

**Submission  
No 323**

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

**Organisation:** Australasian Native Orchid Society

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## INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NSW

### General:

The membership of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 appears to have been compiled in a pro-rata manner from the Members of the Legislative Council; however I feel the appointment of The Hon. Robert Brown as chairperson, does not comply with any interpretation of pro-rata.

In general the terms of reference appear satisfactory, however I note in clause c, a qualification regarding clauses 1 (a) and 1 (b). These directly relate to the intention of the committee to extract from the forests (listed as dot points) as much material as possible for commercial gain. I feel this is a biased point with which to begin such an inquiry.

I would expect the committee would be aware that 95% of NSW forest has already been lost since white settlement including 70% of rain forest. This extensive loss of bush land habitat is the prime cause for the disappearance of a large number of smaller animals, birds and many orchid species. It is also the reason for a vast reduction in the numbers of koalas throughout NSW and other parts of Australia. Koala habitat has been gradually removed over the years and the erroneous statement by the Minister for the Environment that logging of koala habitat will improve their chances of survival, should be seen as ill informed and will certainly have the opposite effect. It should also be noted that the majority of koalas are not located within national parks so any attempt to reduce the forest available to them should be seen another attempt to clear forests once considered as being of little commercial value. Another statement by the same minister regarding her opposition to hunting in national parks has now been shown to be false as this decision has been reversed.

Of the five members of the committee only two have shown any consideration for the environment and any findings made by the committee should not be afforded any status of importance and the bias of the construction of the committee will not serve the wider NSW population. This bias may result in horse riding and possibly mountain bike in national parks as these are commercially driven interests although all are against the principles of national parks and flora and fauna reserves.

The National Parks and Wildlife service is staffed by dedicated and qualified personnel currently under threat from budget pressures along with commercial interests. The case studies listed in the inquiry do not provide good examples of the long term benefits to communities of national parks.

- Conservation areas are important not only for the protection of biodiversity but for critical ecosystem services such as the protection and provision of fresh water catchments and carbon sequestration.
- National Parks and other landscapes are significant for their cultural values to Aboriginal people.
- Australia is a signatory to the International Convention on Biodiversity and is committed to conserve that biodiversity.

- The NSW government is a signatory to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment in which all governments in Australia have agreed to the establishment of an adequate, representative and comprehensive system of protected areas. The NSW government has made some progress to date however many biogeographic subregions are yet to be fully assessed for species which may occur within those regions.

Furthermore there are few competent persons available to undertake this work. Any glance at an environmental assessment for a large development will attest to this.

It is a fallacy that old growth forest, regardless of the type, will continue to protect threatened species when trees with hollows are removed under OH&S. New information indicates many species of fauna which use tree hollows, prefer to use more than a single hollow for several reasons.

- To minimise rates of predation.
- To minimise foraging distances.
- To advertise the continuous use of a hollow to pre-empt its use by others.
- To minimise the incidence of pest concentration such as lice, ticks or fleas.
- To improve thermal buffering as sites can vary in this quality.

If the land under consideration for inclusion as an addition to a public asset of some type it is not in the best interests of the landowner to identify threatened species and contractors, foresters and those involved in Private Native Forestry have little competence or interest in the identification of these species or their protection.

If a species is listed as threatened a code is available which is supposed to provide protection from logging ("Listed Species Ecological Protection"), however this code is only triggered if a species is located and currently no requirement exists to undertake surveys for such species, particularly on private land. Insufficient private landowners have the interest or ethic to note what threatened species exist on their land.

Biodiversity is generally in decline. These concerns include retention of hollow trees, water quality, carbon stored within vegetation and recruitment of trees for future hollows. Private native Forestry also ensures the removal of larger trees, destruction of so-called non-commercial hollow trees via logging, fire, and felling for dubious OH&S purposes. Logging on steep slopes still continues and is a cause for erosion and loss of water quality, both on the property concerned and downstream catchment areas. There are no peer reviewed studies to state this type of activity has or will provide any improvement to the environment, while there is evidence collected over decades which prove the opposite.

Cases exist where landowners preferred to act responsibly after consultation with environmental groups. View existed that the forest concerned had been previously logged leaving little of conservation value. Qualified ecologists locate an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) and several threatened species including a large aggregation of feed trees for yellow-bellied gliders. This tax deductible exercise proved that those with even the best intentions are not always able to identify threatened species, their preferred habitat or an EEC. If the inquiry fails to address these issues many similar instances will go unrecognised and therefore unprotected.

Loss of threatened species can occur via degradation from fragmentation of habitat due to logging and clearing, inappropriate fire regime and loss of old growth habitat features such as hollow trees.

**Report of proceedings of a meeting in Sydney of 26-7-2012:**

After reading the published minutes of this meeting it appears to have been a discussion between The Chair, Dr. Bren and Hon. R.H. Colless with little input from other members and I note the absence of Hon. Cate Faehrmann. It also provided a minimum contribution to the aims of the inquiry but appeared to concentrate of the amount of timber which has come from or may come from the four forests which were the subject of the discussion.

One important point is the mention on 11 occasions of *evidence omitted by resolution of the committee*. How is any person expected to make a submission if a substantial part of the evidence presented to the committee has been omitted without any explanation? What is the committee trying to conceal? The usual clause of *commercial in confidence* was not used, so I must assume the omitted evidence was not of commercial value.

For the most part this session appears to have been a waste of time as nothing substantial resulted from the time spent asking questions of one person in less than two hours.

Have there been any findings published from this committee to keep interested persons informed of events as they proceed? Did any committee member contact Dr. Bren with a question following the inquiry and if so will the content of the question or answer be available to interested persons?

**Conclusions:**

The OEH figures for vulnerable or endangered flora and fauna in NSW lists 882 species and for this reason alone and all efforts to retain as much remnant habitat as possible is essential. This figure does not include EEC's or any flora or fauna considered extinct. Any efforts to see forests as a commercial enterprise will be to the detriment of current and future citizens of NSW whether they are city or regionally situated. With the intentions of the current NSW government to increase the population via consultations with the development industry, NSW will need all available forests to adequately provide for the proper maintenance of what flora and fauna species remain and also to provide suitable recreation areas for that increasing population. The protection of the cultural, historic and visually desirable national parks areas and the overall intrinsic values within them as recognised by most thinking people must not be seen as simply being of commercial value.

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