



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND  
ENVIRONMENT**

**(Reference: Namadgi national park draft plan of management)**

**Members:**

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)  
MS M PORTER (The Deputy Chair)  
MRS V DUNNE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 29 APRIL 2008**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms N Derigo (Ph: 6205 0435)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

**WITNESSES**

**EMERY, MR CHRIS**, Vice President, National Parks Association of the ACT Inc. . **1**

**GOONREY, MS CHRISTINE**, President, National Parks Association of the  
ACT Inc. .... **1**

**HURLSTONE, MR CLIVE JAMES**, Committee member, National Parks  
Association of the ACT Inc. .... **1**

**The committee met at 1.01 pm.**

**EMERY, MR CHRIS**, Vice President, National Parks Association of the ACT Inc.

**GOONREY, MS CHRISTINE**, President, National Parks Association of the ACT Inc.

**HURLSTONE, MR CLIVE JAMES**, Committee member, National Parks Association of the ACT Inc.

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment's hearing and inquiry into the Namadgi national park draft plan of management. I welcome members of the National Parks Association: Christine Goonrey, Chris Emery and Clive Hurlstone. Have you read the yellow card, our privileges card, and do you understand the privilege implications of that statement?

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes.

**Mr Emery:** Yes.

**Mr Hurlstone:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful; thank you. For the record, I move:

That the statement be incorporated in *Hansard*.

*The statement read as follows:*

**Privilege statement**

*To be read at the commencement of a hearing and reiterated as necessary for new witnesses*

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the Resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it.

Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

I also have a few housekeeping matters which I need everyone in the room to observe:

- all mobile phones are to be switched off or put in silent mode;
- witnesses need to speak directly into the microphones for Hansard to be able to hear and transcribe them accurately;
- only one person is to speak at a time; and
- when witnesses come to the table they each need to state their name and the capacity in which they appear.

*Amended 14 March 2008*

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your submission to the inquiry. As you are aware, the inquiry is quite a small one in regard to the plan. We are really only looking at the consultation process of the draft plan of management and the effectiveness of consultation with you as stakeholders, but also the value of the park as a biodiversity conservation area and as part of the great regional conservation corridor. Would you like to make some opening comments to the committee?

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes. My name is Christine Goonrey and I am the President of the National Parks Association of the ACT. First of all, I would like to express our thanks for inviting us to appear. But then I would like to express our frustration that we have not been permitted to see the latest version of the draft plan of management and to place on the record that we are working from a draft which is 2½ years old as well as from a document supplied by the committee—report on submissions, June 2007—which tells us that that draft has been substantially amended. Therefore, the following comments are made with an uncomfortable awareness that we have had to deduce what the changes have been.

I would also like to add that section 3.2 (3) of the Planning and Development Act 2007 provides that where a final draft plan differs significantly from a preliminary draft plan the final plan must be made available for public inspection and written comment. So I would seek some advice on how this provision applies to the current situation where we have been invited to make a written submission but are not able to inspect the final draft plan. We might get back to that.

From what we can tell, the plan shows every sign of having caved in to single-interest groups' pressure for recreational uses, both commercial and non-commercial activities, and it is our opinion that this is threatening the viability of the park to sustain its conservation role. This plan expands on already existing access for horse riding, cycling, running and bushwalking to an unsustainable level.

The committee needs to understand the pressure the new draft places on park managers to manage deeply held but unrealistic expectations. I would like to take a moment to go back to where I believe these expectations have come from. There is a widespread attitude that a national park is a waste of space if people cannot be using it. This is encouraged by people who see themselves as losing a perceived economical recreational advantage—horse grazing, brumby running, tourism operators.

For example, the Tourism and Transport Forum has announced a campaign to change state and territory legislation to permit increased commercial building and use of national parks. This is not us crying wolf; this is a very serious and national thrust to increase commercial and recreational use in national parks. In addition, four-wheel drivers, horse riders, shooters, trail bikers, runners and mountain bike riders are convinced they have been excluded from large areas where they previously had free and easy access.

National parks are often compared to state forestry areas, which give more open access for recreational users—for example, four-wheel drives and horses—but these areas are usually managed for monocultures; that is, single species of eucalyptus, or plantations of introduced species, and then for large-scale clear felling and burning. They are not managed for biodiversity, and that difference is not made obvious to the public.

I would also like to add that various politicians have continued to beat up national parks over the years. The one that took us most by surprise was our former Prime Minister, John Howard, in the summer of 2007 saying that the “lock it and leave it” mentality of national parks was actually contributing to the fire danger in Victoria at the time.

Another factor for the pressure of increased recreational access to Namadgi has been the loss of ACT forest areas in the 2003 fires. There is a sense that Namadgi should take up the slack; that it should open for more recreational use. This is only going to get worse as restrictions on the lower Cotter catchment are imposed to protect water quality in the raised Cotter Dam and as new areas are open for housing and commercial development. I understand horse riders are already angry at some of the exclusions that are being prepared. That is not in the park; that is in the general area.

