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Committee
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INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

My comments relate only to land based matters.

I regard this inquiry as a highly valuable opportunity to renew and redirect energy in a more inclusive and productive way to save these areas from catastrophic fire, serious erosion and damage from deluges that must be expected from global warming; and to enhance their quality and value to the community.

With this in mind I attempt below to identify issues and suggest productive change.

Structure

- a) Basic points relating to the terms of reference
- b) Fundamental issues
- c) Consideration

Terms of Reference

1. Values and Objectives

I have found over time that everyone experiences different perceptions, benefits and disappointments from the same activities. It is important that a maximum inclusiveness be always attempted in National Park and public land use opportunities, short of significant damage to the environment and another person's experience. Tolerance of other interests should be enshrined in the values and objectives to enhance the goal of inclusiveness.

Vehicular access should be enabled for example, but designed in each case sensitively, both as to quantity and positioning; and as to quality. Cradle Mountain in Tasmania is a good example, with a bitumen road to the lake for all, then walking tracks for those who want to experience the wilderness more deeply over a longer period.

Wonnangatta in Victoria is an example of seriously damaging the isolation/deep bush experience by upgrading the road so there are now traffic jams of people driving in and out on major holidays. Prior to the upgrade people self-selected so only those who wanted to have a longer period in deeper bush would go in slowly by 4WD and deal with bogging. The bogging was on flat ground so soil erosion was close to zero.

Much more soil is disturbed and eroded now by annual grading, with greater burning of fossil fuels.

2. Whether governments are providing sufficient resources

I believe sufficient resources are being provided.

What is lacking is resourcefulness in active management with inclusion of voluntary contribution by community groups. If interest groups were welcomed to actively contribute to management, and be treated with respect as part owners of the asset (rather than as pariahs) then great improvements would be made.

For example:

Parks Association members could be invited to participate in research observations and collections of data, track maintenance and all other things in accord with their skills and interests. This would be far better than using their time writing proposals to exclude almost everyone else from these public lands, and requesting that other people's time and money be used to attain their (Park Associations) goals.

Bushwalkers: Track maintenance, stabilisation and development, build and maintain toilets and huts, etc

High Country Huts Association: Build and maintain huts, etc.

4WD Associations: Road and track maintenance, hut and toilet work, etc.

Horse riders and outfitters/guides: Track stabilisation and building, weed control, etc.

Naturalists/academics: Research, observations, etc.

Hunting Associations: Feral animal reductions, observations and all other activities

Fishing Associations: Riparian repairs, replantings, weed control, toilets, etc.

Skiers: Toilet and hut development, replantings, track work, etc.

3. Threats to the objectives

Examples of traditional Australian National Park management by governments are the stupidities and inequities that major private entities are allowed to build major buildings and facilities for their private gain in National Parks, but the various interest groups above are not allowed to control pests, maintain and build the basic facilities badly needed for general public use and interest, or worse are excluded or being manoeuvred to be excluded.

Fundamental issues:

1. There is close to universal perception that the areas under inquiry are mismanaged.
2. Bureaucracies, national park associations and other extremists say the best is being done that can be done, and in any case as much area as possible should be declared under one of these forms of 'protection' because otherwise commercial pressures will cause degradation.
3. Vast areas are being largely or totally destroyed by fire under this regime.
4. The deliberate policy of non-intervention in these 'natural' areas is causing change towards a balance of plant and animal species and populations that has never existed before.
5. To conserve requires active management.

6. A shift is needed from the focus on resources, to resourcefulness, in management.
7. Counter-productive exclusive park administration concepts
8. The narrowness of thinking that has developed in related areas of academia, and consequently their students who go on into 'management' of these areas is such that the areas are being seriously damaged and destroyed, rather than conserved, by the policies developed from this thinking and consequent advice to governments.

Consideration

Perception of mismanagement

It is fair to say that there is universal support for the concept of national parks and conservation areas. But observations by a reasonable person cause most of the community to see that there is no, or grossly inadequate, active management of the areas. The grand land lock up experiment is failing, badly.

