



28th February 2006

The Committee Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Reference Committee,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA

Dear Secretary,

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

Please find attached our Associations submission, in response to your inquiry into Australia's national parks.

Accompanying our submission are Schedule's A, B, C and D.

We trust that the outcomes of this enquiry will facilitate improved management practices in relation to Australian national parks where necessary, and will be used to better the education and understanding of land managers.

Should you have any queries regarding this submission please contact our office on 03 9857 5209.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Coldham
President



SUBMISSION TO THE
FEDERAL INQUIRY
INTO
NATIONAL PARKS.
February 2006

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO NATIONAL PARKS.

Preamble:

Our resources are restricted to Annual Reports kindly provided by Parks Victoria, the observations of our members, anecdotal evidence from sources who prefer to remain anonymous and members of the public who have provided us with factual experiences.

Five major areas of concern:

1. Staffing numbers.
2. Pest plants
3. Pest animals.
4. Fire.
5. Money.

Staffing of the Department responsible for management of National Parks:

We maintain that over a period of twenty-two years, actual maintenance of our National Parks has been neglected while management has blossomed.

- The National Parks Services Annual Report 1982/1983 page 8, (Refer Schedule 'A' attached) heading 'Staff' reports that there are seventy staff at Head Office with 45 District Offices and 272 Parks employees. Our assessment is that 115 staff are looking after 272 field staff. This means that every Head office staff member administers 2.4 field staff.
- The National Parks Act 2005 Annual Report reports that there are 1021 direct employees. There are an 'estimated' 289 Rangers and 107 Field Services Officers. Our assessment is that there are now 625 Head Office staff looking after 396 field staff. Now, one Head Office staff member administers point six (.6) field staff. Refer Appendix 'B' for a full 2005 Staff report.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that, where a National Park is close to a large community, the number of staff employed is increased to provide for a higher number of visitors than a remote location. An example is Wilson's Promontory National Park; Staff has an office at Tidal River that is invariably manned. The park has a highly visible number of Rangers going about their duties.

Members of staff in East Gippsland provided the information that there is one Ranger in Bendoc, one at Cann River, three at Orbost and that there are only two staff committed to noxious weed eradication between Sale and the NSW border.

Staff members complain that they are called into the office to explain minor details of a report, or meetings or to write reports for the new layers of management that require input to justify their positions.

Total area and number of National Parks:

For a Summary of National Parks et. al. areas and staffing, please refer to Schedule 'D' attached.

In 1983 there were 30 Schedule two 'National Parks' with a total area of 685,808 hectares. There were 23 Schedule 3 'State Parks' with a total area of 298,080 hectares. (There was 272 field staff.)

In 2005 there are 39 Schedule two 'National Parks' with a total area of 2,663,135 hectares. There are now three 'Wilderness Parks' totalling 202,050 hectares, 44 State and other parks totalling 256,460 hectares. Marine Parks and Reserves add up to a total of 3,235,249 ha (There are 396 Field staff)

If the lack of country staffing (previous page) is the truth, we hypothesise that Victorian Governments have heeded the demands of groups in our community who have insisted that our public land should be 'locked up and left'.

4WD Victoria looks sadly at our Alpine National Park. We wonder why it is that there is no recognition that our indigenous friends have lived in this area for many thousands of years and the land now has to have the hand of man to help it get back to the pristine condition that we took away from them in 1788.

It certainly appears that the demands of the Public Relations officers are heeded before the care of the environment. How else can we view the input of large amounts of taxpayers funds to quote 'repair the damage caused by over one hundred years of damage through cattle grazing' end quote when we have observed no evidence that cattle have done the damage claimed. Deer, pigs, goats and wild horses are all residents of this 'pristine' environment. We have no doubt that, in the comfort of their city homes, many citizens whose vicarious enjoyment of the Alps is restricted to their TV sets, believe that their taxes are being well spent.

Pest plants:

The facts are different. Like so many National Parks across Australia, we instance the problem of Toxic Woody Weeds such as Camphor in New South Wales, all of us are suffering for the sake of a few who have some crazy concept of good environmental management. Blackberry, in particular, is the predominant species of noxious weed in the Alpine National Park but there are sixteen other noxious plants listed in the National Parks 2005 Annual Report.

