

To the Australian Senate
Environment, Communications, Information,
Technology and the Arts

References Committee - Legislative Committee

Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

A submission on

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS
(Tasmania's national parks and conservation reserves)

by

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Dear References Committee Chair,

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS

I wish to make the following submission to your Committee that is inquiring into the *funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas* and shall restrict my comments to Tasmanian national parks and other conservation reserves.

Objectives

As there is no one set of objectives for Australia's national parks and other conservation reserves that could be provided to me by the Secretariat, I did find the following were useful in an attempt to ascertain *objectives*:

- the Kakadu National Park Draft Management Plan 2006 set of objectives (a-g) under the EPBC Act 1999;
- IUCN categories applicable to Tasmania's Nature Reserves (Category Ia), National Parks or State Reserves (Category II), and Conservation Areas (Category VI);
- the *Australian Natural Heritage Charter*, 2nd edition, and the companion document *Protecting Natural Heritage using the Australian Natural Heritage Charter* 2nd edition, both with useful conservation principles; and
- the *Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement* 1997 Attachment 7, which sets out the category, purpose and objective for each reserve classification under Tasmania's Revised Public Land Classification System. **See Attachment I**

All of the above provide *objectives* which could meet the Terms of Reference for this Senate Inquiry and have been used for my submission on Tasmania's National Parks, Conservation Areas and Forest Reserves.

I would suggest that the Committee consider recommending the production of a specific document that clearly sets out the objectives and management prescriptions for national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas. This could supplement the above publications and provide a useful uniform guide to the States and Territories for the preparation of management plans and their implementation to protect the values of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Reserves in Tasmania

Since the signing of the *Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement* (RFA) in 1997, the State's Land Reserve System was reclassified into two distinct reserve categories, dedicated reserve and other so-called reserves:

- (i) **dedicated reserves** - *National Park, State Reserve, Aboriginal Reserve, Nature Reserve* that excludes resource extraction such as mineral exploration, mining, and logging; and,
- (ii) **other so-called 'reserves'** - *Conservation Area, Game Reserve, Regional Reserve, Forest Reserve* (timber can be removed for roading, tourism infrastructure and mineral extraction), *Nature Recreation Area, Public Reserve* (Crown Land Reserve), *Private Nature Reserve and Private Sanctuary Reserve*, all of which allow for multi-use activities such as cattle grazing, apiaries, kelp extraction, wildlife hunting, timber getting, mineral exploration and extraction, wind farming, and other resource extraction activities as well as tourism developments and off-road vehicle recreation.¹

The area of land set aside as *dedicated reserves* in Tasmania is as follows: by subtracting pre-RFA dedicated reserves (1,347,030 ha) from post-RFA dedicated reserves (1,425,490 ha National Parks + 19,459 ha State Reserves + 45,433 ha Nature Reserves = 1,490,382 ha) Tasmania only gained **143,352ha** in the dedicated reserve system.²

The Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement, signed by the Prime Minister and Tasmanian Premier in 2005 agreed to set aside "a new reserve area totalling about 148,400ha of public land".³ Whilst this latest Agreement claims that the 148,400ha are 'protected' most of the area is to be managed by Forestry Tasmania (a Government Business Enterprise) as a *Forest Reserve* which fails to protect many values, particularly wilderness. Almost half of the new reserves, 73,512ha is within the 366,000ha *Tarkine*, a region roughly bounded by the Southern Ocean, the Arthur & Pieman Rivers and the Murchison Highway. See Attachment II The *Tarkine* has a range of natural values and cultural values that meet the criteria for World Heritage nomination. It has been Listed on the National Estate and also placed on the National Wilderness Inventory. Also within the *Tarkine* there many Aboriginal cultural sites some of which have been Listed separately on the National Estate.⁴

The only reserve classification that protects wilderness values is a *national park*, managed by the Parks & Wildlife Service (Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage & the Arts). The 73,512ha of the *Tarkine* (also renowned for its high quality wilderness values) was **not** given national park status instead it is a *Forest Reserve*, managed by Forestry Tasmania. Such a 'reserve' classification has no statutory requirement for a *management plan* and only protects the area from logging and timber harvesting. It does however, allow for a range of 'multi-use' activities including construction of walking tracks, off-road vehicle recreation, horse riding, tourism infrastructure, roads and tracks for mineral exploration and mining, hunting, beekeeping, cattle grazing, kelp harvesting, wind farm developments, etc. Any one of these activities can degrade the wilderness values which require special management prescriptions.