The end result is that recreational users have developed an abiding belief that they are being treated unfairly in being excluded from more use in national parks. They are convinced that they do not do any harm and that their intermittent use will not impact on the area. This attitude is very pervasive and I would like to put on the record an example. NPA ACT has been told to forget getting access to community accommodation in a particular development because NPA does not support increasing horse riding access or pig shooting in Namadgi.

As a community we have lost sight of the point that national parks are areas of high biodiversity value; that they contain threatened species or ecosystems which require protection, or at least respite and relief, from human interference. We simply cannot accept that all this wonderful bush has not been put here for our own use. But people do impact on nature. The original development of Canberra saw the Cotter catchment set aside to protect it from human interference. It was not conservationists who set aside this use; it was engineers who understood that mixed use in water catchments increased the threat of disease, erosion and failure of water quality.

We understand that in the next financial year TAMS will be developing an outdoor recreation strategy which will seek to put activities in places best suited to their needs and to rationalise recreation use across ACT managed forests, reserves and parks. We urge this community to ensure there is adequate funding in their budget for

preparation, consultation and administration of such a strategy so that people have certainty about what areas they can use. We also urge that the strategy has an educative component which helps people understand why they cannot use a national park for certain activity and which assists them to become active carers of the land they do use. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I have to say, after the comment regarding application for accommodation, that we need to talk about that. That is quite a serious matter.

**Ms Goonrey:** We were quite shocked by it, yes. It may have been said in jest—I am not sure—but we were quite shocked by it.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I just go over it again. You were told that you could not have accommodation because you do not support pig shooting?

**Ms Goonrey:** We were not present at the meeting but a third party was told NPA would not be included in the plans for accommodation and the remark was made: “They don’t support activities like increased horse riding.” Of course, we do accept the current level of horse riding but we do not support increased horse riding. And then the remark was made, I understand, that we do not support pig shooting. I raise that because I believe that shows the level of community expectation that a national park is an appropriate place for these activities.

**MRS DUNNE:** Ms Goonrey, where were you seeking accommodation? Did you have a specific place in mind or was this part of the general consultation?

**Ms Goonrey:** We understand that there are some areas that are being developed for community-based accommodation.

**MRS DUNNE:** So this was community-based accommodation in ACT schools? That was part of that consultation?

**Ms Goonrey:** No, it was not. It is a private thing. It is not the schools, no.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is not the schools. So you were approaching a government department?

**Ms Goonrey:** No.

**MS PORTER:** To just clarify, you were approaching a private accommodation provider?

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** Right, and who has some association with the people that were looking for recreational use?

**Ms Goonrey:** Apparently—or a private opinion that the National Parks Association are people who prevent them using the park that way.

**MS PORTER:** Right. So it was not a government instrument—

**Ms Goonrey:** Absolutely not, no. I use it simply to illustrate the fact that in the general community there is a pervasive idea that a national park should be pretty much open slather for whatever activities happen to appeal to us.

**MS PORTER:** I just want to go back to the four-wheel drive question and clarify something with you. Currently there are fewer areas for the four-wheel drive people to access? My understanding from what you said is that they wish to go back to areas where they previously were allowed to go but are not allowed to go now?

**Ms Goonrey:** They perceived that they were allowed to go. I am not sure where they got the perception in Namadgi, but certainly in the areas surrounding Namadgi they were allowed into what were previously state forests and then became national parks under the regional forestry agreements. It is in that very—

**MRS DUNNE:** So that would be in New South Wales?

**Ms Goonrey:** In New South Wales and Victoria. It was in that very heated atmosphere where people were competing; various jurisdictions were competing. State forests wanted to keep control of areas and they were marketing themselves as “we allow four-wheel drivers—we allow these things—and the national parks will lock it up”. This is where this phrase “lock it and leave it” originated. Those regional forestry agreements have all been signed and sealed, and we have almost forgotten them. They have become part of the way we operate. But I believe that a lot of this expectation of access to national parks lingers on in this quite deeply absorbed sense of being locked out of something that was probably an inappropriate place for them in the first place.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee did a tour of Namadgi last week, a very extensive tour provided for by TAMS—

**Ms Goonrey:** It is a beautiful place, isn't it?

**THE CHAIR:** It is a beautiful place; that is for sure. We were advised that there is a terminology they use called the “locked gate syndrome”. People believe that, if there is a locked gate in the way, there is something substantially more exciting past that locked gate than what they have seen already. I am only surmising that this is probably some of the argument that these people put up.

**Ms Goonrey:** That is right. But I just add that four-wheel drivers and motor bikers had access to places like Blundell's Flat and they have been excluded from those areas to some extent. They still have a lot of access, but a lot of the roads have been closed and rehabilitated because they are now part of that direct water catchment area for the raised Cotter Dam. We have got a whole conflict of emotion and feeling around here of “it is all just getting too hard for us”, and the national park management plan has become a focus.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I just go back a little, Ms Goonrey? Are there places in Namadgi

national park that were hitherto open to trail bike riders and four-wheel drives that are not anymore? My recollection is that it is a long time—

**Ms Goonrey:** No, but in their submissions to the plan of management those groups asked for much greater access.

**MRS DUNNE:** Wider access, yes.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes. As far as we can tell in the plan of management, there is provision to allow private vehicle access to locked gates, to the trails behind locked gates, under certain circumstances and we are unable to establish what those certain circumstances are. So there is a response in the new draft of the plan, we understand, to that pressure, to allow greater access under some sort of certain circumstances.

