

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT

At Sydney on Tuesday 4 December 2012

The Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

PRESENT

The Hon. R. L. Brown (Chair)

The Hon. R. H. Colless

The Hon. C. Faehrmann

The Hon. L. Foley

The Hon. S. MacDonald

The Hon. Dr P. R. Phelps

The Hon. P. T. Primrose

CHAIR: Welcome to today's public hearing in Parliament House of the Inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales. The inquiry is examining the operational, economic, social and environmental impacts of converting Crown land, State forest and agricultural land in the national parks estate, and other matters pertaining to the management of public land. Before we commence I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to Elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

Today we will hear from a number of witnesses including representatives from conservation groups and recreational fishing groups, Professor Mark Adams from the University of Sydney and the Rt Hon. Ian Sinclair. Several local landholders in Armidale will be speaking with the Committee via teleconference, followed by a retired forester, Mr Vic Jurskis. This afternoon we will hear from local government representatives, Mr Andrew Fraser, the member for Coffs Harbour, the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association and representatives of the National Resources and Energy Policy Committee of the National Party of Australia. Tomorrow the Committee will hold a final public hearing for this inquiry at Parliament House. The details of this hearing are on the Committee's website.

Before we commence I will explain the procedures for today's hearing. Copies of the Committee's broadcasting guidelines are available from the Committee staff. Under these guidelines while members of the media may film or record Committee members or witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind any media representatives present that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important for all persons present to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside the evidence in the hearing so I urge witnesses to be very careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take action on those comments. Witnesses are advised that any messages should be delivered to Committee members through Committee staff. A full transcript of what is said today will be prepared by our Hansard reporters. The transcript will be available on the Committee's website in the next few days. Finally, I ask everyone to turn off their mobile phones.

PEPE CLARKE, Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservation Council, and

KEITH WILLIAM MUIR, Director, The Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr CLARKE: I thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear and note the substantial contributions to the inquiry to date by members of the Nature Conservation Council, including written submissions and appearances before the inquiry. The Nature Conservation Council was established in 1955 and we represent 100 local and regional environment groups from across the State of New South Wales. I propose to keep my opening statement brief and wherever possible to avoid repeating things that the inquiry has already heard in its extensive hearings and deliberations. I will speak briefly to the matter of reserve establishment, to some issues surrounding reserve management, forestry issues including issues that have been discussed extensively in this inquiry, and I would like to touch specifically on the issue of bushfire management on public lands and across the landscape. I will also touch briefly on the impacts of mining and gas on public lands.

The establishment of protected areas and reserves is known to be the single most effective method for protecting conservation values, in particular the habitat of wildlife and the survival of threatened plant and animal species over time. The establishment of protected areas—national parks and other types of conservation reserves—in New South Wales has been based on bipartisan national policy, sound science and a rigorous process. I understand the Committee has been briefed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service on these procedures and heard a range of views on that, so I do not propose to go into it. We recognise the important role of private land in achieving conservation outcomes, particularly voluntary conservation and the efforts of landholders in this regard. However, in our view this is not a replacement or an appropriate substitute for a well-managed public reserve system.

Our national parks estate is an effective conservation mechanism and it enjoys strong public support. In relation to the management of those reserves it is clear—it is axiomatic—that protected areas must be well managed to be effective. Tim Flannery is the latest of many conservation biologists who has made the point that we cannot simply draw lines on maps; protected areas need to be managed effectively to ensure their conservation values are maintained or enhanced over time. On a number of land management indicators the National Parks and Wildlife Service performs strongly when compared with other public land managers and indeed many private managers of land. The National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council has provided extensive comments on this issue, which I do not propose to repeat except to say that that advisory council has a direct engagement in the ongoing management of the parks and that on the whole we are very supportive of the comments they provided to this inquiry.

To properly manage our public lands it is essential that public land managers across all types of public lands, whether they be national parks, State forests or Crown lands have the resources they need to do that job effectively. In our view the management of national parks may be improved by the allocation of additional resources for that task to ensure that we not only maintain the conservation values of those areas but also manage and promote sustainable visitation of those areas and maintain good relations with the neighbours of national parks.

In the context of this discussion of the reserve estate in New South Wales I would like to table a comparison of the percentage of lands in New South Wales that are protected areas for the purposes of the national reserve system. That includes the national park estate as well as other protected areas such as Indigenous protected areas. You will see from this table that as a percentage of total State area, protected areas made up, as at 2010, 8.8 percent of the total area of New South Wales. This is the second lowest figure in Australia, ahead of Queensland. All other States and Territories in Australia except for Queensland have a higher proportion of their lands in the national reserve system. If we look at the total area of those protected areas, which is the figure in the second column of the table, New South Wales ranks in fifth place with 7.1 million hectares. That figure has increased somewhat since 2010 but I expect the comparison with the other States would remain essentially the same. You can see that in that comparison Queensland is significantly ahead of New South Wales with something like 50 percent more land area in the national reserve system. New South Wales can justifiably be proud of its role in leading the establishment of protected areas in Australia in a historical sense with the establishment of the Royal National Park and the ongoing establishment of national parks, but currently we are quite a long way behind other States and Territories in the establishment of protected areas.

I turn now to forestry issues. A lot has been said before this inquiry about the ecological impact or benefits of forestry operations. Our view and the view of our members is that native forest logging operations as they are currently conducted in New South Wales are unsustainable in a couple of key regards. One is that the resource is simply being harvested faster than it can regrow, particularly in the north-east of the State. I draw the Committee's attention to the submission prepared by Mr Dailan Pugh of the North East Forest Alliance, which provides a historical perspective on how we arrived at this situation. Logging operations are having significant impacts on biodiversity and water quality, and in some cases water quantity. Forestry operations, according to the New South Wales Native Vegetation Report Card for 2010, are the largest and fastest growing cause of canopy loss in New South Wales; that is, the removal of forest canopy visible from space through satellite monitoring. I will table the figures and graph from that Native Vegetation Report Card, which was produced by the New South Wales Government and released in November 2011. You will see that of the various land uses forestry is a substantially larger cause of canopy loss than the other land uses listed there and that it has also had the fastest rate of growth particularly over the period from 2004 to 2010.

I am advised that because of the operation of the Private Native Forestry Code, as a general rule logging operations on private lands do not appear on these figures because of the basal area retention requirements, so these figures relate principally, if not entirely, to our public lands. The increased intensification of logging activity as a result of the loss of the larger timber in particular and commitments to deliver a certain amount of timber supply must prompt action by government to resolve this issue. It is an issue for the industry and an issue for the State's environment. I would be happy to take questions on this issue. I will pass over the remainder of the forestry issues at this stage but for a brief response to the proposal by the Forest Products Association that up to one million hectares be removed from the reserve estate and opened up for logging. We strongly oppose that proposal. It will not resolve the underlying sustainability issues for the industry and will, as you would expect, be deeply unpopular.

In relation to the less grandiose proposal to access the plantation resource within the reserve estate, the advice provided to me is that the area of plantations within the reserve system is very small when compared with the overall timber supply, particularly in the case of the north-east region. Most of those areas can be rehabilitated to restore their conservation values and the remaining area simply would not substantially address the timber supply issues for the industry.

I turn briefly now to fire management and table a brief submission from the Nature Conservation Council bushfire program on this matter. The document speaks, amongst other things, to the important role of fire in maintaining or improving conservation outcomes. It is a widely held misconception that the conservation movement as a whole and the Nature Conservation Council in particular are opposed to the use of fire in the landscape. On the contrary, we see fire as an important land management tool and a way in which to maintain or improve conservation values. This submission speaks to that. We also place a very high priority on the protection of life and property, and that is one of the goals of our program. One of our bushfire projects recently received both State and Federal national safety awards for our work in the community educating people on how to reduce fire risk while achieving good conservation outcomes, particularly on rural properties but also increasingly in peri-urban communities that are at risk from bushfire.

The submission speaks briefly to four key misconceptions about the management of fire, which I will not address in detail here. The first of those misconceptions is that prescribed burning is a panacea. The second misconception is that national parks start fires, are a leading source of fires and that logging mitigates bushfire risk. The third of those misconceptions is that grazing reduces blazing and is an appropriate biodiversity management tool. And the fourth misconception is that fire management agencies are not effective in managing fire risk. I would be happy to speak to any of those, but I do not propose to take up the committee's time with those now. Finally on the issue of fire management, I understand that Professor Mark Adams will be appearing before the Committee this morning. In the past Professor Adams has made statements about the role of the Nature Conservation Council in bushfire management in New South Wales. If there are any questions arising from Professor Adams' evidence that you would wish to put to us as questions on notice, I would be very happy to answer them.

I would like to table two documents. One contains extracts from the Rural Fires Act and the Rural Fires Regulations. They speak to the membership of the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, which is the State level coordinating mechanism for bushfire management in New South Wales, and the regulations speak to the persons invited to become members of a bushfire management committee. You will see that in both cases, while the Nature Conservation Council is listed in the legislation, it is one of quite a large number of government and non-

government bodies that are provided for in the legislation. The Nature Conservation Council has no role as an assessment or consent authority in the New South Wales fire management system. I would suggest that the Committee regards Professor Adams' statements about our role, and particularly our strong directing influence in the management of bushfire in New South Wales, with some caution. I would be very happy to answer further questions on that either today or on notice.

Finally, I table a book review published recently in an academic journal of Professor Adams' publication *Burning Issues*, to which he refers in his submission. I will not go into detail on the book review, simply to say that it is not a positive review. I will move finally and very briefly to the issue of mining and gas operations on our public lands. In our view, the rapid expansion of mining and gas operations in New South Wales presents a significant threat to our public lands, particularly our State forests and State conservation areas and our drinking water catchments, many of which form part of the public lands estate. I table a copy of our report "Icons under Threat". It highlights seven case studies, most of them on public lands across New South Wales where open cut mining, longwall mining or coal seam gas operations present a significant threat to conservation values, including both biodiversity and water quality. In our view, there is a need to protect our drinking water catchments much more effectively in New South Wales from the current and potential risks of mining and gas. We would also recommend increased levels of protection for certain public land tenures and greater transparency and public consultation around decisions to give access to our public lands. I shall close there.

CHAIR: Mr Muir, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr MUIR: Yes I would. The Colong Foundation for Wilderness was established in 1968 and since that time has worked towards the protection of large intact natural areas. I have read some of the transcripts and submissions to this inquiry and I would like to make comment in relation to those. There have been several activities, some of which have been described as active management, presented as a way of improving biodiversity. I believe that many of these actually degrade biodiversity. They are grazing stock, thinning river red gums, collecting firewood on a large basis, the logging of North Coast native forests, the driving of vehicles in wilderness and off roads, horse riding in national parks, resort development and hunting. National park management should be based on scientific understanding and not on assertions and hearsay. One of those assertions is that Aboriginal burning practices justify increased burning of national parks. We actually do not know in New South Wales what those burning practices were like, but we do know that most of the forests and woodlands in New South Wales were not subjected to frequent burning of less than 10 years' frequency. I read from the Abstract in *The nature of pre-European native vegetation in south-eastern Australia* by Benson and Redpath:

Vegetation types such as rainforest, wet sclerophyll eucalypt forest, alpine shrublands and herbfields, and inland chenopod shrublands, along with a range of plant and animal species, would now be rarer or extinct if they had been burnt every few years over the thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation.

That is a peer-reviewed document and I am prepared to make that copy available to the inquiry as evidence. I would like to now offer two examples of proposed resort development, which would, if they had been approved, harm existing tourism businesses. In the case of the Warrumbungle National Park, the Coonabarabran Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Minister for the Environment and explained that it opposed the development of roofed accommodation inside Warrumbungle National Park for two reasons: one would be that it would deprive the local businesses of patronage and the other that it would impinge upon the wilderness nature of the Warrumbungle National Park. I will make that letter available to the inquiry. There is another aspect in relation to the proposed but rejected development in the Warrumbungles and that is that if it had gone ahead it would have created light scatter and degraded the effectiveness of the astronomical telescopes on the nearby mountain outside Coonabarabran.

The second example of inappropriate development is something on which the Leader of The Nationals, Andrew Stoner, has commented. There was a proposal for a beachside cabin resort development in Arakoon State Conservation Area that would have adversely impacted on the adjoining caravan park owner in South West Rocks, Tony Mayne's operation. Andrew Stoner made comment in relation to it and it was dropped subsequently. The point about these two examples is that you can have tourism in the adjoining areas benefitting from the national park, but if you actually locate the facilities in the national park then you actually draw away the tourism from the established facilities to the facility in the national park and both the natural environment in the park and the existing tourism are disadvantaged. National parks are primarily set aside for nature conservation and with the bonus of tourism, which is enhanced by the national park. If you develop the national park, you may defeat both the purpose of the reservation and the existing tourism growth outside the park.

National parks are not locked up. Unlike private lands and Crown leasehold lands, they are available to everyone. Leasehold lands are an exclusive occupation and through a lease you have rights to occupation which no-one else has and you can exclude people from your lease—similarly with private land. But a national park is available to everyone. National parks provide benefits such as fresh air and unpolluted water, catchment protection and biodiversity conservation. But if you wish to make a profit from a national park, first you have to put a price on fresh air, clean water, biodiversity conservation and catchment protection. You do not expect to make profits from schools, hospitals and a police force; you should not expect to make a profit from a national park. They are part of the fabric of our rich culture, but they will not remain that way unless we learn how to maintain them in an ecologically sustainable manner. We need to learn from these wonderful self-sustaining systems or we will become diminished society for failing to do so.

Nothing we do now is sustainable ecologically. We are mining our natural capital every single day in New South Wales. To suggest that we should exploit national parks through some sort of active management would condemn future generations to not being able to see wild nature or understand what sustainability truly is by its example. Proposals put forward at this inquiry to exploit national parks would condemn prosperity to an inescapable decline in a prison of our own urban industrial culture. We would not have a natural environment that would be worthy of national park status if we exploit these areas for logging, grazing and all the other activities. These areas are set aside for our recreation and inspiration, so that we can develop sustainable practices in our productive areas, not the other way round.

We have not always, as a conservation movement, been successful. The Kinchega Wilderness was revoked, and the Deua and Pilliga wilderness areas were not reserved. There is only one outback wilderness, at Mootwingee, protected under the Wilderness Act. So to say that it is now the turn of the user groups or loggers to get their go because they have missed and we have had our go is nonsense. I will leave it there. I am happy to answer questions.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you both for appearing today and for the excellent work you have done protecting our environment and the excellent work of your organisations in ensuring that areas of nature are put aside for future generations. I am interested to know what your views are on what the public's reaction would be to the opening up of some national parks to logging or the conversion to some existing national parks to State forests so that they can be logged.

Mr CLARKE: I think it is very likely that there would be a very strong negative reaction from the broad majority of the New South Wales public. In 2010 a national poll, rather than a State-specific poll, found that 90 per cent of those polled support protection of high conservation value forests in national parks. That was a poll conducted by Galaxy Research in May 2010 with a sample size of 1,100 people. We can speculate as to whether you would get the same results in New South Wales if you repeated the poll, but I think it is very likely that the New South Wales public would respond strongly and negatively to any proposal to open up our national parks to logging, particularly on the scale that is being proposed by the Forest Products Association. But more generally a proposal to either allow logging in reserved areas or to revoke existing reserved areas to allow logging would be deeply unpopular.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I just want to check your views on the specially managed zones within State forests, areas set aside for conservation but which, as I understand, have not actually been reserved into nature reserves or national parks. Do you know about those through the original Regional Forests Agreement process?

Mr CLARKE: The polling information is about people support for the protection of high conservation value forests. Specially managed zone areas are areas that were protected because they meet specific conservation criteria. So, whilst they remain part of the Forests NSW estate, they are high conservation value forests or have been identified as high conservation value forests, and I would expect that the strong public reaction would apply to those areas as well.

Mr MUIR: I would like to draw the attention of the inquiry to the proposal to log Gradys Creek, which I think was the last time a flora reserve was attempted to be logged. That was one of the major triggers in the rainforest battle, and it of course was not eventually logged. It led to major arrests and protests on the site. It is now a World Heritage area. Some of the flora reserves are of course World Heritage. I would hope that this inquiry does not recommend the logging of World Heritage listed flora reserves as part of its recommendations.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You said in your opening statement, Mr Clarke, that logging obviously can lead to canopy loss. We have heard from some people who have appeared before this inquiry that canopy loss can open up a forest and lead to a healthier forest. We have been shown by Forests NSW and others in the industry some stands of forest that have been logged, and we have been told that these forests are healthy, that in fact logging improves biodiversity or is good for biodiversity in some areas. Do you have any evidence or research to suggest, firstly, that logging is bad for biodiversity and, secondly, why canopy loss is such a bad thing?

Mr CLARKE: This reminds me of an anecdote about a judge in the early days of environmental law in Australia who was taken into the forests to observe the impacts of logging, was told about the impacts of losing the canopy such as soil erosion, loss of habitat and so on, and said, "I don't see what the problem is. They just want to take the trees, not the canopy." I think our understanding of these issues has moved on somewhat. The overwhelming majority of scientific literature on the issue of logging impacts on native forests indicates that sustained logging of native forests, particularly at the levels and intensity that we see in New South Wales at the moment, has a negative impact on biodiversity; so that includes the total number, the species richness.

It is true to say that breaks in the canopy are a natural part of forest ecology; trees fall down, there are disturbance events—we know that. But to extrapolate that out to a much larger scale, and to suggest that logging methods such as heavy group selection are an appropriate way to maintain or even improve biodiversity in our native forests is simply not supported by the science.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: We have also heard about the river red gum forests, and we have heard that the Office of Environment and Heritage is conducting a trial of ecological thinning. Some timber industry witnesses have suggested that they could undertake that thinning and asked why they are not undertaking commercial thinning, I suppose, rather than ecological thinning of these areas. Would you have concerns about timber industry operators and Forests NSW undertaking something that they would call ecological thinning of national parks?

Mr CLARKE: I think it is important to be very clear about the purpose of conducting ecological thinning or a trial of ecological thinning. The purpose of a trial should be to determine whether it does in fact improve ecological outcomes. The best way to test that is to conduct a limited field trial, under independent scientific supervision, and to take other complicating factors out of the equation. The market value of the thinning is very limited and very small relative to the total regional economy in those areas. There is not an overriding policy case for providing commercial access to thinning on the scale proposed by the trial. So a trial that is limited in scale, under strict supervision and conducted according to clear conservation criteria is something that is defensible from a reserve management perspective. We would be very concerned if expectations were created that you would be creating a commercial enterprise out of the thinning. So the trial is something that has a defensible reserve management purpose, but we would be concerned that that purpose may be lost if it was entered into as a commercial enterprise. Also, ecological thinning needs to be ecological; it needs to be conducted for a specified purpose, as opposed to being another way of describing commercial logging operations.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What is your general view about how Forests NSW has been conducting their operations in terms of their impact on the biodiversity of State forests? We have been shown some areas by Forests NSW and been assured hollow-bearing trees are retained and that their operations are conducted well and sustainably. I am interested in your views and whether you have seen any evidence of anything to the contrary, or what have you.

Mr CLARKE: There are a number of issues that affect the sustainability of Forests NSW operations. One is the over-estimation, and associated over-allocation, of the timber resource that means that the resource is being logged at unsustainable rates from a silvicultural perspective; so the resource is being exhausted. As Mr Muir said, we are spending the capital. So the resource is being over-harvested in a way that is unsustainable simply from a silvicultural perspective. It is also being harvested with an intensity, and an increasing intensity, that results in significant loss of biodiversity values.

In terms of compliance with existing forestry prescriptions, in our view the prescriptions themselves are not as effective as they should be; also, the compliance of Forests NSW with those prescriptions has been a major problem. We released a report on this matter last year, where the authors of the report found that there had been a systemic failure by Forests NSW to comply with forest prescriptions, and that was resulting in a loss of conservation values in our public forest estate.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Gentlemen, thank you for appearing today. I start with the north east forest. A view has been put to us by several witnesses that with respect to the north east forest the environment movement essentially won the lot and the timber industry was left with the crumbs, to put it colloquially. Is that the view of the environment movement on what happened?

Mr CLARKE: I would refer the Committee to the submission of Mr Dailan Pugh from the North East Forest Alliance, who also appeared before the inquiry. The material on the public record clearly demonstrates that the environment movement did not get everything they asked for; in fact, they got a small fraction of the lands that they identified as being of high conservation value. That material is on the public record and laid out in detail in Mr Pugh's submission. My recollection of the figures was that the initial mapping by the environment movement of forest areas of high conservation value in the north east region was in the order of 1.1 million hectares and the reserve outcome at that time was around 340,000 or 350,000 hectares.

I do apologise if those figures are not precisely accurate; that is my recollection of the material. But, clearly, the outcome in the north east forests, as has been the case in other areas, such as the Pilliga, was very much a compromise between the interests and needs of industry on the one hand, and the value that the broader public of New South Wales place on the conservation of natural areas. Each of these reserve outcomes, particularly in the case of the Regional Forests Agreement outcomes, was very much a compromise between those interests. In fact, the outcome fell well short of the national reserve criteria established for that process. So the outcomes in the north-east did not even meet the Federal government standards, let alone the desires of the conservation movement.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You mentioned the Pilliga. It was put to us by timber industry representatives when we were there that a swap could occur; that is, some areas that are currently State forests could be added to the reserve system and some areas that are currently in the reserve system as a result of the Brigalow conservation decision could be returned to the timber industry as State forests. What would your reaction be to such a proposal?

Mr CLARKE: I think I would say, first of all, that the Pilliga is a living physical example of the compromises that have been made over the years. The fact that the Pilliga has a variety of tenures through it including State forests is an indication of the way in which government policy decisions have been compromises between the perspectives of conservation stakeholders and the conservation-minded people in the community and the interests of the industry utilising those resources. In relation to the proposition that land should be swapped across tenures, from national parks to State forests, we would recommend a very high level of caution in relation to those types of proposals. A detailed assessment process was undertaken for those lands. It was an extensive process. To propose after the fact that we now start swapping those areas around is likely to be counterproductive from a conservation perspective. We would be strongly opposed to that proposal in the absence of any evidence that it would secure much, much higher conservation outcomes. I do not believe that evidence exists.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Indeed. On the fact of it, a proposition that would involve a forest that has been logged in recent times being added to the reserve system and a forest that has been part of the reserve system in recent years being handed over to the loggers would not meet with the approval of the environment movement, would it?

Mr CLARKE: It is not a great swap, no. We would not support a transfer of more recently logged forests in exchange for areas that had not been logged as recently. As a general rule, the conservation values of forest areas increase over time, as we know, and are highest in those areas that are in fact old growth or that have not been logged for a very long time. That is not something that would be supported from a conservation perspective.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I turn now to bushfire management. We are hearing from Professor Mark Adams today, as you noted in your earlier comments. He states in his submission to the inquiry—and we will get the chance to put this to him as well:

... in NSW, legislation gives extraordinary power to an interest group – the Nature Conservation Council – in the determination of where and when fuel reduction fires will be set. No other interest group has such power – not rural landowners, not groups such as the Farmers Federation.

How do you respond to those strong statements of Professor Adams?

Mr CLARKE: They are demonstrably false. The extracts from the Rural Fires Act and the Rural Fires Regulations, which I provided to the Committee during my opening statement, make it clear that that is not the case. The nominees of the Nature Conservation Council are one of a significant number of nominees or representatives that sit on the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, which has 14 members. One of those is a nominee of the Nature Conservation Council. Bush Fire Management Committees may also have a Nature Conservation Council nominee on them. They have no powers above and beyond any other member on those committees and those committees, at both levels, generally do have the representation of organisations like the NSW Farmers Association. If there is other legislation that I should be aware of, then I would be very happy to respond to a question on notice. But the Nature Conservation Council does not have any role as an assessing or approving authority for bushfire hazard reduction activities. That statement, along with a number of others in Professor Adams' publication, is simply misleading.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I was going to ask a similar sort of question about Professor Mark Adams. Can you just clarify this for me: Professor Mark Adams is a dean or professor of agriculture and environment. What qualifications do you gentlemen have?

Mr CLARKE: I have a Bachelor of Science, a Bachelor of Laws, a Master of Environmental Law and a post-graduate Diploma of Legal Practice.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Righto.

Mr MUIR: I have a Bachelor of Natural Resources, which is a resource management degree.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Thank you. The angle I want to ask you about is this table that you gave to us. New South Wales has got 8.84 per cent under reserve, which is roughly seven million hectares. I think the proposal is that we get to about 15 per cent or so as across the species, or the bioregions, I think was the word. If national parks and wildlife costs us around about \$400 million a year now, how do we fund another \$300 million or \$400 million?

Mr CLARKE: The investment that we make in our natural areas, and national parks in particular, is a question of social values and public policy. The New South Wales Government and the Federal Government currently make a significant investment in the reserve estate and that reflects the broad public support for that investment and for those areas. We would suggest that the Federal and State budgets can accommodate an ongoing incremental growth in the reserve system. That has been demonstrated to be the case so far.

We do acknowledge the concerns that some have expressed around the resources available for the management of those areas and we would recommend a higher investment per area of the reserve system to ensure improved management outcomes over time. But these are social and public policy choices. We are spending literally billions of dollars on other areas of public expenditure, such as the Pacific Highway upgrade. These are social choices, and there is broad public support for the reserve system.

I would say also that whilst the conservation movement has a range of views on the use of biodiversity offsets and the extent to which they achieve conservation outcomes, the fact is that they are now a reality, a part of the public policy environment here in New South Wales. Those biodiversity offsets have the potential to provide a significant revenue stream, not only for the establishment of protected areas but also their management over time. This is not an endorsement of biodiversity offsets as a conservation tool, but simply a recognition that there is a new income source for the establishment and protection of conservation areas. That needs to be taken into account.