Previously with the signing of the RFA in 1997, just 5% of the *Tarkine* did receive national park status. That was the 18,500ha *Savage River National Park* (more correctly named *Baretop National Park* because it includes the non-forest buttongrass plain on Baretop Ridge).

With the recent signing of the Community Forest Agreement in 2005, both the Federal and State Governments **failed** to bring about a land reserve classification that adequately protects the wilderness and other natural values as well as the significant cultural values that exist in the *Tarkine*. This area should have had a reserve status that provided for real protection and proper management of the natural and cultural values as a National Park or State Reserve, instead of the meagre 5% as a National Park (RFA 1997) and the remaining 95% with 'Mickey Mouse' reserve land classifications with both the 1997 and 2005 Forest Agreements.

Not only did the Federal and State Governments **fail** to bring about a reserve land classification to ensure the protection of all of the identified high quality wilderness and other natural and cultural values but it **failed** to provide adequate funding for the ongoing management of the additional reserved areas.

1. Tasmanian Public Land Reserve System 17 April, 2000

2. Biodiversity Unit, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (2000), Tasmania's Nature Conservation Strategy. Hobart

3. The Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement 13 May 2005. Fact Sheet No.3.

4. Refer Australian Heritage Commission Listings & the National Wilderness Inventory.

As a consequence many of the natural and cultural values of the new areas now reserved are being rapidly degraded due to the following:

- a lack of a basic will or commitment by the State Government;
- a lack of money allocated in the State Budget;
- many reserves are still without a Management Plan (reserves, other than a 'dedicated' reserve, do not require a Management Plan)
- where a Management Plan does exist (for example the *Arthur-Pieman Conservation Area Management Plan 2002*), there is insufficient funding to implement the recommendations in that Plan;
- an inept State Government bureaucracy in the Parks & Wildlife Service as a 'Cinderella' division of the Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage & the Arts;
- the State Government bureaucracy, Parks & Wildlife Service that is constrained by Government policy;
- inadequate ranger staffing;
- uncontrolled recreation activities;
- poor community consultation for the planning of developments both within and adjacent to reserves;
- arson;
- lack of, or poor interpretation signage;
- vandalism; etc.

A recent act of vandalism of an Aboriginal petroglyph site (Greenes Creek) in the 110,000ha Arthur Pieman Conservation Area (part of the greater *Tarkine*) was in my opinion primarily caused by a lack of resources to manage this area. See copy of the article published in the February 2006 edition of *The Tasmanian Conservationist*.⁵ **See Attachment III**

Following a public outcry, including some sections of the Aboriginal community, the Tasmanian Minister for Parks and Heritage responded with a \$10,000 reward offered for "rock vandal information" and to convene "a management workshop to consider protection measures for the rock carvings".⁶

Incensed at the repeated occurrence of vandalism of rock art in Tasmania's *Tarkine* Robert Bednarik from the Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA) who also represents the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO composed of 42 national and regional world-wide organisations) earlier in February wrote to Premier Paul Lennon.

Attachment IV.

To date nothing has eventuated from either the Minister or the Premier who have not responded. Now that an election has been called, Tasmania is in a caretaker mode, so my expectations are not high for any response.

