

*Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc.*

FOUNDED IN 1955

AFFILIATED TO THE NATURE CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF NSW

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1st March 2006

The Secretary,  
Senate Environment, Communications,  
Information Technology and the Arts References Committee

Dear Secretary,

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

Attached is a submission to the above Inquiry on behalf of Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc. It is endorsed by the 15 elected members of the Society's Committee and is essentially a compilation of contributions by various members of that Committee. We would be pleased to provide further information or answer any questions you may have on any aspect of the submission.

Yours sincerely,

Faye Coughlan  
Hon. Secretary

attachment

**SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO**  
**NATIONAL PARKS AND OTHER CONSERVATION RESERVES**  
**BY OATLEY FLORA AND FAUNA SOCIETY INC.**

March 1, 2006

**About our Society**

Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc is one of the oldest and largest organisations of its type in Australia. It was established in 1955 and at present has about 250 members, a number of whom have specialist or professional knowledge in areas of biology and environmental science. The Society's activities include monthly meetings with expert presentations and discussions and monthly field days, usually to national parks or nature reserves.

Our submission will deal with each of the terms of reference in the order specified.

**1. Values and objectives of conservation reserves**

National parks and other conservation reserves have different values for different people. The following are considered significant by members of our Society:

Aesthetic values. Many people experience great pleasure and satisfaction from the beauty and visual impact of the scenery and wildlife of national parks and reserves. These areas inspire creativity, and can stimulate profound feelings of peace and harmony.

Cultural and spiritual values. National parks and other conservation reserves provide habitat for the unique and curious species that have become distinctive parts of Australian culture. Most reserves contain features and locations of special cultural and spiritual significance to Aboriginal people, and also provide deep and satisfying spiritual or religious experiences to many non-Aboriginal people.

Recreational values. The large, uncrowded, unpolluted open spaces and natural settings of national parks and other conservation reserves are often ideal for healthy, non-competitive recreational activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, boating, fishing and rock-climbing.

Tourist values. Australia's natural environments are major attractions for overseas and domestic tourists. The special character of Australia that makes it a popular destination for tourists is largely due to its scenery, large areas of unspoiled bushland and open space, and unique plants and animals. A major role in protecting these items is played by national parks and other conservation areas. Tourist visits to conservation areas are important sources of revenue and have highly beneficial economic impacts on rural communities.

Scientific and educational values. National parks and other conservation reserves are major sources of information about natural processes and functions. Their plants and animals and ecological interactions provide valuable information and materials for human use, and insight for the solution of human problems.

Air renewal and cleaning values. Human life is dependent on large areas of vegetation for replenishing the oxygen in the atmosphere. Vegetation also absorbs greenhouse gases and other air pollutants. Through these processes the large areas of vegetation in our national parks and reserves help keep the atmosphere fit to breathe and help slow down global warming.

Biodiversity values. National parks and other conservation reserves are often the only places where rare plants and animals have survived. To prevent these species becoming extinct their habitats in the reserves must be protected and managed. The extinction of any species is an irreversible loss of biodiversity and many people believe an impoverished biodiversity would have very adverse implications for future generations. Biologists now regard conservation reserves as the main repositories of biodiversity (which is essentially the number of species and their genetic variability). The significance of biodiversity for meeting human needs, and its potential economic values, are quite profound. As oil and mineral resources become depleted in the future, human needs will depend increasingly on biotechnology and renewable biological resources. The options for these will depend mainly on the available biodiversity.

The objectives of national parks and conservation reserves should be to maintain the above values and, at the same time, enable people to benefit from the values. Unfortunately, the objectives are not all completely

compatible, and the unregulated use of a reserve for multiple purposes may depreciate some of its values. For example, excessive tourist development and/or recreational activities in a reserve may significantly reduce its value for the conservation of biodiversity. Competent planning and management should minimise such problems.

## **2. Adequacy of resources to meet objectives**

Our members have observed the progressive decline of habitat and other values of natural areas over a period of 50 years or more. This was the reason for our Society's formation. Although the national parks and reserve system has greatly expanded in recent decades, the decline in their quality continues, and the official lists of near-extinct species and ecosystems grow each year. We therefore consider the reserves are not adequately meeting some of their objectives, particularly the aesthetic and conservation objectives.

## **3. Threats to objectives and management**

Significant threats to the objectives and competent management of conservation reserves, as perceived by our members, are as follows.

- Introduced animal pests such as foxes, feral cats, feral dogs, pigs, cane toads, European carp, and mosquito fish are serious threats to the conservation of biodiversity. In this regard, the recent rapid decline of a number of species of small native mammals has been attributed to predation by, or competition with feral foxes and cats. Bitou bush, lantana, privet, blackberries, salvinia and other introduced plants also threaten biodiversity by replacing native vegetation and modifying habitat areas.
- Changes in the frequencies and intensities of bushfires cause adverse changes to habitats and species. This can be an important problem in reserves near urban areas where fire frequencies may be either increased through human contact, or almost eliminated to protect nearby properties. As a number of native plants are dependent on bushfires for seed germination or for controlling competing species, less frequent fires may be as detrimental for some conservation purposes as more frequent fires.
- Global warming through the greenhouse effect appears to be another serious threat to the conservation of biodiversity. If global warming causes significant and rapid changes in the climates of reserves, many species may not be able to adapt, and the human land uses surrounding the reserves are likely to prevent the migration of such species to more suitable areas.
- The conservation of some Australian biodiversity is threatened because viable populations and habitats of a number of vulnerable plant and animal species are not present in the existing reserve system. Some of these species have habitats which are being used for purposes incompatible with conservation such as agriculture, urban development and intensive timber production.
- Population growth and economic growth threaten conservation reserves by stimulating development and land uses that adversely affect the qualities and objectives of adjoining reserves. Population growth and economic growth also create pressures for development and land uses that prevent the creation of new reserves in important areas for biodiversity conservation. Our members could provide many examples of such effects in the Sydney Metropolitan area.

## **4. Responsibilities of governments**

We believe state and Federal governments have responsibilities to manage national parks and conservation reserves, particularly for preventing the extinction of rare and endangered species and conserving biodiversity. The main beneficiaries of these objectives will be future generations, and especially the descendants of Australia's present population. It is therefore reasonable to expect the present population to meet the costs through the Federal taxation system.

The Federal Government has responsibilities to counter some of the threats outlined in Section 3, and for this purpose we suggest the following:

- the funding of more research and practical applications of research by CSIRO, government agencies and universities into (a) the adequacy of the sizes and qualities of reserves for supporting viable populations of vulnerable species, (b) reasons for the decline of vulnerable species and ecosystems, and (c) more effective measures for controlling the introduced plants and animals that threaten biodiversity;

- the implementation of urgent measures to identify habitat areas of vulnerable species not already in the reserve system, and to acquire these areas for addition to the reserve system;
- a program to help politicians and their advisors, business people and the general public to become better informed about the values of conservation reserves, and particularly about the need to conserve biodiversity as a moral obligation to future generations.

## **5. Record of governments**

Before about 1970, the need for national parks and conservation reserves in Australia was not well understood by governments or the general public. After that time, however, the number of reserves was rapidly increased and during the 1980s conservation became an important political issue for both Federal and state governments. Since about 1990 all Australian governments have had 'patchy' records, with progress in some areas of conservation and regression in others. In general, the attention given by governments to national parks and conservation reserves in recent years has apparently depended on the interests, ideology and influence of the ministers concerned. More substantial, longer term commitments are now needed.

**Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Committee**

**Faye Coughlan, Secretary**

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