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, 13 MAY 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

The committee met at 1.02 pm.

THOMPSON, MS DIANNE, Environmental Representative, former Interim Namadgi Advisory Board

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon. Welcome to this hearing of the planning and environment committee in its inquiry into the Namadgi national park draft plan of management. This afternoon we will hear from Di Thompson, a member of the former Interim Namadgi Advisory Board. Thanks very much for coming along. Have you read the privilege card?

Ms Thompson: Yes, I have.

THE CHAIR: You are aware of the implications of its contents?

Ms Thompson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I move:

> That the privilege statement be incorporated in *Hansard*.

The statement read as follows—

> 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.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make some opening comments?

Ms Thompson: Yes, I would. I would also ask for the committee's forbearance because I have tested how long it might take me to speak. It will probably take seven or eight minutes rather than the designated five minutes.

THE CHAIR: That is fine.

Ms Thompson: I support the NPA position as per the *Hansard* transcript, with one exception: the campfires in the wilderness. I will deal with the elements of the terms of reference in some of my comments. It is not all that I would like to say; basically they are key points.

With respect to the effectiveness of stakeholders in the consultation process, I feel that there has been a variance between the development of the draft and the revised draft. I feel that in the revised draft the authors have bowed to the pressures of recreational users and that this will not necessarily result in good park management or park protection. Most of these activities are high-impact activities. They relate to, in my opinion, four-wheel drivers, mountain bikers, horse riders and large group events. There is something unknown in the fire trails and hazard reduction burns, because that comes under the fire plan, which was an integral part of this particular plan.

Initially, I would like to discuss a bushwalking issue—that is, campfires in the wilderness. I know it is a recreational users' issue, but it is for low-impact users. I point out that campfires have always been allowed in the wilderness area, under permit, prior to the 2003 fires. I understand that the committee has been into the wilderness area. It is not a high usage area. The proposal in the change is a limit to 24 persons into the wilderness area. They are low-impact users and it is always by permit.

I have just examined—and I will make these available to the committee afterwards; copies of the reports are on disk—the programs that go up to a six-month period over the winter period of the three major bushwalking clubs: the Canberra Bushwalking Club, the National Parks Association and the Family Bushwalkers. In that three-month to six-month period in winter, there is only one overnight camp of one night, by the Canberra Bushwalkers, with a maximum of eight persons. That is all documented. Whilst I admit that there may be more in summer, the proposal itself and the changes were to allow campfires by permit, with conditions, but only outside the bushfire season. So that is basically during winter.

I point out that, with respect to the position of NPA, whilst it was done in a very democratic manner, the objection to campfires in the wilderness is not unanimous within NPA, nor is it supported by all the members of other key bushwalking clubs. In Kosciuszko, campfires are allowed in the wilderness. You may have noted that the valleys in that area are very tight, cold and can be particularly shaded in winter. Also, every 20 years there is a major fire: in 1939, the 1950s, 1983 and 2003. After those fire events, there was no evidence of bushwalkers' small campfires in any way. Another thing is that we can encourage bushwalkers to clean up after themselves.

In the same area, there is a continued plan for hazard reduction burns. This is incongruous in many ways. I learnt at the NPA symposium that 25 per cent of hazard reduction burns escape, anyway.

THE CHAIR: That was quite surprising for us too.

Ms Thompson: That is my piece on the campfires. I would like to talk about another proposal going around for four-wheel-drive access for management purposes. I emphasise that this must not be an exercise in access that is not normally allowed to

that particular group of people or any others. You just need to look at the NPA current outings program for the next three months, in winter, that I have highlighted for the committee. There are seven physical and hard work party activities that they, as volunteers, are carrying out in Namadgi. They have been doing this sort of thing for 40 years. It is nothing new for NPA.

The four-wheel-drive activity must not be a feel-good drive on management roads, looking for litter and trees across the road. Parks people continually clean them up. If you drive through the park with Brett, he has it down to a fine art. He opens the door and he can lean down and pick it up. He knows the exact spot in which to pull up the can or the litter. They do it all the time. You do not need four-wheel drivers in there. If they are allowed in then vehicles must be washed and cleaned or persons should be taken in in park vehicles that meet these stringent health conditions. Again, the NPA thing over the weekend was very much on about that.

