

CHRISTIAN CAMPING INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

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The Committee Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Reference
Committee,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT

Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

The Australian Camps Association (ACA) and Christian Camping International Australia (CCI/Aus) are pleased to provide this joint submission on behalf of our combined memberships. Thank you for the extension granted for this submission.

Our two organisations have a combined membership of over 500 Conference Centres and Camps across all states and territories - the vast majority of residential group accommodation and conference organisations that are utilised in the education, not-for-profit and religious sectors within Australia.

Many of these centres provide outdoor activities to guest groups that use National Parks, State Forests and other Reserves. We recognise the need for conservation of natural areas but are concerned that more and more of the areas suitable for outdoor educational and recreational activities become difficult or impossible to use due to regulation and compliance costs.

We trust that this enquiry will facilitate improved management practices in relation to Australian national parks while continuing to provide access to these areas for outdoor activities.

Please contact myself, or either of our offices, if you have any queries regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Ken Pullen
CEO CCI Australia
on behalf of ACA and CCI Australia 2nd March 2006

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JOINT SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO NATIONAL PARKS.

Australian Camps Association and Christian Camping International Australia.

Introduction:

Camps and conference centres throughout Australia are extensive users of National Parks for outdoor activities including environmental education and recreation. The combined Membership of the two associations making this submission comprise the vast majority of Camps and Conference Centres utilised by the Education, Community and Religious Sectors for excursion, training, workshop and camp destinations.

Many of the members of both associations are established as not-for-profit and charitable organisations that provide their facilities and activities for altruistic reasons and as a service to the community.

Both our associations recognise the inherent value in the provision of National Parks that balance the needs of conservation with the vital needs for adequate areas suitable for outdoor activity that remain within economic reach of the general population.

Regarding the values and objectives of national parks, etc.

Australian camps are extensive users of National Parks for outdoor activities, environmental education and recreation. Groups from camps are usually school or family groups who gain not only educational and recreational benefits, but also social and health benefits from the group experience and the exercise of the activity (often a bush walk). These activities tend to be low impact, occurring in small groups led by adults who are knowledgeable about an area, concerned about the environment and want to pass on their love of the bush to their group members.

Teachers who take their classes to camp will often choose camps located in different areas so that their children can experience a wide range of environments. The diversity of National Park environments is important for these educational experiences and continued access to well managed, well 'preserved' ecosystems is essential.

For example a school might choose to stay at a camp in an arid area. They would explore the extremely dry local bush and Mallee Fowl. The next year the same students might attend a camp or centre beside a coastal national park thus providing students the experience of bush walking in a lush coastal environment. A third experience could cover the alpine regions or subtropical rainforest.

All of these excursions provide opportunity for the children to learn about the various bushland environments within the context of their curricula, and importantly provides the outdoor experience so lacking in today's urban societies.

Regarding the provision of sufficient resources for National Parks

There is a clear need to adequately resource the provision of more national parks and the maintenance and upkeep of current parks. This needs to be accomplished for conservation needs as well as the provision of parks that allow varying levels of access

and use that will encourage the use of the outdoors for activity in what has become a sedentary society.

Determining what the adequate level of resourcing is will depend on many more factors than can be the subject of this submission, suffice it to say that there are obviously different levels of resourcing of National Parks currently occurring, apparently influenced by the 'tourism value' of the park; the spectacular scenery or high profile for other reasons.

Preservation of remnant forests often appears to be a slow, lengthy and under-resourced undertaking. However the creation of such areas often results in the preservation of unique ecosystems that may not be high on the tourist's 'must see' list, but are invaluable for Camp programs where schools want to study such threatened environments.

As mentioned previously our membership sees the need for different styles of park that allow for educational study through to places that provide for activities from simple bush walks to multi-night wilderness experiences as well as rock climbing, abseiling and canyoning. National parks therefore need to be able to provide different experiences in different places, but must do so at a cost that encourages the use of these parks for the ultimate holistic health of the community.

Our combined associations submit that it is vital that the Australian community be encouraged to experience national parks, for their beauty, educational value and social health benefits. This will not be possible if the outdoor experience is priced beyond the capacity of the average Australian. Thus sufficient resourcing of parks must be provided so that access, licensing and compliance costs are kept low so that members of our two associations may continue to provide the services they do.

Regarding threats to the objectives and management of our National Parks

Park policy makers are under constant pressure to allow commercial development and other commercial use of parks. The nature of the activity that is attractive to most tourists (often larger groups) is not always compatible with the low-key educational exploration of an area by a school group. There ARE commercial operators who offer educational experiences, some of whom contract with camps. These tend to be considerate users of the park and also tend to lead smaller groups similar to those of camps.

Responsibilities of Government

In our opinion it is Government's responsibility to create and maintain national parks for the benefit of all its citizens. Where governments do not adequately perform these responsibilities the existing parks will be degraded to the point of not being of use for educational, recreational or conservation purposes, and new areas will either suffer similar degradation, or be locked away from access to meet perceived conservation needs.

Our associations contend that if sufficient national parks are created, and funding provided to allow for their proper management, then economical use of these parks in the provision of educational and recreational visits will be attainable as park managers will be able to monitor and adjust management policies to cater for their proper use while balancing the conservation, education and social health needs of the park and community.

We all need areas that we can be away from noise and the clamour of modern life. Creating areas that allow access for various uses is vital so that all sectors of our community can be satisfied. Thus parks will need to cater for foot, horse and vehicular access, however these need to be sufficient in number so as to allow all prospective users to do so without conflict.

National parks are public land, and need to be accessible so that they can benefit the community.

Record of Government

In our opinion the establishment of national parks by the various Governments has been at times un-coordinated, but we are thankful for the foresight of earlier legislators for having provided what currently exists.

We remain concerned at more recent developments where access to parks and reserves is being tightened by licensing requirements that can involve significant compliance, training and access costs. Compliance costs will also be influenced by the frequency of licence renewal. Proposed licensing programs have short terms, longer terms would be preferable.

We would request that consideration be given to the nature and purpose of the activities that a member camp or organisation may wish to undertake when access, licensing and compliance costs are set. We contend that education providers, including camps and operators providing outdoor activities that meet curriculum objectives, should be allowed free licensing as is the current case in at least one state. Current proposals for establishing fees to access parks in some states are causing considerable alarm to educational camp operators, especially those that provide the services on a not-for-profit basis.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.



Ken Pullen
CEO CCI Australia
on behalf of ACA and CCI Australia 2nd March 2006

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