

Submission

No 187

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Myall River Action Group

Date received: 23 July 2016

SUBMISSION

In my previous life, as an average suburbanite, I had little need to have any dealings with Crown Lands. I was aware of their existence, however ignorant of the majority of the extent and complexities this public service department encompasses. It is my belief that the majority of NSW residents are similarly placed, until they are placed in a situation requiring a Crown Lands approval and they are faced with confusion, undue delays and inefficiencies in obtaining any decision.

In making this submission, it is my hope that you will find the following comments to be constructive and they are based on personal experience over the past 8 years.

We retired to Tea Gardens, located on the Lower Myall River. The river has been the life line of the townships, initially logging, then fishing and now tourism. It was dredged on a regular basis for approx. 100 years and ceased in 1998 due to withdrawal of funding by the then State Govt.

From 2004, the river characteristics began to change and we began to experience fish diseases, the loss of our local oyster industry due decreasing salinity and increased turbidity. The condition worsened and in 2008 the community submitted a petition containing 3500 signatures asking for urgent action to dredge the natural channel which was blocked due sand migration and the obvious cause for the loss of fresh oceanic water entering the system. The Myall River Action Group was formed and adopted the role of spearheading the community wishes.

THEN THE NIGHTMARE BEGAN

Council listened to the community and undertook the management of the project with MRAG assistance, as and when required. On the basis of the history of dredging we believed the process would be fast tracked, but no. Initially we needed to convince a raft of State Govt. Agencies that such remedial action was required. Those Agencies consisted of our State Member / Council / NP&WL / Marine Parks / Maritime Services / Fisheries / DECC-water-coastal and finally the Environmental Minister who authorised a study and commission of an outside consultant.

That study resulted in meetings of these Agencies (no community input) over a 12 month period and was chaired by a member of NSW Trade and Investment who finally issued a questionable report. That report was subsequently rejected by the community and overturned by the then Dep. Premier who authorised the program be financed.

THE NIGHTMARE DEEPENS

Prior to letting contracts and despite the previous history of dredging, we understand Council was required to obtain a number of licences from numerous Agencies, often inter agency and in the case of Lands, between two offices. Council can provide the full requirements; however we understand approvals were required from EPA / bird societies / aboriginal lands and more.

Delays were experienced, particularly from Lands Taree office in processing these demands and resulted in a 2 year delay to finality. In essence, Council based their removal quantity on 2010 figures—the project completed Oct 2015 and based on an accretion rate of 15K sand per annum has resulted in a further 75K deposited at the entrance and will require remedial work earlier than anticipated.

We have other examples of unnecessary bureaucratic blockages in projects the MRAG is undertaking on behalf of this community and we ask the question as to why?

Briefly---We ask why approvals and licences need to be obtained for the dredging of the Corrie channel which was done 5 years ago. Surely that is an unnecessary duplication.

We ask why sea grass studies need to be completed in a mooring site which has been inundated with sand and all grass has been smothered.

We ask why approvals need to be obtained on whose authority to investigate dredging choke points within the Nat Park area of the Myall River. Our enquiry lead to the statement that such a program would need to be submitted to Crown Lands on the basis they are the custodians of the river bottom and Nat Parks have the responsibility above the waterline.

We ask why owners of jetties are required to gain approvals from Council and Lands etc. Surely those costs are an additional impost.

In conclusion

It is my belief that Crown Lands has a place in Government and fulfils necessary functions in land management.

On the negative side, it is buried in a plethora of other divisions and overlaps functions that should be undertaken by other bodies such as local Councils and or other Govt. Agencies including OEH and RAMS.

Communication and responsibility should be confined and duplication of tasks must be minimised.

The function of Lands under the auspices of Trade and Investment is not understood by the general public. The complex Department needs to be rationalised, streamlined and divest itself of unnecessary bureaucracy. It can and should then be presented to the public as a Department which has a place in our modern society and not viewed in its current form as a nightmare to deal with

Gordon Grainger

Myall River Action Group

July 20th 2016