

# **Four Wheel Drive South Australia**

Submission to the Federal Senate References Committee Inquiry into National  
Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas.

**By John Caldecott**



**February 2006**

The contents of this document represent the views of FWDSA clubs and members to the extent practicable given time and communication constraints. There will be some differing views of some clubs and their members, but reasonable effort was made and care taken to obtain a representative collection of viewpoints.

**Federal Senate References Committee Inquiry into National Parks,  
Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas.**

**FWDSA SUBMISSION**

**Introduction**

The Federal Senate References Committee Inquiry into National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas (APPENDIX A) has sought submissions to the inquiry. This document is Four Wheel Drive South Australia's (FWDSA's) submission.

**Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference (TOR) in APPENDIX A are used as the basis for the submission as follows:

The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:

- (a) the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- (b) whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;
- (c) any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- (d) the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans; and
- (e) the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

**Consideration of TOR**

The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:

- (a) the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas are a statement of the country's natural identity in that they contain natural assets that require sustaining and protecting. Hence the objectives should be to do just that. A carefully developed strategy, including the designation of areas, on the basis of their natural, cultural, historical, recreational values, to be protected should be produced.

At the same time, provision of access to areas where people can take advantage of these natural characteristics, without degrading them, should also be a primary objective.

The means of achieving these objectives should, itself, be an objective.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

1. A carefully developed strategy, including the designation of areas, on the basis of their natural, cultural, historical, recreational values, to be protected should be produced.
2. Provision of access to areas where people can take advantage of these natural characteristics, without degrading them, should also be a primary objective.

(b) whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;

## Management and Management Plans

National parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas are Australia's natural assets whose environmental values are considered worthy of protecting and conserving.

Each state has a system of defining and determining which areas to include in their "parks" system. In defining these areas, they have categories to which criteria are applied to determine the category for which use and management are applicable.

South Australia is currently reviewing its protected areas classifications, which will probably align with relevant IUCN protected area categories. Some vehicle access should be provided in all Parks.

The way in which this process operates is through Management Plans. It is imperative that the criteria used for determining type of park are established early in the process and should involve user groups, conservation groups, other stakeholders etc. "Sustainability", a much-used word, should be clearly defined at an early stage for a specific area. It should include an assessment of the natural values both present and past, on which to base a management strategy. The Victorian Department of Sustainability (DSE) has developed an "index of Wetland Condition (IWC)", on which to base planning for the future (Reference 1). The NSW Government, in conjunction with the Australian Government and other organisations, is also developing a data record including data back to the 1800's for similar purposes (Reference 2).

These values should include visual and acoustic parameters, such as aircraft overflying or taking off from airstrips adjacent to or in the Park etc. Where scientific data on the conservation of these criteria are not available, a conservative approach should be applied in the decision-making process. Closely monitored trials should be used to assess cause and effects of decisions. Resources must be provided to ensure meaningful outcomes.

FWDSA has negotiated access to pre-draft management plans early in the development process to enable input at an early stage.

Ample time should be provided for all groups wishing to respond to management plans rather than the minimum time legislated.

Management Plans in SA are deficient in that they do not include estimates and commitment of resources to achieve a schedule for achieving objectives and actions. A "Plan", by definition, includes the ways and means – resources – to achieve the prescribed outcomes to a defined timescale.

Through FWDSA's involvement with DEHSA, it is our perception that most Park managers are severely under-resourced. In some cases access to areas can be denied due to resource limitations.

A recent example in SA is the acquisition of "Bimbowrie", a station property north of Olary on the Barrier Highway. It has been declared a Conservation Park, but the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) claims that it will not be open for public access in the near future because of lack of funding,

Closure of access tracks in Parks should be a last resort. User organisations, such as FWDSA, should be consulted. Vehicle operators, or groups thereof, who are prepared to act

responsibly and do the right thing, should be distinguished from those who are not. There should be a concerted effort to minimise the latter by “encouraging”, “coercing” and “educating”.

Resources should be provided for establishing a national data base on research and trials on common maintenance and conservation issues, e.g. stabilisation of tracks in soft sand environments, regeneration of native flora in arid environments, etc

### Volunteers in Parks

SA has a very effective Friends of Parks organisation where approximately 130 groups statewide provide essentially voluntary assistance to Parks managers. FWDSA has a Friends of All Parks Unit, which assists any Parks as required. Also, many of our club members are individual members of various Friends groups. In addition FWDSA conducts clean ups in Parks (and other areas) as part of the annual National Clean Up Australia event and other projects in Parks.

The total contribution by volunteers in support of the environment is estimated to be in the vicinity of \$5.2 m per annum. Funding support via Friends Grants from the SA Government has been just \$50K in 2004 and \$60K in 2005/2006 (excluding funding from other grants such as Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) etc). (Reference 3) However, the significant increase in fuel costs places a heavy cost burden on volunteers, particularly for Parks where large distances are travelled by volunteers, eg members of Friends of Innamincka and Strzelecki Regional Reserves are mostly based in and around Adelaide. The distance between Adelaide and Innamincka is approximately 1100kms and costs approximately \$650 per vehicle return without "running around" in the Regional Reserves to do the task(s). Also Friends of Simpson Desert are in a similar situation and the distances are greater.

