

**Submission
No 310**

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr David Freeland

Date received: 24 July 2016

Submission on the Upper House Inquiry into Crown Lands

To the Honourable Senators conducting this inquiry,

Dear Senators,

This is a private and brief submission to your inquiry, in which I wish primarily to state the importance I see in the protection of biological, environmental, cultural and social resources that are enclosed in crown lands. It is of concern to me that passing of control of management away from the state could undermine the very significant value crown lands hold in the preservation of our natural and cultural resources.

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

The vital component of this set of terms of reference for the inquiry is the scope of what constitutes 'active use' and 'benefits of...management' to NSW. Crown lands comprise a diverse range of sizes, shapes and types of pieces of land that are used many ways by a similarly diverse range of users.

Two uses of crown lands are of personal relevance to me: conservation and bushwalking – the former because I am deeply concerned about the potential consequences of loss of biodiversity in our state (for agriculture as well as for enjoyment of the environment) and the latter because I am a bushwalker. The preservation of cultural and historical remnants (both British and indigenous) also has meaning for me.

A bushwalk I joined earlier this year illustrated for me the importance of crown lands in the state's project of conserving an adequate range of biodiversity for future Australians. Our project was to explore two valleys in Wollemi National Park; however, we were only able to gain access via an old travelling stock route, which of course was on crown land. The stock route proved a fascinating historical relic, illustrating the extraordinary ingenuity of early stockmen in moving cattle through rugged terrain, whilst it was obvious that it now provides a traveling route for wildlife. There were animal trails following the ridge along the route. It was also vegetated by the native plant species that inhabit only the ridges, less prolific down the steep slopes. Even I, a non-botanist could see that the route protected a particular ecosystem. It provided us hikers with excellent bushwalking in its own right.

Crown lands perform vital roles in ensuring the adequacy of our system designated conservation areas. Research done by the National Parks Association of NSW showed that as many as 143 out of the total of 193 ecosystems represented in NSW crown lands are endangered, vulnerable or poorly preserved. (I am aware that the inquiry has been made aware of these figures by the NPA's submission.) **Because so many of the classes of ecosystem found in crown lands are poorly preserved in the system of national parks and other designated conservation areas, active management of these lands to preserve their ecological health and integration with the reserve system performs a vital function for our society.**

They provide wildlife corridors that keep populations of animals and plants of viable breeding size, by keeping those in separate national parks in contact with each other. They also provide buffer zones around many parks, reducing the number of feral animals and fires that enter the legally protected areas. This means that the real 'protection' of the value of the parks depends on the state of surrounding ecosystems.

For example, the management of national parks to preserve biodiversity is in many cases only possible because of buffer zones of largely intact natural land surrounding the parks. These lands, many of which are crown lands, hold seed resources for native plant species found in the national parks, as well as habitat that enables animal species to breed outside the parks. That resource is vital to the regeneration of national park bushland after wild fires. It may aid in reducing the impact of territorial behaviour amongst animals species of high density.

Areas of crown land also provide wildlife corridors that enable both breeding and migration between isolated areas of protected habitat that, without the corridors, would constitute ecological 'islands'. Imagine koalas escaping fire, or finding mates when disease or fire has reduced their number in one national park, if there are not enough trees for them to travel to the next park.

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

It is important that public consultation continue and that the public be made aware of the opportunities for input. In particular, conservation groups, bushwalking groups and other frequent users, such as horse riders, mountain bikers as well as potential commercial beneficiaries be given opportunity to state our concerns and expertise.

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

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 really important to recognize that economically oriented management decisions will have an inherent tendency to ignore the long term consequences of loss of public ownership and control, including conservation, and that these could include long term economic loss via ecological pests (of which Australia has an unfortunate history).

Time being short, I will finish by saying that I have perused the gist of the submissions by the NPA NSW and Nature Conservation Council and strongly endorse the views represented in those submissions.

Yours faithfully,

David Freeland