

**Submission to Senate Environment, Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts Committee**

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

**Submission from Dual Sport Motorcycle Riders
Association, Townsville Branch**



Submission prepared by:

Tony Law (BSc Aust Env Sc, BSc (Hons) Grad Sch Env Sc & Eng), DSMRA Member,
Townsville

DSMRA Point of Contact:

Steve Alldridge, DSMRA Area Coordinator , Townsville

Introduction

The Dual Sport Motorcycle Riders Association (DSMRA) is a national organisation formed in 1995. Its primary purpose is advocacy for recreational motorcycle riding access and protection of those areas inclusive of recreational opportunities.

The ECITA Inquiry is therefore of great interest to the DSMRA, and the organisation welcomes the opportunity to constructively contribute to this area of national importance.

Fundamentally the DSMRA supports the establishment and operation of national parks and conservation reserves¹. The DSMRA also advocates that with appropriate resourcing aligned with inclusive approaches to planning and management parks and reserves authorities can deliver improved outcomes for conservation and recreation purposes, which are both valid and valued objectives.

However, the DSMRA are concerned that parks and reserves have, at least in Queensland, been significantly under-resourced for the management required. And that management authorities have generally failed to operate on an inclusive and innovative basis that allows for appropriate levels of access for recreational uses.

Essentially the position of DSMRA is that parks and reserves management authorities need to actively engage with recreational and conservation groups, in an inclusive and transparent manner, to facilitate planning and management that caters for all stakeholders and issues relevant to the use and management of parks and reserves. Further, the DSMRA maintains that management authorities must be appropriately resourced to do so.

Whilst this is no small task, neither is it an onerous one. This has been demonstrated across Australia, and examples are noted. Adopting inclusive approaches, and an adaptive management model, will help to ensure world-class parks and reserves that meet both recreation and conservation objectives – and build significant public and political support.

Considerations with reference to the Terms of Reference

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

The DSMRA supports the establishment of National Parks and conservation reserves. It further supports the management of these reserves to ensure the sustainability of landscapes and habitats, and their suites of flora and fauna populations. The values

¹ This submission makes no reference to marine protected areas.

applicable to leading this management are considered to be those of conservation, recreation and economic activity, but only where that economic activity does not conflict with conservation or recreation.

Bioregional approaches to establishment of National Parks and conservation reserves are specifically supported. Indeed DSMRA maintains that bioregional and ecosystem representative approaches must be critical analytical and management objectives for parks and reserves². Further to that, the DSMRA supports the expansion of singular reserves to achieve a 'critical mass' of many landscape areas – most particularly in the wet-dry and dry tropical savannas. Stated more directly – the DSMRA supports the creation and management of more and bigger parks and reserves.

However, a critical issue for the DSMRA and its national membership is that of access.

The DSMRA advocates that the values relevant to the establishment and management of National Parks and conservation reserves must extend beyond those of natural values, and this has been a problem in some areas. In particular there is a need to explicitly measure, and manage for, recreational values across a broad spectrum of uses and expectations.

Consultation must be established to regularly obtain information on those recreational values, and to update them (probably on a three to five year rotational basis, across appropriate administrative regions). Where information on those values is gathered, then management can be exerted to identify opportunities for both conservation and recreational outcomes, in an adaptive management approach. Further to that, management authorities can then approach management objectives – including both conservation and recreation – in a regional context. By adopting this regional overview management authorities will inevitably identify significant opportunities and synergies that, where appropriately captured and managed, will work to the benefit of conservation and the community at large. This approach can work with the existing holdings of conservation estate, and as further landholdings are brought into the conservation estate they can be relatively easily factored in.

Obtaining, and subsequently maintaining a database of, these values need not be an onerous task. Community consultation methods are now well known and applied in many areas of National Park management to great effect.

