

**Submission  
No 453**

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

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I am 38yrs old. All my life I have spent my recreation time in our bushland/wilderness areas in one way or another.

As a kid, it was fourwheel driving and bushwalks to see our native wildflowers, camping, canoeing in our rivers, driving in to remote beaches to swim, surf, fish, or free dive. As my own son has grown up, I have done the same with him as much as possible.

The life lessons and experiences I had as a kid in the bush are invaluable to me and I retain vivid memories to this day.

I have always tried to provide my son with similar experiences, I have managed to instill in him an enormous appreciation for our natural world, he has a fascination with our native flora, our native animals, birds, lizards, snakes, ants, spiders, you name it! If we see it, we will stop and watch and observe the fantastic intricacies of nature in action. My son can name all sorts of plants, trees, animal, birds etc and has a pride and a sense of belonging in our bush. Not bad for a city kid, who is with dad only every second weekend.

I don't consider myself a "greeny" but I am very conscious and respectful of the natural environment around us, I have instilled the same consciousness and respect for it in my son.

To me, my son has a better appreciation and understanding of our environment than a majority of adult Australians, and this comes through direct experience of time spent in remote and local bushland areas.

I am increasingly frustrated and saddened that these experiences and the lifestyle I love is becoming more and more out of reach and behind more and more locked gates!

Many areas I visited frequently in the past are now locked up, behind steel gates, wire fences and dirt mounds. Many places that I have camped at on short weekend trips are gone, inaccessible, locked up, policed etc. All up and down our coast, I find the same thing happening.

I recently went away with my son for a weekend, we left Sydney Friday evening, drove until after dark, had dinner on the road, and drove 20-30km on dirt roads to a secluded spot I had camped at many times before, only to find a new fence and gate across the track! WHY? This particular spot has been accessible for decades with not a shred of evidence of damage to the environment, by its very nature, it was never in danger of being over used, over run, or damage done to the environment, but some genius decided it should be locked up!

The nearest accessible camping area has now become degraded through increased use and overcrowding due to exclusion from previously accessible bushland.

It is very disappointing to find so many beautiful, secluded camping spots no longer accessible, unless you are willing to hike in all your gear for several kilometres, or be socially irresponsible and break the gate or fence.

Of all the people I know who enjoy four wheel driving and the outdoor recreational activity that fourwheel driving facilitates, everyone of them laments the loss of access to so much of OUR BACKYARD!

The vast majority of these people are responsible, respectful people who appreciate and respect the environment and practice "tread lightly principles".

Often areas are locked up for no apparent reason, sometimes roads are gated for times the road is "too wet", then left permanently locked.

National Parks have recently installed approximately 20 gates across forestry roads and tracks in the Watagan Forest National Park and surrounding State Forest areas.

Some tracks that have been in regular use for decades have recently had trees and rocks pushed across entry points by National Parks to block access, in the process causing considerable damage to these localised areas and excluding thousands of people from enjoying these areas.

These gates have the potential to lock out huge sections of the Watagan Forest that thousands of us have enjoyed for decades. It's yet another area within easy reach of Sydney for a social day, or easily accessible weekend trip that is about to be lost, because it's deemed too hard to "manage".

Our bushland is being locked up with the rationale that it prevents erosion, environmental damage etc. Often the areas that are locked up are vast tracts of land, many hundreds of thousands of hectares. Access tracks into these areas are often very sparse and represent a minuscule portion of these areas. Looking at satellite images of much of our wilderness areas shows tracks are almost indistinguishable, and very sparse indeed.

In my opinion, the impact of erosion from responsible access to our wilderness via existing tracks and roads is negligible. Natural weather events create erosion in untouched areas. Areas that are still accessible are coming under increased pressure as people actively using our bush are restricted to fewer open areas.

Over the years, I've seen areas of state forest clear felled then left to regenerate. In a few short years, tracks are overgrown, in a decade trees and undergrowth are well established, tracks are indistinguishable, in two decades, it's difficult to see that it was ever logged. I continue to see wildlife for the first time in the Watagans, often in areas clear felled in the past. I recently found a Southern Angle Headed Dragon (first time ever) in an area logged only two years ago.

The bushland that I love, the bushland Australians take pride in is under threat! Not under threat of destruction as the green movement would have us believe. It is under threat from a bunch of bureaucrats and government departments who are heavily pressured by greenies and "environmentalists" whose idea of looking after the environment is to put it behind lock and key. The collective wisdom and experience of the individuals and groups who have been using many of these areas for decades and generations is ignored and disregarded in favour of minority, highly vocal, politically active green groups who push a single agenda.

Our bushland and the outdoor lifestyle is under threat from being "managed" to within an inch of its life! National Parks default solution is to put up locked gates. Yes, they do a fantastic job of managing many camping, picnic areas, visitors facilities etc in some areas that desperately needed it, but at the same time gates go up in other areas, increasing the pressure and traffic into areas that are still open. Then National Parks go back to the default "lock it up" management plan.

A quick look at satellite images show enormous tracts of wilderness, thousands and thousands of square kilometers of bush, it amazes me how much wilderness there is, so close to our major cities. Yet get in the car and go for a drive, it quickly becomes obvious just how minute an amount is accessible by car.

This puts the vast majority of OUR bush out of reach to the vast majority of us, and it's getting worse!

I would like to see PUBLIC LAND KEPT PUBLIC, that means, keep it accessible to all members of the public.

I pay for National Parks access permits annually, my money is being used to lock me out of the areas I am paying to visit! I want it to stop! I want my money spent on maintaining access, not locking gates. I want my money spent on educating the small minority who use these areas, but don't understand the significance our bushland has for them, for others, and for future generations.

Yes, there is a minority of irresponsible people who don't care for the environment, who leave litter behind, and damage gates and facilities. There is also a huge number of responsible bush users, who actively clean up areas visited and actively keep idiots in

check. Locking gates excludes and punishes responsible users, but does little to keep out the minority of irresponsible users who are left un-checked.

I come across a huge number of people who share a love of our public bushland, if all of us voiced our displeasure at the management practice of locking out the general public, this public dissatisfaction could not be ignored.

The current management practices are unsustainable, pressure is increased on areas still accessible, frustration among bush users is increasing, leading to more people breaking gates to access their local bushland as it becomes more and more restricted often without apparent reason and often limited consultation.

I would like to see National Parks and Wildlife Services and other land management agencies develop active, sustainable management plans in cooperation with the public, the people using our public land, instead of arbitrarily locking out the public.

I currently pay annual fees for National Parks access, I would willingly pay more if more funds were directed to active management initiatives.

Land management bodies in other States and in other countries are able to actively manage public land with cooperation and consultation with user groups, I would like to see NSW land management bodies do the same.

Regards

David King.