We will never ever be able to keep all the forest in perfect condition permanently. That is not to say we should not try to achieve that dream.

A source with scientific connections has discussed the implications of the blackberry infestation that is over running most remote regions of Victoria. He writes, 'the greatest factor above and beyond all is that 'the bush' now has a greater propensity to produce fuel, including more volatile compounds (as in flammable oils), since there is already a doubling of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere (since 1950), and a significant/measurable rise in temperatures, so that by dint of First Order Chemical Reaction energetics, the reactions(in the leaves) do yield up to a doubling of the products of photosynthesis within the leaves (assuming an OK water

supply, i.e. not drought stressed leaves); plus, some weeds appear to be capable of even greater transfers of energy, into more than 2 x the volume of end-products, as is the case with many invasive grass species, and the toxin producing 'woody weeds'.

We risk so much with the casual attitude of Governments to environmental management. We can no longer afford to gain electoral votes by the use of the environmental management of groups who have absolutely no understanding of the Australian environment.

Exotic weed eradication has to be a priority in future management of remote locations.

Pest animals:

There are many pest animals in all of our remote regions. The Alpine National Park suffers from dogs, deer, foxes, horses, pigs and rabbits.

Pigs destroy bogs as well as meadows, are dangerous when cornered and need to be eliminated. Wild horses also damage boggy places as well as plants and need to be driven out of the high country or at least culled to sustainable numbers. Foxes are a danger to small native fauna as well as domestic livestock. We advocate the fox tail bounty to be reintroduced with a standard reward right across Australia. Deer hunters should be encouraged to keep deer numbers to a justifiable level.

Goats and rabbits seem to be impervious to natural means of eradication. We ought to continue with current eradication methods until something deadlier appears. Cats are too wary for shooting but probably cat traps should be tried.

Fire:

Fire is the greatest tool in the hands of the Land Manager but is the most underestimated.

Fire is the means of regeneration of many seeds but can be the destroyer of colonies of animals if not handled correctly.

In an article to "The Australian" dated 20th January 2003, Prof. Stephen Pyne, Author of 'Burning Bush, A Fire History of Australia' concluded 'Australia does not have a fire problem; it has many fire problems. Some have technical fixes. Most involve political choices that will express social and economic values. But as debates swirl, it is wise to remember that fire is not listening, that it really doesn't care, that it will respond only to the logic of wind and fuel and terrain. If a proposal does not see the problem as fire does - then those implacable flames will ignore it.

Governments are using catastrophic fire events to gain popularity at the polls. The advent of the Eriksson Sky Crane and other types of helicopter has given Governments in the South east corner of Australia a thrilling spectacle for the media

to exploit. What our vicarious, intrepid, out door, sofa loving city resident sees, is money being spent on this fantastic event.

We question why it is that there is only a target of 130,000 hectares of fuel reduction burning each year? We ask to speak to fire authorities regarding this issue but they are in conference. On the rare event that a fire manager is met, there is never ever a word of criticism of the Government's inability to reduce fuel efficiently and in large enough quantities.

With 3.2 million hectares of land to manage, 130,000 hectares per annum is not enough. If it was 300,000 hectares per annum, that would give an average of ten years between burns. Still not enough in some places but better than every 25 years.

A Victorian farmer is threatening legal action to recoup losses after his property was destroyed in the massive Grampians blaze. Tom Napier, of Victoria Valley said his 250-hectare property at Mirranatwa, which backs onto the Grampians National Park, was set alight by fire fighters on Australia Day. His emotive position is relevant when considering how fire control is managed.

Mr Napier said Country Fire Authority firefighters could not get the REQUIRED approval from PV/DSE to start a backburn inside the national park during mild weather and when it was given it was too late and his adjacent land was razed. "Nobody called us, but the ironic thing was that they could not burn the national park without permission", Mr Napier said. "It was the biggest loss on the western side of the park ... but we didn't get burnt out by the bushfire, we got burnt out by the firefighters".

Mr Napier said he lost pasture and it would cost \$20,000 for material to build new fences.

Money:

Our comments on this topic are restricted to the National Parks Annual Reports of 1983 and 2005.