An outstanding example of the application of community consultation and inclusion of external stakeholder values has been the management of feral deer populations in Royal National Park to the south of Sydney following large and destructive fires in the late 1990s. In this example engagement of stakeholders was achieved in a cost effective manner, and broad interests were included to the benefit and satisfaction of the vast

² The role of off-park conservation lands is not addressed in this submission. However, it is acknowledged that off-park conservation lands can, and should, provide significant benefits with respect to ensure an adequate suite of representative ecosystems and their maintenance – to say nothing of their emerging importance in carbon sequestration and climate change management.

majority. More importantly it allowed the inclusion of diverse stakeholder values to effectively manage populations of feral deer in a post-wildfire landscape. Failure to manage those deer would have otherwise resulted in a seriously degraded park of national importance and adjacent to one of Australia's major cities.

Another example of these approaches in a recreational context is detailed below with reference to work by the Department of Sustainability and Environment in Victoria (see p. 8 of this submission).

Inclusive and adaptive management approaches will also lead authorities to think of conservation estate landholdings as a suite of complementary landscapes and opportunities. Use of a 'suite approach' will also highlight unexpected intersections of interest and facilitate ease of management – synergies as it were.

An example will be where multiple use outcomes can be established in areas of more robust terrain. This should include the identification of areas suitable for 4WD and motorcycle use, and the establishment of tracks within these areas. An opportunity to explore the possibility of synergistic outcomes, that QPWS and QDPI (Forestry) fail to acknowledge or investigate, may currently exist at the State Forest Reserve that contains Mount Flagstone, Black Mountain and Mount Ellenvale, some 50km south of Townsville.³

QDPI (Forestry) have advised DSMRA that this State Forest Reserve was originally identified as a quarry resource, but it has since been determined that quarry resources being won from below the reserve are extensive, and the reserve will not be needed for quarry resources. The area is of robust geology, and has a diversity of terrain. With permission from management authorities, groups such as the DSMRA (whom have members with environmental and engineering expertise) could investigate the reserve (or indeed other reserves) and identify areas and routes for recreational motorcycle use. Given that the Townsville Branch of the DSMRA has within its membership environmental and engineering professionals this is an option at least worth exploring for its possibilities.

Routes could be selected and developed as single-track routes requiring no use of heavy machinery to establish, and located in sympathy with the landscape and topography to ensure minimal environmental impact. The expertise is also there to develop impact mitigation measures – e.g., rotational management, log corrugation crossings, rip rap in creek beds, constructed small bridging, monitoring programs – that would ensure the sustainability of the area and recreational motorcycle use. This can be achieved with little if any cost to state government. However, QDPI (Forestry) and QPWS have been unwilling to consider such a proposal, including when this was raised directly with them by DSMRA members at a meeting on 4 Nov 2005 in Townsville.

³ With some analysis it would not be difficult to find other areas where multiple use can be accommodated, including Cardwell State Forests, Lannercost/Abergowrie State Forests and Clement State Forest amongst numerous others.

The main point is that opportunities can be identified, where flexibility is exercised by management authorities.

Finally, a key value that must be achieved is inclusion – where the issue is getting parks and reserves management authorities to operate as members of the community, and acknowledging the social pressures around them. QPWS and QDPI (Forestry) privately acknowledge that illegal use of motorcycles occurs in parks and reserves, and that this is largely driven by rapidly reducing areas of public space in which people can go to ride. Like it or not, people want to ride dirt bikes, and indeed it helps keep kids in particular occupied and out of trouble. What is frustrating is that whilst the authorities privately admit there is a problem, they are neither willing to publicly acknowledge the problem nor to attempt to develop management solutions in the public lands which are our public parks and reserves.

Stated more directly – taking a ‘head in the sand’ approach to motorcycle use in parks and reserves will not make it go away, and indeed it makes the problem unmanageable. It also begs the question of why authorities are unable or unwilling to identify areas in which such activities can be undertaken in a responsible and sustainable manner.

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

Resources for general management are not visible to the DSMRA. What is apparent though, is a level of frustration amongst park rangers who wish to undertake meaningful environmental management programs, and appear not to have the resources to do so.

