

**Submission
No 448**

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

Name: Mr Kenneth Hooper

Date received: 30/08/2012

RECEIVED

30 AUG 2012

GPSC's

N.S.W. Legislative Council General Purpose
Standing Committee Number 5
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney.

24th August 2012

Dear Director and Committee Members,

We would like to offer some comments in relation to the River Red Gum Forests in the Southern Riverina section of your inquiry into the management of public land in N.S.W. We are neighbours to the Werai Forest at its eastern end. We are unsure of its eventual status in relation to your inquiry, once the change from State Forest to Indigenous Protected area is completed.

While some of our submission is particular to our area and experience we believe it will be applicable on the broader scale.

Our property comprises 144 H.A. of varying soil types and vegetation classes. Formerly used as agricultural land, it is no longer viable for this purpose and we have dedicated it to landscape and bio-diversity restoration.

In general this involves revegetating sandhills, restoring flood flows to the ephemeral Red Gum, Black Box and Grey Box wetlands, maintaining the grasslands and thinning our Red Gum forest for ecological purposes.

Because of these activities, pest plants and animals are of paramount importance to us. If not vigorously controlled within the Werai Forest these pest plants and animals will continue to cause problems for us, as they have to date.

We use a variety of control methods for pest animals, including firearms, and believe it is necessary to extend some of these measures into the Werai at times.

Following are some specific comments about vermin and weeds.

Rabbits:

Warren fumigation and ripping alongside biological control are the best methods to attack these pests.

Hares:

Shooting by recreational hunters or adjoining landowners is probably the only control available.

Feral Goats:

Not applicable in our situation but it does appear recreational hunting has a part to play in control of goats.

Foxes:

Without doubt co-ordinated poisoning campaigns with 1080 are the most effective control method and should be pursued vigorously by forest managers and adjoining landowners. Although hunting is likely to play only a small part in fox control and is probably best executed on adjoining farmlands, it could still have some benefits within forest areas.

Feral Pigs:

An ever present threat to landowners adjoining National and State Parks and other areas of crown land.

Drought and recreational hunting had reduced the pig population to very low numbers in the Werai Forest. With regular flooding since 2010 the pig population is expanding and we fear they will reach our property with devastating results. This is apart from the ecological damage they cause in the forest.

Every effort should be made to control these pests including trapping and poisoning (particularly in dry times when food is scarce), helicopter shooting and recreational hunting, including the use of trained and controlled scent trailing dogs such as Labradors and Pointers who bail up but do not attack the pigs, allowing them to be killed with firearms. Co-ordination would obviously be needed so these different control measures did not clash, however with Park managers and hunters working in conjunction, significant control of pigs should be possible

Feral Deer: (In our case Red Deer)

These pests cause considerable damage to our revegetation efforts, mainly by the stags rubbing their antlers on trees and bushes during the breeding season. The photograph below shows one example of damage by a Red Deer Stag in our sandhill revegetation program during April 2012.



The selective browsing habits of deer also impact on native vegetation and have caused us concern in our attempts to re-establish wetland rushes. Our experience of these deer indicates they would have detrimental effects within Red Gum Forests.

Helicopter shooting and recreational hunting are perhaps the only two control measures available.

We were pleased National Parks and Wildlife Service killed a significant number of Red Deer during the helicopter shooting program last autumn.

National Parks staff should endeavour to include private forest lands in their helicopter shooting programs.

Recreational hunters working to control pest deer on adjoining private land should have the ability to enter with permission, park areas to follow the pests.

This happened in our case, the stag causing the damage shown above could be heard roaring from the nearby Werai Forest, but under current regulations it would have been illegal for the hunter we engaged to enter the forest in pursuit.

The potential for killing this stag was more likely in the forest than on our land.

Safety:

There are obviously safety requirements with recreational hunting. Hunting needs to be done under direction of the Crown Land managers by accredited and licenced hunters. Severe penalties should apply to those found in breach of these rules and requirements. Consideration should be given to residences situated near Crown Lands.

In our case we have two residences situated less than 100 metres from the Werai Forest. We suggest an exclusion area of at least one kilometre from any such residential situation. Hunting within this exclusion area should be allowed only with the written consent of the person owning the residence.

