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Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee inquiry
The Secretary
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Parks and Leisure Australia welcomes the Senate Inquiry into these significant matters, and the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry.

By way of back ground our organisation aims to:

To provide a national organisation which promotes co-operation and mutual assistance between persons and organisations associated with public parks, botanic gardens and open space environments; recreation and leisure facilities and services.

To promote the aesthetic, scientific and social development and study of all matters related to and impacting on, the management and operation of public parks, botanic gardens and open space environments; recreation and leisure facilities and programs.

To act as an advocate and representative body of the Australian parks and leisure profession to all levels of government and business instrumentalities.

To promote a conservation ethic within the profession and throughout the parks and leisure industry

To maintain a high standard and status for the professions within the Australian parks and leisure industry.

To assist in the development of parks and leisure professionals through the promotion and support for appropriate information, education and training opportunities.

To arrange meetings and opportunities for member information exchange, through formal and informal forums and conferences, as well as disseminate a range of published material relating to all aspects of parks and leisure services.

To encourage the application of appropriate resources towards the development and maintenance of parks and leisure services across Australia.

To stimulate the development of service levels within the industry and the achievement of best practice.

Parks and Leisure Australia is the key professional Association which provides a broad range of services to members of the parks and leisure industry. Membership ranges across staff and management of parks, gardens, sport, aquatic, rehabilitation; aged hostels and recreation centres, at local and state government levels, students from tertiary institutions, academics, private consultants, private operators of facilities and many more. Our membership comes from all States of Australia and overseas and as you can see from the above sectors, our organisation has something to offer all areas of the industry.

The key values or goals that we advocate as the basis of our response are:

- The protection of Australia's natural heritage in order to improve our ecological health / integrity as well as continue to provide intact sites for recreation and tourism
- That government, private industry and volunteer bodies all have a role to play in the decision making, use and management of these areas
- That Australia's natural heritage belongs to all Australians and processes of management should be brought to bear that are in the best interests of current and future Australians.

Our response has two components: a response with respect to research and knowledge generation into protected areas, and a response that addresses each term of reference more specifically.

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

Parks and Leisure Australia welcomes the opportunity of making a submission to the Inquiry.

We note that in recent years the funding of parks has been reduced relative to previous funding and protected area responsibility, and pushed onto revenue raising sources such as recreation and tourism. This has created a range of major problems associated with protected area planning and management in Australia. The need to raise revenue has seen a need to increase park visitation which has needed an increase in regulation. However no increase in resourcing has come in the area of education and training to achieve this. Recent commentators (cf. Dearden & Rollins 1993) have noted the reliance of park management on strategies that limit and/or control visitor behaviour, these strategies can be seen as a product of the natural areas management educational background of parks rangers and senior policy-makers, an education that has its foundation in the biological sciences (cf. Magill 1988, 1991, 1992). Within the constraints of publicly-available resources, parks managers have established their professional expertise around such functions as identification and classification of fauna and flora species (ie; a stock-taking) and site maintenance, site monitoring, policing of visitor use, (ie; playing a gate-keeper role). In recent years, the function has been expanded to include some visitor education and the application of various land classification systems on the basis of appropriate use rather than species. There is evidence that park managers are only reasonably competent at perceiving what experiences and values are important to tourists and visitors in general (Wellman et al 1982; Clark et al 1971; Hendee et al 1974; Twight and Catton 1975; Twight and Lyden 1989), and that they believe that visitors do not know what forests and parks are about, and they are the experts who know best.

The managers as a sub-cultural segment of staffs often decide much of the presumed appropriate use for the park. This set of appropriate activities is then transferred into the managerial context when implementing strategies for park management. An example is the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (Clark and Stankey, 1979; Stankey and Wood, 1979) which functions as a system of classification of leisure experiences and is used extensively in park management and so transferred across a range of Parks and organisational cultures. This systematic classification of settings is based on the manager's perception of the park setting and its appropriate use, so the attitude of a manager to the tourist may become a part of the management system and serve to reinforce the stereotype of the tourist held by the manager. This means the manager does not have a passive role but is creating the underlying structure of the tourist experience and thereby influencing it to a significant degree.

Park managers as public servants and professionals should be seeking to serve and educate the public. They need to respond to the needs and interests of visitors acting as facilitators and providers of these experiences rather than prescribing or constructing meanings and subsequent 'appropriate uses' for these settings within their own value frameworks. They cannot do this without comprehensive support for training and education in the areas of Visitor Management supported by the funding of courses etc that achieve this. This area has no Centres of Excellence in Australia, no specifically funded CRC or dedicated specialist Degrees or short courses that assist in achieving this although a small number of individual efforts have been made to include this aspect within wider programs (eg, the National School in Park Management through the

University of Melbourne, Parks, Recreation and Heritage at Charles Sturt University and one short course in management at the University of South Australia)..

