

27th February, 2006

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please accept this as my **submission** on the following matter before your Committee:

**INQUIRY into AUSTRALIA's NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION
RESERVES and MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

My background

I have been actively involved with conservation issues since the 1980s and have served three terms on national parks advisory committees (Far South Coast region of NSW). I have represented Tuross Lakes Preservation Group on the Estuary Management Committee for Tuross and Coila Lakes. Islands within Tuross Lakes are part of Eurobodalla National Park and both lakes and the Tuross estuary are included in the new Batemans Marine Park.

a) Values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas

I consider that the general objectives relating to the management of national parks, etc. in Australia should be consistent with the definition put forward by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in 1994:

‘A natural area of land and/or sea, designated to (a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, (b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area, and (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.’

If the Inquiry endorses the above definition it will need to acknowledge the fact that those who lobby for access to *all sections* of a national park *by vehicle, horse, etc.* are apparently unable to reconcile themselves with the distinction that *the park is there for their benefit but not necessarily totally for their use.*

b) Provision of sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements

The favourite comment by those who oppose the concept of national parks is to insist that new parks should not be declared because the current parks are not being adequately resourced. ***This should not be accepted as a reason to defer the declaration of a new park.*** At least the new park will probably

stop logging of a native forest, protect a threatened species or save an endangered ecological community.

Initial works in a new park: Usually the NSW government provides some special funding at the time a new area of park is announced. An analysis is made of the current condition of the land and what needs to be done to bring it up to an acceptable standard. This would form the basis of the High Priority Actions required under a Plan of Management for the area.

It should be noted that quite often the public will not complain if culverts, bridges or roads in a State Forest are below standard (even though those conditions may be exacerbating siltation into nearby streams) but as soon as the area is declared National Park they are asking when it will be upgraded.

Ongoing maintenance: In the many years I was on advisory committees I found national parks staff (in both administration and the field) to be extremely dedicated to the task and very knowledgeable. Problems arise for staff when there are insufficient resources available for ongoing maintenance.

Through management of numerous landcare projects I am aware that after initial rehabilitation of an area a group cannot just walk away because the land usually requires *ongoing weed control management*. In the long term it is much easier to *maintain weed control* (so that weeds do not get a chance to take over an area) rather than having large sums of money being spent at infrequent intervals.

Maintenance Budgets for Pest and Weed Control should be provided on a continuing basis to be effective. The regular audit of park management should be carried out to ensure that the funds are being spent wisely.

c) Threats to the objectives and management of national parks, etc. include:

- the continual lobbying by those who wish to use 4WDs, horses, and motor bikes in environmentally sensitive areas of the national parks
- inappropriate boat speed or anchoring over sea grass in marine protected areas
- vandalism through illegal activities in parks
- tourism resorts being permitted development within park boundaries; over time this usually means extension of the facilities which places more pressure on the parks due to visitation numbers, management of sewage effluent, loss of wildlife habitat, etc. etc.
- the tendency of government to depend too much on park access fees and other park income to provide funds for the management of national parks; most people are happy to pay a reasonable amount to visit a major park but governments should take into account that while this type of amenity is being provided its funding to assist the tourism industry and to provide health and well-being services is probably being reduced.

d) Responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, etc.:

Generally speaking, national parks appear to be created for all the right reasons (refer the above IU CN definition) but their declaration is often timed for political expediency – hence there can be a certain amount of suspicion on the part of those who are against their creation.

To provide sufficient resources for national parks the community has to be convinced that it is worthwhile for their taxes to be spent in that way. This means more and more education in schools, industry and the community to encourage everyone to understand that:

- looking after the environment is part of looking after one's own health and the health of future generations
- it requires management on bio regional or at least a catchment level
- all land across the landscape (regardless of ownership) should be managed according to its vulnerability and that needs to include areas (such as national parks) put aside with the primary purpose of conservation
- if necessary it is worthwhile waiting longer for some other type of local amenity rather than short-change on funding for management of national parks.
- IN OTHER WORDS A GREATER VALUE SHOULD BE PLACED ON THE BENEFIT OF NATIONAL PARKS.

e) Record of governments with regard to creation and management of national parks, etc.:

Active conservationists are usually prepared to work with the government of the day, regardless of its persuasion, as long as it achieves the objective of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of reserves. One would have to say, however, that the NSW Labor government has declared an impressive number and area of national parks over the years. It is still, of course, a very small percentage of the land in NSW.

The National Parks & Wildlife Service in my region keeps its staff up to date in training for fire control management and works well with other government bodies that are also involved with bushfire events.

More funding should be provided for the maintenance of parks and could be justified by the reasons listed above under Item d).

Yours sincerely,

Maureen Baker, OAM