Mr MUIR: I would like to make comment on that point about improving funding for protected areas. There are two mechanisms that I see are relevant: the elimination of subsidies for environmental damage, and the introduction of pollution taxes that would ensure that any surplus gained in depleting or degrading our natural resources fairly compensates the natural environment, which I do not believe happens at the moment. The carbon tax is one example but there are other activities which degrade the natural environment, and these need to be appropriately taxed. There should be pollution taxes. There should be no subsidies for environmental damage. These are external costs and they need to be brought into the marketplace. That is a funding stream which I think could be more successfully pursued than it is now.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Just a final question on that table: Tasmania is sitting at 41 per cent or so, and is obviously struggling with its State budget. Have you got a figure in mind? I mean, Tasmania is basically a failed State economically. It is a welfare State. Are we looking for those sorts of levels? Have you got 30 per cent or 40 per cent in mind?

Mr CLARKE: I might respond to that in two parts, if I can. The first is whether it is appropriate to identify a causal relationship between the percentage of land reserved and the economic conditions in the State. I do not believe that there is evidence to support that. On the contrary, tourism is a significant source of income for the State of Tasmania. People to travel to Tasmania principally, apart from going to that new art gallery, to see natural areas and rural industries. They go there on the whole to see natural areas that have been protected because of the foresight of people in Tasmania and their State Government. Identifying a causal relationship between the percentage area reserved and the financial conditions in the State I do not think is supported by evidence, but I would be happy to take questions on notice, if such evidence exists. To the second part of your question around whether we advocate a particular target: the Nature Conservation Council does not have policy on a particular reserve outcome as a percentage of New South Wales. What I would say though is that we do support the full implementation of the national reserve strategy and the progressive establishment of further national parks in this State.

Mr MUIR: In relation to the percentage or how much of New South Wales should be protected, I think that in relation to wilderness I would like to put on the record that large intact natural areas where they exist need to be firstly identified. I do not know if we have identified them all in outback New South Wales, which is a very large area. There has been no systematic survey of that area for its wilderness qualities and where they have exist—where they have managed by some luck to survive—then they should be protected. I do not think that it is the same with other areas, but the large intact natural areas should be given a priority in consideration.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Muir, just before we run out of time, my final question is that reading the Colong group's submission, you rejected private models such as Bush Heritage Australia or the Australian Wildlife Conservatory and those sorts of groups. I am just curious why, in these economic times, you are against that approach, which might be one of the few options we have.

Mr MUIR: I am not so much rejecting it. I am just pointing out that they are not necessarily as successful as some people assumed. The Walmsley earth sanctuary model is a failed model. It failed. It does not necessarily mean that other organisations might be more successful, but there are risks with business and there is less risk with government and their management. It is the best way we have, at the moment, to manage large intact areas, and that is in national parks. That is an established fact from the Royal National Park onwards.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Gentlemen, how do you define a wilderness area?

Mr MUIR: Well, it is a large intact natural area. That is the best way to describe it. It is generally larger than 5,000 hectares. There are definitions in the Wilderness Act which go to the identification under section 6 (1):

An area of land shall not be identified as wilderness by the Director-General unless the Director-General is of the opinion that:

- (a) the area is, together with its plant and animal communities, in a state that has not been substantially modified by humans and their works or is capable of being restored to such a state,
- (b) the area is of a sufficient size to make its maintenance in such a state feasible, and
- (c) the area is capable of providing opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I will follow up on that point about human activity. I was rather bemused by the fact that you actually gave us some information of which Eric Rolls was the author. He is a well-known historian of the Pilliga area.

Mr MUIR: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: He disputes the history of the Pilliga as some environmentalists may see it. At the time of Aboriginal occupation, it was an open area of grassland, essentially, with scattered timber through it. He makes the point in that very article you gave us that if the Aboriginals had let up on their management, the rampant bush would have overrun them, as happened to the first European settlers in many districts. That is what happened to the Pilliga Forest in the 1830s. How do you respond to that? How can you

now say that the Pilliga Forest is an area that should be preserved in its current form when in fact the Aboriginal population did have a substantially different management regime in there?

Mr MUIR: Eric Rolls supported the Pilliga wilderness for a start. He is quoted by himself in there as saying he supports it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you think he would support it in its current form today? I think he would be turning in his grave.

Mr MUIR: I am sorry—he supported the proposal and that is what he says in his article, that he supports the Pilliga wilderness. The Pilliga wilderness is identified but has not been reserved; it is not a protected wilderness area. The question as to whether Mr Rolls is correct: I have provided to the inquiry a document by Benson and Redpath, which questions whether Mr Rolls is correct in his assumptions. I direct you to that in relation to the second part of that question.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Oxley certainly found it open and scattered.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Rolls was not the only one that said it.

Mr MUIR: And I direct you to that reference in regard to Mr Oxley as well and his comments, because those are addressed as well.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, we are out of time; we could have done with a bit more time with you two. Your evidence is erudite and well-supported. Thank you very much for coming here today. Your position has been very well put. Questions on notice: because we have got Christmas coming up we have suggested that perhaps questions on notice might be returned by about 18 January. However, if either of you find that time constraint onerous we would be happy for you to contact the secretariat to say you need another couple of weeks. Any answers to questions on notice we will say 18 January but note that it is a bit flexible.

Mr CLARKE: May I also table three additional documents to assist the Committee? I understand that these are topics that have been the subject of some discussion. They relate to forests carbon, economic policy settings in the timber industry and the Nature Conservation Council forest policy, which has been referred to in hearings.

Documents tabled.

(The witnesses withdrew)

MARK ANDREW ADAMS, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, University of Sydney, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for agreeing to appear today. Are you representing an organisation or appearing as an individual?

Professor ADAMS: As far as I know I am appearing as an individual.

CHAIR: Prior to commencing questioning from the Committee would you like to make an opening statement?

Professor ADAMS: Just a short one. I have been involved in fire research and public policy for many years. I think it is very true to say that I wrote a paper for the then Bushfire Research Advisory Group of the Federal Minister McGauran that set the scene for the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. That paper is still a matter of public record. The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre has now completed 10 years of research. I have recently stepped down from being a board member; I continue to publish widely in that general field of fire and management of public land.

CHAIR: The Government has conceded to let the crossbench go first.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Professor Adams, straight into your brief submission to us, I was wondering if you could expand on your statement that the New South Wales legislation gives extraordinary power to the Nature Conservation Council.

Professor ADAMS: I think, again, that is a matter of public record. I wrote a book on the subject of bushfires and land management called *Burning Issues*. The material in that book is, as I said, part of the public record. I am unaware that any other State government legislation gives similar powers in any other part of Australian.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: If you could expand a little bit more? I am not sure whether we will get to read your book, to be honest, so a summary would be good. You say in your submission that the New South Wales legislation "gives extraordinary power to an interest group—the Nature Conservation Council—in the determination of where and when fuel reduction fires will be set. No other interest group has such power—not rural landowners, not groups such as the Farmers Federation". Are you aware of the Rural Fires Act?

Professor ADAMS: I have not read the entire Act but I am aware of it, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: So are you aware of the role that the Rural Fires Act gives the NSW Farmers Association?

Professor ADAMS: Yes, I am.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you please tell the Committee then what the difference is between the role that the Nature Conservation Council is given versus the NSW Farmers Association?

Professor ADAMS: I think the great concern that we have, or I have—and I know it is a concern shared by many—is that people directly affected by bushfires, particularly those people who live in rural areas, have no greater say in what happens around their land than, in many cases, people who do not live in that area or who have, at best, an academic interest in that land.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I might just keep asking you about this because it is in your submission to this inquiry and it is a statement where you say that the Nature Conservation Council has extraordinary power and that no other interest group has such power, such as the Farmers Federation, which I assume you mean to be the NSW Farmers Association. I am asking you about the legislation and the difference between the NSW Farmers Association and the Nature Conservation Council for a reason, because you specifically drew us to this in your one-page submission. So what is the difference? Why does the Nature Conservation Council have that in legislation, as you have said? Where is it? Can you please direct us to how they have more power than the NSW Farmers Association?

Professor ADAMS: And I will refer back to the book that I have written. My one-page submission is one page; the book is several hundred pages and it covers a broad range of issues around the management of public land that we think need to be addressed. So it is much more appropriate that I refer to the book rather than to a one-page submission, with respect. The issue of who should and how we should manage public land for fire risk is a serious matter, it is not a matter that can be covered in a one-page submission nor by a single statement; it is an issue that needs very careful consideration, and I believe very strongly that no interest group, particularly interest groups that have not got, if you like, skin in the game, should have the authority or power over determining who reduces fire risk around their property and how. It is inappropriate, in my view.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I just refer you to the legislation, because I want to see whether this is a true statement in your letter to the Committee, because I was surprised when I read that so I turned to the legislation just to check what you mean. Under the Rural Fires Act the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee consists of 14 members, one of which is—you are correct—the Nature Conservation Council, but another one is a person appointed by the Minister on the recommendation of the NSW Farmers Association.

Professor ADAMS: That is correct, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Going back to your letter where you say that the New South Wales legislation gives extraordinary power to the Nature Conservation Council and that no other interest group, including the NSW Farmers Association has that power, in fact, they are on the committee, which is where the Nature Conservation Council is referenced.

Professor ADAMS: I understand your question. To be clear: as you just said, on the advice of the Farmers Federation—or the NSW Farmers Association, which has gone through several name changes so forgive me for not getting it exactly right—the Minister appoints a person, yes?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: A person appointed by the Minister on the recommendation.

Professor ADAMS: The Nature Conservation Council selects their own person.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I am curious how they give so much more extraordinary power over the NSW Farmers Association.

Professor ADAMS: Because, in my view, they can pick whoever they like and they can hold whatever views they like.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What is the problem—

Professor ADAMS: The problem arises at local levels where there are people who, as I see it, have very little skin, if any, in the game.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What does "skin in the game" mean?

Professor ADAMS: It means if you have a property that is surrounded by public land on three sides—and many private citizens have this—they are required by law to reduce the fuels on their property to an acceptable level; they are required to manage the fuels on their property; otherwise they can be fined if they do not do that. On the other side of the fence literally from their property can be a huge fire risk over which they have almost no say. That is, in my view, an unequal distribution, and where a person who holds a particular view about the management of fire risk on public land can have sway over an issue as fundamental as fire risk to people I think we have got the system badly wrong.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I do know that some of the representatives that are nominated by the Nature Conservation Council on some of these bushfire management committees are obviously regional landholders as well. Are you suggesting that they are not local and not regional landholders?

Professor ADAMS: No, as I said, I was careful to say that not everybody is but there are many instances where they are not.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you provide the Committee with that detail on notice if you are making assertions about these many instances? I would be very happy to know who that is.

Professor ADAMS: I am happy to have a look at it.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you aware of the Nature Conservation Council's Hotspots Program?

Professor ADAMS: Yes, I am.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What is your view on that?

Professor ADAMS: It has been a worthwhile program, particularly in the north of the State. I think they have done some good work. They are very good at public awareness and I think that is a good role for an interest group to have in raising public awareness of the issues.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are aware of what Hotspots does, that it actually works with private landholders, stakeholders, the NSW Farmers Association—who else do they work with?

Professor ADAMS: I do not know.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are making assertions that the Nature Conservation Council has not got skin in the game, you are asserting that you know the Hotspots Program—

Professor ADAMS: I said they have not got the same skin in the game as have private landholders who have got boundary fences where on the other side of their fence are huge fire risks but they have got to manage their land and on the other side of the fence nothing is being done to manage the fire risk. That is an inequitable situation.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: That is why I am talking about the Hotspots Program, because you said that it has achieved some good things, but I think that the key success of the program is bringing together—which is why I asked you a question about stakeholders to see if you knew that—all of the stakeholders to work on fire.

Professor ADAMS: I do not keep a list of all the stakeholders involved in the Hotspots Program.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: So it is local government, State government, National Parks, Forests NSW, the NSW Farmers Association—

Professor ADAMS: Over the broad suite. But you are asking me about specifics and, no, I do not keep a record of those things.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you agree that multi-tenure approaches, as advocated by Hotspots, are good for fire management?

Professor ADAMS: There are good examples of multi-stakeholder, what do you want to call them, multi-stakeholder activities, schemes—I do not care what word you choose to use to describe them, they work well in some areas; but in other areas they do not work so well. What I am concerned about is making sure that we have the right level of policy detail in legislation such that it can work everywhere. I am not arguing against the bushfire management committees at a local scale, for example. You do need that.

What I do regard as ineffectual in large areas of southern New South Wales in particular is the way that those management committees, if you look at the list of activities, the list of tasks that are required to be undertaken before there can be any fuel reduction effort, it is a massive bureaucratic effort to get fuel reduction conducted. That is where I see problems with the multi-stakeholder approach. A multi-stakeholder approach is fine providing it does not end up slowing down, making impossible in some cases, practical steps to protect people's property.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: When you say in here, "I strongly urge the committee to recommend as a matter of urgency, the repeal of the legislated role of the NCC in Bushfire Management Committees", is it just the Nature Conservation Council? Would you be satisfied with another proponent of

ecologically sustainable bushfire management? Would you be satisfied with another conservation organisation such as the National Parks Association, for example?

Professor ADAMS: As I said, I am not opposed to the bushfire management committees. I think they are too large. Fourteen people or 14 representatives is too many. It is very hard to get decisions made in a timely way. I do not object to there being stakeholder representation from conservation groups. It is a matter of having it weighted in an appropriate way and such that the conversations that take place at local levels cannot end up in endless deferrals of important decisions. I am about what has to be done practically and having it done in a timely way. I am not an expert in management organisation. I know what I know about the ecology of Australian forests, having worked in them all my life, and I know the risks that are posed by uncontrolled fuel loads on public land. So no, I am not opposed to having representation from conservation groups at all. It is about having an appropriate balance and about having a structure for those committees that, as I say, can make timely decisions and not end up being bogged down.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Thank you for attending today. I am a bit confused because you have just said that you do not have an objection to representation from conservationists on bushfire coordinating committees, yet in your written submission to our inquiry you state, "I strongly urge the committee to recommend as a matter of urgency, the repeal of the legislated role of the NCC in Bushfire Management Committees". How do you reconcile those words with your statement a couple of minutes ago?

Professor ADAMS: I do not have any problem. I wrote in the submission in the current context of how these things are organised. In answering that question I just said that I think those committees are too large; they are unwieldy. It is in that context that I am objecting to having one conservation group with a legislated role. That is the context. So I can reconcile these statements very easily. My concern is that the workings of those committees at a local level is unwieldy and is not timely.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But the sole prescription you urge us to put to government is to chop off one of the 14, being the conservation representative, is that right?

Professor ADAMS: I did not go to the further detail, which would have been to overhaul all of those management committees. I think 14 members, as I said, is unworkable at a local level and it means that any individual who wants to hold up the workings of those committees can do so. I am not suggesting that they do; I am saying they can do so. There are real problems if you have fire risks, in particular private land abutting public land, of getting timely action.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That may be the case, but in your submission you only target the NCC representative; you do not target the Rail Infrastructure Corporation representative or the person nominated by each local Aboriginal land council or a rural landholder nominated by the New South Wales Farmers Association. You do not target anyone but the Nature Conservation Council representative, do you?

Professor ADAMS: No, I do not.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: So 14 is too many—

Professor ADAMS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: —and what you want us to do is chop off the NCC representative, which will take it from 14 to 13 and everything will be hunky-dory, will it?

Professor ADAMS: No, it will not. As I said, my submission of one page is far too small to deal with the issues. I have written a book on the subject and it has been noted. You may not have time to read it. I hope some people do read it. If you read the book and see what we have said in context in there—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Please provide the context. In your book do you propose that any of the other 13 representatives have their roles excised via legislative amendment from the bushfire management committees?

Professor ADAMS: No, I do not, and it is not the purpose of the book.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You only target the conservation representative in your book, is that right?

Professor ADAMS: No, I did not. What we say in the book is that New South Wales has particular issues in relation to fire risk management and there are issues related to, for example, the funding level for national parks in terms of their management. There have been lots of national parks created but very little additional funds for fuel management. That is something that should be addressed; if we are going to have large areas of national parks they should be appropriately funded to manage their fuels. We cannot go on creating. There are a lot of things in the book that I could not possibly cover in a one-page submission. As I said, in there I talk about one particular issue out of dozens that are covered in the book—not just one, dozens that are covered in there and that New South Wales—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: This is the one you have chosen to highlight in your formal submission to our inquiry.

Professor ADAMS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: We can only assume, can we not, that this your greatest priority? Or is it not?

Professor ADAMS: No, it is not my greatest priority. My greatest priority would be for a complete overhaul of fire management policy and practice in New South Wales.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What do you want us to do? You want a complete overhaul—

Professor ADAMS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: —as you tell us now, or do you want us, "as a matter of urgency"—your words—"to repeal the legislated role of the NCC in Bushfire Management Committees"? Which one do you want us to recommend to the O'Farrell Government?

Professor ADAMS: I would like a complete overhaul, absolutely. I gave evidence under oath to the bushfires royal commission in Victoria. I sat through many days of the royal commission hearings. It is not a good thing, I have to say, to listen to the stories of people who have lost relatives, loved ones, who have lost huge amounts of their livelihood. It is an important issue. What I am trying to get through here is that this is an issue that is very large and very important. Sure, in my letter I targeted just one—one in fact rather small aspect. The bigger aspects around resourcing, around culture, around how firefighting and in particular fire mitigation strategies are conducted and organised in this State need serious attention. If you like, I will accept that I have picked one that is likely to be a hot button issue in an inquiry such as this. I accept that, but I wanted to open the door to something that I regard as terribly serious and I firmly believe that the risks to people living in New South Wales from fire are something that needs to be taken more seriously than we do currently.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Can I take it from that statement that your written submission regarding the role of the NCC is simply a small issue—

Professor ADAMS: Absolutely.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: —and in fact you contend that there are far larger and more important issues relating to how we manage bushfire risk in this State.

Professor ADAMS: Thank you.

CHAIR: Would you agree to tabling a copy of your book out of session? I am told that we have one in the library.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I have it.

CHAIR: The Committee secretariat will probably need it. Another thing you need to understand is that even though your one-page submission only covered one aspect, your evidence here today will also be considered by the Committee.

Professor ADAMS: Absolutely.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Thank you very much for coming along. Can you tell us a little about the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, whether it is teaching or research or both, and what sort of teaching and research you actually do?

Professor ADAMS: It is teaching and research. We have a very strong research program. Our research covers everything from the atmosphere and the additions of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, including from bushfire, to production agriculture. We have aspects of horticulture, soil management, hydrology. It is a very broadly based faculty. It is not big by world standards but it is very broad.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In that research program has your faculty ever done any research into the damage to the environment from different types of bushfires—you mentioned you went to the royal commission in Victoria—that type of wildfire compared to a much cooler hazard-reduction burn that might happen at a different time of the year? What is the impact on the environment from those types of fires?

Professor ADAMS: I would be happy to also tender a couple of recent scientific papers that go to this question.

CHAIR: Thank you. You will take that on notice from us.

Professor ADAMS: In particular one is about to appear in the "Journal of Forest Ecology and Management", where I deal with the issue of mega-fires—the so-called mega-fire phenomenon—and I contrast particularly the high-intensity wildfire effects and damage to the environment with prescribed fires. So my answer to your question is fully explained in that paper. The biggest risks, if I can put it to you very quickly, are post-fire soil erosion and what are called debris flows after high-intensity wildfires. These pose significant costs to the public purse. You would be aware of water into dams and water infrastructure being badly damaged by those.

Carbon losses from high-intensity wildfires can be very severe and still unrecognised are losses from soils and surface soils in wildfires. I am often asked about the biodiversity effects of prescribed fire. We know of the potential impacts of annual burning or burning every two years but that is not the real practice. We need to know the effects at five to 10 years, which is the most frequent that we ever generally get around to in public land management. There is equivocal evidence as to impacts but on the other hand we do not count the number of animals that are killed in high-intensity. We just do not have such a tally. We are very good at measuring the impacts of prescribed fires; we are terrible at measuring the impacts of high-intensity.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It would be reasonable to assume that the impact of a high-intensity fire on the loss of animals and biodiversity generally is horrendous compared to a cool burn, would it not?

Professor ADAMS: Again as a scientist we are a little loath—yes, I could agree with your statement. The evidence though, because we have not gone out there and measured it, is very, very poor. What we do know is that the Australian bush, our sclerophyll forests, are very adapted to fire. That includes the wildlife and it includes the plant life. It is really a matter then of adding up all of the issues—the risks to life and property, as well as the risks to environmental concerns—and coming up with sensible strategies.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You mentioned that you had spent a number of days at the royal commission in Victoria. To your knowledge did they take any evidence as to the fuel loads that were present in those forests?

Professor ADAMS: Yes, they did.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you recall what sort of levels they were talking about?

Professor ADAMS: Again I cannot but it will be all there in the transcripts of the royal commission. For example, the Kilmore East fire that went through the Mount Disappointment region, it was noted that there had been little prescribed burning done in the Mount Disappointment region. Again I am always cautious in legal matters and I know that there are still outstanding legal matters in the case of those Victorian fires. It is a matter of public record though that the recommendation from the Victorian royal commission was to lift the target to 5 per cent of public land to be treated every year. Now that is in many people's eyes also a conservative target if you want to achieve a serious amount of reduction in risk.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The fuel loads that exist in public lands in New South Wales, has your organisation done any study or research of those loads?

Professor ADAMS: Yes, we are doing some work in the Snowy Mountains area currently. That has been going for some years and will go for a lot longer yet. The reality is that fuel loads of 10 tonnes of fuel, this is ground layer and shrubs, are quickly reached after fires. In other words, it only takes five to 10 years in most vegetation types, most of the public land vegetation types, to reach 5 to 10 tonnes of fuel per hectare. That presents a risk.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: When those areas have not been hazard reduced for say 20 or 30 years what sort of levels can you expect to find in some of those forests in the Snowy Mountains?

Professor ADAMS: You can get fuel loads of 20 to 30 tonnes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If a fire was to start in those areas, particularly in the summertime, then it would instantaneously become a wildfire or a crown fire. Is that fair to say?

Professor ADAMS: The fire authorities have a good record of suppressing fires once they have started. The difficulty becomes one of the combination of fuel load and then climatic conditions. This issue was extensively covered in the royal commission. It is very hard to stop a running fire when you have got 40 degrees and sub-20 per cent relative humidity. That becomes very difficult and the firefighters have to rely on natural features and serious firebreaks in order to bring those sorts of fires under control. So, yes, it is a dangerous place when you have got fuel loads of 20 to 30 tonnes per hectare and extreme weather conditions. We are not well prepared yet as a country, let alone as a State, for the coming challenges in bushfires.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The previous witnesses gave us a document which said that misconception number one is that prescribed burning is a panacea for fire control. Is there a panacea for fire management and, if so, is it prescribed burning? What are your views on that?

Professor ADAMS: There is no panacea. Prescribed burning is not a panacea—far from it—but we can only control the fuel. That is the only element we have any reasonable control over. It is a subject of intense research both here and in the United States, for example. We know roughly the sort of reduction in risk that you get for every hectare of treated land. Yes, it is still an expensive business. There is no way around this. It is still an expensive business. But if you look at the costs of fire suppression and how they are blowing out year on year both here and in the United States there is a middle ground to be struck where you can reduce the risk using prescribed burning but you will still need to have your fire suppression well resourced.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: When did the Faculty of Agriculture become the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment?

Professor ADAMS: Twelve months ago. Before that we were agriculture, natural resources, food. It was a very long and wordy title.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It was Faculty of Agriculture in my day but I suppose everyone has to pay their dues to political correctness. Can I take you back to the 2003 ACT bushfires, which started in New South Wales. Did you participate in the Federal Parliament's investigation into that? Did you make a submission to that committee?

Professor ADAMS: I did not. You are referring to the Nairn inquiry?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Yes. Are you aware of the recommendations?

Professor ADAMS: I am aware of the recommendations.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Would you repeat them for this Committee and say whether or not you agree with them?

Professor ADAMS: The part that I was involved with was the recommendation for increased research in the high country and particularly in relation to activities that would reduce fuel loads. It was a direction to examine grazing as well as prescribed burning.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Through the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre [CRC]?

Professor ADAMS: Through the Bushfire CRC.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are you also aware that that committee recommended three other key points: better access to areas; increased reliance on local knowledge; and improved fire management techniques, including burning of fuel load? Do you think those are three reasonable recommendations?

Professor ADAMS: I do, and much of the previous discussion here from my perspective was directed towards an emphasis that local management is important. The local fire management committees are important but they have to be made more able to get the decisions made and get the activities to flow.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It would be hard for a person, for example, who lives in Glebe and has a predisposition against controlled burning to offer any reasonable recommendation to a fire management committee, would it not?

Professor ADAMS: It would. Yes, indeed.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If you could wave your wand and develop a successful nil tenure fire management process, what would it look like?

Professor ADAMS: Nil tenure?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Whether it is public, whether it is private, whether it is National Parks, whether it is forestry.

Professor ADAMS: Tenure free?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Yes.

Professor ADAMS: In the recent paper that I will submit I have made the argument that governments all around the world are looking at how do you stop having tenure arguments about firefighting and fire mitigation. That is my magic wand. Increasingly it has to be done by one agency, not by multiple agencies. There has to be integration across land tenure. Yes, it may be a naive—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: At a State level, a regional level, a local level?

Professor ADAMS: I think it has to be at a State level organised but it has to work at a local level. In other words, I do not like the division between the Rural Fire Service [RFS], National Parks, State Forests. I think this is a real problem for New South Wales.

CHAIR: For the Hansard can you give us reference names or some descriptor of the papers that you are going to provide to us under notice?