If we take for example the area of Marketing of Protected Areas, Jenkins and McArthur (1996) note that within Parks agencies, this focus represents a pre-occupation with the 'supply' side (of a market) and ignores any potential to ensure long term preservation of key natural sites through manipulation of the 'demand' side. The traditional approach adopted by parks managers can also be seen as a largely reactive one because parks managers essentially wait until visitors enter a national park before taking (any) action to manage their behaviour.

The approach is also similar to the one traditionally adopted by providers of some other state-provided public goods, for example, Department of Health and the Police services. To explain, the Police services in Australia, as law enforcers, have typically established their professional expertise around the development of an effective and efficient response function, that is, taking action upon notification of a crime being committed and the investigation of a crime. Less attention has been given to deterrence, through activities such as patrolling and community education. In recent years, Police Service Corporate Plans have reflected some desire to re-allocate more resources to 'proactive policing' by working more collaboratively with the community in identifying high risk groups and high risk areas and then minimise the risk of crime being committed. Thus the terms problem-oriented policing or community policing. There is a growing recognition of the need to tackle the social and environmental problems that underlie the incidence of crime just as there is to examine the social context of parks and their use.

As marketers appreciate, the supply of a natural resource cannot easily be varied in response to demand. In a quantitative sense (ie visitor numbers), the supply of a natural resource is fixed whilst demand varies largely according to the influence of societal forces. This is unlike the production of goods where production can more easily be varied in accordance with demand. Further, strategies designed to respond to variations in qualitative demand (ie; visitor user type) are capital and/or labour intensive to implement.

The available supply (capacity) is somewhat a notional one, as those parks managers responsive for making decisions about appropriate use in the face of strong demand attest (cf. Wearing & Brock 1991). This is unlike a number of other tourist services such as hotels and airlines which have fixed room night and passenger capacity respectively.

Visitor demand for key natural areas is only likely to grow. There is much evidence showing the increased awareness of Australia's natural attributes amongst international and domestic tourists for instance. The growing population density in and around Australia's capital cities, accompanying infrastructure and property development and the increasingly frenetic pace of life underlie the need for increasing numbers of city-dwellers to escape city life in their leisure time, seeking more natural, tranquil experiences. The growing pressure on our national parks is not therefore surprising and is not likely to abate. The question is how is it to be managed?

Tourist operators have been conditioned to cater for tourists in a particular way – economies of scale – brochures – mass tourism – coach travel. Thus tourists have been conditioned to interact with the surrounding environment in only a superficial way – tourists want to consume in a convenient way – parks managers on the other hand want to preserve – these two approaches are often considered to be diametrically opposed. This would appear to

reflect the attitudes commonly held by the community, and often use pressures on national parks can be seen as just a microcosm of societal trends.

Tourists

A number of views on marketing of national parks have been published, Middleton (1998), for instance, promote the wisdom of segmenting the tourism market and actively targeting the conservation-conscious end of the market. Current national parks policy documents reflect at least some desire to redress the current approaches and examine approaches such as this (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service 1997).

In recent years national parks authorities have also shown signs of a desire to be more outwardly-focused and more accurately reflect community needs and expectations. Corporate Plans reflect a desire to establish a more market-driven strategic direction, involving strategic partnerships with tourism bodies, more active promotion of recreation and tourism opportunities, and a more conscious effort to provide clear parameters in terms of public use of natural lands. The difficulty arises in transforming policy to action – difficulties with for instance the educational background of the managers who apply the policies, the organisational culture that is focused on preservation and the incomplete understanding of tourism.

This inquiry represents an opportunity to establish a change in the paradigm. Parks agencies may well require a new approach with education and training providing a movement away from isolation approaches focused on preservation, actions that exploit the expertise of parks staff but also educate them of results beyond those perceived as reactionary and within the traditional organisational culture of parks. Off – ‘offsite’ community promotion and education could form a substantial component of time (information-transfer, interpretation, guiding). Ongoing negotiation with tourist industries needs to occur, acknowledging its abilities as well as its shortcomings.

One may well ask how well placed National Parks authorities are to implement policy change. Often the case that those involved in writing corporate / strategic plans are the most outwardly-focused in the organisation – lack of strategic fit between the organisation and its environment – must have systems of resource allocation, structures, operational planning, staff competencies, reward systems that support the strategic direction of the organisation. (six box model). Strategic plans must also go some way to resolving in-built conflict between, in this case, tourism marketing objectives and preservation objectives. These should not be left to staff in ranger positions but should allow them to have some input into the approaches generated.

