

## INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 24 July 2016

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Partially  
Confidential

## Maules Creek Reserve Trust and Maules Creek Travelling Stock Routes

### a) The extent of Crown Land and the benefits of active use and management of the land to New South Wales

The Reserve Trust Crown land at Maules creek is the centre of our rural community. It is a meeting place, a place for recreation – passive and active- both day and night. It fulfils a vital function not able to be fulfilled in any other way. This theme would resonate across most rural crown land- Reserve Trust lands.

There would be no common ground in our community without these space and no ability to move stock by foot. It would be hard to imagine a healthy Australia without public lands or public land with more restricted access.

Our public land contains the only community buildings and facilities- a hall, tennis courts, cricket ground and a tract of relatively undisturbed natural environment. Since it was taken up early last century it has served the local community and its management has largely been in the hands of long-term residents. The Hall is used most days of the week- from special functions such as weddings, private parties, school functions (the school does not have a hall), monthly community group meetings, special functions, weekend retreats, clubs and government functions –information sessions, visiting plays, the rural fire service and much more.

Further, our stock routes are rarely empty of stock. And we do not want coal or gas exploration licences issued over any crown land or pipelines along the routes. That would be a completely misguided direction for these beautiful, central, functioning places.

**The travelling stock routes must be maintained. We are already seeing them eroded by mega-mining much to the anger of the community. The land must remain in public hands and unmined and free from unconventional gas infrastructure.**

- Further there is a lack of publicly available up-to-date State-wide mapping of Crown land. Therefore, the public cannot independently verify the current extent of Crown land.
- Crown land must be managed actively to ensure that public enjoyment of and access to these activities is maintained. The removal of TSRs from a local Pasture Protection Board model to the Local Land Services- which serves a much wider area; has removed local engagement and the knowledge locals have of TSRs. It has eroded community and community confidence in the government's economic agenda for land that already played a significant economic and ecological role in local communities as it was.
- Crown land has significant environmental values, and when properly managed, contributes enormously to the conservation of native vegetation, wildlife habitat **and corridors**, biodiversity in our area. The retention and appropriate management of Crown land will provide a long-term public benefit including in the form of ecosystem services, landscape resilience and river health.
- Our Crown land is of high conservation value and needs active management including control of weeds and pest animals and ensuring that its ecological value is not undermined by commercial activities such as grazing. A paddock is leased, but in reality this land would better serve the public interest if its biodiversity value took precedence.
- We must not see a reducing of active management of the Western Division of NSW as it will threatens biodiversity and ecosystem services as well as the viability of agricultural land, and will significantly increase carbon emissions. Proposed changes to the way

Crown land is managed in the Western Division include conversion of some leasehold land to freehold land, and removing requirements that management be consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

- Changes to Crown land management will be exacerbated by proposed changes to native vegetation laws in NSW which will see land clearing rules significantly weakened by the proposed Biodiversity Conservation Bill and Local Land Services Amendment Bill, including enabling broad-scale land clearing via the equity code.
- Controlled grazing of TSRs has helped to conserve significant parcels of remnant vegetation including endangered ecological communities and threatened species in the Central Division. TSRs need appropriate grazing regimes and management to maintain their importance as wildlife corridors.

**b) The adequacy of community input and consultation regarding the commercial use and disposal of Crown land**

There is broad community concern that the current management and administration of Crown land, including in relation to its sale and leasing, is not transparent and there is little public accountability. For example:

- In Maules creek we are currently dismayed at the imminent that a TSR is going to be cleared by Whitehaven Coal. WE have seen no transparency around this arrangement. It remains uncleared yet clearing has occurred either side of it.



