



BUSH HERITAGE
AUSTRALIA

Our heart & soul

17 April 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
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To whom it may concern,

Defence Legislation Amendment (Woomera Prohibited Area) Bill 2014

Bush Heritage Australia is the lessee of the 217,000 ha Bon Bon Station Reserve that lies within the Woomera Prohibited Area (WPA). We appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission on the Defence Legislation Amendment (Woomera Prohibited Area) Bill 2013.

Bush Heritage Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation committed to protecting Australia's biodiversity and the capacity of ecosystems to deliver the 'services' on which all living things depend. These services include fresh water, healthy soil, plant pollination and nutrient cycling, including natural carbon storage.

Bon Bon Station Reserve was acquired for conservation by Bush Heritage Australia in February 2008 utilising a combination of funds granted by both the Commonwealth's National Reserve System Program (Project No. N553) and the Government of South Australia's Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH), along with additional funds received from Bush Heritage supporters.

Bush Heritage is investing significant resources in the region and into building closer ties with regional stakeholders including Indigenous peoples, regional networks, other organisations and governments. Our aim is to facilitate protection of biodiversity, not only on our own property but also in the surrounding landscape, as whole-of-landscape conservation is needed to deal with the large-scale issues we face.

Bush Heritage wishes to engage in transparent and active negotiation with staff and officers of the Commonwealth Department of Defence at all times in relation to any increased activity on the Reserve and its surrounds, that might otherwise be likely to impact upon human wellbeing, safety and environmental values – without compromising national security. We wish to recognise that Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force, in particular have a proud record of stewardship of land and an active environment management program and we are open to support that work.

Bush Heritage acknowledges the desire of the Federal Government to promote multi-purpose land use within the WPA.

Access to Woomera Prohibited Area

With the adoption of the *Defence Legislation Amendment (Woomera Prohibited Area) Bill 2014* Bush Heritage acknowledges that, as an existing non-Defence user of the WPA, we will continue under our existing access arrangements governed by the *Defence Force Regulations 1952*. We acknowledge that the proposed Bill provides that, along with other existing non-Defence users, Bush Heritage would be exempt from the application of the proposed legislation, but has the option to 'opt-in' to the new permit arrangements should it choose to do so.

Resource Exploitation

In the Explanatory Memorandum for the Defence Legislation Amendment (Woomera Prohibited Area) Bill 2014, (Page 2 paragraph 3), it states...*"the Review proposed that the Woomera Prohibited Area be opened up for resources exploration and mining to the maximum extent possible within the confines of its primary use for defence of Australia purposes."*

This statement recognises the potential mineral wealth of the region and the opportunities for its exploitation. There is however, no recognition of the valuable environmental assets and natural capital of the WPA and the need to protect this largely intact area for the long-term health of the region's biodiversity and human population. Given the level of habitat degradation and species loss in large parts of the South Australian landscape, the WPA provides an opportunity to protect and promote this quintessentially Australian landscape, and create long-term job opportunities through controlled ecotourism and other sustainable income-producing activities.

It is important that the issues of protecting biodiversity and ensuring long-term environmental health of the WPA are also expressly recognised in the Bill, and included as part of the natural and economic values of the area. We recommend that the biodiversity, cultural and landscape assets are formally recognised and made spatially explicit in the Bill (at the very least the second reading speech should give voice to strong environmental values contained in the lands), and that the South Australian Government then honour the intension of the Bill by protecting these assets when assessing exploration and mining applications within the WPA.

As a consequence of the past restricted access to the WPA, the area protects significant extents of intact, healthy vegetation and relatively healthy populations of native animals (I have earlier commented on the positive role of Department of Defence in land stewardship). An expansion of mining activities into this region poses particular threats to native habitats and species. Transportation of weed seeds, such as from Buffel Grass, into previously unaffected areas, and changes to the local hydrology as a consequence of the construction of roads and building infrastructure has the potential to degrade what is currently a relatively intact landscape. The devastating impacts of Buffel Grass on natural grassland and woodland ecosystems cannot be over-stated and all efforts should be made to enforce strict quarantine measures within the WPA, and in particular on vehicles and equipment entering the WPA, to prevent the arrival of such weeds into areas that are currently free from them.

Ground Water

Water intensive mining activities have the potential to adversely affect water availability for other users, both in and beyond the WPA, particularly if the water is being sourced from the Great Artesian Basin (GAB). There is potential to deplete natural soaks and springs through 'draw-down' of the GAB. These springs and soaks are the drivers of life in desert landscapes and of great cultural significance to Traditional Owners. We recommend that the

Bill acknowledges the cultural and environmental importance of water in the landscape and requires mining entities to manage water use in such a way as to prevent any adverse impacts on natural water bodies, soaks and springs.

Bush Heritage would like an assurance from the Federal Government and Department of Defence that it is aware of and investing in the protection of the ecological values of the WPA.

I would be happy to be contacted to discuss this submission further if required.

Yours sincerely

Gerard O'Neill
Chief Executive