In 1983, Treasury funds supplied were \$11.1 million. Allowing for an inflation factor of 2.26, (in today's terms \$25.1 million). This kept 272 Rangers in the field, looking after the public's land at a cost of \$92,280 per Ranger. The Ranger/land managed ratio was 3,623 ha per Ranger.

In 2005 \$67.1 million keeps 396 field staff in the field, i.e., \$169,444 per Ranger. The Ranger/land ratio in 2005 is one Ranger to 8,170ha.

Considering employment in rural areas as a factor, the need for more Rangers in country areas must be addressed as a priority. Country jobs for country people.

Conclusions:

From the air, at 25,000 feet, the Alpine National Park looks magnificent. The ground view is different.

Noxious weeds, pest animals, neglect is the order of the day. This observation is even perpetuated by the cheap binoculars issued to the observers in the network of Fire Watching towers, (Binoculars that cannot differentiate smoke at a short distance).

Our environment is being run 'on the cheap' with excessive empires of management building rank and importance through excessive management structures. We question the need for departments that are not directly related to environmental management. Is there really a need for visitors to National Parks close to Melbourne to be counted when Rangers and weed eradication workers are nowhere to be seen in the Alpine National and State Parks?

We encourage disastrous fires in summer by refusing to carry out sufficient fuel reduction measures when appropriate. The results of the 'feral' fires quickly fade and the armchair spectators watch the next cricket match.

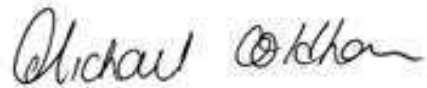
In the forest, where feral fires burned down to a metre depth, or more, the resultant ash, with the remains of colonies of incinerated animals, are blown by winds and washed by rain into creeks, streams and rivers. They eventually end up in water storage reservoirs where they fill the dam and reduce the water capacity.

4WD Victoria Members:

Members of 4WD Victoria are proud of their relationship with Parks Victoria and DSE but express concern when, as a result of green parties' pressure on State Parliamentarians, the timber workers, mountain cattlemen and other labourers have been removed from the High Country. The result is that when fire starts there are few on the ground for a quick response. It can take far too long for the rural town based fire fighters to strike at the heart of fires in remote locations. Canberra, Mitta Mitta and the Grampians spring to mind.

It is hypothesised that if the principles of park management were to change to include the rights of recreation to be included as a prime objective, then the issues of locking up the Parks and Forests would go away. Mutual respect and understanding would take place across the whole community.

Our members, where they can, assist the management authorities in track clearing, field and park management, rehabilitation and land care. We all have an obligation to care for the bush. (Please refer to Schedule C, to find a recent list of our activities.)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Coldham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Michael Coldham
President

Schedule 'A' C.F & L Annual Report 1983 staff excerpt

Schedule B Conservation Forests and Lands staff excerpt page 8

Staff

The total number of people employed in the Services as at June 30, 1983, was 387. These employees were located as follows:

Head Office	70
District Offices	45
Parks	272

Of these 387 employees, 218 were in Public Service positions and 169 were in positions exempted from the Public Service Act.

In addition to these employees, as at 30 June 1983, 29 employees were engaged at Mt. Buffalo National Park on a seasonal basis for the 1983 snow season, and 145 persons were employed on various Employment Initiatives "Parks Access Projects" throughout the State.

During the year approval was given for the establishment of the following eight positions:

- Ranger Grade IV Bogong National Park
- Ranger Grade II Bogong National Park (two positions)
- Ranger Grade I Bogong National Park
- Ranger Grade IV Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park
- Ranger Grade!!! Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park
- Ranger Grade 11 Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park (two positions)

As at 30 June 1983, 15 established staff positions were vacant.

Throughout the Service 379 school students were employed during the year both at Head Office and in the parks under the Work Experience Program.

Although eight new ranger positions were created during the year, the number of full-time employees in the parks continued to decline due to lack of funds. The effect of this decline was offset to some extent by the temporary Employment Initiatives Schemes, but these schemes were not always in those areas where park maintenance is suffering through lack of staff.

Schedule 'B' National Parks Act 2005, staff excerpt.

**This is an excerpt from the National Parks Act Report 2005 Page 21
Staff**

Parks Victoria manages a wide range of areas, including all of the parks and other areas under the Act, conservation reserves and regional and metropolitan parks, as well as aspects of the bays and waterways in and near Melbourne.

