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References Committee
ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. The view of this Association is that the parks of NSW suffer from underfunding, undermanning and an outmoded organizational structure within the Service. We would support increased assistance in this regard. However, the State Government has acted inappropriately in our opinion, by transferring otherwise productive lands into the national parks estate for political rather than environmental reasons. We do not support this policy.

Our submission and references follow.

Yours sincerely

Jacqui Kelly

Jacqui Kelly
Environment, Land Use & Access Coordinator



Submission to the Committee

Inquiry

into

**Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine
protected areas**

These Comments are restricted to the NSW national parks estate, the NPWS and the NSW Government

1. POOR MANAGEMENT

The NSW national parks are not being adequately managed. They have become weed and pest havens (1), and threaten the regionally indigenous species with severe predation, competition and diseases. Many roads within newly created parks have become weed havens by closing off access to the public and not maintaining them. Further, when the pre-existing network of management trails is not maintained, they become useless for emergency use such as firefighting and search & rescue. Management policies in many plans of management clearly show that park planners and managers follow a deliberate policy of closing roads to the public, yet there is no mention in any management plan that consideration has been given to the reasons why the previous land managers invested in the construction and maintenance of them. Now in the event of fires, bulldozers may be deployed to cut straight through the bush to the targets for action as there are few useful roads left in the parks. This is causing more environmental damage in order to attack fire trouble spots.

2. GROWTH OF THE ESTATE

The rate of growth in the parks estate in NSW is driven by the agenda of green activists who are not representing of the population. Small enviro-political organizations which strategically combine to maximize their political leverage while pushing for more parks (2) have been aided and supported by the Government in order to obtain the Green's preferences at the ballot box. The cost of this political support is that the Government transfers more land into the parks estate. There has been pressure to expand the estate from within the Government regardless of the cost, with current plans to acquire large tracts of land in western NSW as this is now regarded as being inadequately represented in the parks estate by the green groups. The land has been adequately managed by private owners and other public land managers for almost 200 years for other purposes. Community concerns about the creation of parks by the transfer of productive public and leasehold land have been swept aside by a succession of Ministers over the last 10 – 15 years.

3. INADEQUATE STAFFING FOR THE SIZE OF THE ESTATE

The appointment of new park staff has not matched the increase in the size of the estate. With more than 600 parks and reserves to manage, NSW NPWS has 78 area managers, 256 rangers and 563 field workers

in the field. There are 504 off park employees covering senior management and administration. The parks estate covers nearly 8% of the area of NSW or 6,450,000 hectares. This means that a mere 897 people are expected to care for and manage between them this vast, discontinuous estate, or more critically, each area manager has to manage an average of 7.7 properties and each ranger must be responsible for 25,200 hectares. These overworked rangers are supported by an average of 2 field workers each. Even on average figures this is totally inadequate. There are numerous volunteer groups willing to help but these cannot be adequately managed due to the low staffing levels. To further exacerbate this manning inadequacy, it must be recognized that with higher visitor usage in proximity to major cities, parks in those areas have more staff to meet the pressures of these high use areas. So the coastal and mountain parks draw needed field personnel away from the lesser used parks, and the need to manage the eco systems in the country parks cannot be met. It is very obvious then, that the country parks are vastly understaffed and as such the service unable to adequately provide for environmental management and visitor safety in many areas.

4. RUNNING COSTS

More funding combined with a restructuring of the service to change the present culture within the workforce is needed to better manage the present estate. The workforce structure has too many levels of management, resulting in far too many planning and operations meetings which draw field staff away from the needed operations in the parks to provide input to the off park staff. There is a need to flatten the organizational structure of the NPWS to empower those people in the field who know what is needed. Until this is done, there can only be marginal improvements in operating costs, decision making and operational outcomes. The NPWS could significantly reduce its running costs and speed up dissemination of decision making by removing at least one level of management. The organization is top heavy, with too few rangers in the field, and far too many managers, planners and policy makers in the office.

5. POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

A huge amount of inappropriate land has been added to the parks estate for political reasons. Former state forests which include monocultures and plantations for legitimate forestry purposes have

been added to national parks. While these may be magnificent stands of native trees, they are not, and never will be areas of significant environmental significance as an ecological unit in a national park and should never have been lost from forestry operations. Degraded farms have been included to boost the estate area after many generations of intense agricultural activity. The buildings and relics may be worthy of inclusion as part of our European heritage, but worn out farms can only be regarded as cheap real estate and not significant eco systems or geomorphic features after many years of modification by agriculture.

6. FAILURE TO WEIGH UP COSTS TO THE COMMUNITY

There is scant consideration of the value of pre-existing commercial and recreational activities (3), by declaring formerly productive lands as national parks. Employment in country areas in timber harvesting, transporting and saw milling has been destroyed across the state. The recently declared South Brigalow Park in the State's north west will create 69 new jobs by the outlaying of \$38.5 million dollars, but this is unlikely to provide employment for those local people displaced from the timber mills and haulage contractors in the area, as it is unlikely to match many of their skills with the genuine needs of park operation. The end result will be new employees being engaged based on their environmental skills coming to the affected towns increasing demands for accommodation and other services, while displaced workers will join the ranks of the redundant or unemployed.

7. DECEPTIVE ARGUMENTS

Political spin is used to promote the false impression in affected communities that by closing down pre-existing commercial activities such as saw mills, new replacement industries will provide the same or better opportunities for them associate with the new park. (4). While it may be true that the NPWS may place work with local industries, it is never at the scale of prior work from logging, road transport or sawmilling. New industries, usually in the form of cottage industries are often encouraged but are only micro businesses which are seldom successful due to lack of demand at an economic scale.