Professor ADAMS: There will be one paper the first couple of words of which are "mega-fires and tipping points". The second one is a review of fuel reduction efforts in the high country of south eastern Australia.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can I just ask you about the grazing role in national parks. Again we seem to have this polar opposite viewpoint that grazing is terrible, it has no role, versus there is maybe some sort of selective role for grazing. The paper that Mr Colless referred to from the Nature Conservation Council said that a misconception is that grazing reduces blazing as an appropriate biodiversity management tool. In the last bit of reading I did I read that there was perhaps some role where you have got ground dwelling birds and the landscape needs to be opened up a little bit for them. Can you give us your feeling on the grazing issue?

Professor ADAMS: We are doing a long-term experiment in the Snowy Mountains, and that means long term. The short-term results suggest that grazing has very little impact in the grassland or in the woodland on either biodiversity or on the fuel load. The biggest effect has been through the use of prescribed fire. It has clearly reduced the fuel load dramatically and the effect has lasted so far for four years.

I am not an expert in the opening up of vegetation for ground dwelling birds. What I would simply note is that grazing per se is not a major tool in fire risk mitigation. It is used very effectively by the landowners in the Snowy Plains area, for example, in conjunction with prescribed burning to maintain biodiversity, to maintain water and the water status, and to maintain the carbon. In other words, as a whole system that area has a very sustainable management system in place and it is extremely hard to separate out just the effects of grazing. I am a dry-eyed scientist and I am not—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: You are agnostic, are you?

Professor ADAMS: Unfortunately for you perhaps, but the important thing for me is to reduce the fuel load, reduce the fire risk. The prescribed burning is the best tool that we have got.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You suggested that you want to see integration across land tenure, you do not like the division between tenures and you would like to see a kind of tenure-blind approach to fire management. The Hotspots Program I referred to, which as I understand it has won an award at the national level for its innovative role in bringing many stakeholders together, would you agree that is actually what they try to do at the local level?

Professor ADAMS: Yes, I would. I think they do try to do it and they are effective at doing it in some places, not everywhere. It is hard to achieve these things everywhere. I do agree that they are trying to take a tenure-blind approach. The tricky part is that underneath all of this we still have defined activities that will be done by the RFS, stuff that will be done that State Forests and stuff that will be done by National Parks. When something bad happens, when you go to a royal commission, all of those things are unpacked and we start pointing fingers as to who is to blame. That is where things get particularly ugly and we learn how our processes, how our legislation, how our regulations do not work.

Hotspots is great but it is an idealistic approach, if I could call it that. We need to make sure that the underpinning policy frameworks and the underpinning regulations and, if necessary, the organisations—National Parks, RFS, State Forests, Catchment Management Authorities and all the rest—have a unified approach, because they do not necessarily have a unified approach. Even though Hotspots may have a unified approach or wish to take a unified approach it is not true necessarily at the organisation, State government level underneath.

CHAIR: Thank you, Professor Adams. We are out of time. If we could have those items that you agreed to provide on notice by about 18 January we would be most appreciative. Once again, thank you for your evidence and thank you for coming today.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

IAN McCANHON SINCLAIR, appearing as an individual, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for agreeing to appear today. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr SINCLAIR: I am not too sure where and to what degree you are looking at public lands so I think it is better if I do not make an opening statement because I might head off on tracks that you are not interested in.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Welcome back to the House where your career started. Can you give the Committee an overview of the process that took place with the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders [BRUS] group and your involvement in that group?

Mr SINCLAIR: I was appointed by the then Minister, Craig Knowles, to try to ensure that the local community and all those interested in the Brigalow had a chance to have a voice before decisions were taken with respect to future management and plans. There was a wide cross-section of people in the community who were interested including Baradine sawmill, Indigenous representatives, residents around the Brigalow area, and hunters, shooters, fishermen and recreational users of the area. The BRUS group essentially was concerned that in any change there should be recognition of existing users and recognition that the more restricted the access the more dense the traffic and the use of any part of the Pilliga might be. In particular, not just in the Pilliga but in so many of our regional and rural communities logging has been an essential part of the way in which country towns have developed.

In my view, in days gone by the New South Wales Department of Forestry was probably one of the best of the State departments. The qualifications of its officers were extraordinary. They really did a magnificent job in managing public lands and State forests, as they were in those days. One aspect that people tend to forget is that logging was far more intense then than it is now, and that so many of those public lands are in their present state, in my view, has no relationship to present management but a great deal to do with the way in which they were managed in the past. My concern, as with the BRUS group, was to ensure there was recognition that proper management entails far more than rhetoric and far more than a notional claim that areas such as the Brigalow have some sort of sacred quality. They are in fact very much a living part of the environment and living forests.

My discussions with the BRUS group were fairly extensive. My discussions with all the people there were such that I tried to consult with anybody who had a particular interest. The report I made tried to take account of the fact that the future operations of the Brigalow South bioregion were important and those who had an ongoing or past interest needed to be recognised and accepted, and that there should be a place for their continued enjoyment of the Pilliga area.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you consider the recommendations that the BRUS report came up with essentially met the demands of both interest groups—the environmental groups and the industry?

Mr SINCLAIR: I do not really, no. I did not feel it was adequate at the time. The difficulty I had was that I had to report to the Minister not to Parliament and consequently my report was to the Minister and having tendered it a few years back I confess that I am now not exactly aware of the detail of what is in it. I did not feel that it met the requirements. There are several aspects to the Pilliga. Every area of public land in New South Wales is different and climatically the Pilliga can be a pretty harsh and hard place. There is often not a lot of rain and there needs to be recognition that in order to manage an area like that you need to take account of experience and recognise, as did the Indigenous representatives who saw me, the peculiar characteristics of the Pilliga. My concern was that when the report finally came out it did not recognise existing use or the benefits there were from the management that had been undertaken over the years in that area.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are the benefits from the management that you are referring to essentially the benefits of the timber industry that was coming out of the Pilliga?

Mr SINCLAIR: Certainly as far as the timber industry is concerned because there was real dispute as to what timber should be extracted in the Pilliga. It is different from rainforest areas or high rainfall areas. They satisfied me that the nature of the timber they were extracting was in fact to the benefit of the long-term sustainability of the timber in the Pilliga rather than stopping forestry because you then get a lot of woody

regrowth and a lot of invasive scrub, which would deteriorate the quality and nature of the Pilliga rather than preserve it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: When the final decision was taken on the Pilliga the BRUS option may have been considered but it certainly was not part of the final solution, was it?

Mr SINCLAIR: No.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Were you disappointed that that occurred?

Mr SINCLAIR: Public lands are not for today or tomorrow, they are forever. If you are going to try to look at future management you need to take a longer term perspective of their use than the one that I felt was taken in the conclusions.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Was the impact on the local community far more deleterious than the BRUS option would have been?

Mr SINCLAIR: It was not just the local community. I considered the consequences of the decisions taken would have a deleterious long-term effect on the Pilliga itself.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: What I do not understand about the Brigalow is that a lot of the evidence we get is from people who have no qualifications. They are not scientists or field technicians. They are well-meaning people: they obviously have a deep love of the area and they are looking for the best environmental outcome from their viewpoint. When you were doing the BRUS report were there people who had qualifications to do the field studies about the environment, the biodiversity and the species that were there?

Mr SINCLAIR: It is a wider problem than the Pilliga. One of the difficulties is that academic qualifications are excellent and essential but you need far more than that when you are looking at native forests or natural resource management. My concern was that while they had experience they frankly did not have the experience of the foresters about whom I spoke before, nor I suspect that the people in the Baradine sawmill had as to what had happened to the forest over a period of time. While they did have academic qualifications they certainly did not have the practical experience in long-term management of the Pilliga that I think would have been helpful in trying to come to long-term decisions.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: You talked about existing users such as fishermen, trial bike riders or horseriders. In your view was their impact on the Pilliga to the detriment of the environment? Were they spreading weeds or causing erosion? Was it manageable or was it a long-term problem?

Mr SINCLAIR: I think it is a challenge that needs to be identified and addressed, but I do not think they were. I think the threat that was suggested was overstated. Certainly, if you have too many users, whether they are on horses or trail bikes or whatever and they start marking trails and things of that character you need to recognise there is an impact. I think the use can be properly balanced by management of where and when and how many, and I did not feel that that was taken into account.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: A statement was made by one of the parks officers when we were out there, to use his words, "I am not convinced that thinning is necessary in the Pilliga." Did you have a view on the matter?

Mr SINCLAIR: I thought it was necessary but I must admit I am not knowledgeable about the Pilliga. I know the bush well and I know other areas of the bush and that is the reason I mentioned that academic qualifications are great but in my view if you are going to make policy with respect to natural resource management you need to have experience in that area. As any bushie will tell you, if you go to any part of the world and look at the trees you can tell what the soil is like, you can tell what the rainfall is like and you get a very good idea of the geology as much as you do of the vegetation. In my view the difficulty is that you really need to have that local knowledge and my assessment was that I do not think they took account of the slow growth generally of decent trees in the Pilliga and the degree to which you get regrowth, and regrowth is something that needs to be managed.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I came in late but I have realised that you did not make an opening statement or make a submission. Did you request to appear before the Committee?

Mr SINCLAIR: No, I was requested to appear.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: It is unusual and therefore I have no concept or idea of your history in any of this or what line or policy you are pushing. I do not think I am in a position to ask you any questions unless you want to tell me why you think you are appearing before the Committee in terms of your interests.

Mr SINCLAIR: I would have thought that parliamentary committees were designed to attract the support and encouragement of the community at large. I am now a member of the community at large and I have a very real interest in the preservation, correct management and future effective operation of public and private lands throughout Australia.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You were appointed by a Labor Minister to do an inquiry, were you not?

Mr SINCLAIR: I was appointed by a Labor Minister to do an inquiry. In this specific instance I was appointed to conduct an inquiry into the Pilliga South Bioregion. I made a report to him in about 2003. It was from that report that the inquiries that have been made to date have been made. One of the reasons I would have been asked to appear is that my report was kept confidential. I have not seen it since. It essentially preceded decisions taken by government, which did not follow the line of my report. It also was at a time when there was a good deal of economic and social disadvantage in that area and where there was great concern about the future. It was felt that decisions taken with respect to future management of the Pilliga would affect not only economic viability but also the social wellbeing of people living there. I had some very, as far as I was concerned, emotional presentations about the impact and consequences of future management of the Pilliga area.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How different was the final outcome to the BRUS report recommendations?

Mr SINCLAIR: They frankly did not take account of some of the human factors that I identified, nor did they take account of existing users in the way that I felt they should. Nor did I think the report looked, as I suggested earlier, sufficiently long term. In management of an area like the Pilliga where it is dry, where the nature of vegetation is different, where the soil is not particularly rich, it is particularly significant that you look at the long term rather than just today or tomorrow.

CHAIR: The Committee has a problem in getting into evidence a copy of the BRUS report, but a previous witness offered to provide a copy. We are awaiting that. I dare say that in our second crack at Government witnesses we will try to find out where that report may be, if it still exists, and attempt to get a copy. In your opinion, are your findings and recommendations of the BRUS report relevant to this inquiry and today?

Mr SINCLAIR: I said before that it is important that you look long term. While it is a long term in human memory, 2003 is not very far in the management of the resource. One of the challenges you have in your inquiry is to try to determine now what can be learnt from past decisions and what changes might reasonably be introduced that will accommodate the medium to long-term future. Yes, I think it is important that you have a look at it, if you can. One of the difficulties, at least in the Federal sphere, is that normally what happens in one government is sacred to that government and, unfortunately, I am not too sure to what degree the papers and records will necessarily be available, but I wish you luck.

CHAIR: We will attempt to get into evidence a copy of your report. Did you find the terms of reference were broad enough for your inquiry to make some serious recommendations?

Mr SINCLAIR: I did. In any report there are a number of contingencies. It is the state of management, the departmental oversight, the money available and future administrative intent. Those issues were not matters that were necessarily known to me when I was making the inquiry. If you are looking at it, as you are now, it is relevant for you to have in your mind how, from the government perspective, management, funding, supervision and operations can be conducted. One of the areas that I did not suggest in the report, but knowing New England, as I know Mr MacDonald does so well, and Mr Colless, that would be very helpful is if every one of these national parks were to have a local advisory board appointed from local residents to supervise and oversee what is being undertaken within the management of the park. In New England we have had instances where fire

has broken out in parks on a Friday afternoon and by the Monday morning enormous damage has been done. It is not only in those terms but also in knowing the country and having the skills and qualifications I suggested before.

If there were to be appointed a small local management team with responsibility for oversight of the way in which a park is administered, it might ensure that some of that local experience, which I think at the moment is lacking, is there. I do not think when you get these other reports that you will find anything of that order but, to my mind, that is something that all national parks need: some local oversight and input that will ensure that the views both of the recreational users and the commercial users for future development, particularly with the mine in question, as it is, where it is going, it is particularly important that you have a small group of local people with some knowledge who might be able to advise government and perhaps advise in the local management of maybe each particular area.

CHAIR: Were you confident that you had sufficient time to get enough from those you were able to get input?

Mr SINCLAIR: The difficulty I think was more trying to get my point of view through to government than from the people. The people were excellent. I turned up my records and I had a large number of people who sought to see me and whom I saw and with whom I spent time. I do not think you can ask for limitless time in any inquiry, but you certainly need to ensure that, given the nature of legislative and administrative responsibilities in government, it would be helpful if you could spend a little time with those to whom you report to persuade them as to the reasons for the recommendations you make.

CHAIR: We will attempt to get on the record a promised copy of the BRUS report so the Committee can look at it and see what it can do with it. I take your point that, obviously, it is only 2012 and, of course, it still would be relevant today, and probably in 20 years time. Thank you for agreeing to attend the inquiry to give evidence. We very much appreciate it.

Mr SINCLAIR: Thank you and I wish you luck. I hope you enjoy your time in the Legislative Council as much as I enjoyed mine.

(The witness withdrew)

MALCOLM POOLE, Chairman, Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW, and

CHRISTOPHER ROBERTSON, Project Officer, NSW Angler Access Project, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: The Committee notes that you made a submission to the inquiry. Prior to commencing with questions from the Committee, would one or both of you like to make an opening statement?

Mr POOLE: Yes, I will make an opening statement. Chris will follow up on his points. The terms of reference for the inquiry are very broad; it is a very broad church. Recreational fishers are part of that broad church and certainly what we do, in essence, in terms of fishing access is really public access in the long term. We have been investigating in recent weeks the Hon. Andrew Stoner's process of accelerating paper roads. We have been dealing with him and his department about how we can actually do things a little bit better and smarter in engaging fishers. It is not about slowing processes down; it is about engaging people in their forms of stewardship. Certainly, in a recent meeting with the honourable member the point was made that we are about ready to get up and have those discussions. As we said before, fishing is about public access. It is about making sure that recreational fishers have a need, and that need is retained for the future. We certainly have been impacted. Recreational fishers are a stakeholder group that are investing considerably in New South Wales. At present we are turning about \$120 million out of our licence fees that were funded to support fishing opportunities and experiences in New South Wales.

Obviously, some of the things we see impact on us. National Parks and Wildlife impact recreational fishing access considerably. We see National Parks and Wildlife using excuses such as no resources, no funding, to continue with a level of access that the public need or us fishers need to beaches, rock platforms, headlands and waterways that run through national parks. We continually see the wind back of those access points through the instigation of gates, logs and boulders across all these tracks. In essence, they are never to be seen again. I suppose anglers are part of the conservation movement by having the eyes and ears and going out and actually enjoying and experiencing the outdoors and being able to report back what they have actually seen, whether it is feral animals, whether it is trouble with massive erosions or land slips. We are part of the bigger program. Crown Lands also deals with things such as organisational structures. A fishing club enters an agreement with the lands department and actually attains access to a parcel of land and builds a clubhouse on it and supports that. We see the rents increase and increase to the point that a number of fishing clubs throughout New South Wales have folded up because of those little things that happen. They certainly looked after the facilities and maintained them, but one thing that pushed them out the door was the fact that Crown Lands was charging fairly exorbitant rents.

In some areas we see National Parks and Wildlife claiming the area down to low watermark, so we cannot provide beach access from one point to another. Wooyung reserve is a classic example of that on the far North Coast. It is located just south of Pottsville on the far North Coast where they have now got access down to low watermark. We cannot drive a four-wheel drive from one side to the other. These are the things that restrict us. Black Rocks camping grounds just north of Iluka and the Bundjalung National Park again is an access point that was considered a critical point for the people who camp in the area, which has only one access in and out from Woodburn. The people who come from Iluka to travel up and down that area from Woody Head have only one access point now. National Parks and Wildlife is unwilling to negotiate with the Aboriginal Land Council and provide an access point for four-wheel drives on and off the beach from the north and south.

These are the things anglers are faced with and it is enormous when you consider the levels of impact that recreational fishing actually incurs. It is not about just fisheries management; it is about local governments putting their restrictions on anglers at boat ramps and fishing at night. We are used as a bit of a pawn in antisocial behaviour. The Clean Safe Wharves Initiative with NSW Maritime is one of those things where we lost access to Cabarita Wharf because of some antisocial behaviour that was target at recreational fishers. People can use fishing as one side of the argument, but on the other side is a public amenity to provide access. This extends to other public reserves around the Sydney foreshore. It is fairly considerable when you start considering the layering of impacts on anglers. It is not just fishing issues; marine parks are another issue. There are plenty of things we can talk about, and obviously we are happy to take points on notice. We could sit here for weeks and talk about the issues, but we do not have that time. Chris prepared our submission for the inquiry. We have supplements points that we have jotted down in recent days, and we will pass those on to the Committee.

Mr ROBERTSON: There are four issues I would like to cover. The first is compliance. There seems to be very poor management of compliance by government authorities that are managing public land. If there are illegal occupations or other illegal practices, there is no follow-up, making it very hard for anglers. As far as public lands goes, coal seam gas operations should not be allowed on travelling stock reserves because that will severely impact access for recreational users; and, because travelling stock reserves are often close to water for stock, coal seam gas operations could seriously impact the river environment and the quality of the water.

Travelling stock reserves cover a massive area of the State. In many ways, they provide the only access to waterways in some vicinities. There is very little identification of those sites on the ground to say that they are travelling stock reserves to which there is public access. Many are locked up and used as private property, and that is a problem for us. I have had complaints from the general public that adequate detailed information is not available on the size and location of travelling stock reserves. There is a book called *The Long Paddock*, but it provides very limited information. Many members of the general public that I deal with in my work suggest that there needs to be a centralised location, maybe part of the Department of Primary Industries, so that complaints about access to public land to be investigated.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you for appearing. In your submission No. 8 you highlight frustrations, as you have mentioned in your opening statement, Mr Poole, with not being able to access public land and because signs are being posted on public land. You say that the public should not have to deal with private landholders erecting signs on public land and denying public access. Are those private landholders actually breaking some law by placing signs and blocking roads? And what do you try to do to get into those lands? And what agencies do you talk to about those problems?

Mr ROBERTSON: We deal with a couple of authorities in regard this. One is the lands department, now Catchment and Lands. We have had difficulty getting them to do follow-up action for us on these things. One issue arose recently in the Wingecarribee shire, where an electronic boom gate was erected across a Crown road and signs were put up that access was not allowed via this public road. This was a public road; it was not under enclosure permit. That road leads to the Wingecarribee River, and where the road finishes it had double access to Crown lands on both sides of the river. People who have been down there to go fishing have bypassed the boom gate have been abused by the owner of the property who erected the gate. We complained to the local lands office, but were very dissatisfied with the response that we received from that office.

We have other issues, such as that no-entry signs put up on a travelling stock reserve definitely attempt to exclude access to the reserve. People have a legal right to go into the reserve; it is a travelling stock reserve. They can use it in daylight hours. However, these prominent signs cause a problem for people who want to go into the reserve, and most people would not push it. The travelling stock reserve provides very good access to Jocks Water, which is a quite reasonable trout fishing stream in the Armidale, New England area.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Your submission also mentions travelling stock reserves. As the legislation currently stands in relation to travelling stock reserves, are you saying in your submission that recreational fishers/anglers have no access to travelling stock reserves?

Mr ROBERTSON: We do have access to the eastern travelling stock reserves during daylight hours. On the Western Division travelling stock reserves, fishing is not a permitted use, and access for the general public is much more restricted in the Western Division. We have concerns about that. Quite often, those travelling stock reserves are fenced right up to a bridge or roadway, with quite substantial fencing in some instances, making it impossible for fishers or other recreational users to get access. We have had instances in the Western Division where recreational fishers have been very adverse dealings with landholders.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In the Western Division, what other uses are allowed in travelling stock reserves?

Mr ROBERTSON: I was mainly interested in recreational fishing, so I am sorry that I cannot answer that question.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Your organisation would be very keen, I assume, to see the environment protected so that waterways for your sport are healthy. You make claims about coal seam gas extraction in travelling stock reserves specifically.

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is it just travelling stock reserves that you are worried about? Is that the reason you mention travelling stock reserves?

Mr ROBERTSON: It can affect all public land. I make the comment generally because of the impact. I feel that most anglers are conservation minded; there are odd exceptions. We see from information that we have in that one of the most prolific means of protecting fish is improvement of habitat, which could rid us of the need to stock waterways with fish. So we are very pro-improvement of habit in streams and waterways because that impacts positively on the quality of fishing and the quality of the environment as a whole. So we definitely support environmental management of our waterways.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you have any comments to make to the inquiry, which for example has been looking into logging activities on public lands, State forest activities? We have heard from both Forests NSW and timber industry operators as well as conservationists and landholders. Do you have any experience of the impacts, good or otherwise, of logging upstream of where you are fishing, or whether logging of State forests has any impacts?

Mr ROBERTSON: No, I do not have any great experience. My only experience is of the impacts where severe fires have gone through forests. But as to logging specifically, no I do not have any details.

Mr POOLE: Logging is a practice that has been occurring in New South Wales for many years, and some practices have certainly improved over those years—such as how we manage our lands, and how we take the timber out of our forests. Overall, providing we do not get major situations of siltation and turbidity resulting from major storm events, et cetera, hopefully our waterways and streams will retain their natural health, which is necessary to stabilise native fish.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In relation to access for fishers to national parks and conservation areas and nature reserves generally, I am not sure what the legislation currently is. Some trout fishing, for example, takes place in Kosciuszko National Park, does it not? If so, is that an exception? Is fishing allowed in national parks, or not?

Mr POOLE: Fishing is allowed in national parks. The restriction is more in terms of access to the water. For example, we have been dealing with Meroo Lake, just south of Ulladulla. It has been a drawn-out process, something like seven years, to try to get a reasonable and tenable agreement between the locals and recreational fishers. Meroo Lake is a recreational fishing haven. We provided money to remove the commercial fishing effort in order to retain that area in its pristine natural condition. That investment is now in essence threatened because National Parks want to put a gate across the access point on the western side near the highway and put a key system in place to permit people go fishing. National parks are supposed to be available for access 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A small minority of people do not look after our national parks, and the laws are there to actually catch and deal with those people. But if you and I were driving down to visit that little area, we would have to come back to Ulladulla and get a key from the National Parks and Wildlife office. Is that what you would call good or fair access? Those are the sorts of things we are dealing with.

National Parks and Wildlife provides a good service; we work with National Parks and Wildlife to try to retain and obtain good access, within reason. But what we currently see in plans of management that are coming out for discussion are restrictions on and reductions in access networks within these parks that are impacting our access points. It does not matter whether you talk about Emergency Services being able to access the beachhead or the back of the dunes; they are now cutting back vehicular access for kilometres; so that you have to park your car in an area that leaves it open to potential vandalism. Emergency Services have the same access problems to try to get to the beachhead. So it is a major concern.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is one of the reasons that National Parks and Wildlife is doing that because they are worried about potential vandalism, with people coming into the parks at night and not having enough resources to police that? Why do you think they are doing that?

Mr POOLE: There are many issues. As I indicated in my opening statement, it is to do with antisocial behaviour—and anglers get caught up in this same issue. The experience is that it does not matter where it is: if you have antisocial behaviour it is about managing that aspect of the problem. It is not about trying to lock out fishers, because fishers generally do the right thing. I think there are a heap of things we can try. On the Central Coast we have had issues at Soldiers Beach, where Wyong council has put bars and gates to restrict or deny

access to a major portion of the fishing area. The beach is quite safe for fishing. The same has occurred in Lake Munmorah National Park; even though people say a number of areas should not be fished, because of inexperience essentially, because of a number rock fishing fatalities in that zone, locking out people who do the right thing from these areas is in essence a challenge to our rights to go and experience these areas. You experiences areas 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and that is what you need to look at.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Gentlemen, thank you for appearing. I am very concerned about recreational fishers being locked out of public lands by Ports Minister Duncan Gay. What can you tell me about the Cabarita ferry wharf? What the hell is going on there?

Mr POOLE: Cabarita ferry wharf went through a number of issues over a period of time. We worked with NSW Maritime to try to support Maritime; we visited areas and talked to fishers; we talked to them at midnight, 1 o'clock, 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning to try to make sure that they could do things right. Yes, I agree: it is about how people see things in our society today; it is about making sure that they look after public assets and public facilities, and that they clean up any mess they make. This seems to be a major problem; it seems we are losing our educational framework and that has a flow-on effect to society these days that people just do not respect public property.

Kissing Point wharf is another that was under threat of loss. But we try to work with agencies such as NSW Maritime to encourage fishers to do the right thing. We certainly are seeing a difference. We work with NSW Fisheries to get advertisements in multicultural newspapers and things like that, to make sure we get the messages across. We share those messages face-to-face because that seems to bring the best benefit; that is because you are dealing with an age demographic where people do not read newspapers or use social media. So we are using a range of activities, but face-to-face delivers a sound message.