Terms of reference

In addition to the above, I can now refer to the five specific points set out in the terms of reference that relate to *the funding resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks and other conservation areas.*

(a) the values and objectives of Australia's national parks and other conservation reserves -

There is inadequate funding and resources provided to protect and manage the values within Tasmania's national parks and other reserves that have 'conservation' as a prime objective. Specifically related to the EPBC Act 1999, Object (a), there has been a reduction in real funding from the Australian Government for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

⁵ Sims, Peter C. *Anarchy on the Tarkine Coast* in *The Tasmanian Conservationist* No.304 February, 2006

⁶ *The Mercury* newspaper 21 January, 2006

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

Successive Tasmanian Governments have failed to provide sufficient funding and resources to meet the objectives (as per the EPBC Act 1999 Objects a-g or the Objectives as set out in the RFA 1997 Attachment 7) or the management requirements that relate to national parks and conservation reserves in Tasmania.

(c) any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks and other conservation reserves -

There has been insufficient funding or resources provided by governments to ensure the protection of the natural and cultural values particularly within the Arthur Pieman Conservation Area and also to the Aboriginal petroglyph sites, cultural landscapes other cultural sites.

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

The creation of new national parks has stalled since 1997. The complete disregard of the responsibility by both the Australian and Tasmanian State governments to protect and manage the natural and cultural values of the greater *Tarkine* area by combining all of the areas with various reserve categories by creating a national park. The values of much of the greater *Tarkine* area was documented for the Australian Heritage Commission by the Tasmanian Conservation Trust in 1992.⁷

The Tasmanian Government has management plans for some its national parks but still has not finalised the plan for the Savage River National Park gazetted in 1998 which is still in 'draft' form. The preparation of the Arthur Pieman Conservation Area 2002 followed a welcome change in procedure with the Tasmanian Resource Planning and Development Commission being charged with the preparation of recommendations for the Plan through extensive public consultation. Whilst this Management Plan has many sound elements to protect and manage the natural and cultural values, its implementation has been a dismal failure due to insufficient funding and poor allocation of resources by the administering authority the Parks & Wildlife Service.

With the signing of the *Community Forest Agreement* last year, the Australian Government allocated \$1M to assist with the development of bushwalking tracks in the *Tarkine* area.⁸ This was a positive response to the agreement for the creation of a new reserve to protect part of the cool temperate rainforest wilderness area from logging by Forestry Tasmania. However both governments failed to give this 73,512ha any real protection other than from logging by having it as a Forest Reserve with Forestry Tasmania as its managing authority. Thus there is no long-term protection for the area's wilderness values as new tracks, access roading for recreation, honey extraction, tourism etc. could impact to the detriment of the feature of the area.

Right now, in pre-election mode, the Labor Party have, if re-elected, just offered \$50,000 to the Burnie Port Authority to re-badge the airport as the *Gateway to the Tarkine Rainforest*. This has been done without proper consideration to the overall long-term management of the *Tarkine* area as a whole, or to consider, that such a promotion in isolation, could have on the fragile wilderness and other natural values. The Burnie Council welcomed the offer and the Circular Head Council Mayor said on ABC radio (22nd February) that "the best way to promote the *Tarkine* is for the Australian Government to provide \$20M to seal the *Western Explorer*" (also known as the 'road to nowhere' that the former Federal Environment Minister claimed was an example of gross environmental vandalism). That same Circular Head Council has in the past resisted any heritage protection nominations as exemplified by a motion that was passed objecting to the Listing of National Estate sites in its municipality. See Attachment V

7. *Forgotten Wilderness: North West Tasmania* Australian Heritage Commission Report by the Tasmanian Conservation Trust 1992

8. *The Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement* May 2005 Fact Sheet No.4. *The Tarkine*

Any funding that comes from the Australian Government must be tied to the protection and management of national parks and conservation reserves, including forest reserves to safeguard the natural (including wilderness) and cultural values against any short-term advantage for any political party, parochial council or for any local enterprise either private or government.