Through its membership the DSMRA knows that environmental management programs cost money, and sometimes significant amounts of it. DSMRA also understands that failure to spend monies, on what is effectively estate maintenance, results in a reducing quality of that estate and higher future costs – and more importantly undermines the sustainability of that estate.

The DSMRA endorses that adequate resources be allocated for basic land management programs. Such programs will include (but not be limited to):

- fire management (using mosaic burning techniques to reduce wildfire risk and concurrently optimise ecosystem diversity and sustainability);
- weeds control, driven by risk analysis with respect to those weeds present and their effect on ecosystem diversity and sustainability, as well as infrastructure maintenance (e.g., fence and fire impacts from weeds);
- feral animal control, where that can be achieved in a cost effective manner with direct ecosystem benefits (e.g., feral horse control);
- monitoring of various factors including: land condition; rare, threatened and endangered species; habitat, and particularly critical habitats; water quality; and land uses;

- coordination of management programs with neighbouring landholders to achieve results on a broader and more meaningful scale;
- basic infrastructure development and maintenance (e.g., fences, firebreaks, tracks and roads).

In relation to those programs the DSMRA understands the difficulties of parks and reserve managers. The DSMRA knows that appropriate management is a dynamic problem, and it involves adaptive management by people with applicable knowledge. Thus the input of organisations including the various Cooperative Research Centres (such as those for Pest Animals, Tropical Savannas and Fire amongst others) is considered to be important and appropriate. It is the view of the DSMRA that park/reserve management authorities would be well advised to build working links with these groups, as valuable knowledge resources.

In further support of park/reserve management authorities the DSMRA do not accept the mythology that parks are ‘overrun with ferals and weeds’, nor the naive assumption that unlimited access for groups such as pig shooters will result in any meaningful impact upon feral animal populations. Indeed such uncontrolled access is likely to cause more problems than it solves.

Where possible, to supplement resourcing, recreational interests should be included in the ‘management loop’. This would need to be a process that would evolve through time, but a simple input that could be initially provided would be weeds observation. In this instance members of recreational organisations could attend training (in their own time) to learn about the weeds of major risk in a given area (e.g., Siam weed, Parthenium weed, Gamba grass). They could then be provided with basic tools (e.g., identification cards and datasheets) to identify the plant/s, record details on spread and location, and even provide samples for verification. In this scenario it would be relatively easy to ‘grow’ a capability amongst selected recreational interests that could value-add to the monitoring of critical factors within any given park/reserve.

Alternately, groups that develop a strong relationship with management authorities could be provided with the approval to undertake management of their own activities. An example of this has occurred in Chichester State Forest in NSW⁴. In this case Glen Charlton of Barrington Tops Trail Bike Adventures works with management authorities to ensure he operates a sustainable activity – both in economic and ecological terms. Glen Charlton actively maintains trails in this area using a variety of techniques. This work is an example of the future of recreational motorcycling in parks and reserves. One technique is the use of reinforcing mesh that has been placed to stabilise the track thus “preventing erosion and the resulting pollution and sedimentation of the nearby creek”.⁵ There are a variety of other methods that can be used, and erosion control and

⁴ Knope, Steve. “Barrington Bliss”. *Trail Bike Adventure Magazine* #7 Jan/Feb 2006. pp. 33-35.

⁵ Jurd, Clinton. “Lets Hope Its Our Future” *Trail Bike Adventure Magazine* #7 Jan/Feb 2006. p. 36.

environmental impact mitigation have become regular features in the media of off-road motorcycling.⁶

Finally in this discussion on resources the application of zone-oriented planning (on the basis that planning outputs become management resources) needs note. Zone oriented planning, within any given park/reserve, is required to ensure that a true application of multiple use. Recreational organisations such as the DSMRA would welcome the opportunity to be involved in such processes. Applying these zonal methods⁷ would also give managers the tools to integrate and manage uses in a way that allows them to work within a sustainable framework – and meet the expectations of government and the public. It is understood that there is a lack of resources to develop suitable plans, and this is of great concern to responsible organisations such as the DSMRA.