Although much closer, Ngarkat Conservation Park is approximately 300kms from Adelaide and costs between \$80 and \$100 per vehicle for just the return trip. It has been conservatively estimated that FWDSA has provided the equivalent of about \$100000 of voluntary effort over more than twelve years in the Ngarkat Conservation Park. FWDSA is involved with DEH in the development of a plan to maintain and manage the Border (between SA and Vic) Track in the Ngarkat Conservation Park to ensure its long term (forever!) viability and sustainability. Consequently FWDSA's involvement with working bees etc is likely to continue at a greater rate.

The large disparity between the estimated value of volunteers input to Parks and the contribution by the government presents a significant risk to the continued strength of the volunteer contingent. There should be a closer match between volunteers' contribution and government funds.

### User pays

User pays is a common reason given for charging fees to use Parks. There is debate on the justification for doing so. The following points are debated:

- Taxpayers are entitled to have access to Parks for which they pay taxes
- Governments have their budget priorities wrong
- Fees contribute to funding for managing Parks

Fees collected in a Park should provide funding for the Park where the fees are collected and not be added to government consolidated revenue or departmental general coffers

### Resources/ Funding (Summary)

There is a distinct lack of funding for Parks in South Australia

- Understaffing to manage Parks adequately
- Inadequate provision for operational purposes including materials, equipment, contractors etc
- Inadequate maintenance of tracks, which results in track closures and reduced access

- Lack of acquisition of value natural estate for future preservation (see [Australia's Natural Estate](#) below)
- Imbalance between volunteers' inputs and government funding for volunteer groups and Parks generally.
- Lack of funding for research, education on fire prevention and safety, more spot or strip burns.
- Lack of funding to research and eradicate feral animals and noxious weeds from Parks.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Sustainability should include an assessment of the natural values both present and past, on which to base a management strategy.
2. Programmes should be developed to gather, collate, analyse and place values on natural assets for use in protection strategies and planning.
3. Resources must be provided to ensure meaningful outcomes.
4. Management Plans should include estimates and commitment of resources to achieve a schedule for achieving objectives and actions.
5. Interested groups should have access from go to woe in the management plan process.
6. Most Park managers are severely under-resourced.
7. Closure of access tracks in Parks should be a last resort. User organisations, such as FWDSA, should be consulted.
8. There should be a closer match between volunteers' contributions and government funds.
9. Fees collected in a Park should provide funding for the Park where the fees are collected and not be added to government consolidated revenue or departmental general coffers

- (c) any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

### Fire Prevention and Management

Although in South Australia some Parks use controlled burns as a means of limiting the extent of the area burnt during a bushfire, it is not a guarantee, particularly in relatively large Parks where the fuel is very flammable. There is need for more research, education on fire prevention and safety, more spot or strip burns and overall funding.

Other states, particularly certain areas in the Eastern states, have different, even more severe, conditions and the above issues are more significant.

### Feral Animals and Weeds

There should be a concerted effort to eradicate feral animals and noxious weeds from Parks with resources provided to do so.

Investigate weed eradication and control techniques, e.g. Cactus & various South African feral plants rampant in Outback Queensland & Black Berries out of control in Alpine National Parks.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

1. There is need for more research, education on fire prevention and safety; more spot or strip burns with overall funding to do so.
2. There should be a concerted effort with funding to research and eradicate feral animals and noxious weeds from Parks.

- (d) the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans;

#### Australia's Natural Estate

The biggest risk to Australia's natural estate is private freehold ownership where, for financial reasons, inappropriate developments destroy the attributes of the area. To avoid this, more of the natural assets should be purchased by Federal and State Governments and be declared as Parks. The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) Fund from the sale of a third of Telstra should have been/be used to purchase areas worth preserving for posterity. and these should be purchased from the NHT and future such funds, eg the current Federal Government surplus and the sale of the remainder of Telstra. Of course, adequate funding for the management thereof must support this.

Grant Kenny, a property developer, was reported in a Queensland newspaper a few years ago as saying to the effect that "all the pristine property is gone in south east Queensland so I am moving to 1770 and Agnes Waters (north of Bundaberg) on the Queensland coast.. This exemplifies the way things will go if something is not done about it now.

The increased difficulty in maintaining access to pastoral lease properties in outback South Australia is indicative of the attitude of property owners/leaseholders. Whilst we sympathise to some extent on some of the issues, mainly because of the irresponsible visitor element, the "closed gate" mentality is prevalent despite the Pastoral Act providing for access under certain conditions. After strong lobbying and negotiation, approximately twenty Public Access Routes (PAR's) have been proclaimed in outback SA. However, this does not necessarily mean property access, which requires the leaseholder's permission. The point is that access to privately owned/managed properties is at the "whim" of the owner/leaseholder regardless of what and where it is and private individuals and groups have virtually no say.

