

**SUBMISSION to the SENATE ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION  
TECHNOLOGY and THE ARTS COMMITTEE  
on the  
INQUIRY into AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION RESERVES and MARINE  
PROTECTED AREAS**

by

**CLARENCE VALLEY CONSERVATION COALITION**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a community group which was formed in 1988. Based in Grafton on the North Coast of NSW, it has members throughout the Clarence Valley. Since 1988 it has been actively involved with a wide range of environmental matters in the Clarence Valley and beyond.

This submission will be referring mainly to the national parks and reserves system in New South Wales and most examples given apply to the North Coast area. We point out that northern area of NSW is particularly rich in biodiversity being situated on the Macleay-McPherson Overlap. The significance of our area is emphasised in the World Heritage status of parks such as Washpool National Park, the adjoining Gibraltar Range National Park, Dorrigo National Park, New England National Park and Iluka Nature Reserve. These parks/reserves form part of the World Heritage classified Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia which extend from Barrington Tops National Park, north-west of Dungog to Main Range National Park, west of Southport in Queensland.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. The primary objective for the establishment and of the management of national parks and nature reserves<sup>1</sup> must be the protection of natural values, particularly the protection of biodiversity.
2. This is extremely important because of the continuing degradation of natural areas outside the Parks Estate and the threat to the survival of individual species as well as habitats. Currently about 10% of Australia's landmass is protected formally by government. And this is in a nation which "has exceptional levels of plant and animal diversity and is one of the world's 17 mega-diverse nations."<sup>2</sup>
3. It is also vital in relation to inter-generational equity. Natural values must be protected for future generations.
4. Because the primary objective is protection of natural values
  - any visitor amenities constructed and recreational activities permitted in national parks or nature reserves must be appropriate to protection of natural values. Amenities should blend in with the natural surroundings - should be unobtrusive. Inappropriate materials (such as CCA treated timber) should not be used for these amenities.

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<sup>1</sup> State Recreation Areas and parks dedicated primarily because of historic buildings/sites or cultural significance obviously have different primary objectives.

<sup>2</sup> P.18, "Private conservations"- Steve Davidson, *Ecos* 128, Dec-Jan 2006.

- the Precautionary Principle must be paramount in consideration of any requests from interest groups/ commercial operators for access for particular activities beyond what is currently permitted. In newly established parks, activities formerly permitted but not now appropriate to the new land management status, should be phased out over as short a period as possible.

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES IN CREATION OF NATIONAL PARKS**

Listed below are a number of important government responsibilities in the creation of national parks and reserves. This list is not exhaustive.

- Protection of a full range of ecosystems across the country. These should be of a size which ensures that they and the biodiversity they are to conserve are sustainable long-term.
- Protection of areas with high conservation value by either adding these areas to existing parks/reserves or creating new parks/reserves.
- Rationalisation of boundaries of existing parks/reserves. For example, there is a case for rationalising the boundaries of two nature reserves (Koukandowie and Chambigne) south-west of Grafton.
- Work with the local community, particularly with landowners and local councils, in providing/protecting wildlife corridors so that wildlife can move between reserves so that species populations do not become genetically isolated.
- In order for the first three responsibilities listed above to be undertaken, governments need to provide sufficient funds for acquisitions.

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES IN MANAGING NATIONAL PARKS**

Listed below are a number of important government responsibilities in the management of national parks and reserves. This list is not exhaustive.

1. **Provision of sufficient funds** so that the managing authority is not overly dependent on visitor fees. In NSW over recent years the imposition of visitor fees<sup>3</sup> has brought with it some difficulties.

- When fees were first introduced, there was a great deal of vocal opposition in some coastal national parks in the Clarence Valley.
- A NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) information pamphlet on the coastal Yuragir NP describes how fees (\$6/day/vehicle) are used. As well as maintaining visitor facilities – parking, picnic tables, toilets, roading, rubbish collection etc – it lists other uses – educational programs, fire management, weed and feral animal control and programs to protect threatened species in parks and reserves that have high levels of visitor use.<sup>4</sup> If the NSW NPWS is dependent on visitor fees for these other uses it is obviously not being properly funded by the State Government. It may be, however, that the NPWS is quoting this long list of uses to justify the imposition of the fees because there has been some community anger about the fees.
- The “user pays” principle results in park managers being pressured to provide ever better visitor facilities to justify the charge. This leads to a preoccupation with provision of visitor

<sup>3</sup> Visitor fees are not imposed in all national parks/reserves in this area. Some examples of parks with visitor fees are the inland parks -Washpool NP, Gibraltar Range NP – and the coastal areas Woody Head (Bundjalung NP), Yuragir NP and its various visitor areas.

<sup>4</sup> “Yuragir National Park”, NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, Feb. 2002.

- facilities to the detriment of management of national parks/reserves for their primary objective - protection of natural values.
- There is also the possibility that the imposition of fees may discourage some people who might otherwise visit national parks from doing so.

**2. Long-term and balanced planning of expenditure.** In this proper attention must be given to the primary objective, the protection of natural values. The nature conservation role of the managing authority must not be neglected in favour of the provision of facilities for human visitation to parks/reserves. This means that proper attention must be given to important measures such as recovery plans for threatened species.