Cabarita wharf is now locked up at night after last ferry and opens in the morning. We accepted a cleaning moratorium in essence to allow cleaners on there so that they were not faced with antisocial behaviour because of people assuming that every angler has a knife in his box and is going to use it on someone with intent to kill. These are some of the things that we have faced over that period of time. We are slowly working through those issues with anglers. But it is just not there that we face those issues; it is everywhere. Public access is challenged everywhere that fishers go because of this perception of antisocial behaviour and having a knife in your kit as part of the fishing bag.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I take your point, Mr Poole, that recreational fishers on public wharves need to respect other users of those wharves, for example, ferry patrons. But is a lockout, as has been imposed at Cabarita ferry wharf, the most appropriate remedy for some antisocial behaviour by a small number of fishers, given the limited number of public wharves available to the people you represent?

Mr POOLE: We accepted the outcome of Cabarita. It was very, very heavily lobbied, in essence, by local residents, but, you know, our mess is not the one mess. Dog walkers do not pick up dog do.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I am a local resident near the Cabarita ferry wharf. I would like to declare an interest: I would like to teach my small children about dangling a line from the Cabarita ferry wharf near my house.

CHAIR: Hear! Hear!

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I cannot do it because of Duncan Gay's lockout. Do you hold out any hope that that can be reversed?

Mr POOLE: We only can hold hope, I am sorry to say, but we are looking at alternatives. Certainly we have discussed with NSW Maritime to try to put in a fishing platform in that area. We are working on things. There are locations that we can try to improve, but again it is about some of the things. Certainly we appreciate your point: that angling is something that is passed on from generation to generation and they are restricting access.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Like hunting.

Mr POOLE: Canada Bay council is one of those big question marks. We certainly raised questions and we try to deal with issues with them.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I do not want to shoot from the Cabarita ferry wharf, Mr Phelps. I just want to dangle a line with my children. Please tell me, Mr Poole, that hope is not lost and that the Recreational Fishing Alliance of New South Wales is working with the Government to restore some access for recreational fishers at or around the Cabarita ferry wharf.

Mr POOLE: I can assure you that the Recreational Fishing Alliance is dealing with public access on public wharves. A gate only requires a key to open it, or it needs to be locked; so it is just there, in essence. It can change. It only needs instructions to come out and say, "Leave the gate open at 10.30 at night after the last ferry", and we can have access back. It is a means of monitoring and managing the impacts of such things.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Minister Duncan Gay and/or his agency, are they pursuing a vendetta against recreational fishers' rights to access the public wharves in this State?

Mr POOLE: No, no. We certainly have some great communications with the Minister as well as his department. We have been discussing this for many years, by the way, on both sides. It did not matter which Government. We try to remain apolitical here as much as possible.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Sure.

Mr POOLE: But the angle really is that again we come back to this issue of the community forces and the recreational fishing forces. Some you win, some you lose, but we try to aim for a win-win wherever possible.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I do not know whether you can assist me with one other matter, trout cod.

Mr POOLE: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I was perusing the fishing section of the Department of Primary Industries website the other day.

CHAIR: As one does.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: As I often do. I note there is some discussion about a potential ministerial order to authorise fishing for stocked trout cod. Can either of you give the Committee any information about what may or may not be happening there?

Mr POOLE: That is true. There is currently a discussion paper out; it closes on 14 December. It is talking about stocking empowerments where there is hopefully no Murray cod—because they do interbreed—and opening up how we manage trout cod to the experience that anglers might have. Put-and-take fisheries is something that exists around the world so that we can actually adopt that. Even though the species is under threat in natural waterways—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: It is an endangered species.

Mr POOLE: Yes, under threat in natural waterways, there is an opportunity to try to manage that fish in an empowerment. But you have to realise that trout cod is always under recovery plans. We are not going to be able to produce enough fingerlings to accommodate our natural recovery plan as well as our stockings and empowerment, if we are going to get that far ahead. Again, we have some anglers who are very much against it and we have some anglers that are for it. It is a little bit like the eastern cod up the North Coast of New South Wales. Again, there are some concepts around those issues. The critical point about a number of these failings of our native species is habitat loss. That is detrimental to any native fish, or any fish, that we have in our waterways. What we see is our pest fish species coming in and actually taking over those waterways.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But one of the contributing threats there is the health of the riparian vegetation, is it not?

Mr POOLE: Yes, that is correct. Natural habitat is the best thing to have. We need to get up and think about restoring it. It is a mega-dollar industry that will have to be considered by the Government as to how we manage some of our waterways that are so degraded that they do not hold anything anymore.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The trout cod has been subject to a conservation program to restore its numbers for a couple of decades now.

Mr POOLE: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Is your Recreational Fishing Alliance represented on the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing that the Department of Primary Industries has?

Mr POOLE: Yes, we have a number of representatives on there, both in relation to freshwater and saltwater as well as at the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing [ACoRF].

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: In your expert opinion, Mr Poole, do your representatives on the advisory council have reason to believe that numbers of the trout cod have increased to an extent at which a ministerial order to authorise fishing of stock trout cod would now be appropriate?

Mr POOLE: Expanding opportunities for anglers to experience is something that is part of, I suppose, the Fisheries Management Act under its objectives. We can experience catching a trout cod today, but we have to return it back to the water immediately. In a number of areas, trout cod have been very successful; in the Murrumbidgee, for example. There are opportunities to do those things. It is the same if you go fishing for an eastern cod in the rivers up around Grafton and the Clarence, or if you go down to the Murray River and experience trout cod or Murray cod. So there are opportunities to do these things. I think where we are getting to now is considering actually keeping a trout cod and potentially taste the difference. Many anglers do not do that anymore. The mentality of keeping something for the table versus releasing something nice and healthy to live another day is certainly changing.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: In relation to national parks and the restriction of access, which you face, do you believe that that has increased in recent times, or has it always been as difficult for recreational fishers to access national parks?

Mr POOLE: National parks and access—we now have what we call plans of management being put in place. We are expected as anglers to go out and respond to those plans of management and provide reasonable rebuttal to why access tracks should be retained. We continually are told from various National Parks and Wildlife Service officers throughout New South Wales that "We don't have the budget anymore" to manage the thousands upon thousands of hectares that they actually have, so those budget restraints apply to providing reasonable access throughout the parks. As I said, we continually get locked out or blocked out, in essence, from getting reasonable access to water.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you accept that it is simply a case that they lack sufficient funding to maintain access routes, or do you believe that it is part of a more extreme green agenda to keep hunters and fishers out of national parks entirely?

Mr POOLE: I will use Meroo here as an example. The National Parks and Wildlife Service was quite happy to get up and buy or acquire a large gate and put the relevant infrastructure in place through railway bollards and wire rope to exclude people where the gate was going to go. They had funds to do all that, but they could not keep the track open. They could put a gate in and they could manage a gate through issuing keys, but they could not maintain the road. So, again, I can understand the fact that it is an ongoing cost to them to maintain a road. We even offered it Recreational Fishing Trust Fund money to assist in road maintenance, even though it was not our entire responsibility to provide public access. As I said before, fishing access is our little niche area, but public access is a thing that flows out of what we are performing.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is interesting to note that you were prepared to offer money, yet they still refused to accept that.

Mr POOLE: That has been offered on several occasions around Durras Lake. Punt Arm Road was another one we offered some assistance with.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you see this exclusion of human beings from national parks as a thing which is a problem at the local level, or would you say it is more a middle and upper management policy position that they have taken?

Mr POOLE: It is very much an upper level management position. We have actually requested a position on the National Park Advisory Council for recreational fishing so that recreational fishers understand what is going on at this higher level. Unfortunately, due to the Government's community reviews, we have not had a position. That has been ongoing since around about April this year.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Would it be fair to say that National Parks and Wildlife Service staff at a local level are in fact quite amenable to access to parks, but find themselves caught in a situation where, if you like, there is an ideological agenda to keep people out of parks?

Mr POOLE: We find some good working relationships with people in the National Parks and Wildlife Service and we find some sour ones; so, yes it is about trying to get that balance in place where access is allowable at a certain level.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: One of the things that was raised by the inland commercial fishers was that they see themselves as providing a strong environmental service by helping to remove carp from inland waterways. Would you say your members would be effective as carp removal agents?

Mr POOLE: Numbers-wise versus hook and line versus a net I do not think would get the correct balance in place. But, yes, again, we have carp musters and we have carp fish-outs and, yes, we do remove carp from the waterways. Unfortunately, due to ecological reasons, the breeding cycle of carp far outstrips the anglers in New South Wales.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: In relation to the river red gums region in New South Wales and the creation of the national parks there, what effect has that had on recreational fishers in terms of access to waterways around that area?

Mr POOLE: It has had some massive effects in terms of social and economic returns to the local regions. Anglers are itinerant people. They travel. They go and investigate things. They want to go and enjoy something in the quiet. The river red gum forest areas offered that opportunity to actually camp beside a river system and actually fish it. Those things we cannot experience anymore because of the fact that we have changed the way we do things. We have restricted access. We cannot go and collect a little bit of firewood to have a fire. Those things are the impacts.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You cannot bring your dog with you.

Mr POOLE: There is a flow-on effect. I could go on with this for hours. There are impacts. We have lost that amenity. We have lost that opportunity to go and explore. People who want to enjoy the outdoors are explorers, in essence.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Can you quantify the lack of access you would have, for example, in river red gums as opposed to what it was like under State Forests? Would you have 75 per cent of the old access, 60 per cent, 50 per cent, 10 per cent, zero per cent?

Mr POOLE: At present, it is getting pretty close to the lower 50 percentile, I think. We would have to talk to our local recreational fishers down there to find out. If you want me to take that on notice, we would be quite happy to try to gauge that. But our south-west anglers have certainly raised points about the loss of access in the river red gum area.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Have you found this in other areas where pre-existing State forests have been turned into national parks as well?

Mr POOLE: Well, Meroo Lake is a classic example. It used to be under State Forests and there was an agreement to actually maintain the access that was there. These things have certainly changed over the years as we have seen the National Parks Estate increase in size from the handing over of State forests.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And then locked up, to the exclusion of the enjoyment of residents of New South Wales.

Mr POOLE: Well, They are locked up in some form or way. If they do not clear the tracks to allow access, well then you cannot get access.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Poole, we took evidence or had an inspection with some Forests NSW people on the North Coast a few weeks ago, and they showed us a sign that they had on the roadside of the State forest. It had all the icons shown fishing, camping, dogs, horseriding, all of which had a big tick against them to show that all those activities Forests NSW actually welcomes in their area. Following on from Mr Phelps' last question, why would you be worried about still having access to national parks where they do not want any of those things happening in there—where they are anti people rather than pro people? Why would you not just forget about them and go and find some of the Forests NSW lands where you are still allowed to do those things?

Mr POOLE: I think the conversion of the State forests to national parks is starting to increase fairly significantly. As we said before, the South Coast area certainly has experienced that over the last two decades, I suppose. So what we are seeing is this supportive approach by State Forests and this negative approach by National Parks and Wildlife. As we said, what has happened in between a State Forest and a national park when you could do all these activities in here and the next day it was called a national park? What has happened? Why can I not take my dog in here when I can take it in here? It is the same thing: what has happened with fishing access? As we see these plans of management development we see these little ticks or these little crosses go against the activities that we would like to try and retain. I respect the problems that dogs might have in a national park to a certain extent, but provided my dog is under control and well-managed I do not think it poses any different threat to what I would be in terms of walking through there in my bare feet or with my boots on.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So your pet dog in a national park would do a lot less damage than a wild dog in a national park?

Mr POOLE: Yes, correct.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In relation to, let us say, Yanga for example, where there was a large body of water within that park, even though, strictly speaking, you are still allowed to access the waterway, because there is no land access to the inner parts of that waterway you, in effect, do not have access to it, do you?

Mr POOLE: That is correct. Land to water interface is a critical issue that we face, as we mentioned about the paper roads earlier. It is about getting from this public access point down to the water's edge; that is what we have to do to go fish that. Whether that is by taking a canoe or a boat down there or physically walking that distance, we do not mind that, but it is getting to that water access that is critical. It is very much the same in terms of look at Sydney Harbour and look at the land to water interface there; there are a lot of areas. But what you then consider is the tiering of local government impacts, you have maritime impacts, ports impacts, development impacts, public lands converted to private freehold land—you start to consider all the layering and you then consider what do we really have left? There is very little.

CHAIR: We are out of time. Thank you very much for agreeing to come and talk to us. Any questions that the Committee might like to put on notice we have determined that we would like replies by 18 January, but given that it is the Christmas period and a lot of your people may not be able to provide those questions on notice, if you cannot meet that date you could just simply let the secretariat know and I am sure they will extend the date. This inquiry is due to report in May. We appreciate your evidence today and if we can get those answers to questions on notice back it will be great.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

JAMES ANTHONY WARNER ROBERTSON, as an individual,

GARY RICHARD ELKS, as an individual,

EMMA JANE TURNER, appearing as an individual,

DAVID PHILLIP DONNELLY, and

ROBERT WILLIAM COSTELLO, as an individual, before the Committee via teleconference, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Not all the Committee members are in the room at the moment so we will just take a bit of breathing space for a few moments. Please stay online. Who is your primary spokesperson?

Mr COSTELLO: I will be doing our opening statement.

CHAIR: Can I ask each of you if you wish to reply to a question from the Committee or to add to Mr Costello's statement to state your name before you start and can I also ask that you allow very short pauses between changing speakers and speak slowly and clearly so that Hansard can record your testimony? Could I ask that if you have any mobile phones there you turn them off please?

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: How is the weather?

Mr J. ROBERTSON: Good.

Mr DONNELLY: Yes, it is quite reasonable today, but we did have quite a massive hailstorm up in Glen last Wednesday and a lot of damage to the ceiling. That is the local update.

CHAIR: We only have half an hour. We have a quorum here—a Greens member and Opposition members are not here. Mr Costello, could I ask you to make your opening statement and could I ask you to speak clearly and slowly please?

Mr COSTELLO: I will do the opening statement. On behalf of our group of New England livestock producers, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the parliamentary committee for the management of public lands for reading our submission and hearing our case. Our group includes livestock producers, both sheep and cattle, who have had experience managing private land adjoining public land from the Queensland border 300 kilometres south to Walcha along the eastern fall. Not only is the adjoining land owned by the State, it includes large tracts of schedule 2 land. Apart from this, the one thing that we have in common is that we have all experienced the stress, anxiety and financial burden that results from wild dog predation on our livestock.

The photos that you would have seen in our submission are the realities that livestock producers in growing numbers have to face on a far too regular basis. Picking up partly eaten stock and destroying dying stock should not be a routine practice for livestock producers anywhere. The numbers presented to you regarding wild dog predation and occurrences are too high and need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. They are highest on properties adjoining public land, in particular schedule 2 lands. To remind you: the figures for 2012 from January to October for the New England LHPA region were 1,073 stock killed, 497 stock bitten, 581 wild dogs sighted and 193 wild dogs killed. In my district alone, for November we had a further 55 sheep killed, 25 bitten, 13 dogs sighted and one shot.

Addressing this issue requires a nil-tenure approach to wild dog control, with tougher laws for non-compliance. The current laws have led to zero successful prosecutions for non-compliance in controlling wild dogs. The New South Wales Wild Dog Management Strategy 2012-2015 contains many good actions and objectives for achieving improved statewide wild dog control, including improved wild dog monitoring and control measures in all public lands including core breeding areas, which are often in schedule 2 lands. The technology to monitor dog movements, the effectiveness of poison baiting programs as well as developing a DNA profile for wild dogs is available and needs further funding and support from governments on all levels. This work continues to show that the vast majority of wild dogs are indeed wild dogs and not dingoes, and the need to control these dogs across all land tenure, including schedule 2, lands is vital.

Public lands, including national parks and State forests, are no different from farmland in that they need to be managed, not simply have the gate shut and left to their own devices. Large tracts of public lands in the State have been influenced by humans as much as they harbour pests, fauna and flora, making the need for management essential so as not to spread the problem in the public land and onto neighbouring private land. This is also true for private landholders. If the budgetary constraints currently governing the management of this public land are such that feral pests and firebreaks are not able to be managed effectively then the answer does not lie in expanding the area of public land until such time as the existing land is managed adequately and the current feral animals and weeds are controlled; this includes reducing the wild dog numbers within the parklands to reduce the pressure being placed on neighbouring livestock producers.

The New England eastern fall includes some of the most reliable and productive grazing land in the State. It is unsuitable for other agricultural pursuits like cropping, due to the topography. If the stock numbers that are currently run in this region were to be relocated to rangeland country, for example, the area needed to run them would be somewhere in the vicinity of 20 times greater with climatic conditions less viable than there is from erosion stemming from reduced groundcover much higher. The submission that we have presented to you and the New South Wales Wild Dog Management Strategy 2012-2015 highlight the areas of wild dog control that need to be improved on a nil-tenure basis to prevent wild dog predation from spreading to new areas and increasing in the hardest-hit areas, including our own districts.

Private landholders adjoining public land should not be the buffer zone in the fight to control wild dogs, as is currently the case. This needs to occur within the public lands with livestock producers continuing to support strategic control measures. Combining wild dog and fox programs will increase the effectiveness of controlling both forms of vertebrate pests. I thank you for your time and now welcome your questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Costello. Could I ask that you act as a mini-chairman for your group and if there is a question that needs to be answered by any one of the people in the room with you if you could make the decision as to who is to answer that question and direct them to do so and if they then give their name, Hansard will have a pretty good record of what you have to say. Thank you very much for your submission, submission No. 515, and thank you very much for agreeing to talk to the Committee today. I will move first to Mr MacDonald for questions as he is familiar, I assume, with your area, and then we will move on to the Opposition and to The Greens. We will try and get at least one question from each group on the record.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Thank you for joining us by phone. I hope WHK are not charging you too much. Mr Costello, you made a comment in the submission about LHPA being a toothless tiger. You are saying that zero prosecutions are a big concern; obviously, some farmers are very engaged and doing the right thing but others obviously, in your view, are not. Can you talk a little bit about that and what the implications are when we are having zero prosecutions?

Mr COSTELLO: I have spoken to Mark Tarrant, who is the senior ranger for the New England LHPA, and he was of the same opinion that the law that the rangers currently have to use enables a prosecution almost useless; it just does not seem able to be achieved. Basically, if you have a producer that is not interested in wild dog control they have to do very little to satisfy the law and, therefore, they are not actually giving us an effective barrier and a continuous control measure, and that is the problem that we have.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I cannot see it in the submission but if you take it on notice about your idea of the powers that they might need to give that landscape-wide effectiveness, if you like—what do they need? What extra powers do the LHPA, or the new LLLs, I suppose it will be, need?

Mr COSTELLO: I will hand you over to David Donnelly to answer that.

Mr DONNELLY: This issue is a difficult one because wild dogs can move over such a range of territory and, thus, it is very difficult to say that a landholder failed to take action to control a particular dog. The issue really relates to the matter of taking active wild dog prevention measures, as in participating in bait programs, allowing trappers to enter the property regularly and freely, and, effectively, being part of the overall wild dog management and control measures. That is what is primarily needed: the ability to ensure that people participate in wild dog control measures.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So the two main strategies where you are looking for more are trapper access and involvement in the baiting regime?

Mr DONNELLY: Most certainly, yes.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: You have also got in your submission that National Parks and Wildlife are using 10 baits per square kilometre and you think it should be 40.

Mr DONNELLY: Yes.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Are there any papers or any sort of evidence that we are looking for that, first, would not come under criticism for doing damage to wildlife and, secondly, that is effective? Has Dr Guy Ballard, or someone like that, done some work on that?

CHAIR: Can I just remind each of the witnesses that each time that you speak state your name, because it is not necessarily clear that it is the same person continuing the conversation.

Mr COSTELLO: I have been actively involved with Dr Guy Ballard and he does have quite a raft of evidence showing also the effectiveness of baiting, 10 baits per kilometre as opposed to 40 baits per kilometre. He is in the middle of that study and by the end of 2013 he will have a definitive answer on that.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: On both angles: the effectiveness on the wild dogs and not harming the native wildlife, so from both perspectives?

Mr COSTELLO: Yes, and also with that they have been trapping quolls as well, cats and foxes. So they are monitoring the impacts on all those species. There was further work done, I think it was in 2005, by Hans Cordner and there is a study on record that was done at Niangala in New England regarding quolls and the impact of 1080 baits on quolls.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can you explain a little more about the buffer zone? A number of the contributors to the submission talk about relooking at that buffer zone, moving back into the park. Can you explain how that would work?

Mr COSTELLO: Currently when we do our baiting programs it is the producers on the edge of the national parks who primarily do all the work. So the producers that are west of us, further away from the park, do not have to carry the burden of doing the work. The idea we are proposing is that that buffer zone is moved actually into the park. So instead of us copping the brunt of the dog predation, by the time the dogs get to us there should be a lot less, if the work is done in the interim in the park before the dogs come out.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Do I understand that at the moment there is no or little baiting in the park?

Mr COSTELLO: There is baiting but the schedule 2 land, which encompasses a fair proportion of the park, does not have a lot of baiting, if any. This is the problem as we see it. They are only baiting along the perimeters, rather than baiting into the core areas because that core area is where the dog numbers just keep building up and breeding. Being a territorial animal, only so many dogs stay in there and the rest move out.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Thank you for your written submission. It taught me a fair bit. I was wondering if you give us some more information about the State Wild Dog Strategy and the New South Wales Wild Dog Working Group. As a layman that suggested to me that there is at least some attempt to bring together the different public land managers—State Forests, Crown lands, the National Parks and Wildlife Service—with the farming community to work on the question of how we best respond to wild dogs and the threat they pose to your livestock. Can you give us more information on the development of that strategy and the work of the working group?

Mr DONNELLY: I have been a member of the New South Wales Wild Dog Working Group quite a number of years—I think it is four years or so. From the initial meeting at Orange the proposal was put forward to actually create the strategy so that we have a unified direction. It took some doing and a considerable amount of work. I would say it also falls under the New South Wales Pest and Animal Council, that it had to be ratified by that group. But what we have now is a unified viewpoint throughout New South Wales. We had to come up with something that the agents would all be comfortable with in adopting, and the messages are that wild dog control should be nil tenure and that all parties should be actively involved. There is a suggestion in some circles about this mesopredator theory. The bulk of the people that we dealt with do not believe there is any basis for

that; there is only one way to control the dogs and that is through the adoption of this strategy and having sufficient resources, which is absolutely critical to ensure that wild dogs are controlled within a buffer zone within the Crown land area, rather than the farmers adjacent.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: With respect to National Parks, do I take it from your submission—and you write at the bottom of page 2 of your submission, "It is acknowledged that in quite a number of areas there is very good cooperation from National Parks and Wildlife Service pest animal control officers. However, resources are limited"—that you do not see National Parks as the enemy, that you have a deal of regard for their staff and contractors who deal with pest management but the real concern is a lack of resources, given the very large areas of land they now have in their estate? Would that be a fair comment?

Mr COSTELLO: That is a fair comment. We have in certain areas very good working relationships with National Parks. I guess the trouble that we see with National Parks is that each individual area is operated by a different manager and it is open to interpretation as to what level of support we get. We do feel that they are underfunded, not only in wild dog control but in other fauna and flora pest species.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: To summarise, one of the major things you would like to see done differently is buffer zones being within Crown lands rather than on your properties, in other words, so the burden is not disproportionately borne by farmers neighbouring public lands. Is that right?

Mr COSTELLO: That is correct. Hopefully the plan is to lower the level of predation and the stress that farmers are having if the number of dogs that are impacting on us is less.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you not for appearing but being on the phone and presenting before this Committee. I too found your submission valuable and interesting. Following on from the Hon. Luke Foley's questions, in relation to the buffer baiting that you are undertaking on your properties, is any assistance provided by National Parks or State Forests in terms of the boundary, whichever tenure happens to be a boundary to your land, in relation to either personnel or resources when you undertake the baiting on your property?

Mr COSTELLO: We try to coordinate the baiting programs or other control measures to improve the effectiveness. We have a planning meeting next week for the aerial baiting which will be in June 2013 and that will be LHPA, the wild dog control associations, National Parks and State Forests. It is not just a willy-nilly approach; it is a coordinated approach. We get good cooperation but as I said earlier that varies a little bit with the different managers of the national parks.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: One suggestion in your submission is that the New South Wales Wild Dog Strategy needs to be fully supported by all government agencies. Can you expand on where that lack of support is now? Is that just in relation to not enough financial resources or does it go beyond that?

Mr DONNELLY: The Wild Dog Strategy requires significant resources and more resources than what is currently available. It also requires an understanding that baiting of wild dogs just on the veranda of these public lands is totally insufficient because a 10-kilometre distance for a wild dog is less than an hour, half an hour or whatever it might be and thus by the time the baits have lost their effect on the dog, the dogs are back through again. In our area we find that, apart from having the two scheduled baitings, we have to do considerable follow-up baitings. In fact, a wild dog could be passing through our land and into the neighbour's chute. We did have a National Parks trapper out there assisting us. So the problem is that this requires much more resources and much more dedication. This is a problem and it is a general taxpayers' problem, not the problem of just the affected farmers.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, absolutely. Does the strategy have in it that the efforts need to be placed on the perimeter in national parks, and are you suggesting that the strategy itself needs to change to ensure that more baiting and trapping is undertaken within the national parks? Are you suggesting that the strategy needs to change, or is the strategy right and it is the support and resources from government agencies that need to step up?