I have to say that I think this is a rod for the politicians' back, because I know that, if I were knocked back by a park manager, I would be picking up the phone and calling you people and saying: "This is just the little park manager. The plan of management says I am supposed to be allowed to do this." It is too indistinct; it is too indeterminate.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. I have been going through your submission, and of course our first term of reference is about the consultation process during the plan. It appears from your submission that you were quite happy with that process.

**Ms Goonrey:** We considered it a very professional process, given the amount of money and the time constraints and the fact that the 2003 bushfires interrupted it. But it was a very professional process, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** On that subject, you go on to say, and you have reflected on this again today, that the attenuated process has sort of worked against effective consultation because what may have been said in 2005 may not necessarily be as effective or as correct in 2008 and that—

**Ms Goonrey:** That is quite right.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes. Without leading you, Ms Goonrey, do you see that the approach that this committee has taken in relation to consultation is appropriate for meeting the needs of the National Parks Association?

**Ms Goonrey:** This process has been very fraught for us because we feel quite frustrated that we cannot see what the latest draft is; we are guessing. To be quite frank, what concerns us most is that we may be making accusations against this plan which are covered; we may be worrying unduly. We cannot see the plan to know how these things have been resolved. We simply have reference to section numbers, which tell us nothing about the content. Does that answer your question?

**MRS DUNNE:** So did the release of the sort of consultation report answer enough questions or did it raise more questions than it answered?

**Ms Goonrey:** It raised a lot more questions than it answered. One of the things that have concerned us over the last couple of years has been the definition of



“management purposes”. It was used in 2005 to justify a tourism proposal to collect endangered frogs’ eggs, which we considered was probably a little risky, and it was covered under “management purposes”. We did ask for a definition of “management purposes” to be included in the new plan; it was not in the original draft. We understand from that 2007 document that it has been included, but we do not know what the definition says.

**MRS DUNNE:** But you do not know what it means, yes.

**Ms Goonrey:** That is a very clear example of our frustration.

**THE CHAIR:** You commented in your submission about—this is what Mrs Dunne is referring to, I think—the effectiveness of consultation with key stakeholders.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes. We have a few doubts about what that term of reference actually means. We thought initially it meant the effectiveness of consultation on the new plan with community groups, so an ongoing consultation process, and of course there is none. But I understand that is not what it means. It means the effective consultation in the process leading up to the development of the plan.

**THE CHAIR:** That is right.

**Ms Goonrey:** We have some concerns because, as I have said in my opening remarks, we think that in fact the effectiveness of the original consultation process has been dissipated by this piecemeal approach: “We will give you an additional camping facility for rock climbers and we will leave open the use of the Booth Range for large scale, up to 1,000. We will remove the table which sets out where large-scale activities should be.” It is really open slather: you put in your request and we will see what we think. So it appears to us that the original consultation process was fine, but since then the process has been undermined by this piecemeal approach to recreation requests.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I distil this? Correct me if I am wrong. What you are saying is that the management of the park may be threatened because the management plan does not have enough hard and fast rules in it; that individual management decisions are made on a case by case basis and without enough guidance from the management plan. Is that a reasonable summary?

**Ms Goonrey:** That is a reasonable summary. We consider that there are quite adequate statements of intent but behind those statements of intent are wombat holes and weasel words that you could drive a truck through. There is no protection for park managers who make a decision. There is always an extra provision for “we can have a look at this” or “with due regard to” or “taking into account”. There is no actual line in the sand that says, “This is against the environmental issues and it is contrary to the conservation use of the park.”

**MS PORTER:** On page 3 of your submission you talk about what you perceived to be some kind of voting process.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** Could you enlarge on that a little bit, please?

**Ms Goonrey:** In one of the consultation sessions that were run by the public servants, we asked whether it would be a count of submissions on a particular issue or would some weight be given. For example, the National Parks Association, in developing its original submission, held approximately 12 committee meetings, took it to general meetings three times, conducted extensive internet and email discussions, placed it up on the web so that our 400 members could discuss it, and then we put it in our document. We asked what weight would be given to the thought and care that had gone towards representing 400 members' opinions as opposed to somebody that makes a single submission. We were told that on the whole it would be a count, a vote. I think the report on submissions actually does convey a strong sense of "a couple of people said this, three people said that, one person said that". So our fears are to some extent borne out, that it has become a sort of popularity contest.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you didn't encourage your 400 members to put it in their individual—

**Ms Goonrey:** We did encourage our 400 members to put in submissions, and they did put in submissions on things, but they ask us to do that work; that is why they do not join the committee.

**MRS DUNNE:** Very wise.

**Ms Goonrey:** It is a lot of hard work.

**THE CHAIR:** I note, too, that of course the third term of reference is the board, which is something that you do not have direct contact with.

**Ms Goonrey:** That is exactly right.

**THE CHAIR:** We have noted that as well. I guess your keen interest is the fourth term of reference, which is its value as a biodiversity conservation area and as part of the corridor. Do you want to expand a little bit on that from your submission?