(e) the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks and conservation reserves -

The Tasmanian Government record for the creation of national parks and dedicated reserves is depicted in a graph for the years from 1905-2000 on page 8 as published by the (Tasmanian) National Parks & Wildlife Advisory Council in *With Every Step* Proceedings of the NPWAC Public Seminar, Hobart 5 October 2002. **See Attachment VI.**

In this same publication a paper by Geoff Mosley *Battle for the People's Heritage: Western Tasmania 1997-2002* provides a Chronology of events that relate to land reservation from 1961-2002. **See Attachment VII**

Mosley indicates that progress for new national parks since 1990 has stalled and *the main onus for extending and protecting the heritage will continue to rest with organised citizenry. ...The Western Tasmanian heritage is of international significance. The competing uses that have been given priority are not. The time has come for government to join with the public in ending eleven years of inaction and finishing the job in Western Tasmania. But, as ever, some of us will have to show the way.*

Another five years has passed, making it 16 years of inaction to have the whole of the *Tarkine* in Western Tasmania set aside as a national park not just the 5% that was set aside as a national park with the 1997 RFA.

All of the multiplicity of reserve land classifications for the *Tarkine* region, like Kakadu National Park, needs to be consolidated and a strategic management plan developed for the area as a whole so that the natural values, including wilderness, and the cultural values are protected.

I would ask the Committee to consider that as the *Tarkine* meets the World Heritage criteria it be initially recommended to become an Australian National Park under the Australian Government's National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975 and for it to be nominated for World Heritage.


There needs to be a much clearer use of the word 'reserve' as the public see such a place as being protected when in actual fact different reserve classifications allow for varying degrees of protection and/or the utilisation of resources e.g. mining is allowed in Forest Reserves which can result in the clearfelling of the forests.

All reserves should be managed by one authority, rather than the competitive and separate approach that is currently practised by Forestry Tasmania with their multi-million dollar high profile tourism developments, such as what has been established in the Dismal Swamp Forest Reserve. This has now effectively 'locked out' the public with its high entry cost, and its gimmickry that is now attracting a decreasing number of visitors to what could have been a wonderful natural attraction with an elevated lookout over the forest and boardwalks with appropriate environmental signage in the swamp forest, in an area that is similar to the Florida Everglades. Prior to the latest development by Forestry Tasmania, over a period of 4 years, I have personally taken about 1000 people into this area as part of a natural swamp forest experience. To gain entry now there is a charge of about \$50 for a family, a gimmickry slide and interpretation that is out of step with an impressive natural area. **See Attachment VIII.**

There is a gross inequality in funding that is set aside for the management of reserves by a Government agency (Parks & Wildlife Service) through the State Budget, compared with the funding for Forest Reserves provided by Forestry Tasmania, as a Government Business Enterprise, through both the RFA and the Community Forest Agreement that has enabled them to develop tourist attractions that primarily promote the forest industry.

Recommendations

1. A clear unambiguous definition of a 'reserve'
2. To produce a specific document that clearly sets out the objectives and management prescriptions for national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas
3. Increase funding for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area
4. Provide special on-going funding for the management of Tasmania's national parks and other 'dedicated' reserves as per the RFA 1997 and the Community Forest Agreement 2005
5. One body be appointed to administer **all** reserves in Tasmania
6. All Forest Reserves within the Tarkine area be upgraded to at least Conservation Area status so as to protect the natural values
7. Initiate a study in preparation for World Heritage nomination of Tasmania's *Tarkine*
8. Provide funds for the development of a strategic plan for the *Tarkine* region
9. Consider the *Tarkine* becoming an Australian National Park, like Kakadu National Park
10. Ensure that any funding from the Australian Government is tied to the protection and management of the natural (including wilderness) and cultural values of national parks and conservation reserves, including the upgraded forest reserves
11. Include in the State of the Environment, reporting on how each State or Territory is progressing with the creation and management of its national parks, and conservation reserves with special emphasis on the protection of natural and cultural values
12. Ensure that the obligations by Australia under any external agreements are being adhered to by the States or Territories



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Current member Cradle Mountain Tourist Development Steering Group
Hon. Life member Tasmanian Conservation Trust Inc.
Hon. Life member of the Tarkine National Coalition Inc.
Member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
Member of the Parks & Wildlife Service North West District Community Consultative Committee - now defunct
Former Chairman of the Launceston Environment Centre Inc.,
Former tour guide and manager of Tasventure and Club Tarkine Inc.
Member of the former Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service Historic & Scientific Advisory Committee