Mr DONNELLY: The strategy calls for a nil tenure in the covering area to ensure that these dogs do not proceed out beyond the public lands. So the strategy is calling for a much greater effort within Crown lands. I should say at this point forests lands are often baited reasonably well but again it is often as a result of the landholders actually doing that through cooperation with State Forests. There is a feeling in some quarters—

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Does he need—

Mr DONNELLY: That is certainly something that does not wash with the farming community.

CHAIR: Can you restate the last two sentences?

Mr DONNELLY: The matter of baiting much further into the perimeter of the National Parks area is perhaps the critical one. It does have reasonable cooperation with State Forests. The farmers themselves, through cooperation with State Forests, do the ground baiting in those areas but the perimeter baiting in the national parks needs to be much deeper within the parks. We are suggesting that that buffer zone be 10 kilometres within the National Parks boundary as a minimum and of course where feasible.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is the major reason for not baiting in national parks purely financial or are there other environmental reasons why baiting is not done more extensively in park areas?

Mr COSTELLO: My understanding is that it would be partly financial but also because the parks have the brief to preserve dingos. This is one of the problems we have, dingos and hybrid wild dogs and this is where the research Dr Guy Ballard is doing will come into its own because they are DNA mapping the dogs as they trap the dogs so they are gaining a pretty good profile of the extent of the wild dog population as opposed to the dingo population. That is the problem that parks have in that they have the objective to control wild dogs but also preserve dingos. We need to distinguish between the two.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Of the DNA mapping that they are doing, what is the extent of the hybridisation and are the hybrid dogs more aggressive to your livestock than the purebred dingoes?

Mr COSTELLO: I would suggest that it would be very beneficial for your Committee to actually get the results from Dr Guy Ballard's research work. That will give you a pretty good picture. I am only speaking from little bits I have seen whereas Dr Ballard has the full picture, but there is certainly clear evidence that there are a lot of wild dogs. You could be talking greater than 90 per cent of the dogs that have been DNA mapped are what you would call wild dogs, not dingoes. Wild dogs probably have a slightly different pattern in that they probably tend to hunt in packs of greater size than dingoes used to do. For instance, we have video footage of nine dogs walking past a camera in one minute 15 seconds and that is not something you would have seen naturally from all the evidence that has been collected over the years from actual dingoes.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for the time you put in. We appreciate that you had to eat into your busy days to do it. Your submission is well regarded and it contains a lot of detail. If any of the Committee members have any questions should they address them to Mr Costello?

Mr COSTELLO: That would be fine.

CHAIR: We would like to get answers to questions back, if any are sent to you, by 18 January. We realise that we have got Christmas and New Year in that period. If you do receive some questions and you need to do a bit of work and you cannot get answers back by 18 January there would be no problem from our point of view if you rang the Secretariat and told them that you will be a little bit late. Would that be all right with your group?

Mr COSTELLO: That would be fine.

CHAIR: Once again on behalf of the Committee I thank you all for taking the time to give evidence.

(End of teleconference)

VICTOR PAUL JURSKIS, Retired Forester, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Are you appearing today as a private citizen or on behalf of an organisation?

Mr JURSKIS: Private citizen.

CHAIR: Mr Jurskis, we appreciate that you have made a submission to the inquiry. Your submission is numbered 460. Before we proceed to questions from the Committee would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes, I would. Good afternoon. I was lucky to start my career 40 years ago when we had healthy, well-managed forests. Since then I have seen them disintegrate as a result of the wilderness mentality. Wilderness is nonsense. The High Court struck it down with Mabo. It is an insult to the Aboriginal people who managed the land for 40,000 years and the explorers who described their economy and are now being defamed by so-called ecologists. Take, for example, Mr Muir this morning. He reckons that Benson and Redpath know more than the surveyors general that were actually there at the time. I wish to table some figures to refer to. I also wish to table six peer reviewed publications that I have cited in my submission.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr JURSKIS: Figure 1 is a scrubbed up mess in a national park where Major Mitchell rode his horse in the dark of night with a couple of Aboriginal kids running ahead of him and lighting up grass trees to show him the way. There is nothing wrong with the idea of national parks but people have got to realise that locking them up destroys the environment and the economy. Red gum is a prime example. Frank Sartor made it clear that stakeholders would have no say and communities would be wrecked to buy preferences.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: When did he say that?

Mr JURSKIS: He said it at a meeting at Gulpa Sawmill.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order: Are we in questions?

CHAIR: No, we are not but I will allow the question.

Mr JURSKIS: He said it at a meeting in Deniliquin at Gulpa Sawmill before many witnesses. The environmental bureaucracy has corrupted science to save forests that were not there before white fella arrived. Even the little bit that has been left for people would be mismanaged to protect parasitic scrub, heaps of deadwood and other hazards that choke out biodiversity. If you look at figure 2 it shows a tree that Edward Curr stopped for a smoke at in 1843 when he explored the Moira. The Aborigines had left their gear hanging in a tree and fires smouldering underneath. You can see it was not forest. Curr described the view up the river as extensive reed beds. If you turn to figure 3 you will see that it is now forest because there is no more Aboriginal burning and there is less flooding. A university student measured a heap of debris in there after a tract was cleared and that is now used by so-called ecologists as a benchmark for natural loads of deadwood.

Figure 4 shows an ancient woodland where grazing and firewood collection have substituted for Aboriginal burning and kept it just as it was. Ironically, the same place is shown in the Natural Resources Commission [NRC] report as an example of healthy forest but the report aims to reduce grazing and firewood collection. Figure 5 shows a protected forest. There are dying trees, scrub, extreme fire hazard. The rare woodland plants and animals that we are supposed to be protecting cannot live in there. This is an example of what Mr Muir calls a self-sustaining system. It just ain't. It does not work.

You can have good or bad management in parks, State forests and private lands; tenure does not count. There must be one simple set of rules for all tenures to protect a few things that really need protection. Park managers must be brought to account, foresters must be allowed to make room for regeneration and the rules must be set and administered by true public servants rather than environmental zealots with a wilderness mentality. I was personally offended this morning when Mr Muir said that parks are for everyone. I can hardly walk anymore because of traumatic osteoarthritis and most of the areas where I used to work in the bush are now blocked off to me by logs, rocks, gates, ditches and I cannot go there.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Thank you for your submission and for appearing before us today. Can I go back to figure 2 that you have just explained. That very old red gum tree in that photo and the couple of trees immediately behind it across the creek, would you describe those trees as good habitat trees?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: By the look of photo they would be full of hollows and be appropriate habitat breeding areas for birds and animals and so on?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: As a silviculturalist what sort of density of trees in terms of stems per hectare would you allow to grow in order to achieve a tree of that nature?

Mr JURSKIS: About 20.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That would be a tree spacing of nearly 20 by 20 metres?

Mr JURSKIS: I cannot do it in my head, I am sorry, but it would be very wide spacing.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If we had a forest growing where the stems were in the order of 400 or 500 stems per hectare, it would not matter for how long those trees were there, would you end up with a habitat tree of that nature?

Mr JURSKIS: You would end up eventually with a habitat tree but not a tree of that shape. Not a wide spreading tree like that. The wider the spreading of the tree, the more strain on the branches, the more they are going to break and create hollows and so forth. If you were growing habitat trees specifically you would be growing them at extremely wide spacing.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Would it be fair to say that National Parks have the objective of providing habitat trees in these forests? Is that your understanding?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes, that is my understanding.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Of the management practices they are intending to impose upon the red gum forests, is that going to result in a proliferation of habitat trees over the next 100 years?

Mr JURSKIS: No, their management practices are actually going to result in the death of the ancient trees that are there already, and they already are as a result of those types of management practices because if you do not have burning or an ecological analogue for burning you get deleterious changes in the soil that affect the roots of the trees. The oldest trees are the worst affected and they are the first ones to go. If you look at an unmanaged red gum forest you will see all the ancient trees are dead and the mature trees are dying and there is some regeneration that is sort of struggling but not dying yet.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: From a forestry perspective the image that you have got in figure 4, would that area be a valuable forest for timber harvesting?

Mr JURSKIS: No.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Would it be a valuable forest for ecological purposes?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you tell us why that is the case?

Mr JURSKIS: It has habitat trees, as you say, and it has open spaces and sunshine and air circulation and grasses and all the sorts of things that sustain the animals that used to live in woodlands and are now rare because our woodlands are either cleared or scrubbed up.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can you explain to me a bit more about the Hastings River mouse. You made some comments about what was suitable habitat and the management that you need to get to that point.

Mr JURSKIS: The Hastings River mouse is an example of the sort of woodland open forest animal that I am talking about that has become rare because its habitat has become rare. The reason that its habitat has become rare on public lands is a result of mismanagement, a lack of frequent low intensity fire and/or cattle grazing. When the Office of Environment and Heritage did surveys on the Northern Tablelands escarpment they found that in suitable forest types that would be expected to contain the Hastings River mouse the mouse was there in grazed and burnt country; it was not there in protected country in national parks. The really bad part about it for the environment is that the Office of Environment and Heritage has imposed upon State forests a management regime that will turn the current existing habitat into unsuitable country for the Hastings River mouse.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I think you made a comment near the end of your submission that to change public land management you need to change the culture. Can you expand on that?

Mr JURSKIS: Absolutely. The culture in the environmental bureaucracies is one of wilderness. It does not recognise the way that Australian ecology works. It does not recognise that our ecosystems are attuned to 40,000 years of human management and if you take it away things go bad. An example of that regulation is supposedly protecting the Hastings River mouse habitat on State forest. That is only one example. In the red gum areas there are ridiculous rules to protect native cherry, which is a parasite that is proliferating as a result of poor management and lack of burning and/or grazing. There are countless examples along the same lines. They are not using science, they are not using common sense, they are not using logic, and they are not using ecological history. They are just trying to exclude people.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Going back to my earlier interruption, what is it you contend that Frank Sartor said at Gulpa sawmill when he was the Minister?

Mr JURSKIS: I believe he said what the Hon. Andrew Fraser repeated in *Hansard*.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Were you at the Gulpa sawmill?

Mr JURSKIS: No, I was not.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Was Andrew Fraser?

Mr JURSKIS: I do not know.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But you made some pretty harsh statements in your introductory remarks.

Mr JURSKIS: I have spoken to some people who I believe were at the Gulpa sawmill and heard it. As I said, I was not there.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you aware that Frank Sartor appeared before this inquiry and directly addressed those claims?

Mr JURSKIS: No, I am not aware of that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you aware that he has repeatedly denied those claims?

Mr JURSKIS: No.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: In your submission you have made some very direct comments, which we always appreciate. You state on page 1 that conversion of various lands to national parks and other reserves has reduced the environmental, social and economic benefits flowing from those lands and increased the net costs while producing poor outcomes of management. Do you stand by that?

Mr JURSKIS: I do.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Does that not beg the question whether we should have a national parks reserve system at all given you believe national parks have in fact led to negative environmental outcomes?

Mr JURSKIS: It does beg the question and I have answered it in my submission where I have said that it does not matter what the tenure is it is the culture and management that need to change, not the tenure.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: On page 5 you state that the cypress—that would be the south-western cypress reservations—

Mr JURSKIS: No, all the cypress reservations.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Okay. You say the cypress and red gum reservations have no justification in terms of the Act.

Mr JURSKIS: They have no justification under the National Parks and Wildlife Act except if they were to preserve the cultural heritage, which they are obviously not doing; they are doing exactly the opposite. They could be justified under the Act if the Act was applied properly. That is what I am saying. Tenure does not matter, it is management that counts.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: If the reservations have no justification in terms of the Act, should we not as a State reverse their gazettals as national parks?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes, I would like to see that but I do not believe it can happen.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Why not? Where there is a will there is a way, surely?

Mr JURSKIS: Even though the reservations have no justification under the Act, what I am looking for are management solutions. The obvious management solution is to take the line of least resistance and leave the tenure as it is and manage the land properly.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: To be clear, when you talk about the cypress reservations you would be talking about the brigalow and south-western cypress?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Let us turn to the Wilderness Act. You say on page 6 of your submission that on a reasonable test wilderness does not exist in New South Wales.

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Why then should we have a Wilderness Act?

Mr JURSKIS: I do not believe we should.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: In an ideal world would the Parliament knock over the Wilderness Act and get rid of it?

Mr JURSKIS: Absolutely. Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What about World Heritage? What do you think of that?

Mr JURSKIS: I think World Heritage is something that should be protected and currently it is being decimated and degraded by the current style of management. I think I mentioned in my submission that I spent a whole day going around World Heritage areas on the far North Coast and showing the responsible officer from the Office of Environment and Heritage the history that I know personally of those World Heritage areas. I was working there in the early 1980s and I saw beautiful open grassy forests turned to crap as a result of bad management. I spent all day explaining in great detail the history, science and ecology of it to a person from the Office of Environment and Heritage who was charged with responsibility for managing dieback in World Heritage areas and the result at the end of the day was, "Oh well, we will have to do a bit of research."

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you talking about the Gondwana World Heritage Area in the north of the State?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: On page 11 of your submission you say that 20 years later, after they were converted to national parks and World Heritage areas, these formerly healthy forests are dying and infested by scrub, mostly lantana.

Mr JURSKIS: Absolutely.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Once again, does that not beg the question of why they are World Heritage listed? Should they not be delisted?

Mr JURSKIS: No, it begs the question why we are not managing them properly.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do you have an objection to their World Heritage listing?

Mr JURSKIS: Absolutely not. I believe they should be managed as would befit a World Heritage area. They should be managed to restore their health and vitality and to save the old trees before they are all gone—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Would logging befit a World Heritage area?

Mr JURSKIS: —and to put the country back into the open grassy condition that it used to be when it was managed properly. In some cases you would need to log to do that and that is precisely what they are doing in a lot of areas in North America where they are thinning and burning national parks to restore them to the natural healthy condition.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Is logging a suitable management tool for World Heritage-listed forests?

Mr JURSKIS: It would be in these degraded forests that need considerable physical input to get them back to something resembling their natural condition.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Tell us about the chronic decline of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, which you refer to on page 7 of your submission.

Mr JURSKIS: There is chronic decline throughout national parks, State forests and private lands in New South Wales. It is particularly associated with certain forest types that grow on certain soil types. It is particularly happening in areas that were open grassy forests and that are now being mismanaged. It is the same story wherever you go. Only the pests and parasites that take advantage of the chronic decline in tree health change, depending on the types of forests and the types of trees and where we are geographically and climate-wise. It is not just New South Wales. It is the same problem across temperate Australia. The lack of frequent low-intensity burning or an ecological analogue is destroying our forests.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You refer to Kosciuszko on page 9 of your submission and say that the long and sorry history of impacts consequent to reservation of national parks—for example, reservation of Kosciuszko State Park and its subsequent dedication as national park—had wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts. Do I take it from that that the reservation of Kosciuszko as a national park in 1944, from memory, was a bad decision?

Mr JURSKIS: No, the bad decision was the decision on how to manage it once it was reserved or the ongoing bad decisions on how to manage it. I have answered your question: I do not believe tenure is the issue, I believe management is the issue.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What is the purpose of the National Parks and Wildlife Act? In summary it is to conserve native plants and animals, is it not?

Mr JURSKIS: Its primary purpose is to conserve native plants and animals. If you take it in context with all the other rules and regulations and inquiries and assessments, conserving nature is obviously taken as

conserving what was there in 1788. What was there in 1788 was the product of 40,000 years of intensive human management. That is the basic problem with management. It does not matter what the tenure is.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: When Kosciuszko was added to the national park estate in 1944 that was as a result of an investigation into grazing in the high country. Do you contend that grazing should have continued in the high country because it was occurring previously?

Mr JURSKIS: Absolutely. The investigation into grazing was much the same as all the current investigations into grazing. It was conducted by people with an agenda and a wilderness mentality. It was not a fair investigation.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The greenies go back to 1944, do they?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I thought Bill McKell as Premier went camping for 10 days in the high country to investigate it for himself.

Mr JURSKIS: Yes, and the Soil Conservation Service did the type of job that the Natural Resources Commission did on the red gums. It misrepresented the ecology and misrepresented the history and came up with the conclusion that you had to keep people out.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: They have not done a very good job of keeping people out of Kosciuszko.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You talked about human management over 40,000 years. Surely there is a lot of difference between how the Aboriginal people would have managed any of the forests and land over the entire landscape, including what we now know as the Blue Mountains and Gondwana, and the way we manage it now?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes, that is the problem.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You said the line of least resistance is to leave the tenure as it is and change the management practices, so are you suggesting you want to see land managed as Aboriginal people managed it before?

Mr JURSKIS: No, I did not say that. I said that the basic problem with management of Australian eucalypt systems is lack of frequent low-intensity burning or an ecological analogue.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Where does forestry come into that?

Mr JURSKIS: Forestry used to manage land properly. We used to do frequent low-intensity burning. We cannot do that anymore because we are regulated. Not only are we regulated, the view of governments has completely changed from one where they recognised the benefits flowing from forestry and decentralisation and rural industries and supporting rural communities and infrastructure. Even though there may not have been a big direct return on investment in forestry there were big indirect returns and overall land management was comparatively very cheap. If you take away all that investment and mismanage lands it costs a lot more.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you aware of people in your industry seeking access to national parks for logging?

Mr JURSKIS: Vaguely. I have heard about it here this morning. I am not in the industry.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: So is what you are addressing today just fire management? I am trying to be clear about this. When you say management practices must be changed are you talking just about fire management or are there other management practices you would like to see changed?

Mr JURSKIS: No. As I said, the basic problem with management of eucalypt ecosystems in Australia is lack of frequent low intensity burning or an ecological analogue.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What do you mean when you say "ecological analogue"?

Mr JURSKIS: Something else that kills seedlings, that prevents woody thickening, establishment of scrub.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is logging an ecological analogue in your language?

Mr JURSKIS: If logging is done correctly, it can be, not so much as an ecological analogue but as a mechanism, as I said before, to restore things back to a condition where they can be managed properly as is being done in North America in national parks.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are aware of bell miner associated dieback?

Mr JURSKIS: I am aware of chronic eucalypt decline of which bell miner associated dieback is not only a clumsy epithet but also is a huge distraction from the basic problem. Bell miners respond to increased populations of psillid, psillid populations increase because trees are sick, trees are sick because forests are not managed properly because they are not burned by frequent low intensity fire or grazed and burnt or managed in some way that stops woody thickening, scrub development and deleterious changes in the soil—nitrogen accumulation basically. Nitrogen accumulation is the major cause of loss of biodiversity around the world. It does not matter whether it is in Australia as a result of lack of burning or in North America and Europe as a result of industrial pollution or in some places in China and so forth as a result of agricultural fertilisers. Take even in the New England where dieback is a result of nitrogen accumulation from pasture improvement.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: When you suggested earlier that much of the State or some areas, I am unclear, were open grassy forests before perhaps the current system of national parks and forest management, in your view, to what areas of the State are you referring?

Mr JURSKIS: Most of the State, as you said.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: So the area of Gondwana land, national parks world heritage area, Blue Mountains sandstone escarpment, all of that area as well?

Mr JURSKIS: The Gondwana world heritage area includes rainforest, it includes forest that used to be open, grassy eucalypt forest and it includes small areas of wet sclerophyll forest. But overall in New South Wales the majority of forests were open, grassy forests.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What is the evidence for that assertion?

Mr JURSKIS: All the explorers from Matthew Flinders—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You have written a paper on it, have you not?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The "River red gum and white cypress forest in south-western New South Wales, Australia: Ecological history and implications for conservation of grassy woodlands".

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I am asking about all of the State, which was the assertion.

Mr JURSKIS: Okay. Talking about the Blue Mountains, for example, Charles Darwin described the vegetation on the sandstone of the Blue Mountains. If you give me a moment, I can actually quote him directly.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Or perhaps you could provide it on notice?

CHAIR: Could you provide it on notice?

Mr JURSKIS: Okay, yes. Charles Darwin described the Blue Mountains. Photo figure 1 that I showed you is on Hawkesbury sandstone on The Northern Road. That is stringy bark forest with the odd Banksia and grass tree. That is the locality and the forest type where Mitchell was able to ride a horse on dark and rainy nights with a couple of young Aboriginal fellows running ahead of him with burning stringy bark and lighting

up the grass trees to show him the way. You can hardly breathe through that now let alone bloody run through it, excuse me, or ride a horse.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I have not been able to read your papers because you have just tabled them, but do you prescribe to the notion that different ecosystems require different fire regimes?

Mr JURSKIS: No. Our ecological history shows us that there was a regime across the landscape of frequent low intensity fire. Those vegetation types that contain so-called fire sensitive plants, for the last 40,000 years were confined to physical refugia where you cannot burn under normal conditions. They will only burn under extreme conditions. Wet sclerophyll forests used to grow in isolated sheltered areas, like in a matrix of open grass forest. While ever that matrix was open and grassy, those individual patches of wet sclerophyll forests were mostly protected.

The only time they would be affected by fire is if you happen to have extreme weather conditions and a lightning strike close by. While ever those extreme conditions last, which is normally for a day, or two days at the most, those pockets of wet sclerophyll forest within reach of that fire in that time period would be burnt and reset to zero age class and all the others in the region would escape because they are protected by that mosaic. What has happened now, which is so obvious in Victoria, is that you basically have two or three age classes of wet sclerophyll forest across the whole State because of the mismanagement of the forests.

CHAIR: The Committee has inspected the river red gum and the cypress forests. Dealing first with cypress forests, the foresters to whom we spoke used a term "locked up" to describe a condition of a forest they say was not being managed. Can you run through what actually happens in a cypress forest like that? Why can it not continue to just grow?

Mr JURSKIS: Cypress, like anything else in Australia, is attuned to frequent low intensity fire and its mode of regeneration, like a lot of other Australian plants, is to produce millions of seedlings on the very odd occasion that conditions are right. Naturally before white man, cypress grew mostly in woodlands and maintained by frequent low intensity burning, when you had a good season. A good season in cypress means you have to have good soil moisture for almost over a year, and then you get mass establishment. Nowadays you get mass establishment of cypress. Under Aboriginal management, when you had those conditions, you had plenty of grass. You had seedlings and grass come up together and most of it got burnt off. The only seedlings that survived to grow into trees would be ones that were protected because they were in an ash bed where an old log had burnt away or something.

They were protected from competition and from the first fire when the grass cured. Now white fella has come along and disrupted Aboriginal burning, over-grazed and introduced rabbits, we had droughts and we had no ground cover. Then we had the floods that broke the drought and we just got massive regeneration of millions of seedlings of cypress over huge areas. Its natural strategy is to produce lots and lots of seedlings so that one or two can survive to be trees, and because that system has been disrupted, the seedlings all survived and in fact over time they choke out, out compete, the old trees. So in an unmanaged cypress forest you lose your old trees, which you can see throughout the south-west as a result of the last drought. There are big dead trees everywhere in a sea of live regeneration. The only way you can manage that system to preserve a semblance of nature or if you wish to preserve European culture is to use thinning and heavy thinning and grazing to control growth of cypress seedlings as well as fuels.

CHAIR: To move on to the river red gum forests, it has been put to us that environmental flooding, in other words, non-natural flooding, can be detrimental to river red gum forests.

Mr JURSKIS: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Is that the case, in your opinion? If so, why?

Mr JURSKIS: I have seen it happen. I cannot remember the name of the forest, not the central Murray but further downstream. Whatever the government department was called in those days that was in charge of water, it did some irrigation trials during the drought. It applied water to supposedly revive the forests and I actually monitored the results on two areas of State forests where they actually had pumped water out of the river into the runners to water the forests. But they stuffed it up because there was a really good rainfall quite soon before they started the irrigation. The trees in fact were already recovering from the drought as a result of this rainfall when they started applying the irrigation water and all the cracks that allow flood waters to actually

penetrate into the underground aquifers where the trees can actually get at the water were sealed up. All you had was this layer of water on top of the clay that was actually smothering the tree roots and so forth. The result of my monitoring was that there are indications that trees that were closer to where the water was applied actually recovered less and more slowly than trees that were too far away to be affected by the watering.

CHAIR: In relation to the river red gum forest, in addition to the management regimes that you suggested, such as grazing and low intensity fire—

Mr JURSKIS: And thinning.

CHAIR: Do you believe that artificial water management also has to be carefully managed?

Mr JURSKIS: It has to be carefully managed, yes. It certainly can work. We have a history of regulating water in the Millewa group, the Gulpa and Millewa and that group of forests. The old Forestry Commission built hundreds of regulators to make sure the forests got watered properly or did not get watered too much when it did not need it sort of thing.

CHAIR: Have you any experience with the river red gum forest at Yanga? The Committee toured that forest and it was explained that as part of the agricultural management of Yanga, river red gum forests were created as a plantation and the regime of water flow was attempted to be modified to suit. Of course, the result was that when the river red gums were planted on perhaps inappropriate soils and the water was not there during the drought, it created mismanagement. Under those circumstances how careful do you think ecological managers have to be in deciding where and when they will, if you like, re-create forests?

Mr JURSKIS: I do not believe they should be re-creating any forests. In nature, the river red gum forests were lines of trees or narrow strips along the high banks of the rivers and along runners or around billabongs and lakes.

CHAIR: So they were not broadacre forests?

Mr JURSKIS: There were no broadacre forests. The low flood plains where they got water every year, basically flooded every year, they were reed beds; and the slightly higher flood plains that got flooding every few years, they were open woodlands that looked like that tree I showed you in figure 2. You can see from the shape of the tree what the woodlands were. As I said, 20 trees to the hectare, and in a lot of cases less. Those were the trees that were wide-spaced and open-grown; they were maintained in a healthy condition by frequent burning. As a result, they were able to control their patch; they were able to access and use all the water within their crown and some outside it. Under current management, as I said, those trees are declining in health; and when you get a flood the seedlings that normally would not survive because they would get droughted out by the big, healthy trees, no longer get droughted out; they actually take over, and the big trees die and the seedlings come up in dense masses.