News of yet another major, damaging fire in a declared national park or conservation area is enough to show that they are not adequately managed.

Those who have read what was here when white man arrived are seeing that the current management practices are changing that condition grossly.

Passive administration will not conserve a condition in natural areas because erosion is a natural phenomenon and because this was not an empty land when white man arrived. The fact that Australia's landscape is relatively flat and that this was caused by erosion makes clear that leaving areas 'to nature' will cause further erosion to occur. This can be seen in the aftermath of the fires in 2002-03, for example, which have caused dreadful soil erosion in a great many areas. The Cotter River was still running bright yellow with clay (not ash) into the Murrumbidgee River 15 months later, after passing through the three dams for the Canberra water supply. The erosion started by those fires has not yet been controlled and stopped.

The erosion caused by those fires is infinitely greater than any caused by grazing since white man arrived. To conserve what we have requires active management.

We must re-examine axioms and actively develop a complex of management priorities and patterns of conservation treatments that will enact the "lesser of evils".

Patterns of behaviour must be changed.

Australia had been managed for tens of thousands of years by Aborigines. Any change from that active management will bring change in the plant and animal populations. Those populations cannot go back to what they were before the Aborigines arrived because there has been too much change and loss of original plant and animal life over tens of thousands of years for it to reconstruct.

What will develop from this 'passive management' will be something new. That is not conservation. That is blind experimentation on a scale that is far too huge.

The National Parks administrators went on as if nothing happened after about 8 million acres of National Parks and other public lands under their care was burnt out to devastation in NSW and Victoria in 2003.

These same people give credibility to extremists who fuss that a horse's hooves may injure a blade of grass, or their droppings from recreational riding might over fertilise the country or spread weeds. If anyone wants to see weeds they should visit a National Park in Australia. These weed infestations have occurred and flourished under the 'management' of the National Parks service. Horses have nothing to do with blackberries, but check them out on public lands in NSW and Victoria. Most if not all of those weeds were put there by the careless toiletry arrangements of irresponsible parrots and other birds.

I found on a recent visit to Yellowstone National Park in the USA a car park for the use of horse floats only.

A shift in governance away from locking things up and guarding them against intervention, and towards an outcomes focused management, directed to actively intervening with maximum resourcefulness, is urgently needed to reduce threats to the objectives.

1. Values and objectives

There is consequently need to more precisely define what we wish to conserve in terms of values and objectives, and then to actively intervene and manage to achieve those aims.

Surely what we should aim to conserve and actively redevelop in national parks and conservation areas is primarily the soil, water, plant and animal conditions that existed in 1788. That includes ongoing human management, for example to avoid soil erosion, manage precipitation and its impacts, and control plant and animal population content and balance.

Values would include that unique 1788 environment for study and enjoyment.

Some change is appropriate for current and future human enjoyment. Examples include hut and toilet facilities, and acceptance that some animal and plant change is relatively benign and can be managed with community input. Brumbies and deer come into that category in the animal field. Whereas cats, foxes, wild dogs, pigs, blackberries and other invasive weeds need the best suppression that public contributions can make.

The invasiveness of some native heath type plants needs fire management to return to a better balance of grass and wildflowers, and to reduce wildfire risk.

2. Government resourcing: “All is being done that can be done, and that is better than risk of commercial use”;

and

Fire

and

Passive administration causing change and disasters, not conservation.

Far too little active management of plant and animal populations is occurring, and the concepts of what can be done within a budget are far too narrow.

To conserve what we had and perhaps reconstruct back towards 1788 soil, water, plant and animal conditions requires a level and range of active management similar to that practised by Aborigines. They knew for example that not controlling fuel loads will bring devastation when lightning strikes occur in combination with dry or drought conditions.

I referred earlier and will refer again below to voluntary community involvement as an element of resourcefulness in achieving outcomes that are unlikely to be achieved in a timely manner with government resources because of competing needs for public funds. I also refer below to leadership by 'commercial use' land holders in conservation over the last 20 years or so, while public lands have been neglected. Public management has not been a better option for land conservation than much/most commercial use in recent history.