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

When addressing the issue of threats to the objectives and management of parks/reserves, the DSMRA maintain there has been a general failure to explicitly address recreational uses of parks/reserves. This failure to engage with the broader public directly undermines ecological and recreational management, and alienates the broader public. This is not to say that conservation need take a back seat, but rather that all stakeholders must be given equal voice in the process of planning and management as it relates to the parks and conservation reserves of Australia.

The lack of resources, as discussed above in varying contexts is also a direct threat. Most particularly it is a threat to the sustainability of parks/reserves, but also by virtue of undermining public support and morale within management authorities.

This loss of public support is very important. Where there is a lack of support it is clear that abuse follows – with the dumping of cars and rubbish, illegal use and access, and even the taking of resources. However, where the public is engaged and supportive the level of threat to sustainability drops as the public take a real sense of pride in ‘their parks’.

A case in point is the work of both the community and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in Victoria to develop a State Forests Bike Plan, which started in 2004.⁸ In this process the DSE are actively working with diverse stakeholders (including

⁶ Over recent years magazines such as *Sidetrack*, *Trail Bike Adventure Magazine* (which bought out *Sidetrack* in 2006), *Australasian Dirt Bike* and *Trailrider* have regularly run items on environmental impacts and the responsibility all riders must adopt. It is now generally accepted within the sport that we have a responsibility to control our impacts and engage with management authorities in a real and meaningful way to curb and control the impacts of our sport.

⁷ Zones should be single use, as this only confines the ability to manage. Multiple use needs to be driven by land capability assessment, and protocols established to ensure appropriate behaviours of multiple land users.

⁸ Hill, Katherine. “Hard to Manage” *Sidetrack*. #53 Apr-May 2005. pp58-59.

the community, recreational motorcyclists, industry reps such as motorcycle retailers, and small businesses that benefit from the recreational land use) to develop a clear analysis of the problems and possibilities as they relate to parks/reserves and recreational land uses. What is promising is that whilst it is hard to manage recreational land uses, the “DSE recognises that trail bike riding in State Forest is a legitimate use in the same way as horse riding, four-wheel driving, camping etc are.” Further, they have been running workshops (that are “very well attended by trail bike riders”⁹), and are engaged in constructive discussions. Solutions that were being canvassed at the time included “education programs, joint patrol programs with local police, and funding for the establishment of better unloading areas, signage, track maintenance and the like.”¹⁰

The key point though is that the management authority has engaged with land users, and is working with them to identify and pursue constructive solutions. This highlights why the DSMRA maintain that engagement with all stakeholders is critical, and can work to ensure public support is built and maintained.

Another risk is that there appears to have been a failure to work with the recreational public to explore options for the use of Unallocated State Land (USL). Most people have no idea how to identify USL, much less how to approach the authorities regarding the use of it. It would be a wise move by parks/reserves managers to identify ways to work with groups like the DSMRA to identify USL opportunities. Not only would this help to ‘spread the impact’, but it would build dialogue and support that could go a long way in the area of park/reserve management.

There also appears to be a general failure to explore lease arrangements within conservation estate for recreational land uses. In this instance tour operators could provide controlled access for recreational land users in a way that give authorities a single point of contact, and lease arrangements that explicitly state the expectations and rights of both parties. It is the view of the DSMRA that there would be great benefits to be realised in this area.

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

Essentially the DSMRA maintain that there is a requirement to inventory holdings WRT natural values and recreational opportunities. This needs to be on the basis of bioregions, ecosystems and recreational opportunities – and must be representative and accessible. And, as stated above, the DSMRA supports the creation and management of more and bigger parks and reserves.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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

The DSMRA see three distinct opportunities here. Whilst there have been failures, the DSMRA feels it is better to focus on positive ways forward.

The first of these is the opportunity to build a more inclusive and reliable level of consultation and negotiation with recreational bodies such as the DSMRA. As partly evidenced by the submissions to this inquiry there is a lot of interest in the general public. It would be an opportunity lost if this interest were not captured, and turned to great benefit as outlined above in this submission.