(Although not a National Parks' responsibility, funding should be provided to manage and maintain an increased number of PAR's to areas of interest.)

Time is on the side of developers in that valuable natural real estate can be developed in a long timeframe unless they are protected now.

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

1. More of the natural assets should be purchased by Federal and State Governments and be declared as Parks.
2. All states should have a list of areas of high natural value for acquisition.
3. Adequate funding for the management thereof must support properties purchased.
4. Access to privately owned/managed properties, if not developed, is at the "whim" of the owner/leaseholder regardless of what and where it is and private individuals and groups have virtually no say.
5. Time is on the side of developers in that valuable natural real estate can be developed in a long timeframe unless they are protected now.

- (e) the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

It is considered that governments have held back on acquiring natural estate for national parks etc. because of the initial capital cost, the "setting up" costs and the on-going maintenance costs.

As has been discussed previously, preparing for the future will require the will and the financial support to ensure that valuable natural areas are bought before they are lost forever.

In general, Park managers and staff are hard working, dedicated and conscientious. Not only do they have to manage the Parks per se, but they also have to deal with Park users and interest groups. Their tasks are made difficult by the lack of government funding.

At times, they “scrounge” equipment. This, in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is symptomatic of the lack of resources.

## Other Points

### Public Liability

Legislation should place more onus on “user being responsible for his own actions” thus making it less of an issue for Park managers.

### Responsible Users of Parks

Damage by inappropriate and irresponsible users of some Parks constitutes a serious threat to sensitive areas. A strategy must be developed to counter such activities rather than close the areas to all including the many who do the right thing and appreciate the Park for its natural characteristics. Park Rangers are not the most effective form of policing infringers. Rather, formal police are probably the most effective. (Study experience from current and past methods to determine the best approach).

Responsible groups, such as clubs affiliated with the Australian National Four Wheel Drive Council (through their state associations) should be given access to tracks, which are currently accessible by parks management vehicles only. A process can be implemented where the relevant club would get permission from the appropriate ranger for the club to access these tracks during a certain period.

This would give the parks the flexibility to restrict access to these tracks during periods where it is not prudent but allow access when appropriate. The club members would obviously not be able to make any claim against the park as a result of any damage the vehicle(s) may sustain.

The detail of legalities would have to be determined and specified.

(In Ngarkat Conservation Park, two tracks are being developed (in conjunction with FWDSA) for “approved” groups, such as FWDSA clubs, to have conditional use).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Legislation should place more onus on “user being responsible for his own actions” thus making it less of an issue for Park managers.
2. Rangers are not the most effective form of policing infringers. Rather, formal police are probably the most effective.
3. Responsible groups, such as clubs affiliated with the Australian National Four Wheel Drive Council (through their state associations) should be given access to tracks.

List of References:

Reference 1. *National Wetlands Update 2006*. Wetlands Australia Issue No 11, Page 12, Australian Government.

Reference 2. *National Wetlands Update 2006*. Wetlands Australia Issue No 11, Page 10, Australian Government.

Reference 3 Information obtained from Manager, Community Liaison, Land Management Branch, SA Department for Environment and Heritage.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the inputs/comments from FWDSA club members and officials during the submission drafting process. Also, the information provided by Dene Cordes, Manager, Community Liaison, and Pam Smith, Friends of Parks Secretariat, DEH, is acknowledged.



## APPENDIX A Letter From Senate References Committee

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AUSTRALIAN SENATE

ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

REFERENCES COMMITTEE  
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
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19 December 2005

Mr Paul Warner  
President  
Australian National Four Wheel Drive Council  
PO Box 2211  
SMITHFIELD NSW 2164

Dear Mr Warner

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

On 8 December 2005 the Senate referred the following matter to the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee for inquiry and report by 30 November 2006:

The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:

- (a) the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- (b) whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;
- (c) any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
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- (e) the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

The Committee is inviting public submissions on its inquiry. Submissions should be lodged by 1 March 2006 and the Committee encourages lodgement in electronic form to [ecita.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ecita.sen@aph.gov.au).

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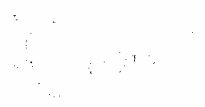
Information on the inquiry and advice on preparing a submission are available on the Committee's website or by contacting the secretariat. The website address is [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita\\_ctte/inquiries.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita_ctte/inquiries.htm).

On receipt submissions become Committee documents and are made public after acceptance by the Committee. Persons making submissions must not release them without the approval of the Committee. Submissions are covered by parliamentary privilege, which means that you are protected from anyone taking action against you because of anything you have said in your submission, but the unauthorised release of it is not.

The Committee is interested in hearing from a wide range of groups in the community. I would be grateful if you could forward information about this inquiry, and the terms of reference, to any individuals, groups or organisations who you feel may wish to make a submission to the inquiry.

Should you have any queries regarding this inquiry please contact the secretariat on 02 6277 3526.

Yours sincerely,

  
Dr Jacqueline Dewar  
Acting Secretary (References Committee)