



Supplementary Submission to the

# **Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts References Committee Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas**

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Submitted by the  
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ATHRA would like to submit this supplementary submission to expand on our previous submission.

a) the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

Our vision

National Parks and other reserves are managed for a full range of values

- Natural values
- Recreation and public appreciation
- Heritage values
  - both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sites and the built environment
  - Actively encouraging experiential heritage

We believe that there is currently a distortion in favor of Natural Values at the expense of the other values.

We believe that accommodating the full range of values is not mutually exclusive, is achievable and is fair, just and sustainable.

Sustainability includes sustaining the full range of values and the benefits that flow from them to a broad base in a tolerant and inclusive society. Sustainability is not just about nature conservation.

### ***Conclusion and recommendation***

Re-focus the direction of park agencies to support the full suite of values in a balanced manner

Actively seek engagement with groups representing those values at a peak body and local area levels.

Address agency corporate culture, branding, publications, programs, training, recruitment etc in support of the full range of objectives and values.

b) whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;

Significant funding is already provided to park management agencies. There is no doubt that a case could be made for more funding.

The current application of those funds is un-balanced between the various objectives of the parks.

Nature Conservation objectives are well provided for in terms of land acquisition, management, maintenance, research and targeted programs and staff allocations.

Cultural Heritage objectives and recreation / public appreciation objectives receive an inadequate level of funding. Funding in these areas is largely directed to tourism and bushwalking trails.

Cultural Heritage and recreation / public appreciation objectives receive a very small proportion in relation to nature conservation objective.

### ***Conclusion and recommendation***

ATHRA would like to see funding and outcomes move towards a balance between the multiple objectives of parks.

All Commonwealth and State funding to the environment should be :-

- Linked to specific outcomes to restore a balance and address previous imbalance.
- Give equal weight to appreciation, recreation and cultural heritage outcomes alongside nature conservation.
- Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage should be treated with equal respect and attention.
- Phase funding based on progress towards outcomes.
- Outcome performance audited at each phase with public involvement in performance audit.
- Spread across land management agencies – not just Nat Park Agencies
- Target removal of divisive nature of National Parks (reserve system) in the community to engender broad based support for the reserve system.

## **The Regional Forest Agreements**

ATHRA would like to specifically address both the last Regional Forest Agreements (RFA) and the upcoming RFA.

- Last RFA process only assessed land for conservation and timber production – Heritage and recreation values not considered.
- The RFA conservation assessed land moved into the park system and public access was reduced – dis-enfranchising the public.
- Timber production levels were set through the RFA and contracts entered into.
- Subsequent NSW state election bought green vote by taking more forest and transferring them to the National Park system.
- This constitutes double dipping into public lands to reward the extreme greens.
- Timber production contract levels now remain the same on a smaller forest reserve which will result in no mature trees remaining in NSW State Forest in the central / mid north coast in 25 years time.

## **Conclusion and recommendation**

Next RFA Process should :-

- Assess land for Recreation and Heritage Values.
- Assess performance / outcomes of previous RFA.
- Be modified according to previous and desired performance.
- Phased funding with performance assessments.
- Tie funding to achievement of recreation and heritage outcomes.
- Address where the shortfall of forest resources to meet RFA 1 contracts (created by the reduction in the State Forest area) will come from.
- Promote multi-use trails.

## **Funding The Bicentennial National Trail (BNT)**

With regard to funding, ATHRA would like to address the recognition and funding of the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT)

- The BNT is an entirely separate organization to ATHRA but one we support both financially and in kind.
- Longest self reliant multi-use trail in the world - walkers, mountain bikes, pack donkey and horse riders carry all their own necessities.
- 5,330KM from Cook Town QLD to Healsville VIC via NSW following the great dividing range.
- Follows heritage trails, roads, stock routes through national parks, state forests and private lands
- One of the few Bicentennial projects to have a lasting benefit.
- A national icon with an international profile.
- Variable support by the states.
- Variable support within State National Park agencies ranging from good support, to reluctant support, to antagonism.
- Constantly threatened by changes or proposed cuts to it's established route and campsites
- Currently no Commonwealth support.
- Volunteer organization with limited funds.

## **Conclusion and recommendation**

ATHRA supports significant Commonwealth and State funding, recognition and support of the BNT.