**Ms Goonrey:** What I would like to do is to read from a paper that has been submitted to NPA's symposium next weekend, to which I think you have all been invited.

**Ms Goonrey:** "Corridors of survival" is a paper that has been submitted by Graeme Worboys, who is the convenor of the IUCN biome on mountains. In terms of our conservation corridor along Australia's great eastern ranges, I would just like to read this into the record: "The vision is to conserve the connectivity of natural habitats that interconnect protected areas for 2,800 kilometres. It is a strategic response to the threat of climate change. The New South Wales section of this area includes 59 per cent of the state's vulnerable and endangered fauna species, 64 per cent of its endangered and vulnerable flora species, of which 78 per cent are vulnerable." I thought that was just a lovely summation of how critical these corridors are.

He also notes that New South Wales has devoted a total of \$7 million in funds over

the next three years to implement this. We do not necessarily see any funds coming from the government and we do not see in the plan of management any specific measures for the ACT to play its role in this very significant corridor. We are a critical part of it but, as far as we can see, the plan of management, other than making some statements which we do not know what they actually say, we have no idea what they intend to do.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee has heard, of course, at other hearings evidence in regard to the Atherton to Alps corridor and how important the bottom of the ACT is in that.

**Ms Goonrey:** The New South Wales funds are going towards Kosciuszko to coast and slopes to summit. The former builds a connectivity link between the Australian Alps, the Great Escarpment and the South Coast; the latter establishes a corridor from the Australian Alps to the endangered grassy box woodlands in the south-west slopes. I think in our submission we drew attention to the fact that Namadgi is one of those unique places, which is the northernmost extension of some flora and fauna, the southernmost extension of others, the easternmost extension, and where the western slopes vegetation also comes in.

**MRS DUNNE:** So it is the pivotal intersection point for—

**Ms Goonrey:** We have an incredibly rich area and, as climate change takes hold, we can expect that mix to increase, to change and to modify. One of the things that astonish me is that 9,000 years ago what is now Namadgi was a wilderness; it was completely frozen, isolated, too cold for anything much to grow. So where did all the plants and animals come from that are there now? They came from the coast, they came from the north and they came from the west. I am not sure that they came from the south. We have this real, living system, which is actually quite huge and which relies on that full extent of those corridors to survive. So we have to be extremely careful. Each footprint in Namadgi counts.

**THE CHAIR:** We saw some wonderful work on the tour—

**MS PORTER:** We did.

**THE CHAIR:** especially in relation to the sphagnum bogs. You are aware of that. In fact, I think NPA has now an award named after a carer in the area.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes, Amanda Carey, who was the ranger who initiated that project.

**THE CHAIR:** She did a lot of work there, and that work is now continuing and the bogs are being rehabilitated, which is a wonderful outcome of all of that hard work, and some recognition as well.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yesterday we were out looking at Hospital Creek bog with Roger Goode, who is a consultant to the higher bog projects. The point that he was making was that those bogs in the high places are critical to our water supply. What we also have to look at is the Hospital Creek bog, which is highly degraded from grazing in the last century, and the Bogong Swamp bog, which is only a couple of

kilometres away.

The little bogs that are spread throughout the park all have to play their part. We cannot just isolate one bit and say, "All right. We will leave that bog alone because it is important but it does not matter what we do in Hospital Creek." They are so interrelated in terms of the exchange of flora and fauna throughout the park and throughout these corridors that we have to be very, very careful about it all.

**THE CHAIR:** We were told it was nature's water filtration system.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** It supplies all of us here in Canberra with our water supply.

**MRS DUNNE:** Dwelling on that but also going back to a comment you made in your opening comments where you refer to the former Prime Minister's statement about "lock it and leave it", it seems to me that it is a very fine line between good management, overmanaging access and too much access. Does the National Parks Association have a view about where that line should be drawn in relation to Namadgi, given what you have said about the importance of all those intersecting ecosystems and the bogs and the water and—

**Mr Emery:** I am Chris Emery, the Vice President of the National Parks Association. I think one of the answers to that is that a considerable amount of management thought went into producing a schedule on group sizes related to the different areas—group sizes that could go into the wilderness area, group sizes that could go into the less critical—and that was at schedule 3. We understand from the notes that have been given to us that it has been removed. So it is entirely discretionary now.

**MRS DUNNE:** About the size of groups that have access.

**Mr Emery:** You could have a group of 1,000 people go into an area around those bogs, and the plan does not give any guidance. It is not that that would be allowed, but the park managers do not have the authority of the plan behind them to enable them to make decisions that might be unpopular but necessary. It gets back to the individual on the day making a decision.

**THE CHAIR:** So from that do I gather then that you are making a recommendation that that schedule be added if it is not within the plan?

**Mr Emery:** It should be reinstated, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And, of course, whilst we are in the same point on the terms of reference there, we do have "including catchment protection and fire management issues".

**MS PORTER:** I was going to raise that.

**MRS DUNNE:** Chair, could you hold that thought for a minute? Mr Emery, you said that schedule 3 had been removed. Do you have a copy of what you understood to be

schedule 3 and, if so, can you provide it to—

**THE CHAIR:** It was with the old plan.

**Mr Emery:** It was in the old plan and it was in the draft from several years ago.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is in the 2005?