**3. Provision of education services** to the community which should include educating the community in the importance of national parks as places where natural values are protected and their importance to future generations.

The NSW NPWS Discovery programs are important for community education about parks and their natural attractions. As well as continuing and expanding these activities during school vacations, the NPWS should develop programs which are relevant to various levels of the school curriculum and can be utilised by schools during term time. Development of such programs will not be sufficient. They must be actively promoted within schools and through the various education systems so that they are utilised.

**4. Effective programs to control feral animals and weeds.** Because of budgetary constraints control programs do not always have effective follow-up actions so that the initial effort and expense is largely wasted. Long-term planning is necessary to ensure this does not happen.

**5. Permitting only uses which are consistent with the primary objective,** protection of natural values.

- Inappropriate uses such as horse-riding, trail-bike riding and four wheel driving along trails which should be maintenance trails or fire trails or along beaches adjacent to coastal parks cause damage and lead to additional management costs.
- Damage caused by inappropriate usage includes erosion and the spread of weeds as well as direct damage to fragile ecosystems. In areas like Station Creek (Yuragir NP) the NPWS provides for vehicular access to a designated beach – at on-going cost to the NPWS. At this beach four wheel drive vehicles, driving in the inter-tidal zone (which is officially outside the national park) impact on the beach biota because of shearing and compression effects. Other beaches adjacent to national parks are also affected in this way.
- In some cases park managers are providing facilities which have nothing to do with the national parks. An example of this is the provision of car/boat trailer parking at the small area at Sandon in Yuragir NP. This takes space which arguably would be more appropriate for a few more camping sites or parking for day visitors visiting the park. As well as providing this facility the NPWS has on-going maintenance costs.

**6. The carrying capacity of parks should be assessed** with a high priority for assessment being placed on those currently with large visitor numbers. Such assessment should result in strategies being implemented in popular (or particularly vulnerable) parks/park areas so that natural values are not degraded because the parks are being “loved to death”.

## **GOVERNMENT PROVISION OF RESOURCES**

Over recent years there has been a rapid increase in the growth of privately funded nature conservation areas, particularly in inland areas which are not adequately represented in the National Parks Estate. One of the reasons for this growth is the fact that governments lack the

funds to buy up the private lands that these conservation trusts are taking over.<sup>5</sup> What is apparent is that they are buying and protecting high conservation areas.

There is some discussion of government provision of resources in GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES IN MANAGING NATIONAL PARKS above.

## **THREATS TO OBJECTIVES AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Carrying capacity.**

- Some very popular parks are in danger of “being loved to death”.
- At popular parks, particularly those on the coast, there is pressure to continually expand/upgrade visitor facilities. Just because hundreds of people might like to park at a beach in a national park on a summer’s day is not a justification for the expansion of the parking area to cater for those numbers.
- Management of camping facilities in popular parks should include a system of booking ahead as well as a limit on the time a camper can stay. The fact that a park camping area is popular should not be the trigger for an expansion in camp sites. Careful assessment of carrying capacity should be the determinant for the number of camping sites – just as it should be for the number of parking spaces for day visitors.

**Inappropriate use** - trail bikes, 4WDs, dune buggies, horse riding (Discussed in more detail above.)

### **Funding constraints** which

- limit possibilities for creation of new park/additions to existing parks;
- lead to a conflict of interest between nature conservation and providing visitor facilities

### **Proximity to human settlement**

In areas where national parks are close to human settlement difficulties can arise because those who wanted to live close to a natural area often realize, after they have settled in, that there can be risks in this proximity – particularly in relation to bushfire management. This leads to pressure on park managers to cut into the reserve to provide a buffer between it and the human settlement. This has happened with the coastal villages adjacent to Yuragir NP and it has happened in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Development of land for residential purposes close to the borders of national parks should only be undertaken if the land developer includes an appropriately wide buffer zone (on his land) between the residential area and the park boundary.

### **Marine National Parks**

In NSW these are relatively new and are certainly an improvement from the days of no real protection for significant marine areas. However, there is still insufficient biodiversity protection in these parks. The Grey Nurse Shark, for example, is on the brink of extinction, and drastic action needs to be taken to ensure its survival along the NSW coast.

### **Climate change**

Climate change will be a major long-term threat to the viability of many national parks and the biodiversity they protect.

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<sup>5</sup> The rise of private conservation trusts and the effectiveness of management of these areas is discussed in a section of the CSIRO journal *Ecos* 128, Dec-Jan 2006 (p. 18-27).

## **Phytophthora**

*Phytophthora cinnamomi*, a soil fungus, probably introduced since European settlement, has affected hundreds of thousands of hectares of native vegetation. It has been listed as a key threatening process under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) <sup>6</sup> It could have a devastating impact in national parks and reserves if it continues to spread which seems likely. At the end of 2005 it was reported that it was detected in one of the Wollemi pines<sup>7</sup> in the very limited stand of these important trees in Wollemi National Park, west of Sydney.

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Hon Secretary  
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<sup>6</sup> *Pytophthora Fact Sheet*, Department of Environment and Heritage, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> *Wollemi pine infected by fungus - 04/11/2005*, *News in science*, ABC.  
<http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s1497961.htm>