

**Submission
No 171**

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Armidale Branch of National Parks Association

Date received: 24 July 2016



NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW
protecting nature through community action

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UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND

Dear Secretary and Committee Members

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the review of the management of Crown Lands.

The management of crown lands impacts on many issues, including public use of lands, rivers and the ocean, environmental conservation and, while many Crown Lands are good carbon stores, climate change.

The members of Armidale Branch of the National Parks Association (Armidale NPA) regard most Crown Lands as invaluable public infrastructure with enormous environmental and social value so we are very concerned by many of the changes to Crown land ownership and management that have been mooted.

Armidale NPA supports the submission from the National Parks Association of NSW as a whole. We write to both express this support and add extra comments on matters we are particularly interested in.

We have a long-standing interest in Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves (TSRs) and their management to maintain nature conservation, Aboriginal cultural and recreation values, along with such grazing value as is consistent with these values. We are very concerned by proposals to review TSRs with the objective of selling many of them.

Travelling stock routes are vegetated corridors which connect other remnant bushland on farms and public land. The loss and degradation of this land will be significant in loss of habitat and local extinction of species. Regents Honeyeaters continue to breed successfully in a TSR close to Armidale – the only successful breeding in recent years in northern NSW has been in or adjacent to TSRs. This is a critically endangered bird, and the habitat must be conserved. Similarly there are many uncommon or threatened plants which are largely confined to TSRs. Other species could become critically endangered if the TSRs were managed like adjoining private land where grazing is more consistent causing loss of grazing-sensitive species, preventing regeneration of taller plants, allowing clearing of woody habitat from the ground and decreasing the diversity of invertebrates which also destroys the food chains of vertebrate fauna.

Like TSRs, there are many other Crown Lands in the New England region which protect important components of our landscape and provide habitat for flora and fauna, including many threatened species and endangered ecological communities. These

include closed or 'paper' roads which still have old trees with hollows supporting wildlife – something adjoining landholders cannot create in time to stop wildlife dying out. In highly cleared landscapes, as it is in most of our New England region, crown lands provide vital habitat linkages and stepping stones between conservation reserves. Private landholders and landcare groups have based their district and property management plans on continued functioning of TSRs as wildlife corridors and windbreaks.

Many TSRs have no fence where they adjoin a road. If sold, under the proposed Biodiversity and Local Land Services legislation 30m wide strips could be cleared along the length of former TSRs for fence construction without any need for approval. In many cases this would reduce the width of vegetation by 20 to 60%. The effect on integrity of the remaining ecosystem would be greater .

At this time the Government has provided insufficient information about proposed reforms to Crown lands legislation for us to be able to assess their full implications. From the information available we have identified some serious concerns including:

There is a lack of reference to ecologically sustainable development. In many cases crown lands are significant environmentally, as described above. It does not appear to be a priority to manage crown lands for their environmental value. It appears that the plan is a business model promoting economic growth over environmental and social values. There is little evaluation of the social or environmental values of Crown lands during the review although this was required by the Review's terms of reference.

There would be no protection of crown land assessed as having local significance if transferred to local councils. Councils could then sell or its use be changed without State government oversight. Councils often have some difficulty managing the land for which they are now responsible so they should be able to choose whether to take on more, not forced to.

The federal and state governments are saying that they are taking climate change seriously, and taking action to meet their carbon reduction targets. Carbon sequestration is important. Giving management of crown lands to vested interests will not guarantee that vegetation will not be cleared.

There has been insufficient mapping of current use, also the social and environmental values of crown land. Crown Land may contain wetlands, remnant vegetation, sports fields etc. This land must remain public property.

Crown lands must be preserved for the benefit of the community and our future generations. These lands are fundamental to our social, economic and environmental well-being and their management must conform to ecologically sustainable development principles.

The Crown Lands Review and proposed legislation puts at risk the future management and use of public lands.

Kate Boyd
For: Armidale Branch