**MS PORTER:** Yes.

**Ms Goonrey:** Page 181, 2005.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay, thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** If I could just come back to some of those issues that I was going to raise, the catchment protection and fire management issues, when we did the tour we heard from park rangers there about some ideas to widen some of the roads to allow floats in for the spur, in particular, so that bigger graders could get in there. They voiced their concerns to us about the size of the roads and limiting the size of machinery that could go in. They believe we could do just as good a job with smaller machinery without modifying the roads, so how does NPA feel about that?

**Mr Emery:** We fully support that view. In fact, research that has been done in Victoria demonstrates that the size of the machinery that they were planning for on some of these roads is no longer appropriate or effective.

**THE CHAIR:** We discussed, of course, the cost of widening roads and bringing large machinery in to do trails, if you needed to, for fire management, and whether or not perhaps we should recommend to the government that you save that amount of cost and use it in other facilities, such as water-carrying helicopters, that sort of thing, when fires actually occur, rather than spend it all on larger prevention.

**Ms Goonrey:** I think it is important to put on the record that smaller machines do not do a lesser job; they in fact do a better job. The bigger machines are slow and clumsy and we understand that in 2003 some of the firebreaks that they graded were no more or less successful—in fact they were all unsuccessful, of course—than the smaller ones. The smaller ones give much greater flexibility and smaller graders were used in the recent fire, the Mount Clear fire. They got in very, very quickly. They were able to get around the fire really quickly, and rehabilitation was much easier, so you have got cheaper, faster, lighter and more effective.

We are concerned that the new draft it is 2½ years out of date. A lot of this thinking has taken place quite rapidly because of government investment in research and thinking through the Bushfire Council, the CRC. The plan seems to be stuck back in post 2003 where we all went through this crisis of: “Oh my God, what are we going to do? That cannot ever be allowed to happen again.” We are quite concerned that the plan does not take the lead on fire management. There is no reference, for example, to the middle level of planning, which we understand TAMS is now doing, which is called the strategic—I cannot remember the right term, sorry.

**THE CHAIR:** Strategic bushfire operational plan?

**Ms Goonrey:** There is the strategic bushfire management plan and then there is another level that is going in before the bushfire operation plan. I have got a complete seniors moment and cannot think what it is. But that is really progressing very fast within TAMS. This plan does not make any mention of it that we can see.

**THE CHAIR:** There was some clear evidence, from the trip that we did, that some prior burning operation before the 2003 bushfire hit certainly saved and protected some of the species there. In fact, they seem to have regrown a lot better than in other areas where there was no burning in advance. Does NPA support that particular operation with regard to fire management?

**Ms Goonrey:** We like to pay attention to all the facts. Prior burning did save Pryors Hut. It did not save Mount Franklin chalet. It did not save some of the stands of alpine ash—it did save some—and some back-burning got out of control and made things worse. I think it was a firefighter who said, “It doesn’t matter who starts a fire; you’ve got no control over it anyway.” So we prefer to try to look at the scientific evidence, which is why we run our workshops, which is why we put out our symposium, why we take people out and try to encourage people to get involved and to understand the issues.

I personally do not think that there is a single answer that you can give: “Yes, prescribed burning will save the bush.” I think the single most important thing is that we should not be burning bush to protect the city. That is a mentality that has also crept into the ACT; that if we just have all our fires out there we will be safe here. The point about 2003 is that the protection of our assets has to be close to our assets, and burning the bush is not going to do that for us.

**THE CHAIR:** The other thing that we found, too, is that there is a lot of standing dead alpine ash, for example, up the top, and the new growth is coming from underneath. In fact, it is quite wonderful to see the alpine ash growth from seed and from germination, as opposed to the epicormal growth from the gums. One of the concerns is that we are left now with a lot of dead standing wood. Do you have any views on how we should try to control that possible fuel build-up in the future?

**Ms Goonrey:** Dead standing wood is one of the least flammable substances. It is less flammable than a house in many instances. This is the problem with a lot of the work on fuel loading that is done under the McCarthy index: it takes a full account of dead standing timber, large recumbent timber, as well as leaf litter and forest floor fuel, and, combined, that can reach quite dangerous levels, whereas in fact—and again I am going to quote a firefighter here—it is extremely difficult to light and sustain a fire in those circumstances where there is a huge fire load but there are not the conditions to start a fire.

**THE CHAIR:** It is not as combustible, yes.

**Ms Goonrey:** So I would, frankly, rather have large standing timber near my house than the small, scrubby, immediately regenerating fuel loads that you get from too frequent prescribed burning.

**THE CHAIR:** While we are still on that, just going back to the firefighting vehicular access too, we are advised that, if they were to grade larger roads, to bring in floats, with bigger dozers, that would make it, I guess, more available for weed growth—

**Ms Goonrey:** Absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** once you break the surface. Do you have comments on that?

**Mr Hurlstone:** I am Clive Hurlstone. Certainly there are indications that whenever there is disturbance along the side of established roads, like with widening of the roads, grading activities, you get a crop of weeds coming up—this has certainly been very noticeable around parts of Namadgi where road work has been going on—but in many cases it is the weeds that have been there for a long time.