Fire

Devastating wild fires enabled by high fuel loads are not an 'act of God'. Each is an act of gross mismanagement. An academic is reported as stating that the 2003 fires in Kosciusko were the worst in 22,000 years. That is consistent with the Aborigines deciding 22,000 years ago to never allow such conditions to build up again.

The devastating national park fires in recent years such as in Royal National Park near Sydney; in New England, NSW; and the southern NSW and Victorian Parks in 2003 cause disastrous soil erosion and major changes in water absorption rates, plant and animal devastation and population changes.

To my knowledge no senior parks management sackings occurred over this mismanagement. Worse still, I am not aware of any responsibility being taken by those in parks management or among responsible Ministers for this disastrous destruction of these areas for which they have the responsibility to conserve in trust for the community. An ever-expanding policy of neglect seems to be entrenched.

Cool burns and/or carefully controlled grazing is necessary to avoid catastrophic fires. By learning what we can now from historic official and unofficial records a balance of burns to control the quantity of heath vegetation and reduce woody fuel loads can be developed. To minimise the amount of burns so as to learn what effect they have on the variety of plants there as our expertise grows, we need carefully controlled grazing. It may be that a balance of carefully managed cattle, sheep and goats and deer may be the best way to manage grass and heath/woody weeds growth with a minimum of burning.

Alec Costin (A.B. Costin, *A Study of the Ecosystems of the Monaro Region*, CSIRO, c. 1953) seemed to believe that fire could be excluded from the Monaro and contiguous regions, and repeatedly stated that burning should be stopped in the best interests of the region. Since he wrote that seminal piece of work we have had the

2003 fires and the 1952 major fire that came out of the Brindabella area and could not be stopped at Canberra. We urgently need to develop expert scheduling of cool burns to ensure that minimal damage is done to plant and animal regimes we have or want to redevelop. These burns would aim to ensure that catastrophic wild fires have minimal chance of developing.

They would not be the hot burn disaster that “environment people” in the ACT Government lit in the Cotter catchment during the dry autumn of 2006. Better informed people were outraged and made public statements that included reference to vandalism and pyromania. A sensible burn time would have been late winter/early spring when everything had a depth of dampness from winter.

Alec Costin was also firmly of the view that grazing should be stopped in a large area of what is now Kosciusko National Park. In the 1940s when he wrote this, it was basically a matter of uncontrolled grazing, or none. What could not be fenced economically then could be now. There is better resourcing and knowledge for monitoring grazing and managing it closely for specific purposes today. A combination of Parks and grazier funding could be used.

To achieve a greater population of kangaroos to graze down dry grasses would require a vastly more active wild dog/dingo control activity. If anyone questions this then they only need to look at the kangaroo population in the Victorian high country. There are very few kangaroos because the dingoes keep them down. Kangaroos have not been shot in Victoria for decades. There were few there in 1788. They do not browse, nor do they eat the range of plants that the aforementioned mixture of animals do, nor in fact do they eat dry grass unless desperate, so a good deal more managed burning would be necessary if managed grazing with domesticated animals is not used.

The Wonnangatta valley is a disaster waiting to happen now that the cattle have been removed, for example. Victorian rural fire authorities have raised this with Parks administrators to no effect. Hunters have raised these concerns with authorities to no effect. Kangaroos have not populated the area. The same dangerous mess can be expected to develop in the other areas where cattle grazing is now to be excluded. Those areas have been managed by the grazing families for the last 150 years or so. These families took over from Aboriginal management of grazing, and fire and wild dog control. They have done it at no cost to the community. What is the estimated cost of public resource that will be needed to manage so as to avoid the disasters of 2003 on public land taken over recently from graziers?

I appreciate that conventional wisdom would immediately brand me a crackpot among the parks bureaucrats and academics following the prior paragraphs, because their thinking on plant and fire management is virtually non-existent. Their focus has been on whether something has been ‘introduced’ rather than seeing changes in native species, and developing action to redress those changes, to conserve the balance and range of all living things.