As at 30 June 2005, Parks Victoria had 1021 direct employees, comprising 786 full-time; 98 part-time; 81 fixed-term and 56 casual staff.

It is estimated that 289 rangers (including 15 chief rangers) and 107 field service officers were engaged in managing areas under the Act as at 30 June 2005. There were 47 ongoing and four fixed-term indigenous staff, including rangers, working in areas under the Act.

Parks Victoria, in conjunction with DSE, undertook a recruitment campaign as part of the Public Land Fire Initiative to further support on-ground fire management resources. A total of 12 field service officers and 12 planning and community engagement staff were appointed, most of whom work in areas managed under the Act.

Under the Seasonal Ranger Program, 28 seasonal rangers were recruited to run visitor services programs during the summer period in areas managed under the Act.

Staff from DSE (particularly the Conservation and Recreation Division) and DPI (particularly fisheries officers) also contributed to the parks program.

Schedule 'C' 4WD Activities as of February 2006

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

In October 2005 we started to list the notable achievements of four wheel drive clubs, preparatory to our embarking on a political campaign for our recreation to be recognised at the November 2006 State Elections. We believe that this information is also relevant to the Senate Inquiry into National Parks as, in Victoria, our members joyfully engage in track maintenance tasks as well as other mutually useful activities with both Parks Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

First, about us:

Who are we that our recreation should be vilified by the media? What sort of person is active in 4WD Club affairs? Is there a 'type' of person who loves to use a 4WD to experience the wonders of our natural land?

One club has advised the following survey results; 12 Farmers, 1 Accountant, 4 Builders, 2 Plumbers, 2 Doctors, 3 Engineers, 2 Fitters & turners, 2 Public Servants 3 Pharmacists, 4 Nurses, 1 Dairy Inspectors, 2 Vic Park Rangers, 3 Teachers, 2 Bank Officers, 1 Panel Beater, 2 Department Managers, 2 Computer Science graduates and 5 small business proprietors.

We are ordinary Australians who use vehicles with four wheel drive capabilities. Together with our families we experience the remote regions of our continent. We encourage our partners to learn to drive in rugged terrain. Our vehicles enable us to understand the bush, to want to provide a good standard of stewardship so that the management provided by thousands of our indigenous friends over many thousands of years is recognised and continued, subject to modern limitations.

Here is an up to date list of activities that are carried out on a club basis by our members. First, there are a number of clubs that engage in unique activities. Perhaps their age or size has developed them, but we do have some inspired leaders who have contributed special talents to our recreation.

Clubs with extraordinary achievements: Most clubs have very good records of community support, some, much more.

Land Rover Owners Club of Victoria Inc.:

For 36 years, on a continuous basis, LROCV has supported the running of the Red Cross Annual Murray River Marathon. Providing up to fifty members each year, their duties are vital to the running of the Marathon. The task involves preparing for a Boxing Day drive to the start of the Marathon, then, carrying out duties for a week until the finish on New Years Day.

This club also runs the Wandin Field Day held in the third weekend of February each year. Semi-professionally run by club members, this is the premier outdoor 4WD shows event in Australia.

Other duties that are done, or have been done by this club include support for The Scouts Jamboree (now undertaken by the Victorian Scout 4X4 Group), for six years they assisted the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind by providing marshals for the Business Review Weekly sponsored triathlon. For a number of years the club organised trips to the Red Cross Blood Bank in South Melbourne. Members of their club, in 1987, started the Phoenix Bush Can Plan, a campaign, still running, to encourage members to avoid leaving rubbish in remote locations. Recently, LROCV has operated as a Mobile Unit of LandCare and is regularly engaged in willow clearing, tree planting and other duties as directed by LandCare.

Pajero 4WD Club Inc:

This is another club that operates as a LandCare unit. It is currently active also in Commonwealth Games Green House –Neutral activities as a special project. Pajero Club members built and continue to maintain Mt Stirling Rescue Hut. Each year, at the clubs expense, it is maintained and stocks of food replenished. Pajero Club members have adopted the Mississippi Track and perform hand tool maintenance and attend to signs.