With climate change and other factors like more vehicles passing over these roads, we are starting to worry about new weeds coming in. So it is not just the old weeds; there is a danger of new weeds taking hold in the park, and of course there is virtually a weed to suit every environment in the park, so no parts of the park are safe from weeds. It is only preventing their introduction that will keep the park in the condition we all want to keep it in. Bigger, wider roads are not going to help in that area.

The other aspect of these float roads is that there are going to be maintenance costs associated with them to keep them up to condition. It is quite wrong to describe them as fire trails when you have got a road that can carry a vehicle that might weigh 15 tonnes, carrying a 15-tonne bulldozer on the back of it. So we are talking about roads here; we are not just talking about some winding trail through the trees, covered with leaves and dead twigs, and something that might be nice to stroll along. It is going to be a big road.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I just pick up on Mr Hurlstone's comments, because they lead on to the questions that I wanted to raise in relation to weeds and weed management in the park. Some of the rural lessees have raised with me concerns about the spread of weeds on the rural end and the possibility of those escaping into the park. You, Mr Hurlstone, have just talked about some of the vectors for weeds into the park. What are the weeds of particular concern to you which are in the park, and which ones are not necessarily in the park but about which we should be vigilant?

**Mr Hurlstone:** One of the weeds that are in the park now is St John's wort, which is quite difficult to control and the seeds are very easily carried on vehicles. The park service has this process of washing down vehicles that have been in areas where these weeds occur, and also washing equipment as well. But now the Bobeyan Road goes through the park, from Tharwa to Adaminaby, and that is a public road, so there are problems associated with what happens along the side of the road.

**MRS DUNNE:** So would you see that the Bobeyan Road is a vector for those sorts of weeds?

**Mr Hurlstone:** Certainly.

**MRS DUNNE:** When you say that the park staff have practices for washing down, what about a contractor—say, the dog catchers and the people who lay baits for the pigs and things like that? Are they subject to those rules as well, do you know?

**Mr Hurlstone:** Yes. Of course it depends on not goodwill but on people sticking with the rules. Many of the people comply, and I think it is probably pretty good compliance, but it comes down to washing down equipment as well. When you have emergencies or fires, there is always an issue about equipment being clean, and it is possible that at those times things can slip through. But I suppose, too, the public can be one of the vectors as well, with their own vehicles coming into the park for recreation or driving through the park to go somewhere else.

**MRS DUNNE:** Apart from St John's wort, which you mentioned, are there particular weeds that are considered a problem or a threat?

**Mr Hurlstone:** Grassy weeds like serrated tussock, African love grass, Chilean needle grass—Mexican plume grass is a new one to appear—can be particularly hard to control and really it is only by continual monitoring and information gathering that you can jump on any infestations before they take hold.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I go back, Ms Goonrey, to your “lock it and leave it” comment and ask the views of the National Parks Association: are we at risk of perhaps locking it and leaving it because there are not enough resources to manage the park?

**Ms Goonrey:** I do not think we lock it and leave it. My point in quoting that was that even the Prime Minister of Australia can absorb that attitude to national parks—somebody who would be one of the most well-briefed people in Australia, yet that remark just came out as an expression of current thinking.

**MRS DUNNE:** So do you see that locking it and leaving it is a risk in Namadgi?

**Ms Goonrey:** No. I have the utmost respect for park management. We did a six-hour walk to a remote hut and it had been visited in the previous week by the manager, who had swept out the floor, tidied the hut, made sure it was in good condition and left a little note: “please take your rubbish with you”. We see no indication anywhere that the park is neglected or ignored at any point; we have the highest respect for management. We would always welcome more resources. The feral animal problem is huge and the waves of deer that are coming up from Victoria and New South Wales are already out of control in the alpine parks there and those deer are nibbling at our borders as we speak, if they are not already in.

**MRS DUNNE:** I thought they had extended beyond the nibbling at the borders.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes. I think more resources are always called for.

**THE CHAIR:** Just back to the locking and leaving it, there are some locked areas of the park for vehicles, but they are still open for walking, for example. We found on the trip, unfortunately—we do not know whether they were vandals—that somebody had been there before and literally broken the locks, took them with them, for those areas.



**Ms Goonrey:** We have seen evidence that they actually bring angle-grinders in and oxyacetylene torches.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is an ongoing issue for the rangers to make sure that those locks are in place to stop the extra vehicular access, but to still allow it as an open place to walk through.

**Ms Goonrey:** It is worth noting, because the National Parks Association are accused of being just bushwalkers and supporting bushwalking use only, that we disagree with the thought that has been put forward and accepted in this plan, that there should be fires in the wilderness. We have a standing policy, which we have debated at great length among our members, and we strongly support the notion that it should be a fuel stove only area, simply because any fire in the wilderness is going to consume habitat for a great range of biota.

The smallest fire might not make much of an impact but we consider that the conservation values, particularly in that wilderness area, are so important that we should not be burning anything. So we are not popular for that either, but we are just trying to say that this is an area that we should be leaving alone. It is okay for us not to use some parts of our planet and to let them get on with being nature.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I just go back to the feral animals, because I suppose these reflect my particular concerns. You were saying that you concede that there is always the need for more resources to deal with feral animals. Are you satisfied with the scope and intent of the programs to deal with dogs and pigs and deer, the process?

