

**Submission
No 167**

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Willoughby Environmental Protection Association (WEPA)
Date received: 24 July 2016



Willoughby Environmental Protection Association (WEPA) Inc
WEPA, PO Box 4263
Castlecrag 2068
wepa@wepa.org.au

24 July 2016
Parliament of NSW
Upper House Inquiry into Crown Land
[Submitted online](#)

NSW UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND

I am writing on behalf of members of the Willoughby Environmental Protection Association (WEPA) Inc in response to the NSW Parliament Upper House Inquiry into Crown Land. WEPA, which was established in 1981, is a community-based group with an interest in environmental protection. While our primary interest is the City of Willoughby on the North Shore of Sydney, our members are also involved with environmental matters at state and national levels. WEPA has considered the issues surrounding the terms of reference provided by the Inquiry into Crown Land and wishes to make the following observations.

Willoughby Local Government Area

There are over 70 individual land parcels of Crown Reserves located within the City of Willoughby. These range from small road packages to recreational parks and ovals and large bushland reserves.

Crown Land in the Willoughby area includes areas of high local conservation significance such as Explosives Reserve, Castle Cove; Lane Cove River Foreshore; Flat Rock Creek Reserve Northbridge and Land Cove National Park. These areas have a significant role in maintaining environmental biodiversity on the lower North Shore. They conserve relatively undisturbed local native vegetation, wildlife habitats and corridor, wetlands, rivers, coastal environments and estuaries. With suburban and industrial encroachment these types of bushland reserves, which can be critical to the survival of resident, itinerant and migratory birds and other animals, are becoming ever rarer. WEPA would contend that these Crown land parcels need to be preserved for conservation purposes and to ensure the continued integrity of ecosystems, landscape resilience and river and marine health. They require active management including the control of weeds and pest animals and constant vigilance to ensure that their ecological value is managed and preserved.

Crown Land in the Willoughby LGA is also used for a wide range of active and passive recreational activities including bushwalking, bird watching, kayaking, jogging, dog walking and a wide variety of sports for people of all ages. Crown land needs to be managed actively to ensure that public enjoyment of, and access to, these activities is maintained.



WEPA is concerned that the Government's proposed changes to Crown land management will impact deleteriously on these much-loved and utilised bush and park areas. Of particular concern is the potential, under the changes proposed, that Crown land reserved for open space or public recreation will be handed over to Councils without restrictions relating to present use. This will leave them open to being undermanaged, managed inappropriately or leased for commercial purposes; all of which would undermine their environmental, cultural and social values.

Concerns over the future protection of Crown land in our area are exacerbated by the proposed merger of the City of Willoughby with Mosman and North Sydney Council. WEPA fears that the value of our parks and reserves may not be rated as highly within a much larger local government entity which will encompass a higher proportion of high and medium density, commercial and developed urban areas.

NSW

WEPA also harbours grave concerns in relation to the impact of the proposed changes to Crown Land management in other parts of NSW. The Crown lands estate covers 42% of NSW land, providing remnant vegetation and habitat, as well as habitat connectivity, for threatened species in areas which in many cases have been largely cleared of native vegetation.

Within the Crown Land estate there are over 93,000 hectares of wetlands, some of which are [Ramsar listed](#) and provide habitat for migratory bird species protected under international agreements. Crown lands contain endangered or poorly reserved ecosystems, habitat for threatened plant and fauna species and iconic areas of nature conservation such as the Macquarie Marshes and Gwydir Wetlands. In addition, over 30 million hectares of Crown Land in the Western Division have land management arrangements to protect the fragile soils and water sources in the arid landscape.

Crown lands are currently managed separately to national parks and State forests. However, because of their environmental significance, any framework within which they are managed needs to be consistent with the principles of ecological sustainability. The conversion of leasehold land to freehold land will see the removal of requirements that management be consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development. The proposal (in the Government's Crown Lands Legislation White Paper) that Crown Land be administered as a Public Trading Enterprise raises concerns that there will be widespread sale and commercialisation of Crown Land. In addition, the proposed Government's Crown Land reforms, when coupled with the native vegetation laws proposed under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Bill, paves the way for continued clearing of critical native vegetation.



Summary

In summary, WEPA endorses the following major points made by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, of which we are members, in relation to the terms of reference for the Inquiry:

- If Crown land is to remain a valuable public resource it must stay in **public ownership**, held on Trust by the State on behalf of the people of NSW.
- 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.
- Crown land must be administered in an open, transparent and accountable manner that increases **public participation, including Aboriginal people**, in their management.
- Management of Crown land throughout the State must be based on the principles of **ecologically sustainable development**.
- 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.
- Agencies responsible for the administration of Crown land, 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 Crown lands are vitally important to the ecological health of our neighbourhood and our State; they should stay in public hands, preserve our fragile ecosystems and remain protected for future generations.

Dr Meredith Foley
Hon. Secretary, WEPA Inc

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