

**Submission
No 115**

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Parklands Albury Wodonga Ltd

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Parklands Albury Wodonga Ltd is a community managed public manager, working across six local government areas on environmental lands. This includes parts of Albury, Greater Hume, Federation and Snowy Valleys Local Government areas. Our comments are based on experiences in south east NSW.

(a) the extent of Crown land and the benefits of active use and management of that land to New South Wales,

Crown land in the south east of NSW is some of the last remnant patches of threatened Box Gum Grassy Woodlands and other depleted and threatened EVC vegetation communities. The benefit of Crown ownership is that this protects these remnants into perpetuity and provides community access for recreation, education and appreciation, therefore growing the network of custodians caring for country. NSW Government act on behalf of NSW residents. The terms of reference should not be about the extent of Crown land but the importance of preserving this Crown land for future generations in a good condition, in terms of biodiversity and public access. A recent NSW Government White Paper recommended shifting responsibility for Crown land from NSW Government to Local Governments. Whilst a cost shifting measure, this is far more preferable to disposal of Crown land.

(b) the adequacy of community input and consultation regarding the commercial use and disposal of Crown land,

Parklands Albury Wodonga is concerned about the lack of transparency and community input into decisions about the commercial use and disposal of NSW Crown land. When we become aware of proposals to sell off closed road reserves providing public access to waterways, including the Murray River, we have written to express concern. However, there is no public register of what land is under consideration for sale and therefore no consistent public accountability in decisions about commercial use and disposal of Crown land. As regions grow, it is important to retain land in public ownership for future needs, particularly access to waterways for recreation and recreational fishing. Waterway corridors, closed road reserves providing access to waterways, closed road reserves with high conservation values, travelling stock reserves and disused railway corridors must be retained in public ownership as they provide significant opportunities for communities in terms of economic benefits (rail trails) as well as significant environmental corridors which are essential for threatened species as we adapt to a changing climate.

(c) the most appropriate and effective measures for protecting Crown land so that it is preserved and enhanced for future generations, and

The management of Crown land for biodiversity outcomes and passive recreation (such as walking, mountain biking and recreational fishing) with grazing limited to spring and autumn (for fuel load management) is recommended for Crown land which is not classified as national park. In Crown reserves where threatened species of flora are found, grazing would not be appropriate. The current system of appointing local custodians via the Trustee system ensure local governance and active management. Passive management via grazing licenses alone is not an effective means of protecting and enhancing Crown land for future generations.

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

In response to Terms of Reference (c) and (d), active management of Crown land will ensure it is preserved and enhanced for future generations. A Trustee to oversee this active management (local group or local council) and state government funded resources to employ an Aboriginal land management team would create economic participation opportunities as well as build knowledge and skills in traditional land management practices. Of particular importance is environmental mosaic burning across the landscape to enhance biodiversity and reduce fuel loads.

Thank you for the opportunity to input to this enquiry. Parklands Albury Wodonga urge that the NSW Government establish an open and transparent register of all Crown lands that are proposed to be used for either commercial or disposal and a sufficiently long period of public consultation (at least 6 weeks).

Furthermore, corridors of connectivity are to be retained in public ownership because of their crucial role in enabling rural communities, agriculture and environments to adapt to a changing climate.