The route of the BNT should receive Commonwealth and State recognition and be preserved.

Agencies should actively support the trail and retain its original location and campsites.

ATHRA supports an agreement between the Commonwealth, QLD, NSW and VIC governments and the BNT.

c) any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

National Parks and other types of reserves should be an inclusive and uniting feature of Australian life and not allowed to become exclusive and divisive.

*ATHRA believes that the biggest long term threat to the National Park and other reserves system is the loss of public support by alienation of the public.*

Governments and their agencies must embrace the full range of objectives that these areas are reserved for and encourage sustainable appreciation of the values to foster public support. In doing so, a significant resource will become available to assist in the form of political support, expert knowledge, good will, volunteer resources and funds and support for increased government allocations. All these are conditional in the public perceiving value in the reserve system. To gain this, the public need to feel engaged not alienated or begrudgingly tolerated on the margins.

The spoils of land allocation, access and funding of the reserve system must not be allowed to be concentrated solely in the nature conservation objective but must be balanced with the objectives of cultural heritage (both aboriginal and non-aboriginal) and public appreciation including recreation. These objectives are not mutually exclusive as some elements of the debate portray. Effort and good will is required to manage the full suite of objectives.

Our identity as Australians is not just about our natural environment but also includes our culture, cultural practices, (heritage both built and heritage practices),

Governments and their agencies must actively move to engage the full range of stakeholders to restore a balance between park objectives and broaden their support base. Policies must be re-assessed, staff retrained and recruited from a wider background other than primarily environmental science. Conflict of interest policies must be vigorously applied. Performance based monitoring must take place against the full range of objectives.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

Expand and maintain public support for the park system by:-

- Accommodating a full range of activities
- Stop transfer of land to the reserve system then excluding horse riding.
- Stop using parks for political pork barreling
- Stop the National Park spoils going to the extreme greens and bushwalkers whilst excluding or minimizing other groups.

- Genuinely engage with park stakeholders
- Change Park agency Corporate Culture and branding from “Conservation” to the full range of values
- Change park agency recruiting to a wider range of life experiences – not just primarily environmental science graduates.
- Address the Park Plan Of Management (POM) process :-
  - Genuine community engagement BEFORE the draft POM
  - Remove green stacking of Advisory committees and the Advisory council
- Adopt adaptive management principles
- Remove public perception of alignment to green organizations.
- Remove reserve category based management (e.g. National Park therefore can only do certain things.)
- Managed according to the carrying capacity at a smaller zoning level (e.g. this track can accommodate walker, bike and horse traffic.)
- Stopping Category Creep – managing land as if it were a higher reserve category
  - (e.g. State Recreation Areas now managed as if they are Nature Reserves)
- Remove bias towards bushwalking
- Promote, build and convert trails to multi-use concept :-
  - Efficient use of public funds
  - Benefits multiple groups
  - Expanded network for all
  - Removes artificial divisions
  - Promotes understanding and tolerance between groups and individuals.
  - Impacts spread not concentrated

d) the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans;

Covered in principle under the other parts of this submission.

e) the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Re-assess the Wilderness concept

- Alienates land from the people
- Creates access privileges to an elite group – fit young bushwalkers whilst excluding large segments of stakeholders.
- Failed to protect the environment (Phytophthora root rot fungus introduced to the Wollemi Pine site within the largest Wilderness area in NSW).
- Assessment process is costly to the public – introduce charges to those proposing Wilderness areas.

Other public Land Managers should also receive environmental, recreational and heritage funding.

Health benefits of active recreation need to be acknowledged and accommodated.

Stop the land grab into conservation agencies :-

- State Forests conversion to the National Park system
- NSW Western Division lands including leasehold properties
- Travelling Stock Reserves
- Cadastral Road Reserves
- Other agencies have a fine record and have broad scale public support

Instigate a reasonable regime of management responses to problems:-

- Response in keeping with the size of the problem.
- Examine a full range of alternatives.
- Risk weighting of threat and responses against the full range of park and site specific values.
- Solutions Manual / Toolkit / Education to provide options to land managers. (potential Commonwealth funded project).
- Prevent “collateral damage” to other user groups when fixing problems.
- Surety of process to engender public support.
- Lock-out as a last not first management response.
- Engage the stakeholders in the process and solution (for support, expertise, resources and transparency).

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