8. FALSE PREMISE FOR MANAGING PARKS

The parks are not being well managed by the lock it up approach of the NSW Government. The Wilderness Act and the areas declared under its provisions are notable failures in effective land management. Decent people with long connections to the land stay out or enter only in accordance with the law (1), while irresponsible persons enter parks and wilderness knowing the likelihood of apprehension is slim at best (5) except in the well publicized areas. This applies also in many nature reserves where activities such as pig hunting, including the freeing of sows for future harvesting of their progeny occurs. Weed proliferation along closed or unmaintained roads and in open forested areas by the uncontrolled activities of law breakers is increased due to lack of maintenance and policing of illegal activities in these remote areas. Trail bike riding is almost unchecked and many ride for the thrill of the ride not for any appreciation of the bush. Networks of ad hoc trails through the most challenging terrain have been created as an alternative to trail riding on established trails & roads or where roads have grown over with weeds. Uncontrolled entry into closed areas by some 4WD operators occurs on the basis that there is little risk of being apprehended, Both examples of misuse makes the lock it up policy a total failure in environmental management.

9. POORLY FUNDED

Funding is inadequate but is not the root cause of the state of the national park estate in NSW. Too much of the funds provided go into administration and planning to meet the requirements of the Act and its regulations. These have resulted in the development of the multi-tiered hierarchical structure of the NPWS as it attempts to employ the best planners, administrators and effectively creates its own high cost operation which then starves the operations areas of funds. As a consequence, the few environmental scientists which the NPWS employs in the field cannot effectively manage such a large estate. The second outcome of insufficient funding is that the condition of the parks suffers from a scarcity of capital for essential infrastructure and operating funds for maintenance(6).

10. OVER WORKED AND UNDER TRAINED

Overworked staff are not efficiently supported by middle management; instead there is a culture of endless meetings and consultations about setting limits and restrictions on staff which:

1. tie up valuable workers from their primary duty of managing and protecting the parks and the visitors.
2. require field staff to spend many hours preparing reports to middle management.
3. add to time spent away from the parks by being required to provide comment to park planners on draft plans of management.
4. create a compliance mentality of doing actions which perpetuate further review meetings with multiple levels of management.
5. do not allow the land manager to utilize skills gained to make effective decisions in the field.
6. as a result of this meeting culture, it is frequently difficult to make contact with the land manager if there is an on Park need for their assistance.

Our Association believes that more funds, better spent after a restructure of the organisation, are needed to improve the operations of the NPWS for the better management of the parks in NSW.

References:

Following pages

(1)
1.1



(4747): *Casuarina* leaves contain a natural herbicide and dropped leaves form a dense mat to reduce competition from other native plant species. Exotic weeds (*Lantana camara* Moth Plant *Araujia sericifera*) have been able to badly infest these areas and are now affecting the survival of the *Casuarina*. (M. Vessey 2006 - Etterema Wilderness).

1.2



4758): Weeds (*Cobblers Peg Bidens pilosa*, *Wandering Jew Tradescantia albiflora*) have established on a closed road due to no maintenance, and encroaching upon the *Casuarina* stand which is

stabilising the bank of Yalwal Creek. (M. Vessey 2006 - Etterema Wilderness).

1.3



(4759): Lantana *Lantana camara* & (Paddy's Lucerne *Sida rhombifolia*, Wandering Jew *Tradescantia albiflora*) infesting a closed road leading to Yalwal Creek.

(M. Vessey 2006 - Etterema Wilderness).

1.4



(4811): Established weeds and bushfire fuel load increasing on a closed road. Various grass weeds and sida with areas of thistle in the camping area which is now unused due to difficulty of access (M. Vessey 2006 - Etterema Wilderness).

(2) - Current proposal to enlarge the NSW national parks estate by extending both the Blue Mountains and Gardens of Stone National Parks and by creating a Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area and a Western Escarpment State Conservation Area. The proposal has been put together by the following small groups:

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness

Blue Mountains Conservation Society

The Colo Committee

All of these groups are allied with the Greens Political Party and the proposal will no doubt become a demand in exchange for preference support from the Greens.

(3) – Existing businesses in the hamlets of Capertee, Ilford, Bell and the towns of Kandos & Rylestone have closed as a direct consequence of the creation of the Wollemi, Gardens of Stone and the Turon River national parks. The forecast park visitors to support local businesses never came. Local residents unable to find work have left the area. Formerly these areas relied on timber getting, bee keeping, and the supporting services associated with those activities. The local volunteer population managed fires for many decades by containing outbreaks between the network of fire trails. As recently as three years ago, the roads through the Turon River NP were traversable by two wheel drive vehicles. By locking these up in 2003 and not maintaining them, roads surfaces and creek crossings have eroded and local residents now find they have deteriorated to the point where access by 4WD would be difficult at best. (C. Ribaux 2006, national parks around the Capertee Valley)

(4) – New Industries from new parks: Many B&B operators set up in the hope of meeting park visitors' accommodation needs. Most have been misled about the size of the market for this type of accommodation and it is common for many establishments to operate on a discontinuous basis. Bush furniture manufacture is another business which even if the product is properly made, has only a limited market for the products. Many of these fail in the first year of operation.

(5) 5.1



Prickly Pear (common) *Opuntia stricta* infestation and dumped rubbish on park, near Sawyers Gully. The park is infested in many places as it is composed of discontinuous portions within long established settlements resulting in a high ratio of park perimeter to area. (J. Kelly 2006, Werakata NP)

(5) 5.2



Trail bike track winding through park between Sawyers Gully & East Cessnock. (J. Kelly 2006, Werakata NP)

(6)



Dumped Asbestos building refuse dumped on park near Sawyers Gully. The scale of dumping cannot be coped with by park field staff due to severe undermanning. (J. Kelly 2006, Werakata NP)