

**Submission
No 354**

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

Organisation: Baradine & District Progress Association Inc.

Name: Mr Ted Hayman

Date received: 31/08/2012

This submission is made on behalf of the Baradine and District Progress Association and concerns the conversion of the State Forests of Brigalow Belt to National Parks. More specifically our concern lies with the validity of the process and the rationale for conservation. There was also concern regarding the effort put into dealing with the social and economic impact on communities and the inaccuracies in the stated benefits that were supposed to be a result of the change of tenure. There was also unease about the integrity of this very high cost process as it appeared to have had strong political motivation.

This submission raises the issues concerning the disregard for community input, despite the fact it was considered valid, particularly the government's disregard of the Sinclair report after claiming that it would be the definitive answer to the process. It also points out gross inaccuracies in the assessment of timber volumes that would be available to industry, which was completely contrary to the knowledge available at the time.

The Hon Robert Brown, MLC
Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5
NSW Parliament House,
Sydney NSW 2000

31 August 2012

Dear Sir,

Re – Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in NSW

This submission is made on behalf of the Baradine and District Progress Association and concerns the conversion of the State Forests of Brigalow Belt to National Parks. More specifically our concern lies with the validity of the process and the rationale for conservation. There was also concern regarding the effort put into dealing with the social and economic impact on communities and the inaccuracies in the stated benefits that were supposed to be a result of the change of tenure. There was also unease about the integrity of this very high cost process as it appeared to have had strong political motivation.

Outcomes from the decision were supposed to deliver a sustainable timber industry, an increase in the employment base, and a more viable community through NPWS spending and greatly increased tourist income as well as the supposed improved environmental management.

None of this has happened.

As a consequence of the decision the Baradine community lost 44 jobs from a full time jobs base of around 250 (17.5%). Two other businesses that were partly dependant on the timber industry also closed.

Census data from 2001 to 2006; eighteen months after the decision show a drop in district population of 157 people with a drop of 12% in full time employment. The unemployment rate stayed at around 12% due mainly to the loss of population and an increase in people moving on to pensions.

It is unlikely these figures will have improved since 2006 as State Forests have continued to shed jobs.

As for the boom in jobs that was supposed to come from tourism and national park visits, it hasn't happened and a lack of interest from government in developing tourism has left an unfunded community to attempt the work.

For the most part the assessment of the Brigalow Forests appeared to be less about the realities of conservation and more about how much State Forest could be converted to National Park. This is in despite of the well understood fact that the forest that is here today is not the same as the open forest that was here at the time of European settlement or the science showing the best conservation in these forests would come from adaptive management and not a lock it up and leave it regime.

In 2005 the then State Government announced the conversion of 348,000 hectares of State Forest to either National Park or Community Conservation Areas which excluded the timber industry but allowed mining and gas extraction.

It would appear the far more invasive gas and mining industries were favoured over the benign cypress industry.

Prior to the decision, the cypress industry had a combined log allocation of 68,000 cubic meters per year, well below the sustainable yield of the forests at 75,000 cubic meters. At this level of extraction there was a buffer of 7,000 cubic meters per year and the industry was considered very sustainable. In fact forest standing volumes had increased from .63 million cubic meters in 1950 to 1.86 million cubic meters in 2000. By this measure the forest could not be considered over stressed.

In all the surveys carried out for the Brigalow assessment none stated that the cypress industry was in any way a degrading process. In fact it was understood by anybody with an intimate knowledge of the forest, including many on the National Park side of the debate, that the harvested and thinned areas had the greatest biodiversity values. Yet the industry was demonised rather than accepted as part of the solution.

Following the decision, the government stated there would be 57,000 cubic meters of log available to industry with 20 year supply contracts. This was an absurd situation as with the amount of forest left to industry tree growth rates would have to increase two to three times to maintain that volume of supply. Every body in the industry including State Forests knew this was unworkable.

The situation today is that the volume of small log has had to increase as a percentage of total supply in an attempt to maintain quota.

The effect this is having on the mills is a great loss in efficiency as the small logs are more costly to cut and only produce product that has a low market demand.

Under these circumstances we as a community are concerned as to the future of what is our largest employer.

During the assessment process an alliance of community groups called the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders (BRUS) was formed, of which The Baradine and District Progress Association was a member. The members of BRUS were not against conservation, quite the opposite, but they wanted a workable outcome and were concerned with the way the process was being implemented, focusing on the timber industry and not on the conservation realities.

They were also concerned about the cost of the process and what would be the ongoing cost of park management to the NSW population.

Through the process the group put forward a number proposals that offered better conservation outcomes, while maintaining communities and offering a much greater conservation return on expenditure. In short, the triple bottom line outcome we had been asked to achieve.

The first of these papers was the BRUS option. Put simply this proposal set out how the areas that could benefit most from a National Park management regime could be set aside with only a 3% impact on the cypress industry. The BRUS option also delivered conservation values within 2% of the maximum obtainable on public land. This option was one of nine options under consideration.

Because of the number of options put forward the then State Government asked Mr Ian Sinclair to assess all the proposals and report his conclusions. This report was never made public or acted on. However, a copy has now been obtained. In it Ian Sinclair concluded that the BRUS option was his preference, as among other points the BRUS option offered the best balance and had the greatest support including most Aboriginal Land Councils.

He concluded his report by saying that management is more important than tenure. A point strongly advocated by BRUS and the contention that the timber can be part of the solution.

A companion paper to the BRUS option, which detailed the option's principles and argues its values, particularly the economics, against the other options was also submitted. However, this paper like most information coming from the community was seemingly ignored.

Another paper put forward by BRUS was titled Debunking the Myth. This paper analysed the proposition that National Parks would generate more income and jobs than the timber industry. The paper used figures from NPWS and other government departments and completely discredited the claim.

An audit by a government appointed auditor supported the papers contention, however, this was also ignored and the false claim that tourism would solve job losses continued.

Other papers put forward dealt with the economic aspects of conservation in the region as most of the ecosystems that needed protection were on freehold land and not in the forests. These submissions demonstrated and argued how using the money that would be used in park management and industry adjustment could be better used in obtaining control over these more at risk landscapes on private land and the development of corridors between NP and SF.

Privately this proposal was well accepted by most but was never discussed at large and like other community input disappeared.

After a great deal of community effort, to finish with what appeared to be an agenda driven outcome, is it any wonder why the community was disappointed.

Yours Sincerely,

EW (Ted) Hayman
President Baradine and District Progress Association