CHAIR: We are out of time. Mr Jurskis, I would like to thank you for coming all the way up here to give evidence today. And thank you very much for your submission and the supplementary documentation that you have provided. If the Committee has any questions that it would like to put to you, are you prepared to take those on notice?

Mr JURSKIS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has determined that we would like answers to those questions by 18 January.

Mr JURSKIS: No problem.

CHAIR: Given the Christmas period, if you feel you need a bit more time the secretariat would be happy to receive answers to those questions. Thank you very much for coming; we appreciate it.

Mr JURSKIS: Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

MARIA JANE WOODS, Vice President, Shires Association of New South Wales, and

GEOFFREY STUART HUDSON, Senior Policy Officer, Natural Resources Management, Local Government and Shires Association of New South Wales, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome to the table Councillor Maria Woods, Vice President of the Shires Association of New South Wales, and Mr Geoff Hudson, Senior Policy Officer, Natural Resource Management, Local Government and Shires Association of New South Wales. I note you have made a submission to the inquiry, No. 203. Before we proceed to questions from the Committee would either or both of you like to make an opening statement?

Ms WOODS: Yes, I would.

CHAIR: Please proceed.

Ms WOODS: Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Councils support the need for land to be managed for not only community use but also conservation and environment management. We have major concerns however with the current system of public land management in New South Wales. I will briefly touch on a couple of key points. Local government requires adequate, timely and realistic consultation on the legislative requirements of any conversion of Crown land, State forest or agricultural land into national park or any other type of conservation area.

Currently, there is no consultation; often, the first time a council hears of the land being converted to national park is a certificate request from a solicitor or reading about it in the *Government Gazette*. Local government also has concern over converting land into national parks without the resources to manage them appropriately. Pest and weed control are two key areas where significant improvement is needed. Local government strongly supports the need for public land managers to have the same standards and obligations as private land managers.

Councils have requested that when considering conversion of private land to national park, or from State forest to national park, that a clear procedure be developed, with objective criteria and an open and transparent procedure. Local government would like to point out that there is currently a major lack of ongoing funding to assist with supply of infrastructure to State-owned public lands. Councils are responsible for access roads to these areas, and many times significant damage is caused to local roads without adequate compensation. Trucks and logging equipment are an example of this. Many councils have concerns with the transfer of State forest to national parks. Often, complete industries are shut down in a town, with a suggestion that the increase in tourism more than makes up for it. Economic modelling is not available to support this suggestion.

Finally, I would like to highlight the enormous economic impact that current and future public lands will have on the abilities for council to rate. It is fundamentally wrong for public lands to be exempt from paying local government rates. This is a direct cost shift from the State, and places an unnecessary burden on both councils and the communities we represent. Of particular concern are government businesses or trading activities that make an economic return. These enterprises do not adequately compensate the councils.

CHAIR: Mr Hudson, do you have anything to add?

Mr HUDSON: No, not at this time.

CHAIR: Then we will proceed with questions.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Councillor Woods, this morning we heard discussion on the role of bushfire management committees and two concerns were expressed: firstly, that there were on those committees people who were opposed to fire management routines and, secondly, that the committees were too large to make timely decisions. Would you comment on your experience or any anecdotal evidence you may have in relation to bushfire management committees?

Ms WOODS: Certainly. There is concern about the management of bushfires in national parks and those committees. The lack of appropriate and timely fire management has been raised in most rural councils

that I could speak of, and certainly with regard to the size of those committees. I will ask Geoff Hudson to comment on that in a moment. The timely way in which they make decisions and the lack of support or confidence they have in local decision-makers, not necessarily councils but also local committee members, have been a concern of local government for some time.

Mr HUDSON: The main point I would like to make is that local government is very concerned about local decision-making and councils being involved in local management. Obviously, there have been recent resolutions by both associations regarding our relationship with the Rural Fire Service; but specifically in relation to bushfire management committees, councils certainly want to continue to be actively involved. There is certainly an anecdotal suggestion that some committees are too large, but councils have not given us any concrete evidence about that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If I could put it this way: there should not be proclamation of these areas without the appropriate resources to management them. Are you therefore asking for more resources, or fewer proclamations?

Ms WOODS: Whichever is appropriate to the individual area. I believe that the proclamation issue is very much one about consultation. It is very much, as I said, about having a clear, open and transparent process. With regard to resources, local government has long supported the view that there are not enough resources to manage not only, as I said, particularly weeds and feral animals, but also a number of other issues that are important to public land management.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: To that end, do you believe that some parks should be delisted?

Ms WOODS: I do not have a view on that at this time, but I can get back to you.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is fine. Mr Hudson?

Mr HUDSON: The only thing I would like to add is in relation to resources. It is not just national parks; it is also State forests and Crown lands as well. All three types of public land are under-resourced, and councils in different parts of the State have issues with all three. So it is not just national park; it is all three.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: In relation to tourism, you said there is a lack of economic modelling; presumably, that is in relation to the benefits that will accrue to local communities. Is that what you were talking about in relation to these reserves?

Ms WOODS: More particularly where an industry is shut down. I am sure all members of the Committee have heard of instances where the closing down of logging operations have had dramatic influences on communities; and the smaller the community, the larger the impact. It has been suggested that having more national parks will more than make up for the loss of that industry. There is absolutely no evidence that I know of to support that suggestion. If people are going to make these statements, you need to do more economic modelling of those particular communities to ascertain the factual position.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is my understanding that in both the Pilliga and the river red gum area there was evidence provided in relation to the tourism benefits which would accrue from the listing of those areas. The problem is that it was completely bogus: the figures were never realised, and are never likely to be realised. Isn't that the real problem?

Ms WOODS: The real problem is, as I said, that the economic modelling does not support the assertion that tourism takes over from the industries that are shut down. Whether that is, as you said, bogus or whether it does not exist in particular areas—which it certainly does not—the economic modelling does not support it.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Councillor Woods, the other hat you were as that of councillor of Walcha. Do you mind if I ask you questions a bit more specific to your part of the world, rather than just as the representative of the Shires Association?

Ms WOODS: I certainly am representing the Shires Association at this time; but, if you would like, I can take a question.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: The amount of public land in New South Wales that is reserved land is 8.8 per cent, and the target is about 15 per cent. About a third of Walcha shire, according to the Walcha council submission, is public land at the moment. What would roughly doubling the amount of reserved land mean to somewhere like Walcha—if it did double in Walcha, and I am not saying that that is definite? But, if we are going for these sorts of targets across the State, there would be an increase in Walcha public land. What would that mean for a council like Walcha?

Ms WOODS: I believe for a council like Walcha it would be catastrophic. Walcha has 6,270 square kilometres within its area. Of that, 1,700 square kilometres are national parks and 521 square kilometres are State forest. If you significantly increase that proportion of Walcha shire the effect would be quite devastating. Obviously, Walcha is prime agricultural land and is well-known for the quality of its fine wool and lambs. It also has an enormous amount of gorge country which is currently under State forests or the like.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: If the increase came, it would more likely come out of State forests; maybe some private land, but a lot of the land targeted would be in State forests, I would imagine.

Ms WOODS: State forests have provided a very valuable industry to Walcha for a considerable of time; and, although certain parts of that have closed down, certain parts of it is still very much supporting our local economy. The conversion from State forests to national parks, or indeed more freehold land—and as early as 10 days ago there were another 1,800 hectares of private land converted—certainly is ongoing in that area.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can you tell me whether any of the latest Macleay River fires were in Walcha shire?

Ms WOODS: The fires certainly did come into the Walcha area.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: What does the 90,000 hectares that was burnt out—and correct me if I am wrong—mean to a council like Walcha? Did you have to financially contribute, or does it have any sort of impact on the community, business and the council?

Ms WOODS: I will have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Councillor Woods, I go back to your recommendation. And congratulations on preparing a submission that has recommendations; that makes our job easier when we are considering recommendations. So thank you for that. The recommendation at the bottom of page 3 talks about consultation with the relevant council before there are any conversations. What form should that consultation take? Should it be upfront, first point of call type consultation, or should it be done further down the track when things are more in place?

Ms WOODS: It should absolutely be first port of call. That consultation should continue through the entire process. The Local government area represents those communities, and they understand the needs of those communities, so we need to be in at the very beginning of any discussions; and we certainly need to talk about the long-term management of access roads and other ramifications that these changes might bring to those communities. So it is not just about a point in time; it is about being there at the beginning and staying involved until the end.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Should local government be an equal player in that game? For example, should the local government body have a power of veto at some stage if they think the impacts will be too severe on the local government area?

Ms WOODS: I do not think we have actually formed a view on whether we should have the power of veto. Certainly, we should not have anything less than equal say in our communities.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The second part of that recommendation is that particular consideration should be given to the impacts on the local economy and employment. The Committee heard evidence at its hearing in Bourke that, following the conversion of the station Toorale, the resultant loss of business was equivalent to 10 per cent of the total business turnover in Bourke, and 4 per cent of its rate income. Do you see that those sorts of figures are going to provide a really severe impact on communities such as Bourke and other communities around the State?

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Ms WOODS: I imagine if those percentages were in any community, the ramifications would be severe. The further you go into rural Australia, you know, it just has a multiplier effect on a number of issues that they are already struggling with. So there is absolutely no way that that cannot affect that community significantly. At that percentage, it would affect any community.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If a State Government made a decision in the Blacktown City Council's area that was going to reduce business turnover in Blacktown by 10 per cent, World War III would nearly erupt in Blacktown, would it not?

Ms WOODS: As I said, in any community, irrespective of whether it is metropolitan or rural. Those percentages are huge and would have a significant effect.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Councillor Woods and Mr Hudson, thank you for coming today. I will just drill a bit more into the loss of rateable income. Forests NSW does not pay rates, does it?

Mr HUDSON: No.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The National Parks and Wildlife Service does not pay rates.

Ms WOODS: No.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Indeed, many of your member councils have given evidence to us over the last few months about loss of rateable income. When we are looking at a State forest being converted to a national park, the loss of rateable income does not stem from the conversion to national park but goes back even further to when the land was made a State forest. Is that not right?

Ms WOODS: The loss of rateable income would not be significantly changed then. The loss of jobs and the loss of productivity in your community would be significant.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I am not asking you about that, Councillor Woods. I am asking you about the loss of rateable income. I am just trying to get clear in my mind where the loss occurs. Can I put to you that where private land is converted to national park, there is clearly a loss of rateable income for local government, is there not?

Mr HUDSON: Yes.

Ms WOODS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Where a State forest is converted to national park, there is not a loss of rateable income to local government stemming from that conversion, but there is a loss that stems from the fact that State Forests in the first place was not paying rates to your member councils' rates. Am I putting it correctly?

Mr HUDSON: Yes, absolutely. For that type of conversion, there is no loss of rates because there are no rates to lose. There have been no rates to pay in the first place.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You lost them in the first place.

Mr HUDSON: I suppose the only point I would like to make in that is that it is the association's policy that we believe that State Forests should have been paying rates in the first place.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Yes, indeed—or the Rail Infrastructure Corporation.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Yes, but what about the 30 loggers who lose their jobs and move out of town. That is 30 houses from which you have lost rates.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Or 30 teachers.

CHAIR: Order! Allow the witness to answer the question.

Mr HUDSON: I support what Councillor Woods said in relation to the loss of economic turnover in the community, but what we are saying is that the whole idea of public land not paying rates, whether it is State Forests or the National Parks and Wildlife Service—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Or the Rail Infrastructure Corporation, or the ports authority.

Mr HUDSON: Or the Rail Infrastructure Corporation, or Crown lands, or a whole range of other public lands that do not pay rates. Yet they use council services to access that land. Therefore, we believe that they should contribute to the local community and local revenue.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Thank you. Councillor, could I go back to your earlier statement. I think what you put to us is that you do not believe there has been any economic analysis of the tourism benefits or lack thereof that have resulted from the creation of national parks. Is that what you said?

Ms WOODS: I believe I said that the economic modelling does not support that the increase in tourism overrides the loss of the industry in those particular communities.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Does the Shires Association have members among the councils in the far north-east corner of New South Wales?

Ms WOODS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: So Byron shire would be a member?

Ms WOODS: It is a member of the Local Government Association.

Mr HUDSON: It is a member of the Local Government Association, not the Shires Association.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Tweed?

Ms WOODS: It is our largest Shires Association member.

Mr HUDSON: Yes, it is.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Lismore is a city, so it is in the Local Government Association.

Mr HUDSON: It is in the Local Government Association.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you aware that this Committee received evidence from some local government representatives and some environmentalists from the north-east corner of the State providing direct evidence about alleged economic benefits flowing from tourism in the north-east corner of the State? Are you aware of that?

Ms WOODS: I believe that the Local Government and Shires Associations strongly support all sectors of the community. We are not about supporting farmers. We are not about supporting a particular group. We support all the interest groups. I think when you have particular interest groups that come along and mention their thoughts, I would just leave that to be their thoughts. I do not believe where industries have shut down by and large it is has been an increase on the industry that was shut down to create it.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Is that your personal view, Councillor Woods, or the view of the Shires Association?

Ms WOODS: The Shires Association, as I understand it, believes that shutting down industries, particularly in rural and regional New South Wales, does not have the turnaround to tourism. It does not support the loss of that industry.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Councillor, when this Committee sat in Grafton, we heard evidence from mayors and general managers of various councils in the north-east of the State. We heard evidence of a 250 per cent increase in tourism visits to north-east New South Wales national parks since 1997. Do you still stand by

your statement that there have been no economic benefits resulting from tourism that have occurred since the creation of national parks in New South Wales?

Ms WOODS: I did not say there have been no economic benefits. I said that I do not believe that it overrides the industries, particularly in rural and regional New South Wales, that have been closed to do that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: We heard evidence in Grafton, which I quote from the transcript:

In 2010 there were some nine to 11 million visits to north-east New South Wales national parks. That is up 250 per cent since 1997. This visitation is generating a business turnover of the order of \$400 million to \$500 million per annum and some 2,600 to 3,000 direct and indirect jobs in the regional economy.

Could you accept that perhaps the north-east of the State is an exception, and the economic benefits that have flowed from the national park decisions in that corner of the State may have been a net positive in economic terms?

Ms WOODS: Do you have the figures for what was there beforehand?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Good answer.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Not from the evidence I am quoting, no. I am asking you: Can you accept that there has perhaps been a net economic benefit flowing from the national park decisions in the north-east corner of the State? Or would you not accept that?

Ms WOODS: No. I would ask you if you have the economic modelling that was there beforehand.

CHAIR: Just before I give the call to Ms Faehrmann, the evidence that was quoted to you was in this context: We met with two areas, Lismore and Grafton, at the same meeting. Both areas had totally different demographics in so far as the percentage of their shire that was given to public land and that which was not. Grafton had nowhere near the amount of public land in its shire. Therefore the level of what I will call productive industry perhaps was much higher. Has the Shires Association put out any position statements on tourism as a replacement for other industries? In particular, does the Shires Association have any position on whether you feel that the additional support needed by a shire to undertake tourism has been adequate from, say, State Governments or other organisations that provide advice, benefit and money, such as Tourism NSW, et cetera?

Ms WOODS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I do not believe that we actually have put out a position paper. Certainly I can get back to you to confirm that. I will hand over to Geoffrey.

Mr HUDSON: I just thought I should mention that obviously tourism is an economic development. Through-tourism is a priority for councils. We certainly encourage councils to be very active in that tourism space. To that point, the association has actually run an annual tourism conference specifically for councils. That is in various locations in the State each year. I think we are up to the third or fourth one coming up next year. It is something that we are quite active in. The further details about what the associations' policies are in regard to the performance or support by other State agencies I would have to take on notice.

CHAIR: That was going to be my next question. Would you be able to provide us with the associations' position on whether you believe that the State Government provides local government with sufficient resources where a replacement of industry has occurred? I particularly refer to tourism. Some of the evidence that was given by some of those councillors up there seemed to suggest that they felt that they were not adequately supported, and that councils bore the lion's share of having to promote tourism from a standing start and with a loss of industry. Suddenly they had to try to provide resources and programs to drive tourism. If you could, I would like you to take that on notice.

Mr HUDSON: Certainly.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you both for appearing and for your submission. On page five of your submission, you have written about the appropriate resource and funding allocation to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. You state:

... all too often there are not enough rangers or field staff and not enough funding and resources to manage this broad range of land management challenges. The NPWS need to be properly resourced to manage the land under their management.

Councillor Woods, are you aware of the recent funding cuts and staff reductions under way in the Office of Environment and Heritage and the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Ms WOODS: I might hand over to Geoff, if you do not mind.

Mr HUDSON: Yes. Look, the association has been sort of keeping a watching brief on what have been recent changes to government agencies. Mainly that information has been through the media and the like. We have been keeping up to date like everybody else.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Given what you have said in your submission, does it worry you that from every division of parks staff we met during the course of this inquiry, and that has been in various places across the State, we have heard that each division has to reduce staff, including people who will be managing parks? Does it concern you that, rather than more funding for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, we are expecting less from this Government?

Mr HUDSON: It is certainly a concern in the sense that both associations support national parks, support the concept of national parks and want to see them managed to the best standard possible. Like any government service, such as managing national parks or resources for the local hospital, we believe the State Government should provide the appropriate resources to provide the services for the local community. That is just as valid for the number of rangers or whatever in a national park. We believe there should be the appropriate amount of resources allocated to that.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. You refer briefly on page four of your submission to commercial activities within national parks. As I understand it from your submission, technically, commercial activities within national parks remain exempt from paying rates, but there is a voluntary arrangement for that. Is that correct? Is that your understanding?

Mr HUDSON: There are some voluntary arrangements to work with the local council to deal with that type of issue. It is certainly a major concern for the association. If someone is making money out of a venture within a national park, they should pay rates. They are making money out of it. They are using community services, whether it is even the road that drives up to the national park. Their customers are using that road to get to their commercial facility; therefore, they should pay rates. Whether that is a private industry or a government department maybe with a commercial venture it remains the same.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: By "commercial venture", you do not need to name names, but you are talking more than lodging?

Mr HUDSON: There is a whole range of commercial ventures that occur on public land in New South Wales, whether it be national parks or Crown lands, and we think all of those commercial ventures should mean that the land should be rateable for local government.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you talk a little bit more about one of your recommendations that the inquiry call on the New South Wales Government to cease the appropriation of council revenues and the encroachment on council revenue-raising capacity? You are talking about cost shifting as well. You are wanting, obviously, to get rates from all public land. So what is happening in terms of the other way? When you are talking about cost shifting is it recent cost shifting or over a period of the last 10 or 20 years?

Ms WOODS: Cost shifting has been an ongoing thing that the associations have obviously put a lot of time into evaluating. Obviously, the other way that the State Government hampers local government in their ability to rate is rate pegging. So not only are we hampered in making those decisions for our communities, we do not even get to rate peg public lands; they are completely off the radar to us.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What about the recommendation in here about weeds? I am not sure whether the LGSA supported it but there was a move, I think, for noxious weeds—there was a bill before Parliament on noxious weeds and an attempt, I think by The Greens, to get noxious weed management through national parks and State forests as well, the same requirement as is on private lands. You support that approach, is that correct?

Ms WOODS: We believe that public land managers should absolutely have the same obligations as private land managers and there was, as I understand it, originally a suggestion they be class 1 and 2 weeds only to be considered to have the same obligation. But, by and large, it is the class 3 and 4 weeds that cause the significant harm to adjacent landowners. Often the class 1 and 2 weeds are basically restricted or non-existent in the State to start with, so that is letting the State off the hook a little bit. They should have the exact same obligations as the person that owns the private land next door to them.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Your responsibility in terms of dealing with these noxious weeds is that when they leave the boundary of the parks that is when local councils have to deal with the problem? They are not having to deal with the weed problem in national parks themselves, are they, or State forests; it is when the boundaries are encroached, is that correct?

Mr HUDSON: Yes. Local government has only got the legislative power to inspect and issue notices to private property owners, not State agencies, and that is certainly a frustration for local government weed officers, that whether it will be national parks, whether it will be State forests, whether it will be Crown lands, whether it will be a rail corridor or a freeway, council's hands are tied in relation to actually getting the State agency to do any weed control on that. We can ask, we can cajole, we can play nice and friendly to try and encourage them but we cannot force them to. We cannot issue them with a notice, unlike a private property owner that we can issue a notice to force them to control their weeds.

Ms WOODS: Invasive species by their very nature are just that—they are invasive; so they do not tend to stay in the boundaries where they are put, whether that be feral animals or whether it be weeds. Quite often the closer you are to the public land the greater the burden on your particular property given the high-risk pathway and the spread of those invasive species.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Just going back to the replacement industry argument, would it be perhaps a way forward to say that where a parcel of land is gazetted for reservation, if the tourism had not accrued in, say, three years time that the land reverted back to unreserved Crown land?

Ms WOODS: We do not have a view on that at this time.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What about the argument that it is just too bad, that because a lot of this land which is being reserved is in rural and regional New South Wales that people out there will just have to suffer so that city-dwelling elitists can assuage their consciences about places that they will never actually have to visit and that it is just tough luck for people in country New South Wales?

Ms WOODS: As I believe I said in the beginning, councils support the need for land to be managed for community but also for conservation and environmental management. I am not going to go any further than that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What about the idea that those people who like to call themselves environmentalists should have a special levy placed on them so they can help defray the cost of running these parks and also perhaps to help provide benefits to those areas which have been negatively affected by the proclamations?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Everyone who has presented before this inquiry has said that they are an environmentalist, Peter—the loggers, the farmers—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Here is the opportunity for them to put their money where their mouth is rather than relying on general taxation revenue. Would you favour, for example, an environmental licence in the way the UK has a TV licence so that those people who wish to proclaim their environmental credentials could actually contribute some money?

Ms WOODS: I would favour the State Government paying rates on public lands.

CHAIR: We have had some evidence from a few different witnesses talking about proposed models or, if not models, paradigms as to how the various tenures of Crown land, including the land that is managed under trust by local governments, should be managed. Does the Shires Association have any views or ideas on how better the specific issues such as fire, weeds and feral animals, for example, could be managed cross-tenure

and how would you see that happening and what would you think the role would be that the Shires Association and local government could play in that?

Ms WOODS: With regard to, in particular, weeds, one of the key initiatives of both the Department of Primary Industry and local government in recent times has been the New South Wales Weed Action Program. What it allows for is regional strategic planning and very much local delivery and local inspection. We strongly support local government retaining the current roles that it has. We obviously have made submissions and they are available with regard to other ways of managing invasive species. What I think is absolutely crucial is that you have the regional strategic planning but absolutely ensure the local delivery of services.

CHAIR: Could you perhaps provide us, on notice, the names of those references or documents you just referred to?

Ms WOODS: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you believe that councils get a fair shake out of being a trustee for Crown lands? I suppose you could always have the option as a local government to step aside from being a trustee if you felt you were not, but does that impact upon shires—the need to have to manage Crown land under trust—or do you generally find that it is a money-making venture like, for example, caravan parks and those sorts of things?

Mr HUDSON: I suppose councils are the voice and the face of their local community. In a lot of cases members of the community do not really distinguish between services being delivered, whether it is local, Federal or State government, they just want the service delivered, and because council is the government closest to them, that is who they go to. In a lot of cases it does not matter if the Crown land is vested in council or not, the community expect it to be managed and look to the council to do it. So there are a lot of cases around the State where councils are just managing vacant Crown land because they have got to do it for their local community; their community is expecting it; they are not getting the support from the State Government. So the work has to be done and the council just does it, at their own cost.

In a lot of cases management of Crown land is a significant cost to councils. There is very little money making to be had from managing Crown land and in situations where there is—whether it be caravan parks or the like that are on Crown land—councils are now finding that State government agencies are coming back to them and saying, "Okay, you are doing all the hard work but we own the land so you have got to give us some of the profit", and councils are, as you would not imagine, not very happy about that because it is the one area where they can actually make money on Crown land, but the State Government is coming in for its cut.

CHAIR: Would you like to, on notice, give us a recommendation on that particular aspect?

Mr HUDSON: It is actually included in one of our recommendations in the submission. That issue is addressed in our submission.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Just one final thing—just thinking about it now: presumably, private conservation land is rateable, is it not?

Mr HUDSON: Under the National Parks and Wildlife Act voluntary conservation agreements are rate exempt—only the land that is part of the actual conservation, not the entire property. So if 50 per cent of the property is put under a voluntary conservation agreement they only pay 50 per cent of their rates for the part that is not under that agreement. The way that system works is that that property is non-rateable but councils can then disperse the loss of rates amongst the rest of its ratepayers. So we lose \$500, we then spread that \$500 loss amongst the other 10,000 ratepayers that we have, so it is 20¢ each or whatever it may be. Councils are still supportive of private land conservation; we have been actively working with the Office of Environment and Heritage over the last couple of months to look at private land conservation—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Except that taken to its logical conclusion you would have no rates other than urban rates.

Mr HUDSON: We are certainly working with the Government to look at ways for which councils can be compensated for private land conservation. We are not against private land conservation; we just think there should not be any impact on local rate revenue for the conservation of land—it is an agreement between the State and the property owner, so therefore the State should pay for that, not local government.

CHAIR: Just on that issue, the Minister for the Environment in answer to a question on notice in the House said exactly what you have said: If a station the size of Toorale is acquired then of course it is up to the council to defray that cost across the rest of the ratepayers. What would you say your ratepayers' views are on that issue of having to pay extra rates, particularly given that when a lot of this happened it was under a rate cap?

Mr HUDSON: I am sure Councillor Woods has got something to say about rate capping. I think it depends on the situation. If it is a small offset in a council such as Wyong, for example, where you have got 130,000 people or more, potentially the increase for every other ratepayer is very, very small. If you go to Bourke, that is a completely different situation and that is why we have been very clear in our submission about consultation with local government about what the potential impacts are of that conservation, whether it be private land conservation or conversion of land use.