**Ms Goonrey:** With the pig program we have had rangers come to talk to our general meetings about it. It is an imaginative program. It is pursued with passion and diligence. There are still pigs there. I do not think that is—

**MRS DUNNE:** Do you see that the ultimate aim should be to get the pigs out?

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** I do not think there is anyone that disagrees.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, but I am just wondering whether there is a view that a modest population is bearable.

**Ms Goonrey:** I do not think so, but we sometimes despair that we will ever get the better of pigs, goats—

**THE CHAIR:** Bait?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes. That is part of the program—

**Ms Goonrey:** I think it is an indication of the ACT's capacity to adopt new technology that that has been trialled here in Namadgi for use across the broader Australian park system.

**MS PORTER:** One of the comments that was made to us was “we know when the rangers are doing a good job because it is the same; it looks the same”. But, of course, to get public support to make sure that that continues to happen and that the resources are there to make sure it continues to be the same, somehow we have got to get people to understand the value of the asset that they have got and what it means to all of us, both as a people here, as Australians, and in fact the world, because all our ecosystems are interconnected. If we do not allow people to get in there at all and have a look at it, how do we inform the public about the value? You have to get out there and see it first hand.

At the weekend I was talking to someone about the threat to the green space in the ACT overall and I asked whether she realised how much of the ACT is national park. She had no idea; she had absolutely no perception of how much there was. We had a discussion about that and she was much comforted by the amount of national park that is here. But how do we get that message out more to the public? That is my question, I guess. How do we get the public to understand the work that is being carried out and the value of it?

**Ms Goonrey:** The first thing I would say is that there is no need to open up the wilderness to the general public in order to get them to understand wilderness. Yerrabi Track, for example, is a constructed track which NPA had a hand in, I must say, and it takes you to a vantage point from which you can see Kosciuszko on the one hand and the wilderness area on the other. We can look at it and we can see how stunningly beautiful it is. We do not have to walk in it to appreciate it.

Namadgi is particularly blessed. We have two public roads. They are weed vectors, but they are also the opportunity for mum and dad and the kids—which is what all of us have done; put the kids in the back seat on a Sunday afternoon and gone for a drive to Orroral—to be in the midst of stunning scenery without leaving bituminous road. We have a tremendous capacity here and to promote tourism. I have often thought that I would set up a second career offering afternoon tea at Brayshaws Hut, where you just get people going out and looking at these sites.

**MRS DUNNE:** So long as you take a gas bottle with you.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes; I will boil the billy on a gas bottle. I do not think that our civic businesses understand what is there. Our commercial operators and our hospitality industry are internally focused; if it is not something happening around the lake, they are not pushing it. If you come as a visitor to Canberra and you want to take a walk in the park, there is no material in any of the local hotels or motels about how to get to Namadgi or what is there when you get there.

That is where I personally would take a part. I would be talking to our hospitality people, I would be talking to our local tourism operators, and saying, “What are you doing to promote the park and get people out there into the publicly accessible areas in a way that helps them to understand what is there?”

Blowing our own trumpet again: NPA has got a grant from the government to trial podcasting cultural notes and environmental notes about various walks. With any luck,

that will attract more young people out there: “Here is a podcast. Stick it in one ear so you can hear the birds in the other. Go and have a walk around Orrol and you will be getting information downloaded about what you are seeing.”

**THE CHAIR:** I can think of one on the dusky woodswallow that would probably go well.

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes, there is so much and we have not begun to scratch it. We have got to get our commercial operators excited and involved. I do not think they have been out. Imagine what would happen if we took our major hotel operators out on the sort of tour that you guys had and said, “All you have got to do is put out some brochures and encourage people to go out.” I am being naive, I suppose.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee had a wonderful opportunity last year to have a look at ecotourism in Queensland. We had a look particularly at the rainforest gondola system in Cairns where businesses were able to put in place a tourism avenue right through the nature park, the wildlife area, without inflicting too much damage on the area. In fact, it cost them a lot more to put it in place, because they had to use helicopters rather than construct roads to do it, but the end result is that ecotourism numbers have come up so much now that they have almost paid themselves back in a very short time and they predict good profits for the future as well. So there are some ways I think we can allow perhaps some more ecotourism into the area without damaging it.

**MS PORTER:** The interesting thing about that was the cooperation between all levels of government, the Indigenous people, all the conservation people and those who were really desperately concerned for the environment, with the commercial operators—everybody being involved—to the extent that contracts that are let are dependent on park management and on the management of the corals et cetera. They know that, if they do that and they work in cooperation, they will get a renewal of their contract, and in fact long-term renewals.

So there is a great incentive to work together to protect the environment, and it seems to be working because they have got the commercial people engaged—you were saying we should try and get them a little bit more engaged—in understanding the value of the ecosystem.

**Mr Emery:** A lot of the areas in Queensland that are open to ecotourism are private land and forestry land, not national parks.

**MS PORTER:** The coral, the Great Barrier Reef, we are talking about as well. Some of those operators have 15-year leases, based on how they protect the corals.