We note there is considerable opposition to hunting in National and Regional Parks. We believe much of this opposition is based on parochial, emotional, or ideological grounds with no logical or practical consideration of the reality of managing Red Gum forests, or even the need to.

N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service should be discouraged from taking the questionable easy option of park management by just banning activities that can logically involve some members of the community.

Allowing controlled recreational hunting in National and Regional Parks should go some way to help alleviate the negative attitude held by many people within local communities toward the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Weeds:

There are many weeds within the Werai Forest that can and do invade our property. Woody weeds such as Sweet Briar and African Boxthorn are spreading rapidly in the adjoining forest. Obviously these need controlling.

During the current tenure changeover for Werai Forest there appears to be a burdensome process for achieving action on weed control. This situation must be improved in the future.

We are encouraged by the progress being made towards management of the Werai by the local indigenous community. This should address these current concerns.

Control of weeds that can spread from adjoining private lands and roadsides to Park areas needs to be enforced by the relevant authorities.

Spot spraying of weeds such as Horehound and Bathurst Burrs needs to be carried out at appropriate times.

Biological control of Patterson's Curse is required in Park areas. It is working in our bush areas and the early signs are encouraging. We believe there is a role for this control measure in Park areas.

Park managers should strongly advocate for research into biological control of the highly invasive weed Lippia.

Other weeds in general:

Although the Werai Forest adjacent to our property is leased for grazing, it has not been grazed for several years. We have noted a resurgence of native plants which compete with the exotics. We believe a return to more appropriate flooding regimes and removal of cattle grazing will assist in the recovery of under story plants in the Red Gum Forests and their inclusive Grey Box, Black Box, sandhill and grassland areas. Our observations indicate cattle prefer to graze the more succulent native plants, which suppress their vigour, and allows weeds to flourish against this weakened competition.

Grazing in Red Gum Forests:

We regard it as a detrimental practice and should be discontinued for the reasons given above as well as their pugging actions in wetlands.

Timber Harvesting:

There is clear evidence timber harvesting and silvicultural management has had a detrimental effect on the biodiversity of Red Gum forests. The closure of some areas to timber harvesting, along with more appropriate management, particularly increased flooding and ecological thinning, should allow this situation to be slowly corrected.

Ecological thinning of Red Gum Forests:

This is a necessity to address some of the biodiversity issues, particularly the loss of trees with habitat hollows and forest understory. It will also provide some firewood, at least in the short term, which is of great concern to the local communities reliant on firewood for heating purposes.

We are pleased to note National Parks and Wildlife Service are about to commence ecological thinning in demonstration plots in local Red Gum Parks.

Apiary Activities:

We oppose the use of National and State Parks for commercial bee farming purposes. There is a shortage of hollow bearing trees for native wildlife because of timber harvesting and ring-barking. This shortage is likely to decline further before recruitment trees set aside during thinning operations become hollow bearing. Feral exotic honey bees compete with native wildlife for hollow space.

European Carp:

This invasive pest has detrimental effects on forest wetlands. The current efforts to control them are an absolute necessity. Every effort to expand these control measures should be undertaken by Park Managers and N.S.W. Fisheries.

Closure of forest roads during flooding events:

Although difficult to control, vehicle entry to flooded forests should be banned. It appears some irresponsible 4 WD owners consider it appropriate to destroy roadways during flooding. The added costs of repairing these roads consume funds which would be better spent on constructive management of the forest. Perhaps the use of hidden surveillance cameras, heavy penalties for breaches during closed periods and public education programs could be used to prevent this damage which is costly and an inconvenience to dry time users of the forests.

Conclusion:

The conversion of State Forests to National and Regional Parks and Indigenous Protected Areas with the accompanying much needed management changes has caused anguish within the local communities. We believe the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service should endeavour to encompass the needs of as many stake holders within the general community as possible without compromising the need to improve biodiversity within the Red Gum forests.

We hope this submission is of help to your inquiry relating to Red Gum forests conversion and management. As practical naturalist neighbours of the Werai Forest we have a joint interest in better practical management of the Werai.

The change from State Forest to Indigenous Protected Area and State and National Parks is a golden opportunity to introduce measures to enhance the forests values. It is our desire to have a practical working relationship with the current and future managers of the Werai Forest.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth John Hooper.