The population of large macropods in Australia has probably not been as high as it is now since the Aborigines first came to Australia. Early explorer records do not indicate large populations. It is only a few years since I discovered why the depiction

of kangaroos look a bit badly drawn in the early rural paintings. It is because they were a long way away and only seen very early and very late in the day by the artists. I was out on a property near Canberra late one afternoon that I had attended weekly for many years when I saw kangaroos looking like the old paintings. They were on a ridge about 250-300 metres away in the late afternoon sun. The strong shadow on parts of them caused them to look just like the paintings of the 19th century. These high kangaroo populations are not achieving the balance, nor reducing fire risk, as some people may theorise. Professional shooters have been brought into the S.E of Australia for the first time to control them.

What had happened to the small animal populations that were said to be approaching extinction when Alec Costin observed their condition in the 1940s, since exclusion of stock and burning, before 2003? What was the result after the 2003 fires? Eg p239

The public as owners with rights and responsibilities

In America on entering a National Park, the staff give the visitor an “Owners Manual”. There is clear recognition at all times at all levels that these areas belong to the public. As owners the public has rights, and obligations/responsibilities.

In Australia the bureaucracies give every impression that they are the only ones who know best and can be trusted to do ‘the right thing’. They do their best to keep the public and other expert bodies such as rural fire authorities out, and to minimise public involvement in management. This is nonsense, and needs to be changed urgently.

We only need to look as far as New Zealand to see a philosophy that is near to the opposite end of the spectrum. Parks staff there welcome people into the parks, and they construct and maintain huts and toilet facilities in good order so that people can enjoy the parks and be safe in doing it. They inform the public constantly on walking tracks, huts, conditions, work being done, research being undertaken, etc. etc. See www.doc.govt.nz Tens of thousands of tourists are attracted to New Zealand and to walk in its parks as a result.

In contrast, in Australia parks staff are constantly looking for excuses to restrict public access and to destroy historic huts in the parks. They do little or nothing to build new ones to enhance the enjoyment and safety of public access to these areas. They have attempted to delay and avoid rebuilding those burnt in the disastrous fires of 2003. Recently there has been some agreement to allow voluntary work on some of the sites.

Vastly more could be achieved at current government resource levels by inviting public voluntary participation.

Soil conservation, and plant and animal population management can be assisted by the public at little or no cost. I have helped scout groups weed areas near beaches for example. Parks associations could be invited to roll their sleeves up and contribute voluntarily to plant management in a real manner. Bushwalking groups, with a small cost in oversight, could be invited to assist in a similar way. These groups tend to be heavily biased to plant and rock interests.

There is a case for personal spraying of poison on woody weeds by parks staff. Boom spraying from vehicles or from aircraft is too broad a cast of poison in parks/conservation areas.

Because of the imbalance in parks administration leadership whereby too little emphasis is given to wildlife expertise, I draw particular attention below to feral animal management.

Animal management can be greatly assisted by voluntary public activity in a much less damaging way than the parks administrators have been practising. Current policy relies far too heavily on poisons. Poison should be an absolute last resort in national parks and conservation areas. New Zealand has widely used poisons broadly cast from aircraft to poison Australian possums and introduced deer, but health damage to people is being observed and of course the bird life can be expected to have suffered. Poisoning is being wound back in New Zealand.

Where foot based shooting has been used in National Parks, for example in New Zealand and in South Australia, and to some extent in Victoria it has proved a highly successful method of reducing feral animal populations. It is precise and humane. Helicopter shooting by government paid personnel is expensive and less humane. There are a number of hunting and shooting organisations of long-standing and reliable management in Australia. They would be pleased to assist in animal population management, and have done so successfully in South Australia and Victoria. The budget for this would be minimal. Members of these organisations would provide their services voluntarily. Together with local voluntary hunting, feral animals such as donkeys in the north can be culled by overseas hunters guided by Australian licensed professionals. Substantial offshore ('export') income can be earned in ridding park areas of feral animals, as New Zealand does.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service recently raised for official sanction a proposal to add three Refuges to the list of Refuges open to hunting and fishing and increase those activities in six others (hunting by the public is used for animal management on 37 such Refuges). This is part of their humane management involving the community in the balance of wild life against sustaining plant resources. The nine Refuges currently under review are in Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey and Wisconsin – quite a large area of the US.

