outcomes in geographically isolated areas.

The project was designed to develop the protocols for delivering voluntary partnerships in specific boundary zones of National Parks Estates. The benefits of the project were to be shared between the Federal Government, NSW State Government, Private Landowners and the Environment.

The pilot project was to establish guidelines, education and communication strategies in order to facilitate genuine partnerships between the operators of private farmland and crown reserves.

Initially the benefits were to be limited to identified and agreed areas, however, partnership benefits could extend well beyond the project scope.

Multiple outcomes beyond the initial project scope could include:

1. The building of positive relationships between private and public landowners.
2. The development and delivery of shared objectives for the protection and enhancement of species population on both private and public land.
3. The building of a new positive partnership model that could deliver cost effective strategies for natural resource management on crown land
4. The aim of this pilot project is to enhance shared understanding of public & private land boundaries with the ultimate goal of establishing an effective and positive neighbourhood network.

At the time the project was submitted to the Natural Resources Advisory Council for assessment under an administered funding program. Unfortunately despite the positive potential in 2008 for building bridges and relationships, the project was not funded.

Full project details can be viewed in **attachment B**

Commercial partnerships:

Public Land

History may well show that the 1990s through to the period of 2010 was accompanied by high expenditure on environmental issues in Australia. While the asset base grew, on going management costs were left to the NSW Government.

Competition for Government resources in the future may mean that environmental expenditure will be curtailed and requirements for efficiency may be imposed.

A likely scenario in the present economic climate and for the foreseeable future is that Government resources will not be sufficient to sustain the level of ongoing management that is required for NSW conservation reserves.

The question becomes, how can limited resources be maximized?

One avenue that requires further exploration is the part commercialization of conservation opportunities in conjunction with cost effective opportunities to offset on going management costs.

Attachment B does explore some opportunities for voluntary /shared cooperation within national parks regions. However as a pilot project, Boundary Care did not look more broadly at commercial scale benefits.

For broader commercial partnerships to meet the future needs of National Parks, a range of new opportunities should be explored. At the heart is not to reduce conservation outcomes, but to find opportunities to maintain conservation goals but with a variety of options to maximize available resources.

Agricultural Land:

For example, agricultural land converted to national park tenure, may present opportunities to reduce management costs. In Western NSW large scale properties previously used for sheep grazing, now attract management costs without incomes resources to offset those costs.

During the period of acquisition and conversion, widespread community concern would often result. It was recognised that rate increased would apply to remaining ratepayers and in some cases the loss of a major grazing property changed the economies of scale for associated small towns and contractors.

It may be possible to build new partnerships that help to offset those losses, regain local opportunities and importantly, find mechanisms to offset on going management costs.

For these types of national parks, land leasing or the ability to offer agistment reverses the negatives and begins to build positives from the original decision to convert land tenure.

Examples such as Oolambeyan National Park, Yanga Station could lend themselves to part commercialization to enable more effective investments in park resources. In addition to the limited incomes streams from visitors, part commercialization of certain areas may enable continued investment in weed control, the upkeep of station buildings and the development of new tourist facilities.

Toorale Station is another example where part of the total land area may not have sufficient conservation values to validate the restrictions that national park status imposed.

Opportunities to lease part of the property may help offset the commercial loss of Yanga station to the local communities. Such an approach on a genuine level would help build positive and mutually beneficial relationships between park managers and local communities while helping to offset the costs of ongoing management.

Many of these previously station properties have significant buildings that could be utilised on a commercial basis. However, it is often difficult within the framework of National Park budgets to maximize commercial benefit, nor may the relevant expertise lie within the national park agency. Leasing part of the properties for tourism purposes may also attract avenues for funding.

National Parks Forests:

In certain geographic locations, where maximization of tourism management by National Parks agencies is difficult or not commercial feasible, consideration of private tourism potential may prove an advantage.