Melbourne Jeep Owners Club Inc.:

Phoenix Bush Can Plan is now operated by the Melbourne Jeep Club. In 2005, MJOC received a congratulatory letter from Mayor Jane Rowe of East Gippsland Shire. The letter acknowledges the efforts of the MJOC in continuing the Phoenix Bush Can Plan that was started by the Phoenix 4WD Club in 1987. She continued ‘This is a fantastic effort and members should be congratulated and feel proud that they have become role models in the Four Wheel Drive Club industry, by providing the funds to the Royal Flying Doctor Service and encouraging good behaviour. East Gippsland is one of the country’s most beautiful regions and it is heartbreaking to see how casually it is littered, however with the assistance of individuals and groups like yourselves we are enjoying the benefits of a cleaner and better environment.’

Swan Hill 4X 4 Club Inc.:

This club has been involved in track clearance work in Hattah National Park and is currently involved in a signage and cleaning project on the banks of the River Murray.

They are working towards a scheme to assist tree seed collectors with a view to collecting seed themselves.

Otways 4 X 4 Club Inc.:

This club operates a monthly maintenance schedule in the Cape Otway Cemetery. The club has a local reputation for being a competent, trustworthy group. Once, called upon by Victoria Police to assist at the scene of an accident, they stayed on duty for almost four hours, directing traffic around the problem site.

The local Department of Sustainability and Environment sought their assistance to clear a campsite after a group of logging protesters had vacated it. Eight club members worked for eight hours to clear the site of concrete obstacles loaded with steel spikes as well as a wrecked car that had been left there. Two skips of removable rubbish constituted a “cleaned” campsite.

City West Four Wheel Drive Club:

This small city club showed the way recently with a huge input to the management of the Wombat State Forest. In addition to wholehearted support for the following activities, they were also involved in a Parks Victoria/ Dept of Sustainability & Environment High Country Promotion, a special project over the Queens Birthday weekend in 2005

Special Activities:

The following clubs are involved in special activities:-

Jackaroo Club has regular bone seed pulling days in the You Yangs.
Hamilton has a Club track available for emergency services training.
South Gippsland teaches sand driving to surf life saving clubs.
Victoria Police provides support drivers for Typo Station.

Generally speaking, all of our clubs take the following activities for granted. They tackle these tasks without too much thought for the cost of volunteering.

Community Activities:

Oxfam Xmas Tree deliveries.
Bush cemetery, clean up activities.
Clean Up Australia.
RFDS. Red Cross. Variety Club fundraising activities.
Give blood to Red Cross Blood Bank.
Big Brother, Big Sister activities.
Carted hay for Qld fodder relief train.
Promotes 4WD Values at local community events.
Carer's relief, taking kids on a trip to give relief to carers.

Bush activities:

Supports 4WD Code of Ethics.
Support for the High Country Huts Assn.
DSE/PV organised clean ups (small scoped)
DSE/PV organised huge clean ups. (Wombat)
DSE General Maintenance.

Multiple clubs, huge clean ups. (1985 Thomson Catchment Clean Up)
Bush fire relief and fencing (includes comforting dispossessed families)
Flood relief and fencing (includes comforting stunned families)
Has repaired log bridges. Land Rover, Pajero. Phoenix.
Regular track clearance activities.
Always clears up campsites left in bad condition.
Clears trees during club trips.

Four Wheel Drive Victoria submits that its members pay for any track deterioration in remote areas by their willingness to assist the Land Managers. We offer the observation that, being so dedicated to good management in these areas; it would be difficult to compare our activities with any other recreation.

Michael Coldham.
President.



Schedule 'D' Comparison of staff to area ratio's of National Parks. 1983 - 2005

Four Wheel Drive Victoria

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into National Parks.

Comparison of Staff levels between 1983 and 2005 as per Annual Reports, with a comparison of the number and area of National and State Parks and reserves.

National Parks adjacent to cities and major rural communities usually have a greater number of staff due to the frequency of visitors.

Three PV staff at Orbost, one at Cann River, one at Bendoc does not constitute adequate management of East Gippsland

Year	Number of National Parks	Area of National Parks. ha	Hectares per employee	Hectares per Ranger
1983	30	985,463	2546	3623
2005	39	3,235,249	3168	8170

Year	Total employees	Field staff with Managers
1983	387	272
2005	1021	396