**Figure 1** TSR corridor runs to right of broadscale clearing

- Indeed there is a rumour that a deal has been done by a select group to allow its clearing.
- There is no readily available information to the public about how money raised from the sale, leasing and granting of other interests of Crown land is spent.
- At Maules Creek the reduction of transparency has been exacerbated by the Local Land Services process in relation to TSRs, and for the Reserve Trust - a reduction in those allowed to attend meetings- being reduced to just the Board. And in fact, members of the Board appear to be having meetings without advertising and requesting the attendance of those on the board.
- It has only been in the last 10 years that community members have been excluded from invitation to the MCRT meetings. If community are allowed to attend it seems to be called an extraordinary meeting. This has reduced communication within our community and participation. For example meetings rarely occur and there is no transparency.
- The community needs to be brought back to these currently closed meetings.
- Further erosion is via the State and Local Gov't who appear clueless as to the role of Reserve Trusts. For example they have joined together and are currently attempting to force our Trust to operate outside it's duties under the Act. They are asking them to select "community fund"- Voluntary Planning projects for approval and funding by money held in trust by Local government in the first instance and ultimately projects will be approved and badged by a local coal company in the second Instance.
- The Lands Department have thus far been strong in their support of the Act in this situation. They are to be commended for their interpretation of the Act for the benefit of the Narrabri Shire Council general manager and the Reserve Trust.
- The Reserve Trust handbook is good. But it could be strengthened by increasing the educational role of the Lands department for volunteers. This being in the form of face to face education sessions for trust members with regular review meetings.
- I have been only aware of this submission request via twitter at the last minute- and I am on the Trust. This is not adequate and will undermine the inquiry's integrity.
- I believe that rural communities overall may be surprised to know this Review of Crown lands and push to sell them off is underway.

**c) The most appropriate and effective measures for protecting Crown land so that it is preserved and enhanced for future generations**

- Crown land must remain a valuable public resource and it must stay in public ownership, held on Trust by the State on behalf of the people of NSW. This will build community and social cohesion. Something under threat in our modern approach to the primacy of economic growth. The health of the population must be measured by measures such as community resilience and ecological sustainable environments within which future generations can live. Public lands will and must play a major role in this.
- It is crucial that the social, cultural or environmental values of Crown land are properly evaluated before further decisions are made about the future of Crown land, including TSRs.
- Crown land must be administered in an open, transparent and accountable manner that increases public participation in their management.
- Management of Crown land throughout the State must be based on the principles of ecologically sustainable development. This point is extremely important and valuable for climates in crisis as they are in inland NSW amongst other places. They should become

places for education. An expanded role is going to move our state towards a leadership role for these spaces.

- Crown land management must recognise the importance of and protect ecosystems and the services they provide such as clean water and air, carbon sequestration and biodiversity. Without trees our ability to attract rain is undisputed. Crown land must support this requirement.
- Agencies responsible for the administration of Crown land, including TSRs, must work co-operatively with other land managers including State Forests, NPWS and councils to promote conservation of biodiversity and protection of ecosystem services. Our focus must shift if we as a state are going to maintain our clean green image and value to tourism and food production. This is our future.

**d) The extent of Aboriginal Land Claims over Crown land and opportunities to increase Aboriginal involvement in the management of Crown land.**

- Increased Aboriginal involvement in the management of Crown land to conserve its cultural and heritage values as well as environmental values is strongly supported. For our state to move forward, this is a perfect opportunity- area by area to build our entire community. This is a opportunity to lead.
- It is unclear what implications the proposed changes to Crown land management will have on pending or future Aboriginal land claim rights. In particular consideration must be given as to what effect proposals to transfer or sell land to agencies or private persons will have on future claims. It is essential that Crown land is properly managed to protect its important environmental, social and cultural values pending the resolution of any outstanding land claims.

**In summary** this submission opposes the transfer of crown land ownership to local councils and the sell off of crown land and supports keeping all crown land in public ownership- in trust by the State for the people of NSW.

It also supports a greater transparency of processes and all levels, a strengthening of the focus on the role of all Crown lands in boosting ecological services provided by the crown lands, an opportunity to increase Aboriginal involvement in the management, ecological sustainability and education.