The recently established Game Council in NSW is beginning to provide these services on public land. There is a lot of unnecessary bureaucracy attached to it at this early stage, which has not been found necessary in Victoria, New Zealand or America. In Victoria and other states hunting of feral animals on public land has been ongoing.

Hunters are the original conservators, and internationally continue to put more funding and time into conservation than any other group in Australia and elsewhere. Their efforts benefit habitats broadly and a great many species of birds and animals that are not hunted.

It has become a conventional wisdom among academics and bureaucracies in Australia that shooting by private individuals is inadequate in reducing animal

populations. Where voluntary foot hunting has been applied in a broad and considered manner, and the effects measured, such as in South Australia it has been shown clearly to be very effective and very cheap. The decades long foot culling by hunters in New Zealand maintained control of populations of deer and other introduced species until commercial hunting was introduced for international commercial markets. Members of hunting organisations are pleased to have the opportunity to hunt, and to play a role in conservation. The negative conventional wisdom is self-serving and herd comfort among Australian academics and bureaucracies, but quite clearly wrong.

Parks staff need to be brought to understand this and get over their bureaucratic fear of public interest groups and expert authorities such as rural/forestry fire authorities, ruining 'their' parks.

In New Zealand public land has been open to hunting, and specific public access rights along all streams are reserved in legislation, whether on private property or public land. Permits are readily issued to hunt introduced species in National Parks in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Government enabled an open trial of management efficiency of hunting and other game management matters between the bureaucracy and a trial Game Council, and found that the Game Council was much more efficient and effective. That major portion of wildlife management was moved by the government from their bureaucrats to full responsibility of the Game Council. The matter continues to be efficiently and effectively managed by the Game Council.

Similarly, interested groups (including parks association members, bushwalkers, 4WD club members, anglers, hunters and horse riders) are keen to build huts with voluntary labour and already help in track maintenance. Much of the building material would also be provided by these voluntary groups. A small amount of parks staff oversight and discussive input would be all that is required to ensure the design and construction is agreed in accord with environmental and safety requirements. This is another field of endeavour where much more could be done with current resources, by including the public (the owners) much more in park and conservation area management.

Track maintenance voluntary help should be invited from 4WD clubs, motor bike, push bike, and horse riders as well as other interest groups, as part of their obligation and responsibilities in enjoying the Parks and conservation areas.

Members of those public voluntary interest group associations would gain an increased sense of ownership and responsibility through the increased involvement and respect entailed in contributing to national parks and conservation area management. More care in driving, riding, hut usage, etc in parks and conservation areas can be expected from this. Savings in public resource input would be significant.

The ACT Government has recently made known its thoughts that managing parks is too expensive and is talking about handing them over to NSW to look after. Another

sad example of the poverty in thinking and narrow sense of responsibility at government level.

3. Threats to the objectives and management

The major threat to the objectives and management of land based national parks and conservation areas in Australia, is park administrators. It would be an exaggeration to call them managers. This is partly caused in my observation by a preponderance of 'plant and rock people' in the higher levels to the exclusion of wildlife expertise and interest. A better balance of wildlife expertise will bring with it an increased focus on population dynamics and action to address habitat needs.

Learned helplessness has paralysed bureaucracies in recent years, and has been enhanced by bullying politicians. We need to renew efforts to attract the best and brightest to public service, then develop their judgement and active outcomes orientation.

Conserving soil is the highest priority. Minimising wildfire risk, most effectively by shifting management of fire from parks administrators to the fire authorities in each state, together with cloud seeding, is the first step in soil conservation. That would reduce the major threat to national park and conservation areas on land.