With this strategic approach in place the refocussing of Service to be customer-orientated and skilling existing managers in this area while ensuring that educational institutions that are drawn on for staffing, and are providing training in this area, will ensure that there is change. The Service's professional staff need to have not only the social science skills to deal with people but the skills to understand the tourism industry and the tourist. If this is provided, the barriers can be broken down and more effective approaches to the tourism industry and the management of tourists can be achieved. With this, managers may be able to engage the tourism industry and the tourist to enable a dialogue that could see changes made in approaches to management. If this occurs management of parks can look forward to an interesting and exciting future of interaction with tourism with adequate support provided via the Federal Government for training and education in this area.

In order to achieve this we would suggest the Government establish a Centre for Excellence in Protected Area and Leisure Management to deal with issues surrounding the changing role of Parks in society and the need to support this with organisational management change and research.

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

In Western and modern societies the setting aside of areas of land to be protected in some sense from the majority of uses is a relatively recent phenomenon, but then again the industrial–modern world is itself a recent phenomenon. Drawing upon this recent history Australia has been at the forefront in deciding to protect its natural areas, originally in order to provide spaces for recreation for the growing metropolitan populations. Intertwined with this goal, and soon following as a dominant concern is the protection of various flora and fauna species. One of our first areas to be protected, which was in the 1860s, was the Jenolan Caves Reserve, lobbied by John Lucas MLA to be ‘preserved’ partly it is believed to protect the developing tourism industry that depended on the caves remaining intact.

It seems we now wish to ‘protect’ the ecological integrity and there are a variety of reasons for this:

- Given the world’s, and Australia’s, history of species distinction we desire to halt the extinction process. We want to halt this process partly because of a moral imperative that as a single species on this planet we have no right to destroy in huge numbers the other species around us.
- We also want to halt this process because we are becoming increasingly aware that our own health, quality of life and perhaps ongoing survival is dependent on the overall ecological integrity of the planet and the continued existence of the species that make it up.
- There is still so much we don’t know about the vast number of species on the planet and we now realise that the genetic make up of many species offer new understanding into many problems which we as a species face – ranging from physical to chemical to biochemical problems.
- As with Jenolan – to ensure that the resources upon which the tourism economy depends are not diminished in integrity
- And many people desire to continue to use natural places for recreation – be that walking, hunting, bike riding, fishing, photography and the list goes on.

Our national, state and local governments all have agencies established with agendas that variously reflect the above intentions:

For example the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation list their intended outcome with respect to biodiversity as being ‘improvement in the conservation of biodiversity, including threatened species, on public and private lands.

Their priorities to achieve this include:

- Lead the process of reforming NSW threatened species conservation laws, systems and approaches.
- Review, develop and lead implementation of the next stage of the NSW Biodiversity Strategy, 'Living NSW'.
- Provide tools and knowledge to support catchment management authorities and councils in their protection of the natural and cultural values of biodiversity.
- Work to address the impacts of climate change on biodiversity.
- Develop and implement off-reserve programs and initiatives for conservation as part of building a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system.
- Develop and implement a strategy for improved protection of NSW wetland systems.

Another example is the Federal Department for Environment and Heritage, which states:

We now recognise the essential contribution of ecosystems in providing clean water, clean air and healthy soils, as well as maintaining our unique biological diversity. Some management practices place enormous pressures on the land, damaging these 'ecosystem services', reducing biodiversity and degrading soils and waterways.

The Land Management web site provides information about the Australian Government's activities to maintain landscapes, biodiversity and ecosystem services while ensuring sustainable production systems and providing for other human needs.

and ...

One of Australia's greatest challenges is the way we manage our natural resources - our soil, water, plants and animals. Ensuring the ecologically sustainable management of Australia's natural resources is a critical issue if we are to maintain the health of our environment, conserve our [land](#) and [biodiversity](#), and continue to be a major agricultural producer and exporter.

To protect Australia's environment and the future of our natural resources, governments and the community must work together. By collectively tackling major issues such as [salinity](#), declining [water quality](#), [native vegetation](#) loss and conservation of [threatened species](#), Australia will reap not only environmental but major social and economic rewards.

We support the concern demonstrated at a local, state and national level. We need to continue to hold these values and agendas to ensure maximum quality of life for all peoples and to prevent ecological and climate disasters that will see either total or mass destruction of ourselves and most other species.

We strongly support the current statement of values and intentions, and welcome the government taking this opportunity of reviewing them and hopefully strengthening our path toward achieving our goals. We would be concerned about any change to these values and objectives that 'watered them down' and diminished the level of protection afforded to protected areas.

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

It is clear that a significant proportion of the Australian population uses Australia's protected areas and that these same protected areas constitute important tourist sites; for example, Blue Mountains National Park, Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu, and integrated areas such as the Great Ocean Road.