I belong to a four-wheel-drive club and have for some years. They should be offered some really necessary work, like weed treatments or the removal of wildling pines. Let them walk into Stockyard Spur arboretum, like the NPA bushwalking members do, and then see how interested they are. It really has to be realistic, not just a feel-good thing.

The next area is biodiversity conservation, which includes catchment protection. As with so many things in a plan of management, it also overlaps with stakeholder and user groups—the horse riders. The board and others agreed very early on in the board days that the safety of riders and other users of the bicentennial trail should be addressed. One very safe option, and environmentally appropriate, would be a parallel route along the Boboyan Road. This can be constructed with the general roadworks or maintenance program. This should not really be through Long Flat, although the forested areas that it does go through are acceptable. That is basically the area of the current temporary deviation.

The proposal that the horse riders be allowed west of the Boboyan Road, whereby they actually egress through private property and then end up on New South Wales roads, is something that should be objected to very strongly. Horse riders in this area have long pushed for access along that Back or Grassy Creek valley where there is the highest density of Namadgi's huts. That is in that very southern area.

Some KHA members have grave concerns with respect to the huts in the valley, given the history and experience in Kosciuszko national park with horse rider usage. The horse submission, which I looked at on the web, focuses on weeds. Weeds are one part of an issue in this almost weed-free part of the park. The area is almost a major refuge, because it was part of the about five per cent of unburnt area after the 2003 fires. I would refer committee members—and I have put this on disk—to a 35-page bibliography that was prepared for Kosciuszko national park on the potential impacts of horses. There is a lot of scientific evidence. There is also a paper by a young PhD student called Andrew Growcock that describes the very low threshold for damage from horses and other hoofed animals. Frankly, from my point of view, this scientific evidence says it all about the potential for damage by horses in that Back or Grassy Creek area.

Over the weekend, at the NPA forum, I spoke with Roger Good and Professor Geoff Pope about it. They emphasised that a single event, even one horse, can damage a wetland, bog or catchment. They also emphasised that horse damage can turn a wetland into a grassland. So I think we have a responsibility in that area. The message that I am putting is: put horse riders elsewhere, in forested areas, and keep them out of the sensitive areas like the Naas catchment at Grassy Creek and other riparian zones.

Given the increasing competition for water, there is a need for us all to protect catchment and wetland areas. Horses do more damage than pigs. This was a bit of a surprise to me: pigs damage fringe areas of wetlands and horses and riders go right into it and damage the wetland banks, the pools and the bogs.

The third component—and I do have some more that may be covered later—is the nature and level of participation by the Interim Namadgi Advisory Board. I put in my submission what an honour I felt it was to be a member of that first board. But I am hoping that the committee will delve deeper by asking me questions and particularly elaborate on their expectations of the board with respect to the development of the draft plan of management. At this stage, I thank the committee for hearing me and turn it over to them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for those comments. Do you have some questions, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: I am not sure whether I misheard you, Ms Thompson. Are you proposing a parallel horse riding route to the Boboyan Road?

Ms Thompson: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Rather than the Boboyan Road itself?

Ms Thompson: Definitely not the Boboyan Road itself. That has always been the issue, because I admit there is a safety issue there.

MRS DUNNE: So it is a matter of separating horses and cars, essentially?

Ms Thompson: Yes, definitely.

MRS DUNNE: How much separation do you envisage? I presume from reading your submission and listening to you here that the horse route would be on the eastern side of the Boboyan Road.

Ms Thompson: Yes, and with respect to the separation, just what would be a reasonably safe distance. That area is undulating and flat in parts from the campground, so it is not a large distance, either. It is only a matter of kilometres, and then they are into New South Wales. They are going to end up in New South Wales and on roads, irrespective of what they propose.

MRS DUNNE: What you are saying is that when they get to New South Wales they are going to be on the Adaminaby Road?

Ms Thompson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But you wanted to keep it clear of the Naas Valley catchment?