In undertaking consultation and negotiation there also needs to be an improvement in the utilisation of appropriate KPIs to measure the performance of management authorities in engaging with the community and recreational groups. These should include turnaround times, numbers of community consultations, the appropriateness of their timing and operation, and general accessibility to management authorities. Failure to meet their own KPIs on consultation should be fed back into the management loop in a constant performance improvement model, not dissimilar to Environmental Management Systems (ISO14001:2004).

Finally, there is a real opportunity to effectively implement permitting systems. There has been a general failure to do this in north Queensland, even after much effort on the part of the DSMRA to comply with those systems. The benefits here can be to provide guidance to land users, and to collect use data that can inform management actions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The DSMRA recognise that management of parks and reserves is a complex and often times difficult task. It also recognises that management authorities have conflicting objectives and expectations to meet.

However, the DSMRA feels that management authorities have generally failed to capture opportunities for inclusive management, and have in some cases ignored the goodwill of recreational land users.

The DSMRA wish to engage with management authorities in a meaningful dialogue, and to value-add to conservation and recreation outcomes. The suggestions made in this submission are some of the ways in which this can be achieved.

The DSMRA recommends:

1. the creation and management of more and bigger parks and reserves;

2. the values relevant to the establishment and management of National Parks and conservation reserves must not only include, but extend beyond, those of natural values, and explicitly include recreational values across a broad spectrum of uses and expectations;
3. consultation must be established to regularly obtain information on those recreational values, and to update them - probably on a three to five year rotational basis - across appropriate administrative regions;
4. the adoption of regional overview by management authorities to identify significant opportunities and synergies that, where appropriately captured and managed, will work to the benefit of conservation and the community at large;
5. maintaining and regularly updating databases of natural, recreational and economic values for parks and reserves;
6. using inclusive and adaptive management approaches for managing parks and reserves (i.e., the conservation estate) as a suite of complementary landscapes and opportunities;
7. parks and reserves management authorities operate as members of the community, openly acknowledging the social pressures around them including recreational uses and the challenges of inclusive management:
 - this should in particular commence in relation to facilitating access for recreational groups where those groups contribute funds raised from the event to local schools and charities – as is the case with DSMRA;
8. adequate resources be allocated for basic land management programs including (but not be limited to):
 - fire management (using mosaic burning techniques to reduce wildfire risk and concurrently optimise ecosystem diversity and sustainability);
 - weeds control, driven by risk analysis with respect to those weeds present and their effect on ecosystem diversity and sustainability, as well as infrastructure maintenance (e.g., fence and fire impacts from weeds);
 - feral animal control, where that can be achieved in a cost effective manner with direct ecosystem benefits (e.g., feral horse control);
 - monitoring of various factors including: land condition; rare, threatened and endangered species; habitat, and particularly critical habitats; water quality; and land uses;
 - coordination of management programs with neighbouring landholders to achieve results on a broader and more meaningful scale;
 - basic infrastructure development and maintenance (e.g., fences, firebreaks, tracks and roads).

9. recreational interests should be included in the 'management loop' (e.g., for data collection with respect to weeds and erosion through the utilisation of identification cards and datasheets);
10. groups that develop a strong relationship with management authorities be provided with the approval to undertake at least some management of their own activities, noting the example of where this has occurred in Chichester State Forest in NSW (see p.6 and footnote 4);
11. the application of zone oriented planning, within any given park/reserve and across regional suites of regional parks/reserves, to ensure improved management for multiple uses;
12. management authorities immediately, actively and consultatively explore options for the use of Unallocated State Land (USL);
13. management authorities immediately, actively and consultatively explore lease arrangements within conservation estate for recreational land uses – in particular with tour operators to provide controlled access for recreational land users in a way that gives authorities a single point of contact, and lease arrangements that explicitly state the expectations and rights of both parties;
14. improvements in the utilisation of appropriate KPIs to measure the performance of management authorities in engaging with the community and recreational groups; and
15. effective and active implementation of permitting systems for recreational land users.

The DSMRA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission, and is available for further consultation with interested parties.