

Waterbird Conservation Group



Correspondence to: The Secretary,

Committee Secretary, Senate Environment
Information Technology and the Arts
References Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



PUBLIC COMMENT - INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PARKS, OTHER CONSERVATION RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Dear Sir / Madam

The Waterbird Conservation Group has already forwarded a submission and addendum relating to the above Senate Inquiry into National Parks.

We are not aware of any final response yet in relation to this inquiry. If they have not already been considered, would you please include the following additional points in your Inquiry regarding how effectively our National Parks are being managed and resourced:

At a regional level here in the Perth area, landcare across certain localities eg Swan Region, will no longer focus on funding officer positions but Natural Resource Management (NRM) projects. Such projects will be put out to tender. Consequently sub-regional groups will be required to apply for these projects through the tender process. There are no guarantees the sub-regions will be successful with their bid for tenders. Considerable concerns have therefore been raised that such a process could undermine or go against the sub-regional structure that has been so carefully established. These valid concerns need to be addressed.

Importantly, many of the Natural Resource Management officers / sub-regional coordinators currently work in conjunction with Conservation and Land Management (CALM) officers, or on CALM managed Reserves to implement projects within National and Regional Parks. This may no longer occur under the new arrangements, which may no longer fund or support such officers.

It appears the regional coordinators and the NRM sub regions they administer would be replaced by program managers who would oversee the implementation of centralized projects. This has raised great concern among active (and successful) sub-regional groups. In the experience of such groups, NRM officers / sub-regional coordinators are vital for NRM delivery. They are essential for maintaining the existing capacity,

momentum and wonderful achievements already made, irregardless of whether funding is state or federally derived.

It is felt the newly proposed process would seriously undermine previous commitments to local government and to the community, and would run counter to (in this instance) our Swan Regional Strategy, which is dedicated to improving community input and capacity.

Of further concern, there has been no community consultation, nor have local government, state government or industry partners been consulted either. It appears no use has been made of the existing (and successful) network of local NRM organizations. This is undemocratic, disempowering and unacceptable, it is not in the interests of improving catchment and broader landcare management. Serious consequences are likely.

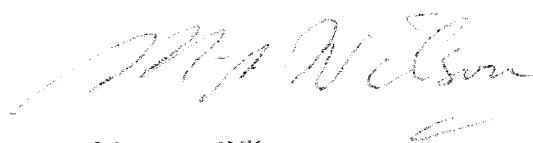
Full openness and transparency are imperative. A full, cooperative effort is needed bridging all levels.

It scarcely needs to be reiterated that sound catchment management is imperative everywhere in Australia if the health and integrity of our waterways and ground water systems, the life blood of our country, are to be protected.

The ground swell of active community input into improving and maintaining local catchments is precious indeed and needs to be nurtured in the best possible ways. Without the assurance of ongoing support and guidance, without the guarantee that projects will receive continued funding and the continuity of good leadership, it is felt this community input may falter and decline.

We urge your Senate Inquiry to examine these issues with the greatest care.

Yours faithfully



Margaret Wilson
(Secretary)
19 June 2006