

**Submission
No 206**

INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission to the NSW Government's Inquiry into Crown Lands

A citizen's concern about the insidious erosion, commercialisation and privatisation of Crown Lands in an increasingly unequal society.

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

Over my lifetime I've been increasingly disturbed by the alienation of Crown lands in favour of interest groups which seemingly are able to dodge scrutiny from elected authorities or, more the point, to do backroom deals with them. Focal points of accountability in this process appear curiously fragile. For example, where did disclosure and debate disappear to in the case of the attempt to take over a swathe of Moore Park for a temporary stadium or the plan to build the Tibby Cotter Bridge as a part of a grand plan for the permanent take-over of the parklands for sporting interests?

I realise that protecting and maintaining public lands from damage, especially with increases in population, is costly. For example, walkways are necessary to protect coastal flora and toilet facilities are an essential public amenity. I also realise there is the need for compromise. On the one hand, avoiding damage means steering people onto designated paths and particular areas.

However, there is a need to avoid corralling people - to provide freedom of access and room to breathe, free of commercialisation and pollution by mind-numbingly loud music and advertising, and specialisation.

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

We seem to be subject to the normalisation of creeping tokenism in public decision-making – at all levels of government. True - the blame for this could be sheeted home to public apathy. But while this may be the most convenient of all defences it is also the hollowest. Its implied cynicism rests on an underlying contempt for the voice of the people; i.e. we, the citizens and ratepayers as the shapers of our national personality, and the custodians of our dignity.

Furthermore, it is the poorest and most vulnerable whose voices are not heard during community consultations and who need the benefits of Crown lands more than most especially as our society becomes more unequal.

It is to be hoped that this inquiry leads to guarantees that in future there is going to be more transparent scrutiny when plans to take over, or make alterations to the use of, Crown lands are mooted .

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

Put a cap on special interest groups, especially organised sporting interests and commercial enterprises, such as expensive restaurants and accommodation, which cater for the few at the expense of the majority.

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

It is time to **give the aboriginal population some real say about the management of lands** that were once theirs.

In conclusion I believe it is high time to strengthen the laws and regulations that protect Crown lands and to prevent the insidious takeover by special interest groups . If as much is lost, as I've seen in my lifetime, over the next couple of generations then public spaces which are free of privatisation and commercialisation, and which give people freedom of access, will be seriously eroded and depleted.

Margaret Hope