Current management occurs across a diversity of levels: national, state, local, commercial and voluntary. Natural scientists argue that to preserve the integrity of ecological systems the full range of ecosystems needs to be protected and be of a large enough landmass to enable the full variety of species to breed and sustain themselves. Most states have been increasing the area of land under protection in order to attain representation of the full biodiversity, and to protect areas of land large enough to support sustainable populations. This is an important step toward a competent protected area system.

The task of managing these lands needs to include a breadth of activities that will allow achievement of all the reasons that motivated us to protect these lands in the first place. This means:

- Managing to ensure that the biodiversity is not harmed
- Managing use to ensure that the recreation / tourism values are not harmed (this includes provision of interpretation / sharing the knowledge of these systems with community and visitors)
- Continuing research that allows us to better understand how the ecosystems function as well as identifying new chemical, biochemical or biophysical resources for our own use.

Are sufficient resources being allocated to the management of our protected areas? More funds could always be used. Perhaps the question is more about what proportion of our national wealth should go into our ecological resources to achieve our goals? We could argue that given the importance of environmental health and ecological integrity to the success of our industries, communities and quality of life in times of economic wealth we should be investing more into the protection of ecological resources. We would be concerned if any increase in funding came through private mechanisms and which might result in increased but less controlled use of protected areas.

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

There are some tangible threats to the integrity of our conservation areas. These include:

- Pollution – e.g. in the case of the Great Barrier Reef
- Feral animals and weeds – which in some cases are expanding their habitat e.g. the cane toad into the Northern Territory
- Competing or over use – activities which use resources such as fishing, hunting or even walking and camping can have harmful impacts on the environments and ecological communities that are being visited.

However, there are also less tangible threats to the successful management of our protected areas. These are more to do with cultural norms and the values that we ascribe to our natural heritage. There will always be a threat or pressure from people or groups that are able to attain short term profits from protected area resources and who have no responsibility for maintaining any ecological integrity for the ongoing use of future generations. The values that we ascribe to protected areas are long-term values – these are resources that cannot be replaced in a matter of weeks, years or in the case of ecological communities even decades.

Hence a very real threat is the use of decision making systems which place economic concerns over ecological or social. Whilst our protected areas contribute greatly to our economic well-being the success of our protected areas can not be measured on economic grounds – our success can only be measured by whether or not we have been able to maintain their ecological integrity and provide sustainable access to communities to use these protected areas.

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; and

It is not clear that we have reached adequate representation of ecosystems and therefore will achieve our goals. Whilst private and/or commercial groups might well take responsibility for establishing their own protected areas the full coverage of representative ecosystems, and full access by the community can only be achieved under public ownership. Community access to protected areas is an important component of the management of these areas and includes adequate information services that provide knowledge about what are appropriate activities and why.

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

This is a challenging question. In considering our record in Australia who should we compare ourselves to? And what indicators should we use?

Some well used indicators might be levels of extinction, percentage of our land and ecosystems that are currently protected, infiltration of feral species, and management of fire.

Australia has one of the worst records with respect to extinct and endangered species – our record is not good. Fifty five species of fauna are extinct, 14 are critically endangered and a further 313 are listed as either endangered or vulnerable. These numbers do not include plant species.

In 2000 the total area of Australian that was protected was 5.6%. This compares quite favourably to the global situation where we have 5.37% of the earth's land protected, and 5.1% of land and sea protected. We don't compare so well with the United States which currently has 25% of land protected and 23% of their land and sea; and compared to the United Kingdom which protects 30.6% of their land and 18% of land and sea.

With respect to fire management we can only conclude that our protected area management agencies are doing a reasonable job in managing fire. In Victoria in 1851 (pre-protected areas) a massive fire resulted in 25% or 5 million ha were burnt and 12 people died. Between 1851 and 1939 (what is known as Black Friday when 2 million ha were burnt and 71 people died) there were at least 7 major fires, and 69 deaths. Since then our record keeping has improved and there has been a total of approximately 153 deaths. The number of people dying in major fire events has been drastically reduced since the fires of the early part of the century, the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983 is an exception with 47 deaths in Victoria. In a hot, dry and volatile vegetated country our record of fire management has improved.

At some levels our record is improving, but at others we are treading water or going backwards. The spread of many feral species is an example, and it is also an example where local, state and federal governments need to work together with voluntary and commercial interests.

What is clear is that we still know relatively little about these environments, what lessons we can learn from them, how best to protect them, and how to live in an integrated way with them. Furthermore, knowledge of the interdependence of the natural ecosystems and visitors is even less impressive, yet possible just as critical.

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