**Mr Emery:** And it is audited as well.

**MS PORTER:** Yes.

**Ms Goonrey:** And may we say at this point that this is exactly what the plan lacks: it lacks any audit process as far as we can see; it lacks any specific performance indicators which will be reported upon publicly, annually; and it lacks clear definition. No business is going to get involved if it is going to be about “maybe we will

investigate and we will take due consideration, and it is possible that". The sort of weasel words that concern us as conservationists would concern any sort of investment in the park. We need really clear guidelines.

**MRS DUNNE:** Are you saying there is a lack of certainty about what would be expected of them?

**Ms Goonrey:** Absolute lack of certainty about what you could do. You can drive a truck through—what we know of the plan.

**MRS DUNNE:** Getting back to what you know, if the situation arose where more information became publicly available, would the National Parks Association consider a further submission?

**Mr Emery:** Yes. If a further draft is going to come out, we will certainly provide another round of comment.

**THE CHAIR:** You are probably aware that Mrs Dunne has put a notice on the Assembly notice paper—

**MRS DUNNE:** I was not going to mention it, Mr Gentleman, but if you wish to, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** to publish the draft as it is, so that will be debated in the Assembly at some point in the near future, I would imagine.

**MRS DUNNE:** The next sitting Thursday is the plan.

**Mr Emery:** That would be excellent. I should also point out that the National Parks Association spends a lot of its time and effort promoting the park. We run at least two walks a week in our walks program. We are encouraging all the time by the production and subsidising of brochures for track notes and things like that—many ways of getting more people out into the park. We publish field guides, and that is quite an expensive process. We are about to launch a field guide that has cost us \$35,000 in printing costs, and that is only one of our guides. So we are putting our money where our mouth is and we are also promoting the park. We are certainly not locking it up.

In terms of wilderness areas, I think you will find that our main thrust is that we do not want motorised vehicles, or any vehicles, in wilderness areas. What is a wilderness area? Not something that you drive through. That should be for management purposes only, except we now cannot quite find out what "management purposes" covers.

**Ms Goonrey:** There is no disagreement at all about our continued engagement in this process. We are here for the long haul. We have been here for 50 years. We will be here for another 50 years and there will be this plan of management and then there will be the next plan of management. There is no hesitation about getting involved; it is just that momentary thought of all the work on the second and third shifts, but you guys would know about that.

**Mr Emery:** Also, we recently went on a conducted tour of Kosciuszko national park and we were very impressed there about the way that the rangers and the managers constantly referred to their management plan as their authority for doing this, their authority for doing that, their authority for not allowing certain things. The Kosciuszko national park plan of management seems to be a much more prescriptive document than we are ending up with here. In fact, the rangers and managers seem to be relaxed by the fact that they have a management plan that has community support and is their bible. That is what we would like to see happening here—not something that has got a loophole in every second paragraph.

**MRS DUNNE:** On that issue, do you think that it is a risk for the maintenance of the continuity between the parks if there is a perception or an actuality that our management plan is less rigorous than it is for, say, Kosciuszko; that what might be a particular practice south of the border may not be the practice north of the border? Do you see risks there?

**Mr Emery:** Yes, but there is an agreement between the states to harmonise their management plans. We already have agreement between New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT not to vary substantially.

**Ms Goonrey:** Except that, of course, fires in the Kosciuszko national park are forbidden above a certain level, but we are going to permit them. So there is some potential then for interest groups that use Kosciuszko park to say, “Look, they are doing it in Namadgi; why can’t we have camp fires in the Kosciuszko wilderness areas?” There is that capacity to bleed through.

The other thing we notice about the plan that concerns us is that that document, the 2007 report on submissions, claims that there is no point in signing up to the Australian Alps fire management principles. We submitted that this was the ideal place and the very place where the ACT’s already strong agreement to those principles should be enshrined in the plan of management, yet we understand that it is not to be. It seems to us that the new draft is not paying attention to that full responsibility that we have already undertaken for the Australian Alps national parks.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you, either now or later, point that out to Nicola; I would be grateful.

**Ms Goonrey:** I can; it is at the bottom of page 12 of that 2007 document:

It was suggested that the wider landscape approach identified in the Australian Alps Fire Management Principles were not more adequately addressed in the draft plan.

Cross-border/boundary issues are considered to be adequately addressed ... A regional fire risk assessment map is included ... it is not considered necessary to include this information in the Namadgi Management Plan. No change was made.

**THE CHAIR:** Because it is in the strategic bushfire plan.

**MS PORTER:** It is in the bushfire management plan.

**Ms Goonrey:** No, it is not.

**THE CHAIR:** That is what it says here:

A regional fire risk assessment map is included in Version 1 of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan ...

**Ms Goonrey:** Anyhow, we are trying to read between the lines. We would just like to see the Australian Alps fire management principles enshrined in the final plan.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. Are there any final comments or questions?

**Ms Goonrey:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** With that, thanks very much for coming in to the committee. If there are any further questions we have for you in the next few days, we will try and get those to you, and then we will provide a report to you when the committee has finalised its inquiry.

**Ms Goonrey:** Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**THE CHAIR:** We will see you next weekend.

**The committee adjourned at 2.07 pm.**