

Submission
No 144

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition Inc

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Submission to Legislative Council Inquiry into Crown Lands

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a Clarence Valley based community group which has been involved with a wide variety of conservation issues in the Clarence Valley and beyond since its formation in 1988. The CVCC has an ongoing interest in Crown lands and their management throughout the state.

The CVCC understands that the NSW Government has been reviewing Crown lands legislation and is proposing to make extensive changes to it. **We believe that this state's public lands are an important resource for the people of the state and should be maintained in public ownership for the benefit of current and future generations.**

Below are some comments on several of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

A. The Extent of Crown Land and Benefits of Management of Crown Land to NSW

1. The CVCC is aware that Crown Land comprises a significant percentage of the state's land. However, it is difficult for the public to identify which areas are Crown Land because there is no publicly up-to-date mapping of the Crown Land estate. The CVCC believes that such mapping should be undertaken and published online.

2. Crown Lands provide significant environmental benefits. Many parcels of Crown Land, such as TSRs, contain relatively undisturbed native vegetation which, if managed carefully, provides significant biodiversity value. This is extremely important given the loss of habitat in many parts of the state where this loss is leading to either local or widespread extinction of native flora and fauna. As well as

providing habitat, these remnants, when they are relatively close to each other, act as wildlife corridors which improve biodiversity outcomes.

3. The Crown Land parcels referred to in 2 above will become even more important if the proposed changes to native vegetation legislation are enacted. These changes will result in the weakening of land clearing rules and will enable broadscale land-clearing which will have a devastating impact on native flora and fauna.

4. The community has a vital interest in the continued existence of our extensive network of Crown Lands because of the importance of these areas as places for both active and passive recreation. These recreational activities include bushwalking, jogging, fishing, canoeing and bird watching. Obviously this makes genuine community consultation and transparency of great importance.

B. Adequacy of Community Input and Consultation Regarding the Commercial Use and Disposal of Crown Land

1. While we acknowledge that Crown Land comes in a variety of “packages” (e.g. TSRs, Crown Reserves, Crown Roads, leasehold land in the Western Division) and are subject to an extensive range of uses, we believe that any decisions made in relation to commercial use or disposal of this public resource must be made following extensive and genuine public consultation. Furthermore, the decision-making process must be fully transparent and any decision should be in the public interest.

2. The Barangaroo development is a relatively recent case illustrating both a shameful lack of community consultation as well as an appalling lack of transparency over the development of an important parcel of public waterfront land. Barangaroo also illustrated how the public interest was disregarded while powerful commercial interests were promoted.

3. The Bay Precinct, encompassing Blackwattle Bay, Sydney Fish Markets, Rozelle Bay, Rozelle rail yards, Glebe Island, White Bay, White Bay Power Station and surrounds, is also up for re-development. Whether the Bay Precinct redevelopment will see the same lack of community input and lack of transparency as well as decisions made in commercial rather than the community interest remains to be seen.

4. The CVCC hopes that this Inquiry, as well as the lobbying by community groups, will ensure that this time – and in the future - the NSW Government consults properly with the community and that the decision made in the Bay Precinct and other areas ensures that the community receives the major benefit of the development of **its public land**.

5. The CVCC does not believe that public lands should be seen as a resource to be disposed of (e.g. “privatised”) in the interests of government budget bottom lines. Obviously once public assets are sold off, there is a short-term financial gain for the government but the community has lost its asset forever.

6. Another transparency issue in relation to monies raised from Crown Lands – through sale or leasing for example – is that there is no readily available information on this available to the public. The funds so raised and where they are subsequently spent should be publicly listed.

Conclusion

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition urges the Inquiry to represent in the strongest terms the need for the Government to protect the public lands in the Crown Land estate for the people to whom they belong and to ensure that the community is fully consulted about any changes to their management and that all decisions affecting their management are fully transparent.

Leonie Blain
Hon Secretary