

Senate Inquiry into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected areas

Dear Senators

This submission to the Senate Inquiry concerns the right of individuals to access National Parks.

I am a senior citizen with no family in the Southern Hemisphere. I have a medical condition that limits activity and restricts normal social participation. I keep a dog as a Therapy Companion.

I endeavor to live as well as I can do within the limitations of my circumstances. Because of this I am concerned that dogs such as mine are not permitted in National Parks – which, because of their peace and natural beauty, provide quality yet cost free respite from the day to day troubles that afflict us all.

While I appreciate that ecologically sensitive and scenically aesthetic areas must be managed so as to maintain their biodiversity and majesty I cannot see why, as a responsible person, I am denied access to them just because my dog accompanies me!

On a trip two years ago in the south west of Western Australia, I turned off the highway and onto a small track that led into a forest area. I was alone apart from my dog who was in the back seat.

There was no signage, but from the highway the general area had looked appealing. Driving slowly along that narrow winding 'track' and into the midst of some truly magnificent trees, the world itself changed. It combined tolerance and pride with humility and wisdom, and from the expression on my dog's face, she too was enthralled with the aura of all that surrounded us - then we reached a clearing which had been turned into a large parking area. Now, several parked cars, a couple of tourist buses and many people dominated our surroundings. Adults were calling out to each other and excited children were running around squealing. One young boy picked up a small branch and threw it some distance into the shrub, and then another did the same in an apparent attempt to throw 'his' branch further.

As I turned around to go back to the highway, my dog still sat quietly in the back seat of my vehicle, but her look of disgust was unmistakable. We had to leave because I'd suddenly realized we were in a National Park and, since she was with me, we were not allowed to be there.

I still can recall the grievance I felt that day. I felt it was unfair that access to National Parks is denied to those who feel respect for the source of the beauty that surrounds them, while it is permitted to those who go there for entertainment. It is my sense of grievance that has prompted this submission to you.

My plea is that serious consideration be given to allowing dogs, under certain conditions, to enter National Parks with their owners.

I make the point that the majority of people who travel/holiday with their dog do so because it is a valued member of the family. Through its inclusion in 'outings', the dog learns from supervised exposure what behavior is appropriate in those places where it is taken.

There are an increasing number of retirees who travel with their dog, and for those who are otherwise travelling alone, it is the only company - and sense of security - that they have.

I suggest that careful, responsible and considerate owners with a quiet, well-mannered and leashed dog does not disturb the tranquility nor harm the ecosystem of National Parks more than typical human activity does.

Maybe those who are travelling with their dog and wanting to visit a National Park, could be required to obtain a permit for that purpose and that some criteria be set for the issuing of such permits? Perhaps, to deter any who are improperly motivated, there could be a refundable bond to ensure that dogs, which are taken into a National Park, are not then abandoned there.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Pat A Styles
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