CHAIR: We have also had evidence—I think it might have been in Grafton—that there is a continual problem with local government trying to assess what percentage of a road should be maintained by the council where, for example, you have a State forest. Do you have that sort of issue coming up at the Shires Associations very often where councils have difficulty trying to come to a landing with public land users over the sharing of costs for the maintenance of roads?

Ms WOODS: Very much so. There is always an issue as to where the burden on the local ratepayers finishes and where that should then be the State responsibility, and that continues to be questioned across the State in a number of different ways.

CHAIR: We are out of time. I understand you have travelled some distance to be with us, so thank you very much for coming down here and giving us your views; they are very much appreciated. For questions on notice we would like to try and get answers to those by 18 January if possible. If the public holidays present a problem for the association then just let the secretariat know and they will be happy to give you a bit of extra time. Once again, thank you very much for giving us your time.

(The witnesses withdrew)

MICHAEL EDWARD BLAKE, Chairman, Natural Resources and Energy Policy Committee, National Party of Australia (NSW), and

DUNCAN FRASER MACINTYRE, Member, Natural Resources and Energy Policy Committee, National Party of Australia (NSW), sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr BLAKE: Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. There is probably a host of issues that have been canvassed by folk today, which I have listened to most of, and previous speakers at other venues that you have all attended over the past four or five months. Having heard what I have heard today in a couple of instances, I have changed my focus a little bit on the opening statement and I will just briefly sum up if I can. The Brigalow bioregion has been mentioned fairly consistently during the day by a number of people. I have been, over the past five years, a member of the Central West Conservation Advisory Committee on the Central West part of the bioregion. Under the Brigalow and Nandewar Community Conservation Area Agreement in 2008, for those members who are not familiar with it, the bioregion was divided basically into three parts: north, central and south, running basically east to west or west to east. The idea was to oversight the activities of the appointed managers, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, by three committees. Those committees were made up of community-based folk and they were supported by probably nearly an equal number of agency people, even though the managing people were the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Something that jostled me a bit, in the right sense, was what Mr Ian Sinclair said. I reckon he hit the nail on the head. There should be local input in the management of national parks or generally all land management. That brings me to a salient point. The tenure of these committees was five years, which expired in February this year. We waited for some time and we were advised not in writing but verbally that the government of the day has disbanded those three committees, which to me is the wrong direction to be taking because they have lost a great deal of expertise and input from community people overseeing what National Parks were doing.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: When did this happen?

Mr BLAKE: It was officially made in June this year. We were concerned about that because we believe that we were finally starting to get our legs in the sense that—I say this with respect, because I have a lot of friends in National Parks as well, but in the first year or two of the activities of our committee—I think it happened in the north and south committees as well—National Parks tended to have sway because of the newness of people on the committee. We just seemed to get our legs and we were being involved very much in management plans of a range of State conservation areas and bang, that happened. Having said that, it sounds like a complaint, which it probably is, because I thought, even on a personal level, we were contributing and we had a lot to contribute because of the amount of expertise from north to south on those committees.

That aspect of it is an issue in itself but I got involved in the Brigalow bioregion aspect, particularly on the BRUS option, et cetera, from early days and I was involved in the RACAC process and sat for finally three days or whatever it was in Dubbo where the outcome in my opinion was already in place, and that is what happened and the way the place was divided up. I honestly believe that the State conservation areas would have been better left—sorry, I will start again. Those areas that were zoned, zone one—there are four zones, which you are probably familiar with under the process—is national parks and from my personal point of view, and I am sure other committee people who I have dealt with over the past five years, believe that that is as far as the National Parks management should have gone. The other three zones should have been left with Forests NSW. They were managing those areas anyway and managing, considering the fact that they were supposedly self-sufficient economically and producing their own royalties, et cetera, to survive in general terms.

The flow-on effect of what had happened, as you have all heard time and time again no doubt over the past few months from north or south of the State, not just the bioregion, is that it not only decimated the industry in the bioregion, both in hardwood and cypress and what have you; it knocked the tail end out of individual people. The loss of jobs was incredible. It might be 300 or 400—I cannot give the exact numbers town by town, but the fact is that in the big picture in rural Australia when you lose 10 people out of a community who work in a sawmill it has a devastating effect on the economy of the town. The third thing, of course, out of those three things, is that the devastation has caused I believe a loss of morale within the forestry management, the agency itself. Over the years one way or another I had a lot of dealings with National Parks folk as well as forestry

people in their agencies. I believe the expertise that was sitting there being utilised in the right way in Forests NSW, from biologists to ecologists—you name it, they were all there—were doing an outstanding job. For the government of the day to take away all that expertise and restrict the amount of real estate they have left in the State to operate within was a travesty in itself. That is my basic opening statement.

CHAIR: Mr Macintyre, would you like to add to that?

Mr MACINTYRE: No, not at the moment.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you for attending this afternoon. Looking at your submission, you have "3. Green Agenda-Agenda 21" and you just outline, I am not sure, just a paragraph on agenda 21 but you do not explain why that is a green agenda. Can you explain to the Committee why you have included that in your submission?

Mr BLAKE: I think overall in the brief summary I think it is fairly self-evident but I just jump to the second paragraph where national parks association have had dealings with the National Parks Association. I am still convinced that no matter how good the intent might be, it is in the public sphere or in the public mind, the majority of people who are not involved like we are—and I include the people on the committee—do not differentiate. They see a statement coming out from the National Parks Association and there is a psychological link to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. That in itself is a distraction as well as confusing to some people when the government of the day, does not matter whether it is the previous Government or the Government of today, makes an announcement that might be contrary. But I also believe there is an ongoing agenda by many people within the conservation movement who play a game and they use their own agenda, which is not always correct, in my opinion. I cannot give you an example off the top of my head, but the fact is that they can distort the facts. I have seen it. I have been on river management committees where they have done exactly that to the rest of the committee and they have tried to change the direction of agency statements and things like that within a committee.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I am still trying to get to the bottom of why agenda 21 is included in your submission. Are you saying that The Greens or the conservation movement influenced the United Nations?

Mr BLAKE: Well, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Wow.

Mr BLAKE: Well, they tried.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: It is good to get that on the record by the National Party.

Mr BLAKE: But not necessarily to the benefit of society but to the detriment of society.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you anti national parks?

Mr BLAKE: No, I am not. No, contrary. I have never said anything like that in my whole life.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you believe it would be difficult for this Government to revert any national parks or land that is currently under nature reserve, national park or community conservation area to a different tenure such as State forests?

Mr BLAKE: Yes, it probably would be difficult, depending on the numbers in the upper House.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I would think, depending on the numbers in the upper House at the moment, it probably would not be too difficult at all. Are you aware of a recent statement on the ABC by Kevin Anderson at a Tamworth community Cabinet meeting where he said that the "Natural Resources Commission is looking at holding an independent study to see what the benefit is of locking up"—I am assuming he is talking about the Brigalow and Pilliga area—"how it is tracking now and whether there is the potential for a viable logging industry"? Are you aware of anything the Natural Resources Commission or the NRC is doing in relation to that?

Mr BLAKE: Commission?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

Mr BLAKE: I am not aware of any commission.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: No, the NRC. I think he would be referring to the State NRC.

Mr BLAKE: No. I am not aware of the statement and I am not aware of it, no.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you aware of any statements out there by National Party members that some areas of public land now that is reserved as national park, nature reserve or community conservation area should be opened up to logging and will be?

Mr BLAKE: Yes, I am aware of some statements.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Was there a commitment by the National Party to the community and the public before the election that this would take place?

Mr BLAKE: To the best of my knowledge there was a general approach to revisit and reassess some of the issues that took place prior to Government, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What are the particular geographic areas in the State that you are looking at when you say that you are aware of some commitments that the National Party would look at areas to see if they were viable to open up for logging?

Mr BLAKE: I suggest the river red gum forest.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Any others?

Mr BLAKE: Possibly the Brigalow, yes. Parts of the Brigalow, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Any others?

Mr BLAKE: I couldn't tell you.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I am assuming the National Party committee influences policy or assists in drafting policy that is then adopted by the National Party. Is that how your committee works?

Mr BLAKE: Not quite. We do investigative work. We place the outcomes in two venues, in two streams. One, it goes to the parliamentary team for assessment and it also goes through conference.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Has your committee placed any recommendations to open up any areas currently reserved for conservation for logging?

Mr BLAKE: No.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Does the National Party—do you think that the Minister for the Environment is doing a good job?

Mr BLAKE: I will take that on notice. I do not think that is a fair question to ask.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: For the record for *Hansard* there was a lot of laughter then.

Mr BLAKE: I am not here to castigate some individual.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No, I am asking in relation to issues that we are discussing at this inquiry do you believe she is doing a good job?

Mr BLAKE: The Minister for the Environment has a role to play. I am not fully aware of all of the aspects of decisions made so I do not think it is a fair question to be asked.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr Macintyre, are you prepared to say if the Minister for the Environment is doing a good job or not.

Mr MACINTYRE: From what I have heard or seen I do not—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Point of order: This line of questioning is asking for an opinion and I do not think that it is appropriate to be asking questions of this nature in this forum.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To the point of order: If I may say firstly that it is perfectly in order at Committee hearings to ask witnesses for an opinion. That is what they are here for. The second thing is that they have raised a number of issues about governance in this State and I am asking do they believe the person who is in charge of that portfolio is actually doing a reasonable job. I propose to follow that up by saying, "Are there any additional matters that you believe they should be following?"

CHAIR: There is no point of order but I will remind the witnesses that you are not obliged to answer a question. If you wish to answer a question then do so to the best of your abilities. Mr Primrose, please proceed.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Given that our witnesses have indicated they are not in a position to indicate whether they believe the Minister for the Environment is doing a good job or not, can I ask you: Are there any additional things that you believe that the Minister should be doing differently which would aid your case? What is the National Party's view on that?

Mr BLAKE: I am still not prepared to answer that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You are not prepared to say whether she is doing a good job or not and you are not prepared to say whether as Minister for the Environment there are things you would like her to be doing differently in relation to the matters that are the subject of this inquiry?

Mr BLAKE: With all respect, sir, I will not take the bait. I have respect for the Minister's position, and whether you consider her to be doing a good job or not is irrelevant to this submission as far as I am concerned.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I say—I will not labour the point beyond this—I am giving you the opportunity to say here and now as part of our report are there any matters in relation to national parks or any other matter that you believe she should be doing differently, policies she should be pursuing that are different to those she is pursuing at the moment?

Mr BLAKE: I am still not prepared to answer that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. Mr Macintyre, does the National Party have a view on that?

Mr MACINTYRE: No, I am not prepared to answer that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Blake, can you give us an outline of your experience in natural resource management?

Mr BLAKE: How far do you want me to go back?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I know it goes back a fair way. Let us say in the last 20 years what sorts of projects have been you involved in in relation to natural resources?

Mr BLAKE: My original academic background is both in architecture and building. I went back to university and I have got degrees in parks, recreation and heritage and natural resource management. I have got postgraduate studies in ornithology, both a certificate and a diploma, and I am still trying to complete a masters. As well as working in conjunction with—as a consultant to various people, particularly in the Brigalow bioregion when that was underway, I have worked with a couple of government agencies doing flora but fauna studies in particular. I worked with Corrective Services doing flora and fauna surveys in western New South Wales. I ran my own three-year research program on the endangered malleefowl in the Pilliga and the Goonoo

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Would you call yourself an environmentalist?

Mr BLAKE: I would call myself a logical environmentalist.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You mentioned the Brigalow process. Were you a contributing member of Brigalow Region United Stakeholders [BRUS]?

Mr BLAKE: Contributing in a sense that I was asked for an opinion on a range of matters over a period of time.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: When you were in that role and participating in that process were you satisfied that the community's views were properly taken into account in the process of the BRUS options that were designed, and ultimately in the final decision?

Mr BLAKE: The short answer would be there was an appearance of taking into account what the community had to say but the final outcome, particularly when I sat through those couple of days in Dubbo, it was painfully obvious I think to a lot of folk on the last day where it was all heading and the outcome was not a surprise. I think that is the best way I can answer that. It was very disappointing. Listening to Mr Ian Sinclair this morning, he indicated to the committee then that a lot of the recommendations in his report were not taken on board by the government of the day.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I think you mentioned a little while ago that you were participating in a river review process some time ago?

Mr BLAKE: I was on the Cudgegong Macquarie River Management Committee for seven years prior to the bioregion thing, yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In relation to the way that national parks are now managed, in the experience you have had with natural resources and that type of thing, and taking into consideration that you said previously that you had many friends within the national parks system, with the direction that National Parks are going with their management in areas such as the Brigalow do you think that they are in fact being managed in a way that is going to enhance the environmental aspects of those areas? You can make comments about other areas as well if you like. I know that you have had a fair bit to do with the cypress woodlands.

Mr BLAKE: The worry I had when they took over the management of so much real estate was that—I say this advisedly. There are a lot of good people in National Parks but there were also people in there who were verging on zealots, if I can use that word. That is probably not the appropriate word but the fact is that there were folk who possibly should not be there. There is a couple that I know have actually gone from that particular region I am in. They are now gone. There has been a redistribution of boundaries as I understand it in recent times, which I think is a good thing. There have been some folk who have taken redundancies. I do not know what the reason for that was but in a couple of instances it was probably over-commitment of numbers in their particular region. But the thing that always stood out from my point of view was the over-commitment of people to do the same job with more money than Forests NSW was doing it. I think that was a telling statement. I mean, Forests NSW was bled of funds and yet they still achieved just as much as National Parks have achieved with all their extra numbers and extra money.

When I was initially handing over to National Parks for 12 months I was taking former forest people who had been given positions, and/or former mill operating people or workers at mills who had now then joined National Parks—I was taking them out and showing them particularly how to on fauna but also how to track animals. I had a bit of a background in identifying animal tracks and all that sort of stuff because when I was doing the research program on the malleefowl I had to know and understand all that sort of movement, particularly with reptiles and monitors and what have you and you name it. So I was asked to take these guys out. All these fellows just—they are all good people, but they just added to the numbers and added to the numbers. To me, I thought National Parks had that expertise but here was someone else from outside who was asked to bring some expertise in to upgrade and upskill these fellows.

Mr MACINTYRE: Can I just add to that, as Mr Blake mentioned earlier, the local representation would be—you asked how to better manage national parks. If there is local representation they can add to it and there was that in the earlier inquiries. Like the health boards where we are trying to get back to local

representation on the local health boards, that local representation can help a lot because they know the areas and how it works and how fires run and that sort of thing. It can be done. The National Parks are working to control fires and use fire as a control of weeds and things but the local knowledge is very beneficial and could be used better in the future.

CHAIR: You do not happen to have a copy of the BRUS report, do you?

Mr BLAKE: No, I do not. I wish I had.

CHAIR: That is okay. I think we have found a way to get one. An issue was raised with us particularly in the cypress forests. This was talking with the foresters. The National Parks and Wildlife personnel—I will not say they took a counterview but they preferred not to comment. We were given the impression that in the Brigalow the managed cypress forest, albeit forest that had been logged 10 years ago or whatever, was in better condition than the unmanaged forest which had been allowed to just go up of its own accord. Do you have any experience in that area and would you like to pass a comment on how cypress forests or cypress woodlands, whatever you like to call them, should be managed? Do you have any experience in that area?

Mr BLAKE: A little only inasmuch as having done some work with Forests NSW. Forests NSW were still in the position of owning the real estate when I started my research program and so I got to know and understand even better what they had been trying to do with their thinning programs and what have you. There had been three basic approaches to thinning, everything from cutting off the trunk at ground level to the basal level to a higher waist level with chainsaws over the years. I witnessed and actually viewed areas where they had trialled all three types of things. The problem was they were always starved of funds to do the job in total. Yet it was one way of opening up the forest or getting it back somewhere to a nearest state of woodlands than it was when the explorers, Cunningham and Oxley and what have you, went all through that Brigalow area.

The fact that there was always insufficient money was a thorn in my side because I felt for the people who were trying to do a great job. I believe the general management of the forests was par excellence. I have had a fair understanding of how the forestry people operate and over 40-odd years, mainly because I had an office alongside them, I have seen how their professionalism has grown and how their academic backgrounds and depth of academic knowledge have grown, and how they have applied it. That has been terribly important and a great asset to the State. That was what I was getting at when I said earlier that they have been decimated. Their legs have been chopped from underneath them. Their approach to the cypress industry and the way they handled it was really good.

CHAIR: Thank you for giving us your evidence. Are you happy to reply to any questions that Committee members may place on notice?

Mr BLAKE: Certainly.

CHAIR: The Committee would like the replies by 18 January but if your workload or holidays preclude that the time can be extended.

(The witnesses withdrew)

BRIAN WILLIAMS, Vice President, Volunteer Fire Fighters Association, sworn and examined, and

ANDREW SCHOLZ, representative, Volunteer Fire Fighters Association, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would either or both of you like to make an opening statement before we ask questions?

Mr SCHOLZ: We thank the Standing Committee for providing us with an opportunity to make representations to the Committee's public inquiry into the management of public land in New South Wales. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association is the only association in New South Wales that solely represents the voice of the NSW Rural Fire Service volunteer. Our association acknowledges that there has been a rapid expansion in the national parks estate in the past decade. There is increasing evidence that the land that is now being gazetted as national park is being transferred from highly modified or disturbed ecosystems and we now have a national park estate in New South Wales exceeding 800 parks and approximating 6 million hectares, which represents approximately 8.83 per cent of the conservation reserves in New South Wales.

The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association believes the decision to convert private and public land to national park is made without proper consideration of the socio-economic factors including the cost of converting public and private land, particularly State forest and agricultural land, to national park. We feel there is a need to re-evaluate the opportunity costs, including the loss of land value and revenue to New South Wales from the previous productive land use. There are also obviously direct and indirect costs in establishing a national park and the ongoing recurrent costs of managing a national park. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association believes the process of converting public and private land to the national park estate lacks transparency and is often motivated by political opportunism and poor community engagement.

Our association believes there should be a standardised methodology, which should be publicly available, for determining the costs and benefits of converting public and private land to the national park estate. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association is advocating a review of the current models of converting agricultural and forestry land to the national park estate, which currently is exclusively for conservation and recreation purposes. We believe there needs to be a rethink of the land use classification system in New South Wales to incorporate a sustainable multiple land use model in which activities such as recreational four-wheel driving, fishing, hunting, logging and conservation are all permissible uses within that land classification system.

As well, rather than transferring productive agricultural land to the national park estate, the Government should be promoting the existing conservation agreements under which the Government may enter into an agreement with private landowners to conserve the conservation assets on their agricultural land in perpetuity whilst maintaining productive use of those parts of the land that do not have a significant conservation value. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association is advocating that a moratorium be put in place on the conversion of Crown land, State forest and agricultural and marine areas to national park estate until a fully transparent evidence-based process is developed that enables an objective examination of the social, cultural, recreational, economic and environmental impacts of the conversion process and includes an extensive community engagement process with affected communities before land is gazetted as a national park.

In relation to bushfire management, the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association is very concerned that the current funding and financial resources available to manage existing national parks are not adequate, particularly for essential fire management works including maintenance of fire trails and asset protection zones and hazard reduction by prescribed burning. The same financial and funding crisis also applies to the Crown land estate and the State forest estate. The NSW Rural Fire Service annual report for 2011-12 shows that the National Parks and Wildlife Service has been unable to meet its key performance targets for hazard reduction over its estate. The National Parks and Wildlife Service completed only 49 percent of its hazard reduction target for 2011-12, whilst State forests exceeded their hazard reduction target by 24 per percent. That is, they achieved the target of 124.8 percent. This clearly demonstrates, amongst other factors, that the National Parks and Wildlife Service does not have the resources to adequately meet its land management responsibilities for mitigating bushfire risk.

Under the current government structure in New South Wales the land management agencies are operating in silos. Outside a declared bushfire emergency, land management agencies in New South Wales generally work independently of each other in the area of bushfire risk and mitigation. We are advocating that government agencies responsible for the management of natural areas in New South Wales should be amalgamated into one super department based on a similar model to the Department of Sustainability and Environment operating in Victoria. We believe this will enable the limited financial, physical and human

resources currently available to those agencies to be pulled together in a more efficient and cost-effective manner to manage the natural assets of the estate irrespective of the land tenure. We believe this will ensure there is a fully integrated and coordinated approach to the maintenance of fire trails and managing bushfires, feral animals and noxious weeds.

We also support the adoption by the land management agencies of New South Wales of what is known as the Canobolas model for managing bushfire risk. The Canobolas model is a map-based bushfire management plan which is tenure blind and adopts a whole-of-landscape approach where the risk is identified and the landscape is allocated into zones and effective bushfire treatments are allocated to the land based on risk, not on land tenure. We also support sustainable grazing by livestock in national parks which were previously grazed prior to gazettal as a national park. We believe this would be effective in reducing fuel loads and weeds and would provide fodder to livestock during long-term drought. I have no further comment to make at this point. Brian may wish to add something.

CHAIR: One of the members of the Committee has to leave so I will interrupt you to enable Ms Faehrmann to ask a question.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you for your submission and for appearing today. On page 4 of your submission you talk about inconsistent funding for and approaches to the management of weeds across the public land estate in New South Wales. You say that of concern to you is that flammable weeds such as African lovegrass are spreading across the public land and that the land management agencies have an inconsistent approach and level of funding to control these weeds. In your opening statement you also suggested you want to change the land tenures and have shooting, grazing, four-wheel driving and horseriding and other activities in areas that are now national parks. Do not many of those activities cause the spread of weeds into areas where there are possibly not weeds now?

Mr SCHOLZ: We do not have evidence to support the assertion that these activities are spreading weeds. Many of the national parks that have been recently gazetted have had a previous productive agricultural life and many of them currently have a significant problem with feral animal populations and noxious weed populations. I would need to see the evidence that recreational activities would contribute further to the spread of noxious weeds, in this particular case.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What about seeds in car tyres and horse manure, for example? Do you think they have the potential to spread weeds in national parks that do not have weeds now?

Mr SCHOLZ: As I pointed out earlier, State forest conversions and land that was previously agricultural have already been affected by human activity since European settlement, particularly the agricultural conversions. They would also be impacted by the presence of noxious weeds and feral animals. The challenge for land management agencies is to ensure they are adequately resourced by the State Government to fund programs to mitigate the challenge, I suppose, by feral animals, noxious weeds and bushfires.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I am not sure whether you said in your opening statement that there are many hundreds of national parks and nature reserves, but are you restricting your statements to just the national parks that have been converted from land that was previously agricultural?

Mr SCHOLZ: We understand that the primary objectives of this Committee are to examine the conversion of land that previously had a productive agricultural use or was part of the State Forests estate. Not entirely. Quite clearly our focus is on ensuring that any of the activities that occur are consistent with what I said in my opening speech—that is, we believe there should be an alternative land use model considered by the State of New South Wales that permits multiple land use, acknowledging that there are opportunities for recreational four-wheel driving, hunting, fishing et cetera, and conservation that can within this multiple land use classification operate side by side. It is acknowledged, and I take on board what you say, that I cannot rule out the possibility that some activities may introduce noxious weeds into a conservation area. However, with proper resourcing of the land management estate by the State Government, we feel that many of these issues could be addressed. I make the point also that many of the parties that engage in recreational activities are fairly responsible citizens of New South Wales and through engagement with the land management agency I am sure that appropriate procedures could be put in place to mitigate the potential for the spread of noxious weeds.

CHAIR: Before proceeding with further questions, Mr Williams, did you want to add to the opening statement?

Mr WILLIAMS: I would just like to introduce myself so that people can ask me the appropriate questions. I live on the Bells Line of Road sandwiched between the Wollemi and Blue Mountains national parks, which totals about three-quarters of a million hectares of land. I have been observing and using those areas all my life. I have seen quite a dramatic change over the years and, unfortunately, it is not for the better. I would be happy to take questions on that later on. I have had 44 years as a volunteer bushfire brigade member. For the past 28 years I have been the captain of Kurrajong Heights Brigade. I am also the Remote Area Firefighting Team [RAFT] leader for Hawkesbury. Our job is to go into remote locations. Usually we are inserted by helicopter and winched from the helicopter into the fire to try to take that fire out very quickly before it has time to spread.

CHAIR: Dangerous work.

Mr WILLIAMS: It is dangerous, hot and becoming a much more increasing task as less hazard reduction is being done. In the past I have been called to give evidence to three State Government inquiries into bushfires, two Federal Government inquiries and one coronial inquiry. Currently, I am sitting on the State Government's Hazard Reduction Audit Panel and we have a discussion paper out in the market place at the moment on enhancing hazard reduction. We are due to report to the Government early in the new year on our findings from that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Can you elaborate on the problems created by the loss of fire trails? Can you quantify it? Do you have actual statistics or at least anecdotal evidence about what conversion does to the network of fire trails? What sort of percentage loss are we looking at?

Mr WILLIAMS: I can talk on practical terms on this. Over the years thousands and thousands of kilometres of fire trails have closed down. Once we had good access into bush. Most of the logging tracks were out along ridge lines and things, which gave us a control line to get in and burn back from during the night to cut off a major fire. Now we virtually have none. If you look at the Blue Mountains National Park, you have the Bells Line—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Could you explain why it is important to have a network of fire trails?

Mr WILLIAMS: To get access. You need bulk water to deal with fires. To get in there quickly and you need lots of manpower.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Essentially, you need tankers?

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes, and the beauty is we get in at night when it is safe and we can burn back and contain a fire before it has time to escalate. Now we have no tracks to work from. The only access we have to a lot of areas is by helicopter and they are expensive. That is chewing up the public purse in a big way.