Cloud seeding to overcome the reduced precipitation caused by global warming needs to be re-introduced. Cloud seeding will help re-establish plant and animal populations and reduce fire risk. It was used to fill Warragamba Dam quickly. People have caused global warming so we have a responsibility to intervene to reduce and overcome its impact on national parks and conservation areas while we work through how to stop our pollution that is causing global warming. Precipitation has reduced by an average of 50mm p.a. in the S.E. of Australia over the last 50 years because of human activities. We have a responsibility to replace it in National Parks and conservation areas by cloud seeding.

In the USA (Idaho as I recall) I have seen lodge pole pine and other trees killed by fire, that were then fallen horizontally across steep slopes to slow water run off and assist in rehabilitation.

Riparian work on plantings and log clearing to avoid erosion is now needed to cope with the increased savagery of flooding that is to be expected as global warming impacts worsen.

Research

A research philosophy that is based on the ideology of locking areas up and not intervening with nature would continue the observation type research that has been done. Even much of that research has been done in the free time of individual scientists, and much of it against the will of the administrators.

Observations on what is there is passive. I have referred elsewhere to the certain disasters that will continue to occur under the present ideology of passive administration.

What is needed to reduce the major threats to maintaining and redeveloping soil, water, plant and animal conditions towards those existing in 1788 is management that is directed to how to actively achieve the 1788 circumstance. That needs to be supported by a shift in research towards active intervention to most effectively achieve stabilisation and redevelopment as soon as possible. Greater emphasis on applied research that concludes with recommendations on action to achieve outcomes is needed.

In the 1970s 'conservation' in Australia was focused on kangaroos. Well-meaning blue-rinse ladies in Washington and elsewhere were driving world pressure on Australian conservation policy and focusing it on kangaroos.

This was not changed by national parks and environmental authorities. It was changed by the Hon. John Kerin as Minister for Primary Industry, and his Department; by drawing attention to the primary, major issues of soil and water conservation.

Research funding was directed to these issues, the "Landcare" movement was started, Greening Australia was established, Prime Minister Bob Hawke announced a goal of planting (a billion?) trees. Progress continues to be made on all these fronts.

National parks administration gives every impression that it is still in the mindset of the 1970s, where stopping people from doing things, while counting and whining about withering animal and plant populations is the focus.

Research findings, for example, that heath is a higher fire multiplier than grass and herbs is a waste of valuable research opportunity. Everyone who has seen or dealt with fire in the bush has known that from time immemorial. What we need researched is how, when, where, by whom and how often should fire be used in National Parks and other conservation areas to best conserve them from disastrous wild fires, and stabilise them in condition similar to that of 1788.

How grazing and browsing can be used to minimise the need for control burning is obviously also what we need to know. People who know the basics of land management already know that soil stability is best ensured by trees and grazed/burnt grass and herbs. This keeps plant density high and minimises the deep and destructive hot burns of dense heath or long tussocky grass. The conservation needs of heath lands and wild life dependent on them have to be taken into account obviously.

Resourcefulness

A key concept is: "It is not a matter of resources, but a matter of resourcefulness".

Resourcefulness should particularly include inviting public help and involvement, dumping forever the 'holier than thou', exclusive attitude that has been the hallmark of the administrators. This will bring into play a vast amount of voluntary resource input and change attitudes amongst public interest groups so that less damage will be done as well.

Such a shift away from non-intellectual, risk averse, learned helplessness, passive reporter administration would remove the major threats to the land based national parks and conservation areas. With this major change in management, an ongoing change management program will be needed to adjust the approach and sense of participation through all levels of staff from top to bottom.

This shift would need to be discussed with the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee so that a shift is instituted in the way Australian biological/parks academia develops thinking and presents it in writings and among students.

4. Responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks and conservation areas

Global warming caused by human industrial activities has been real since the industrial revolution and will bring increasing weather extremes of drought and floods, and shifts in rainfall/snow patterns. This was made clear to the federal government about 20 years ago by CSIRO. A key government responsibility is to address causes of global warming, and to recognise the increased risk of devastating fires and floods that it is bringing to public lands.

