

Submission to the Senate Enquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a report of concerns to this Senate Enquiry.

Introduction.

This report will endeavour to express the concerns of myself, and others in relation to Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas with emphases on the role and management of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of Australia (hereafter known as NPWS).

Once again we find ourselves at the mercy of the unfettered NPWS. Once again the NPWS is contemplating the creation of new park areas and the expansion of current national parks areas within Australia. At what cost to the public in relation to financial costs and the constant deterioration of the freedoms, rights and heritage of the common person.

National Parks and Wildlife Service of Australia.

Public perception of the NPWS is very poor. Everyone likes to visit national parks and appreciates their beauty and environmental significance. The perception now is that the government and in particular the NPWS are out of control and creating national park areas for no other reason than “they can”. Another perception is that the NPWS creates new park areas to justify their own existence. Even Conservation groups and committees recognise the failures of the national parks systems.

Poor management has led to the practise of acquiring land without consideration of the long-term environmental impact. Vast tracks of national parks are “locked up” because of a lack of finances and staff to effectively monitor them. Without the effective monitoring of these areas ground fuel has been left to rise to dangerous levels, tracks are unmaintained creating dangerous firetraps. In some areas this practise has led to the unchecked infestation by feral fauna and flora.

As a rural resident of Sussex Inlet NSW I survived the intense bushfires in December 2001/January 2002. One week later I drove into the burnt remains of the Morton National Park. I don't think that any staff from the NPWS had ever been there before. Surely they would not neglect a national park to the extent that 30 – 40 dead trees per acre are allowed to accumulate on the ground creating a massive fire risk. The trees I counted were only the ones of about 1metre diameter or greater.

I have visited national parks on a monthly basis for approximately 15 years and only once have I ever seen National park staff.

It is poor management practise to purchase land for the public and then to neglect maintenance of the areas and tracks to a point where they deteriorate and thus must be closed to the public.

It is a well-known fact from previous NPWS reports that they have far exceeded their practical abilities to maintain and managing the already vast areas of National Parks.

People have complained to myself that they woke up one morning and found bushland areas adjacent to, or near their homes, are now national parks. They don't remember reading anything about the change in any of the local media.

We all realise that there is the need for a governing body to preserve and protect areas of heritage, environmental or cultural significance. I am at a loss to understand why the NPWS considers that a significant area of say about 1-2 hectares must be surrounded by 1000 hectares of nation park. It can't be justified.

Public access has been severely restricted by the NPWS. State forest and parts of state forests have been converted to the governess of the NPWS creating virtual human wastelands. Areas that were once utilized by prospectors, campers, bushwalkers, caravan owners, 4wd enthusiasts, trail bike riders and various other recreational groups are now subjected to restricted access and, or complete closure. This is done for little or no apparent reason.

Australian culture and heritage are being repressed by the ideologies of the NPWS. For hundreds of years the Australian people have looked at the vast expanse of beach, forest, open land, rivers and streams as being part of our culture. To be free and able to go to the beach, go bush, take a dip in a stream, explore that valley. That's what we as Australians are all about. To enjoy our recreational activities as our fathers and grandfathers have done over many years. I don't want to show my grandchildren a photo of a picturesque valley or a flowing stream only to tell them that we can't go there any more.

Financial considerations must be taken into account on the issue of the creating or expanding the national park system. As stated previously reports from the NPWS state that they do not have the financial nor human resources to adequately manage the current NPWS system. They consider the fact that tourism is good for the economy but at what expense to Australians. National parks within the vicinity of capital cities create vast tourism dollars due to their location to vast numbers of people within these cities and ease of access via transport access. Have the NPWS considered the impact of national parks on smaller communities. I consider not. Ask a small town retailer near a state forest about what would happen if the area were converted to a national park. The business would diminish if not cease. You might have a dribble of high priced tourist purchasing petty Australian icons and tokens but will lose the constant stream of state forest users such as campers, bushwalkers and others mentioned previously in this document that purchase fuel, groceries, toiletries, alcohol etc. Most of the latter have extended stays within the area as opposed to the usual day trip of tourist.

Education of the public should be considered the priority at this moment. Education works. Being a very keen prospector, fisherman, camper and bushwalker I meet a lot of likeminded people. One of the most pronounced topics discussed are the agreement of all to the “Tread Lightly “ theory and the disgust at the on goings of the rogue element. This is a clear example how education can change the culture and ideaologies of people. More effort should be taken to identify and prosecute people who wilfully damage the bush and the ecosystems of public lands. Increased penalties and media education would help to discourage such activities. Once again the people who take responsibility for their actions in the bush are being punished, by being disadvantaged, because of the actions of the minority.

Conclusion.

Inquiry into national parks management not national parks. There should be an enquiry into the management, practise and procedures of the NPWS before they are allowed to confer and implement any decision that will effect the environment and the people of Australia. Better management practises and a review of the departments current “closed” culture should be engaged to curtail the current crisis facing the NPWS.

It would be better to act now against the NPWS before the situations escalates.

It is the position and opinion of myself and others that the Federal Government should be held ultimately **accountable** for the actions and implementations of the NPWS.

“MANAGE” OUR LANDS FOR ALL.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Submitted for favourable consideration.

Regards

R J Hiscox