Mr SCHOLZ: In our report we specifically cited an example in the Nymboi-Binderay National Park in northern New South Wales where a prominent fire trail runs across two land tenures between the aforementioned national park and the Clouds Creek State Forest. Once the track crosses from the national park estate into the State Forest estate it deteriorates significantly into a track that is barely negotiable by four-wheel drive. It is quite apparent that the two land management agencies there are not cooperating on the maintenance of that trail, which, I might add, leads to a camping area that is accessible by four-wheel drive.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Following on from that question, what factor do you ascribe to the loss of this extensive network of trails? Is it simply that National Parks does not have the money and resources to maintain them or do you believe it is more to do with an ideology of keeping humans out of national parks?

Mr WILLIAMS: The second absolutely. Once an area is gazetted as a national park the first thing they do is start regenerating tracks. That costs a great deal of money. So they have money to pour into the regeneration of access tracks. When we get a major fire we have bulldozers that are very expensive working around the clock to reopen trails. In my case, as a captain I keep all my existing maps because all the existing trails have been taken off maps that are now produced. I work off my very old maps so I can put a bulldozer down where I will need it. It is a very, very costly exercise once you eliminate the tracks. They have to be

reopened at times or you have to use helicopters instead. So it is costing the public purse quite a lot of money by closing those off.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Am I right in taking from your comments on page 3 of your submission regarding the 36 million hectares of Crown land administered by DPI that your view is that that estate is managed worse than the national park estate? Is that the view you are putting or am I misunderstanding what you have put to us?

Mr SCHOLZ: The position we are taking is that the Crown land estate comprises a significant proportion of bushfire land that is at significant bushfire risk. The Crown land office within the Department of Primary Industries is, we understand, very poorly funded and very poorly resourced. It is not a recognised fire authority under the Rural Fires Act. It does not have resources on the ground to assist with the suppression of fire on the Crown land estate. We understand it has a memorandum of understanding with the NSW Rural Fire Service to delegate its responsibilities for bushfire management to the Rural Fire Service and its volunteer membership. We believe that is not appropriate. We believe the Department of Primary Industries should be resourced to provide appropriate fire protection measures on the estate it manages. I draw your attention to the Rural Fires Act, which requires that every land manager has a responsibility to manage bushfire risk on their estate.

CHAIR: A point of clarification: In that 36 million hectares are you including the Western Lands leases?

Mr SCHOLZ: Correct.

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you discounting the fact that that Western Lands lease area—I do not know the numbers of Western Lands leaseholders—represents the primary firefighting manpower effort in those 36 million hectares?

Mr SCHOLZ: My understanding is that, having attended many major fire operations across the State, the Rural Fire Service takes control of the management of any major fire on the Crown land estate. It also manages hazard reduction activities on the Crown land estate. Our association believes that the Department of Primary Industries in its present form as the land manager for that estate is not taking full responsibility under its statutory obligations allocated to it under the Rural Fires Act.

CHAIR: Do you mean the Department of Lands rather than the DPI? I think you will find that the landlord is the Department of Lands.

Mr SCHOLZ: You may be correct on that. We are often confused about where particular land management agencies sit in the Government's structure.

CHAIR: You are not Robinson Crusoe on that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Following up on the Western Lands issue, there are local bushfire brigade members and organisations in the western division, are there not?

Mr SCHOLZ: That is correct.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: They would perform a similar function as local brigades in the eastern and central divisions?

Mr SCHOLZ: That is correct, yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is it not true also that when Crown land is leased to a landholder, that that lessee then becomes the manager of that land and as such are they not responsible then for their own bushfire control measures as they are in the eastern and central divisions on freehold land?

Mr WILLIAMS: They are probably responsible to see that fire does not escape from their land, but bushfire suppression on whatever land comes under the jurisdiction of the Rural Fire Service. I do not think it is

fair to say someone with a big massive lease out in the western country is responsible for all the mitigation on that land. They would use the resources available to them.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Sure, but is it not a fact that the responsibility for fire control in the western division is very similar to the management of the central division?

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The DPI or the Department of Lands or whoever is the owner of that land is not responsible for the overall fire management of that land?

Mr WILLIAMS: No. If it was leased out to an individual, no, it would come under them.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We heard a bit of evidence—I believe at Grafton—about fires to the west of Guyra. The implication was that there was more reluctance for volunteers to go into parks because buffer zones were small, tracks were narrow and there were fewer and fewer turnaround areas. Is that just one person's view or is that a more widely held view?

Mr WILLIAMS: No.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can you comment quickly about safety?

Mr WILLIAMS: Anybody in charge of a fire has to make a risk assessment. If the tracks are narrow and there are no turnaround areas, you have to weigh up safety. That takes the major priority at all times. With the track system in the mess it is, we are reluctant to go into areas in which we do not feel safe, particularly when it gets down to the amount of fuel load—how long it has been since that area was burnt. A lot of things come into doing a risk assessment. Generally speaking, the tracks are deteriorating, they are getting more dangerous to use and quite often it is now a case of falling back to a major control line, which is often just the main roads.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Just let it burn.

Mr WILLIAMS: That is not what we would like to happen, but that is what does happen.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And it was not very successful in 2003 with the Canberra fires?

Mr WILLIAMS: No. If you look at the Canberra fires, there was an enormous build-up of fuel in the bush and the fire just created—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And there was a dereliction of the tracks in the parks in the ACT?

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes, absolutely, and a reluctance to put them out in the early stages. There were a lot of contributing factors there.

Mr SCHOLZ: Which comes back to my point in our submission that again we do not believe the National Parks and Wildlife Service is adequately funded to maintain the current network of fire trails under its estate. We believe it will only get worse if the national park estate continues to expand without proper consideration of all the factors before a gazettal is made.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: When you answered a question asked by Mr Colless it was not solely a funding or resource issue, it was also a culture or management approach.

Mr SCHOLZ: Absolutely. There has got to be a will to want to get on with the job. You can come up with a million excuses why not to do things, but you need proactive people to get in there and manage. If you look at what is happening now, we are burning less than 1 per cent of bushfire-prone land; so it would take us more than a hundred years to get around those lands once. So there has to be a will. One of the things I would like the Committee to look at is that anything that does not make a dollar today is doomed to fail; and if we are going to convert all this land into national parks they will have to return a dollar somewhere down the track. So we have to look at some sustainable way to manage that country for future generations and try to have it pay a little of its way.

CHAIR: We are running out of time. Is your association a national association?

Mr WILLIAMS: A State association.

CHAIR: Do you have a sister organisation in Victoria?

Mr WILLIAMS: No, not connected to us.

CHAIR: I ask you on notice: You stated that our land tenure should be managed similar to the DSE. Do you have any information from firefighters that would support that?

Mr WILLIAMS: We do. We have a lot of correspondence.

CHAIR: We will not go into that now; I will put that on notice. You probably heard me say before that Committee members may like to ask you questions on notice. If it is possible, we would like those answers by 18 January. But if you have business or firefighting duties or even holidays and cannot make that deadline, that is not a problem. Are you happy to accept questions?

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in to talk to us. We appreciate that.

Mr WILLIAMS: If you like, I will leave you these documents. They tell you a bit about us.

CHAIR: I note that the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association tables documents.

Documents tabled.

(The witnesses withdrew)

ANDREW FRASER, Member for Coffs Harbour, before the Committee:

CHAIR: I welcome Mr Andrew Fraser, MP, member for Coffs Harbour, to the hearing. Mr Fraser, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Mr Fraser, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I would, Mr Chairman, in general terms. I did make a somewhat brief submission to the inquiry; in fact, I think if I had three hours here I still could not give you the information that I have gathered over 22 years in Parliament and many years taking an interest in State forests and national parks on the North Coast. It has been extremely frustrating for me over the past 16 years, and probably before that in government, to know the attitudes of bureaucrats and advice given to governments in relation to the conversion of State forests, for example, to national park. I am still amazed, and cannot understand why a forest such as Pine Creek State Forest—which has been operating for in excess of 120 years as a logging forest, providing timber to New South Wales while retaining the values that deem it appropriate to be classified a national park—could not continue as an operating forest, under proper management regimes, producing timber for the good of our economy and at the same time conserving its existing biodiversity.

When Kim Yeadon was Minister and Bob Carr was Premier I put a proposition to both of them that John Wamsley, who was running Earth Sanctuaries in South Australia and elsewhere, would be interested in coming up here and forming an earth sanctuary at Pine Creek State Forest, an area of more than 4,000 hectares; I cannot remember the exact area. I spoke to the local council and also to State Forests employees at the time, and we arranged for Mr Wamsley to visit us. We also visited his facility in the foothills of Adelaide. He was not all that keen about making an earth sanctuary out of a working forest until he came up and had a look at the Pine Creek State Forest. We showed him the largest koala population on the North Coast, or so it was deemed at the time, and he was quite excited about applying Earth Sanctuary's management regime to Pine Creek State Forest. That management regime was one of fencing the forest, eradicating the feral animals by shooting, trapping, poisoning or what have you, and allowing the native animals to multiply and form colonies. That is a system that has worked, I would suggest, in Western Australia, and worked quite successfully. I took the matter to Kim Yeadon, and was advised, despite local advice from New South Wales forest employees, that forestry was not keen on it.

At the time—I can now tell the story publicly because he has retired, but he could back it up—Graham King, who was the hardwood manager at the time of the north east forest, said, "Look, we've got to do something to stop the green rollout," as he called it, under which areas were just being locked up. We had seen that in Dorrigo area and elsewhere; as soon as National Parks and Wildlife took over a State forest they blockaded the road by putting earth mounds on it, and at the same burnt bridges. I can take the Committee to Dome Road, Dorrigo, where they burnt the bridges out—basically intent on keeping anyone out of those areas. I remember having a discussion with a senior National Parks employee at the time and asking, "Why do you want to close the roads?" They said, "Because if you close the roads it will stop the foxes, wild dogs and feral cats going into national parks." Well, having lived adjacent to a State forest and in very close proximity to a national park for a number of years, I can tell you now that there are plenty of foxes and feral cats in national parks, and wild dogs too for that matter.

I also draw to the attention of the Committee that there was a number of years ago a forest nature reserve in the Kyogle region. I cannot give you the exact reference, but it is on paper. The National Parks and Wildlife Service advised State Forests that they should retain the lantana within that State forest area because it was habitat for the black-breasted buttonquail. When asked why, they said, "Well, there's that many feral cats, wild dogs and foxes in the place that the black-breasted buttonquail needs somewhere to breed, and the lantana is an area where the cats, dogs and foxes could not get to them." That to me is not management. What we have to do as a community, as a government and as a Parliament is accept that the forests, nature reserves and national parks that we have now are vastly different from what they were prior to white settlement but also prior to Aboriginal settlement of this country. We have brought in a lot of pests, from rabbits to pigs, foxes, wild dogs, cats, you name it; and it is those animals that are depleting the flora in this country.

I have travelled to the red gum forests in the Riverina, and I have walked through them; and I know this Committee has done some travelling. I would suggest that if the Committee wants a true picture it should see every national park and State forest in New South Wales. I have been to the north-east, I have been up to Whian Whian, to Queens Lake, and obviously on the North Coast, and I have been over to the cyprus forests in Pilliga. In fact, we were there some years ago and took photographs of the cyprus forests, which I brought back and

showed some of my colleagues. On one side of the road was national park, or a moratorium area that was later made a national park; on the other side of the road it was State forest. I am quite happy to provide those pictures to the Committee. I showed the pictures to my colleagues and asked them to tell me which one was national park and which one was State forest. Every person I asked told me that the State Forests managed land had to be national park. Why? There were birds, wallabies and kangaroos, green grass and no undergrowth. On the national park side of the road the young cyprus was as thick as the hairs on a cat's back; it was a fire trap—which was proved to the people of New South Wales in late 2006 or early 2007 with a lightning strike.

A fellow by the name of Rod Young took a dozer or two out, wanting to cut a firebreak to contain the fire. He was told by National Parks management at the time—and I am sure Rod Young can provide this evidence to the Committee himself—that he could not do that because they were unsure what flora and fauna were in there that needed to be protected and the plan of management may not allow a firebreak to be cut there. As a result, hundreds of thousands of hectares of that area were burnt out. I happened to be in Narrabri a few days after the fire started; as shadow Primary Industries spokesman at the time, I was travelling across to visit some cyprus mills and saw some National Parks and Wildlife Service employees who were having breakfast. I asked them whether or not they were going out to fight the fire; they were ex-forestry employees. They said they were, that they had been out there earlier. I said, "What was it like?" One Aboriginal fellow said to me, "Mate, there's burst koalas everywhere." They had burst because of the heat. The fire was so hot that the carbon in the soil was burnt to a depth of 30 centimetres, and that kills the landscape for a long, long time.

The information that came back to us as a Parliament and to the general public was that the koala population there was quite safe. I would suggest thousands of koalas died in that fire; we were never told the truth. If Rod Young had been allowed to cut that firebreak, it is highly likely that the fire would not have spread the way it did. Rather than cut a firebreak and conserve biodiversity and preserve fauna in the area, without a break the fire wiped them out. We are seeing daily the building up of the tonnage of fuel on the floors of forests and national parks on the North Coast. I am dreading this fire season. We had rain on the North Coast last night, the first rain we have had in weeks, and I can say now that there are lodes of more than 100 tonnes per hectare on the ground there at the moment.

The Rural Fire Service at Bellingen a number of years ago told me that they were asked by National Parks to go into what used to be Oaks State Forest, now turned into a national park, to conduct a hazard reduction burn. They refused to do that because they believed if they did we could never have put the fire out. We have been very lucky. We have had 10 to 12 years of extremely good seasons on the North Coast, and that has kept the fire risk down. At the same time it has increased the undergrowth. If we have hot and dry conditions and get a fire up there this year, as we had in February 2002, I think it was, there is that much fuel there that you will not be able to put the fires out; you will destroy what we are trying to conserve. I do not believe in preservation; I believe in conservation. I have got to say that the management by National Parks and Wildlife Service staff is abysmal, and has been abysmal.

I would like to table an article I found this week by Ellen Fanning, an ABC journalist, called "A Feral Cat Ate my Bilbies". Attached to that article is a table called "Conservation By The Numbers—Or Not?" I draw the attention of the Committee to ranger numbers in the table, per State, although all the States are not listed. But, as a quick example, New South Wales has 1,750 "Ranger numbers", which I guess are parks employees, for 7.08 million hectares of national parks. That equates to one ranger per 4,000 hectares. I also point out to the Committee that the amount of funding that National Parks receive in New South Wales is about \$58 or \$58.50 per hectare for management, and that that is far higher than funding in any other State. I look at two States, purely because they are in the news regarding the integrity of their national parks; one is Tasman and one is Northern Territory. Tasman has one employee per 10,000 hectares, compared with 1 to 4,000 in New South Wales; the Northern Territory, where I visited both Litchfield National Park and Kakadu, have one person per 36,220 hectares, according to this table.

Document tabled.

That says to me, and I would suggest the Committee could take the same inference, that the management of New South Wales national parks by comparison to those others is abysmal, even though they have far more employees. The article by Ms Fanning comes up with statements such as:

"Most rangers don't record how they spend their time," Instead they have to estimate how they divide up their working life.

"For instance, they might say they spend three per cent of their time on weed management." She adds that it's hard to be more precise even about how much herbicide is used by national parks, because such chemicals are purchased at a regional level.

The article goes on to state:

But rather than establishing costly scientific monitoring programs in each national park, they began asking park rangers to fill out an online survey in which they were asked to guess at what was going on in their patch.

The article also states, "... if you tick the box that says there are increasing numbers of feral cats, foxes or donkeys in your park, you might get more money", and what she is saying there is that rangers were being asked about whether their regime is working or not. The article states:

... if you tick the box that says there are increasing numbers of feral cats, foxes or donkeys in your park, you might get more money for feral animal control. Then again, you may not get that promotion.

When you read this whole article there are some fantastic implications in relation to the general management of national parks. I commend to the Committee that it looks closely at the article, especially the comparison to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy [AWC]. That is a Western Australia conservation area that is managed by a private trust, or people contracted by the Government. It would appear that what they are doing with their money is far better. I preface what I would also like to put before the Committee today by saying I note in today's email, which I read as I was coming in from that delayed flight, the North East Forest Alliance [NEFA] today put out a media release—no-one knows who belongs to that organisation and I would suggest that is because your Committee is sitting, Mr Chairman—which states:

The North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) wants Premier Barry O'Farrell to rule out any logging in National Parks, ever.

It goes on and on and on. I suggest that the Committee look at Google Earth's maps of the Pine Creek State Forest, which is now known as the Bongil Bongil National Park. I have three copies I can provide to the Committee, and I will pass them around. I want the Committee to note, and you do not have to be a scientist to do it, the plantations that are shown in there. It amazes me that you can have monoculture in a national park and say that it is protecting biodiversity within New South Wales. We have flooded gum plantations right across Pine Creek national park. We also have Gympie messmate in there. I do not think it has been fully removed.

The reality is that if you manage these parks, or any forest for timber production, as has been proven by the history of these parks you can actually have sensible forest management, productive employment for local communities, and the provision of building supplies for builders and people who are doing alterations right across New South Wales and Australia without having clear-felled rainforests in Malaysia. At the same time, if you apply the appropriate management techniques, you will be able to conserve your biodiversity, eradicate feral animals and ensure that we have forests and natural forests as well. I am not saying, "Log wilderness areas", or anything like that; but I am saying, "Let's start with what we own, and what we're paying \$58 a hectare to manage at the moment", and you could ensure that we have a timber supply into the future and a boost to our local economies." We have builders at the moment who are buying merbau from Malaysia and putting on decking because you cannot get boards that are big enough from the trees that are left in State forests.

I would also like to touch on fire management. Going back to the early nineties, all roads in State forests, and national parks for that matter, were maintained so that they could take what was then known as a category C tanker at 70 kilometres an hour. If you had a lightning strike, that allowed you to get into the base of the fire very quickly, put it out, and stop the huge damage that we have seen. I draw the Committee's attention to the fire in Wild Cattle Creek in 1994, which I flew over, from Coffs Harbour to Armidale. I have to say that in my words—this is my description—"It was a moonscape." Why? That had been turned into a national park from a State forest and grazing lease. The fire started. It was a lightning strike. I believe that the National Parks and Wildlife Service understood that it was a lightning strike and said it was a natural event. They let the fire rage out of control for weeks until a Qantas pilot reported the blaze. By the time they got in to fight it, it was almost impossible to put it out. The native animals that must have died in that fire would be innumerable.

As a member of this Parliament, over the years I have been absolutely disgusted by the way that we manage what is supposed to be a public asset. If we keep managing it along the lines that we are managing it at the moment, the mammals and the native animals, which everyone is screaming are becoming extinct, or are going down, or are vulnerable in their numbers, will be wiped out because of poor management. The message I give to this Committee, the Government, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forests NSW and the Department of Lands is: Manage your land properly, accept the fact that we have changed the landscape since white settlement and since Aboriginal settlement, and conserve what we have left for future generations.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Fraser. I make a point of clarification for the record. Gympie messmate is non-indigenous to the northern part of the State.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: No, Gympie messmate is a Queensland timber.

CHAIR: Correct.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I would also point out that if you go to Wyan where the old dairy was, there is a box tree there that I reckon is probably eight feet across. I think it is a box, but it might be a tallowwood. It is growing through the roof of the old dairy. If you go to Wild Cattle Creek, an area that was cleared 80 years ago, it is now a national park. Forests NSW has photographs of the corner that was there then, and that now is claimed as old growth. It is old growth: it is 80 or 90 years old now, probably 90 years old. The trees are probably six or eight feet across. It is proof that you can regenerate. It is proof that those areas can be turned into national parks, but it is also proof that if you are going to turn it into a national park, let us ensure that we have a management regime that allows a national park to be paid for, such as in Canada.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Late in your commentary, you spoke about species extinction. You tabled last week's article from Ellen Fanning, which I found very interesting as well.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: It is a very good article.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What concrete suggestions do you have for our Committee to make to the Government about what changes ought to be made by our State Government that would slow or reverse the rate of species extinctions that are occurring?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Number one, I would say to them, "Okay, we now have Bongil Bongil National Park that is in two areas, one of which was declared in the early nineties and the other side was declared in 2003. Get John Walmsley over and get him to fence it." I am very supportive of having sporting shooters go in and eradicate feral animals. "Go in and eradicate the feral animals and use it as a test case. Use it as an area that could be utilised for forestry"—because we still have a hell of a lot of plantation in there, as you can see from those maps—"but at the same time, do your species counts." Do what Ellen Fanning is saying is not being done. Go in and do your species count. "Run that for two years, and just have a look at the improvement. Then try to apply that management across the board." If you were to set up something like an earth sanctuary in an area such as that, which is on the Pacific Highway, I would think that it would become self-funding. I think you would have people wanting to go and stay there and wanting to see the native animals and wildlife. Obviously you would keep them out of any active forest coupes, if they were logging those areas. "Go in and appreciate what is there and what can be done."

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Our Committee is grappling with a lot of issues, including socioeconomic issues and the need for a viable timber industry, but if I can just keep you on species extinction for a minute, for several decades now there has been, if not a consensus, a majority view among Australian governments that building a public conservation reserve system would be about the best thing governments could do to protect biodiversity. Indeed, it was John Fahey's Government, not a Labor government, that entered into the national forest statement in the early nineties and signed up to the system based on comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness [CAR]. You are now saying to us that that thinking is mistaken and we ought to walk away from a model of a public reserve system and move to a system that, in its place, will be a private system that Ellen Fanning writes about and is growing in Western Australia and other places. Is that where you are at now?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: No, I think you can have a multifaceted approach to it. I really do. I am not talking about going in and logging areas that have never been logged since white settlement. What I am saying is this: Let us accept that we have these changed areas, and let us look at better ways of managing them. I cannot understand the science behind having a monoculture forest in a national park—a forest that has been planted with row after row after row. Those photographs prove it.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: With respect, they are very small areas, are they not, in terms of the overall seven million hectares or whatever we are talking about.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: They are, but that forest has been managed on a different scale right across for over 100 years. Some has been natural regeneration and some has been plantation. On the north-eastern corner of the Bongil Bongil National Park is a failed pine plantation where they decided they would try to put

pine in there. It is still there. It has been there for years. I mean, why have we not actually looked at regenerating that area with the natural vegetation that was there previously and bring back the native species into that area? While ever you have a failed pine plantation, you will not get that. What I am saying is that I support plantations, and I support national parks, but I support the proper management of those national parks in order to maintain a biodiversity or to rebuild biodiversity. At the same time you can take out the timber that is not needed within those parks, the plantation stuff. It may be small, but as someone stated earlier, the forest industry is desperate for timber. The only that is saving the long-term wood supply agreements at the moment is the fact that there is a downturn in the building market.

The reality is that we have to come up with a better system of management. As the people from the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association [VFFA] said, we have to come up with a system where people want to go to a national park and the parks start becoming self-sufficient. In national parks in Canada, which I have visited, on the roadside they have orchards there. Those orchards are productive orchards, which actually pay for the maintenance of the national park and pay for the conservation. They also have fenced those areas. I think there are a lot of lessons to be learnt, but I think first we have to accept that what we have been doing for generations is not the best management for national parks. We have to look at a new regime to ensure that these endangered species do not become extinct. It is not rocket science. I think it is proper management by people who understand the bush. It should not be a lock up and lock out mentality.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Fraser, you mentioned the cost of managing national parks being in the vicinity of \$58 to \$60 per hectare per year. If we were to apply the Walmsley model to the Bongil Bongil National Park, would the cost of that initially—and I take on board that we would be looking further down the track to generating some income out of it—in the process of setting that up and establishing it, do you think it could be done for \$58 per hectare?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I think you would save money. Initially it would cost you more because you would have to fence it, but in reality I think we have one ranger who wanders around there and treats it as his own backyard. I might be wrong here, I might be verballing whoever is looking after it at the moment, but the bloke I met there originally was the fellow that led the forest blockade at Wild Cattle Creek a number of years ago. He has a National Parks uniform but he does not wear the boots. But I think at the end of the day if you fence that area, if you use that as a pilot, the initial cost would be fairly heavy, but the timber production from it out of the plantations would contribute to the cost, and if you had a Walmsley-type atmosphere where people could actually go and stay in constructed camp sites and huts and be given guided tours of the area under strict supervision, I think you would find you would actually pay for the management of it and eventually you would not need that \$58.00 or \$58.50 per hectare supplementation from the State budget.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So is one of the problems that we are facing at the moment this issue of tenure? Would we need to change the tenure of that area in order to allow it to proceed?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: You would need a management plan that said let us get rid of the plantation timber for starters and let us look at a proper way of regenerating the natural bushland there. But I think tenure of national park would allow you to do it; it is only a management regime. For years and years and years I have seen plan after plan—I have got a cupboard full in my office upstairs of fire management plans that have never been implemented. They have all been constructed and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to do but they have never been implemented on national parks.

If you had a proactive management of that area as a national park I cannot see where you would need to provide any change in tenure. It is a public estate, it is a Crown estate, and it would give us the opportunity to actually allow people into it, welcome them into it as they do in the Northern Territory, and pay for the privilege of camping overnight in what is a truly magnificent area. I would remind the Committee that it is a magnificent area that has been logged for about 120 years.

CHAIR: We are out of time. It has been a very productive afternoon. Thank you very much for coming all the way down on a late plane and agreeing to jump your time around. If Committee members would like to put questions to you on notice are you happy with that?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I am only too happy to accept them.

CHAIR: We have determined that we would like answers by 18 January. It is just an arbitrary date and if you have problems with achieving that it would not be a problem.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: No, I would be quite happy to do it.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 5.17 p.m.)