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6 April 2006

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

Dear Ms Dewar,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry and your willingness to accept this as a late submission.

One of my central research interests is the place of protected areas in society and the associated cultural and political landscapes. It is from this perspective that the following comments, which respond to the terms of reference for this inquiry, are made.

The reasons for the reservation and management of protected areas have always been highly socially and politically contextualized. Our earliest national parks in Australia (e.g Royal National Park south of Sydney) were set aside to protect appealing landscapes for society's 'pleasure' and enjoyment and as 'health and pleasure' resorts (e.g. Yanchep National Park to the north of Perth). These actions were a response, in large part, to the increasing urban existence of Australians at the time (late 19th century). Significant areas were then reserved in the 20th century and beyond to provide examples of landscapes as they were pre-European settlement, with many national parks and reserves being created to 'protect' landscapes from agricultural clearing and/or forestry activities.

In the last 20 years, several other significant social drivers of reservation have emerged. The one that has most influenced a generation of policy makers and the public has been notions of biodiversity and the importance of protected areas in protecting the world's biodiversity. The emphasis we have seen in Australian environmental policy on the importance of having a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system (to be achieved predominantly through protected areas) has been driven largely by this strong interest in biodiversity.

Another significant driver over the last 20 or so years has been efforts to acknowledge Aboriginal attachment to country, through giving land back to its original owners (e.g. Kakadu National Park) or by establishing mechanisms for joint management (e.g Purnululu National

Park). Designation of areas as national parks has proved to be an effective means of enabling Aboriginal ownership or at least joint management.

The last driver has been an increasing social and scientific interest in marine protected areas. This seems to have been driven by an array of social factors including Australians' preference for seaside living, rapidly increasing boat ownership and concerns regarding the need to protect marine biodiversity. The latter has paralleled and complemented terrestrial interest in biodiversity.

Collectively, protected areas reflect our historical and current interest in natural landscapes. As such, they are historically important as places that reflect our complicated relationships with the natural environment as an emerging nation and then as a player in world affairs. Given these social values *over time*, such areas require a consistency and permanency of management that is best achieved through government management for the 'public good'. Additionally, such management for the public good enables the needs of future generations, as well as past and present ones, to be clearly included in decision-making and management.

The 'public' importance of protected areas, as records of the past, areas attributed with multiple values by present generations and as the means of considering the needs of future generations, makes continued public management and support for protected areas essential. For these reasons, recent arguments that biodiversity needs can be met by private lands or quasi-public lands, such as IPAs, need to be tempered by the realization that biodiversity is only one of a suite of socially positioned values of protected areas. To achieve the expectations and meet the needs of current and future generations, public ownership (and management by government on the public's behalf) is critical.

Having said this, the public good values of protected areas requires that the views of the public are taken into account, where ever possible, in the planning for and management of protected areas. Given that these areas are managed on behalf of the various Australian publics (past, present and future) they need to be consulted and included in decision-making and management. A number of scholars have put forward the argument that where the values of the public can't be accessed (past and future generations) then it is the role of the public sector and has been a *de facto* role adopted by environmental groups, to provide these additional perspectives.

The implications of these comments with respect to the terms of reference are as follows:

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

- Protected areas have multiple values determined by their position in today's social and political landscape as well as their historical positioning and the anticipated needs of future generations (including, importantly, being able to keep our options open).

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

- Resources need to be sufficient for governments to meet their public good commitments with regards to protected areas.

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

- Threats are twofold (for the perspectives presented in this submission): (1) lack of recognition of the social positioning and hence importance of protected areas to

Australia's past and future; and (2) lack of recognition of the need for public lands, set aside for conservation and protection, managed by governments on the public's behalf.

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

- See points made under (c) above.

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

- Activities by governments to-date show a commitment to the importance of reserving and managing public lands that reflects society's relationships with and values regarding the natural environment. Although responsibilities for reserving and managing protected areas rests predominantly with the States, the public good nature of such areas signals a clear role for continuing involvement by the Commonwealth. Such a role is particularly important in ensuring the national historical importance of protected areas is acknowledged as well as reflecting and supporting current social views and values. The National Reserve System program, where the Commonwealth has assisted the States in purchasing land for addition to the protected area system, is a good example of where the federal government is supporting current interests to collectively achieve the national public good. Given my above comments, there is a vital, important and ongoing role for governments in protected area acquisition and management.

I wish you all the best with this important inquiry and would be happy to expand verbally on this submission if called to a hearing.

Yours sincerely,



Susan A. Moore