



Australian Ranger Federation
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Dear Senators,

The Australian Ranger Federation (ARF) is pleased for the opportunity to forward a submission to your Inquiry into National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas. The ARF mission is to communicate for, about and with Rangers; to support sustainable natural, cultural and recreational resources management practices through Federal, State and Territory conservation agencies; to promote and enhance the Ranger profession and its spirit and to provide a forum for professional and social enrichment.

This submission brings together the views of professional Rangers from around Australia and are not the views of the author or any one individual and do not represent the situation in any one State or Agency. For the sake of this submission, unless otherwise identified, National Parks, Other Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas will be all referred to as Protected Areas.

Responses to the key points raised by your inquiry.

a) The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's National Parks, Other Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas.

The key objectives of Protected Areas are all described and protected in the legislation of each jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions also identify the values which are protected with each level of Protected Area. Generally legislation is adequate to identify and protect the core values and objectives of Protected Areas across Australia.

There is a varying degree in the political will to manage and conserve these values in the face of any contention or dispute with individuals or a community. Often the core values are unrecognised (or merely ignored) by some users who are seasoned in gaining political and executive “concessions” to their demands and expectations, despite attendant impacts on and conflict with irrefutable conservation values.

At other times values and objectives are compromised to meet the economic potential of a given area. In some areas conservation values and objectives come in second or third to other economic interests like mining and grazing. This is further endorsed through lower reservation status of Protected Areas to meet these needs at the expense of some internationally significant natural and cultural values.

The recent introduction of Commonwealth funding sources like GST and NHT to assist the states in areas of health, education and the environment don't seem to be

forthcoming except for projects which draw significant media attention. It is difficult to see where these funds have gone when looking at core environmental values of Protected Areas. The core demands of managing areas in often politically “variable” situations appear to be overlooked as a matter of routine.

State governments on the other hand find it difficult to allocate a lot of funds into environmental protection when there are higher human welfare issues of Policing, Health and Education to consider. Protected Area funding is always considered as a poor cousin to these other demands and is seldom enough to meet the demands of protection for these areas.

The economic “spin-off” from well conserved and presented natural areas is widely recognised (PWS managed estate in Tasmania for example is alleged to generate many hundreds of millions to the state economy yet the budgets dedicated to that estate don’t reflect that).

b) The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's National Parks, Other Conservation Reserves, and Marine Protected Areas with reference to whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management.

Rangers are constantly engaged in crisis management. We generally know very well what objectives and values we are supposed to be managing but we rarely get the opportunity to do so. Protection agencies are always inventing new systems and procedures to be seen to be meeting the objectives of Protected Areas. Some of these have great value in identifying priorities for budget submissions, but unless there is some perceived political gain from these priorities these lists often become wish lists.

Operational funding is effectively decreasing and we are increasingly pressured into applying for special projects funding in an attempt to prop up the shortfall. Ironically, the special projects funding is not designed to pay for operational activities and the constraints placed on the funding are increasingly designed to ensure it doesn’t get spent in that way. The result is that we build infrastructure and engage in activities which can be paid for with this funding, but cannot maintain what we have nor continue in a productive way, the management activities we initiate with that funding.

A lot of funding is provided with a short term (2 – 3 year) window and most conservation management activities (like habitat management or threatened species recovery management) occur over a longer term (10-20 year) window. It is sometimes easy enough to attract initial funding to start a project but after several years this funding dries up before long term conservation outcomes are achieved. We are always trying to play catch up to fund and keep active important long term environmental programs.

Protected Areas with International importance (like World Heritage Areas and RAMSAR sites) have long been regarded as the richer cousins to the lesser known other protected areas. This is because of their ability to attract dollar for dollar funding between the States and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth managed

Protected Areas (like Kakadu and Uluru - Kata Juta) are also known to be well off cousins to the States. State and Territory Agencies appear to be better able to meet Commonwealth funding on a dollar for dollar basis to fund management activities in Protected Areas. Generally they also appear to like being seen to act in unison with the Commonwealth when it comes to environmental protection.

c) The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's National Parks, Other Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas with reference to any threats to the objectives and management of these reserves.