In remote or inaccessible areas, tourism on its own may not be commercially feasible, but maximizing potential through private partnerships may open new opportunities.

Tourism opportunities with agricultural land owners, may build cross tenure benefits through mutual partnerships. Agricultural/tourism operators with a partnership arrangement with the NSW Government, may swing the balance to commercial feasibility, for a tourism venture.

Agricultural businesses may already have suitable tourism facilities in place, but the farm aesthetics may not provide sufficient attraction to maximize tourist potential. By including a partnership with National Parks, tourism opportunities for fishing, bush walking, bike riding or general outdoor recreation can provide mutual benefits and help improve relationships which can deliver many new benefits not previously considered.

A Government/Private partnership approach may allow some agricultural tourism to become more commercially feasible on the basis that tourism in the adjoining national park is part of the package.

The Government/private partnership may have a series of models with models reflecting the location, opportunities and individual commercial realities.

The partnership model may also vary as to whether commercial rates are paid to Government, or whether, financial returns are delivered in another way. For example, as a condition of the partnership, normal tourism contracts may be waived in favour of mutually beneficial arrangements such as agricultural/tourism operators providing weed spraying services, rubbish collection, checking of fire trails, road maintenance or other park duties where these would not overlap with National Park conservation works.

4. ANY OTHER RELATED MATTERS.

Tourism

In recent years, the significant economic impacts arising from changes of land tenure to National Parks is claimed to be offset by the rise in tourism to the local area.

In the Barmah Millewa Forest region, this result, like many other areas predicted to have substantial rise in tourism, is unlikely to occur.

The loss of the economic value of the timber industry in the Riverina bioregion is estimated to be approximately worth \$73 million annually. This figure has also been described as approximately \$48 million based on studies that supported the decision to change land tenure (Regional Economic Impacts of National Parks in the Riverina bioregion Nov 2009)

Regardless of the different dollar values placed on the annual worth of the red gum timber industry to the region, it is widely recognised that the value of tourism being attracted to the new national park is unlikely to generate comparable economic activity.

Social and economic adjustment packages provided to the region were a political solution not an economic solution.

Many associated industries were not considered eligible for assessment in the limited compensation funds, nor are there ongoing funds to address future impacts eg to adjoining landholders.

Community participation

Despite local communities and particularly adjoining landholders having significant associations with the Millewa National Park, there is no mechanism for community involvement in management decisions.

The Barmah Millewa forest is listed as a recognised site under the Ramsar Convention. Ramsar recognition is based on the term 'wise use of resources' and should not be confused with a conservation status that is exclusive of human activity.

When a site is listed for recognition by the Ramsar Convention, the site undergoes a number of protocols for assessment of its continued values.

This usually involves a plan of management and a set of criteria for assessing or measuring future site outcomes. In the case of the Millewa Forest, the NSW State Forest undertook a plan of management and this was done in conjunction with community consultation.

When the Millewa forest converted to National Parks, the plan of management was amended and referred to the Federal Government for recognition. Under this arrangement, there has been no community involvement in determining the new plans of management for the Millewa forest recognised by the Ramsar convention.

This is contrary to the long term and highly successful involvement of the local community in providing input into the management of the forest.

The most well known and most successful process was the establishment of the Barmah Millewa Forum, or specifically the Barmah Millewa community consultation reference group CRG.

Established in 1994, the Barmah Millewa forum was an actively involved interagency and community forum to determine plans of management for the forest with particular emphasis on the establishment and management environmental watering programs.

Today, there is no effective community involvement in the plans of management for the Millewa National Park.

There is the Barmah Millewa Community Consultative Reference Group set up as part of the Living Murray Icon site management process, but the CCRG rarely meets and there is no clearly defined process for committee deliberations to be passed on to decision makers.

Request through this process for greater community involvement in the broader multi agency management group have been denied. This higher level group consisting of Government agencies and indigenous representation, specifically excludes involvement of the community.