In the S.E. of Australia, and in Tasmania, there would only be tiny, if any, further areas that should be classified as national parks.

The Forestry Commissions/authorities in each state have a far better record of conservation than the national parks authorities. Most of the area already classified as national parks and conservation areas would benefit from a shift to "forest park" classification with the Forestry Commissions managing them actively. Again New Zealand is ahead of Australia in this respect.

State Forestry Commissions have the equipment and management expertise in a more balanced condition than the parks management authorities, both to fight and manage fires, and to rehabilitate areas. Specific trees could be harvested (not clear felling) under this management, together with replanting of tree species to return the balance. This would include planting commercially valuable trees such as Australian Red Cedar, Red Mahogany, Silver Beech, Coachwood, Blackwood and the various other species that have been harvested from the areas since 1788 because of their commercial value.

This would give an additional level of purpose and income generation to fund active management needed.

Tapping the resource of public interest groups and other volunteers

Parks Association and bushwalking club members, Scouts and other interested parties could provide much of the tree planting labour, similarly to the voluntary input in other areas of need discussed above. Many people in the community would be pleased to help if invited and some positive organisation and leadership were to be provided. Current Park 'management' is in the opposite direction.

One only needs to look at the "Clean Up Australia", "Greening Australia" and "Landcare" activities to see what is possible.

If people feel no direct sense of ownership and/or something has no value for which people are prepared to pay or work voluntarily, then it will not be well maintained. Returning value and community involvement to plant and animal species has been highly successful in Africa as well as North America and Europe.

Rehabilitation of grazing land by landcare groups demonstrates that commercial management of land is now well in advance of parks management in many respects. Greening Australia is quite expert now at management to conserve and enhance populations of a beneficial range of plants and native animals (including birds).

It is now dishonest and/or arrogant and ignorant to suggest areas are best locked up to keep them from further degradation.

Victoria's high country will now suffer devastating fires and weed outbreaks where grazing has been recently removed by government. This will be the direct result of removing good managers who were active in maintaining the areas, and their replacement by parks staff and their 'passive management'. These areas were readily available for public enjoyment while under grazing management. Precisely specified contract grazing to achieve specific aims should be instituted in these areas.

Much greater public, particularly interest group, involvement by government in parks and conservation area management with the managerial support of government will be hugely beneficial.

The small area of land affected by cattle tracks throughout the whole of the Victorian high country is only equivalent to a few metres in length of any one of the number of roads built into the area. Much of the grazing impact on the land that some people point to, was caused by the rabbit populations in the 1920s-1950s. Consideration of these matters has become hysterically distorted by urban extremist propaganda.

5. Record of Government

Australian governments have an outstanding record of creating national parks and conservation areas, but a dreadful record of mismanaging them.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Well-meaning academics and park administrators, urged on by other well meaning urban based puritans have put national parks and conservation areas on that road.

Governments have accepted that noise, and the poor, narrow policy advice from those groups too readily.

Recommendations

1. Committee members carefully inspect the Kiandra area, as a readily accessible region, to appreciate the devastation caused by the 2003 fires. (I can provide guides.)
2. Define precisely what condition of plant and animal balance we wish to conserve and redevelop in each area. Include this in management plans for public comment.
3. Clearly recognise, in legislation, that active interventionist management to conserve and redevelop as defined is required of management staff.
4. Move responsibility for fire management in national parks and conservation areas to the rural fire authority in each state. If there is a separation between forestry fire authority and rural fire authority in particular areas, then it is most likely that the forestry authority would be the most appropriate. Legislation should state that such rural fire authority will take account of the conservation goals in that area.
5. Legislate to change the status of much of the current national park area to 'forest park' to be managed by the forestry authorities.
6. Include in the active intervention management, legislated requirement that voluntary input by the public is to be invited and included, becoming resourceful rather than demanding more resources.
7. Take steps through the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee to change academic focus to active interventionist management of parks and conservation areas.

I have over 30 years of voluntary office bearing experience in outdoor-related national organisations, including at the highest level.

I would be pleased to appear before the committee.

Ian Coombes