Rangers are generally aware of threats to values and management of Protected Areas in a subjective manner but rarely receive the support necessary to quantify those threats with any accuracy. Even if we do receive funding to quantify the issues and impacts, there has never been a commitment (either financial or political) to progress any of the proposed solutions. Rangers consider themselves as professional managers, committed to their areas and put their all into managing threats even though they are often not resourced to. This can lead to conflict with communities, managers and politicians as rangers perceive a general apathy in the broader Australian community to “let sleeping dogs lie”.

Lack of political will is the core problem in managing threats to Protected Areas – if there was sufficient political will to address the issues we would be resourced adequately. There isn't and we aren't. It's simple; natural and cultural resources and values don't generate Ministerial letters or complaints, so they are easy to ignore in a publicly accountable world.

d) The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's National Parks, Other Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas with reference to the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of these reserves with particular reference to long term plans.

Management plan prescriptions are dissected in great detail by professional officers, reviewing bodies and through community consultation processes. It is estimated that funding sufficient to meet the intent of current management plans for major National Parks would exceed most Protection Agencies annual budgets. It is also considered that an increase in staffing and a commitment to supporting that staff is required to meet management plan actions. Generally staffing does not increase in response to a plan, or in response to community demands. Therefore plans only ever get implemented to a minor extent and become a wish list for best practice. Most plans are adequate to allow us to propose a course of action and the likely resource implications. What our plans don't do is identify how we are going to get the support to undertake the appropriate action.

Sometimes developing long terms plans is all that is done, implementing these will never be achieved. Most plans gather dust on a shelf for a period of time until funding is provided for a review, when they are redrawn to reflect the current political reality, again often without any commitment to adequate funding. Developing plans is a core industry in and of itself – doing something is a whole other ball game (usually not a well attended ball game!)

e) The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's National parks, Other Conservation Reserves, and Marine Protected Areas with reference to the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of these reserves.

New Protected Areas are created for many different reasons depending on the political climate and direction at the time. Sometimes these are the right reasons like protecting a particularly vulnerable or important community or species or place. Sometimes these reasons are for none other than to transfer the management of a contentious piece of unallocated crown land to an agency to take a higher level of responsibility for. Generally there is a total lack of additional funding or staff when new Protected Areas are created, despite continual promises from politicians of “no new Reserves without equivalent adequate additional staff to manage them”. Very little in the way of resources gets transferred with the declaration of a new Protected Area and if it does it seldom finds it’s way onto the ground for active management.

Regional Forest Agreement Reserves are a classic example of negotiating outcomes for the most vocal and militant groups (traditionally big business and blue collar industries such as Forestry) while making promises to “alternative” interest groups (such as Conservation organisations), without actually funding those promises. Most RFA Reserves come with a suite of pre-existing uses which are no longer compatible with the new preservation status and no funding or education program to inform the users of the changes. Therefore a lot of times these new Protected Areas never get the funding to protect and care for the values for which they have been reserved, and a lot of times are attached to already busy Ranger management units with no extra resources forthcoming.

There is also a gap between what the important values to protect on an International scale are, and what is important on a State/Territory scale. The concept of a National Park having important national values and being important on a national scale, although recognised by individual States is generally not classed as unique by the Commonwealth. If the Commonwealth were to recognise the importance of National Parks and higher order Protected Areas on a national scale, there would be a higher level of importance put on resources for the protection of these areas.

Sometimes it is important to protect a piece of land simply because the opportunity arises and then work out what its values and objectives are later. If you wait sometimes the opportunity disappears and potentially useful (in conservation terms) land can be compromised. This is especially important in areas where there is widespread degradation of privately owned land and very little representation of the regional ecosystem or vegetation community.

Generally most Protection Agencies try to do their best in managing the Protected Areas that they have and Rangers generally have a good record of doing something with little or no support and make the best of difficult situations. This is often in the face of much criticism and flack from other people and agencies who claim that we aren’t the suitable agency to manage areas, simply because we don’t achieve stellar results (by their way of thinking).

Rangers generally feel that the interests of Conservation and the management of Protected Areas is best served through publicly accountable Government Agencies, and that these need to be better resourced and funded to undertake the management tasks expected of them to protect the values and objectives of these areas.

ARF would like to be further involved in this inquiry and can make available some representatives from around Australia to make further representations to your committee. For further information about the operations and values of the Australian Ranger Federation please visit our website at <http://www.ranger.org.au> .

Yours sincerely

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