Ms Thompson: Yes. The whole area is part of the Naas Valley catchment. The area that they are going through in Long Flat is part of the Naas Valley catchment, but there are areas in that that have forest. Again, talking to the scientists, the forested areas, if you have any choice in this matter, are a better area. What we have got through, on the current bypass, is to the border, at the gate. What the horse people are asking for is to go beyond that and along back on Grassy Creek, which is a pristine area. It is also a major wetland and it has all the huts in it. So there are any number of issues. Horse people do not stay on the tracks. They do not want to, and they never have. Even though in the draft plan it says that horses should be tied up beyond 100 metres of huts, they do not. They take them up and tie them to the verandas, the posts and whatever.

THE CHAIR: There is a discussion in the plan about food for horses before you go into the park, for what length of time and what sorts of food.

Ms Thompson: Yes. I support that, but that is just one of the issues in a whole range of issues. In this instance our major issue is to protect the environment from trampling. Now we know that one event can start to cause that breakdown in a wetland area.

MRS DUNNE: The really strong message is keep the horses away from the bogs?

Ms Thompson: Yes, and the drainage areas.

MRS DUNNE: On the subject of the preparation of horses, how do you envisage that that can be policed?

Ms Thompson: I don't think anything like this can actually be policed.

MRS DUNNE: You are relying upon the understanding and goodwill of people who are participating?

Ms Thompson: Yes, to a certain extent, and an education program. The alps committee, of which Namadgi is a participant—we are the northernmost area, except for parts of Brindabella—have a code of conduct for horse usage. It is a pretty good document, except that it does allow a party of 20 horses in sub-alpine areas. Twenty horses going through the creek in that Grassy Creek area is a lot. If they go through one way and come out again, you have got 40 horses.

THE CHAIR: They have got four hooves each.

Ms Thompson: That is right.

MRS DUNNE: Does part of that code of conduct also address the carrying of fodder?

Ms Thompson: Yes. It is not only the carrying of fodder; they actually need to be

feeding their horses certain fodder days or a week beforehand.

MRS DUNNE: It is easier to police the fodder that you are carrying with you than it is to police if you fed them properly, according to the code of practice, a week beforehand?

Ms Thompson: The unfortunate thing about this code of practice is that it is not a legislative tool. It is something that is partly our people and Kosciuszko and everywhere else having to provide support and education on. In dealing with all of us users—and we are all users—we need that encouragement. Sometimes you have got to use the stick. It does not always work that well. People get into corners. Often it is that effort of actually taking them out there and showing them. Certainly that has occurred in Kosciuszko, with the removal of feral horses and the efforts that went into that. It took some time. Some of the horse people started to say, "Yes, we can actually see that by, repeatedly going in and out of this alpine area, it did damage it."

THE CHAIR: You also touched on fire management and referred back to the NPA conference over the weekend. It might be worth while fleshing that out a little for the committee. Would you like to give us an overview of the presentation of this? Our committee secretary was actually taking some detailed notes.

Ms Thompson: I have also taken the liberty of providing a sourced document for that, which I did not download because it had all of that. One of the presenters at the NPA symposium over the weekend was a young officer called Phil Zylstra who is now five years into his study, which I think was pretty much brought on line. His study, which will later lead into a PhD, is into flammability. He did a study called the fire history of the Australian Alps—prehistory to 2003. It is actually a beautiful book to read. It has got a lovely background on his interpretation of the Indigenous fire regimes and the interaction of white society on that. It is a very generous and open perspective.

Phil Zylstra is challenging a whole range of things. Others are too, I might add. In 2003, the ANU had a big fire forum about three or four weeks after the fires. I have to admit that I was amazed when I went to that fire forum—and I am on a fire committee for Cooma/Monaro—that the world of fire experts is huge and is not just limited to Phil Cheney. What Phil Zystra is looking at is a whole range of things, which they have all looked at—the slope, the weather conditions, the wind factors, the dryness and all this sort of thing. He is looking in terms of flammability of bush, as have many others.

If you keep burning on some of these areas, you actually create more burnable areas. I think that is the position that many of the scientists at the NPA forum and others are coming up with. It is a complex thing. If we do not burn, there are issues. If we burn too frequently, we create other issues.

In Namadgi, we have the alpine ash, which is an area that should not be burnt anything less than 25 years, because they have not had the time to mature and to make the seed. This seed is not kept in a seed bank in the ground; it actually requires a fire in the canopy. I think we are a bit at risk in Namadgi because so much of it burnt that, if we are not careful with our fire regime, because we virtually have a park now with one age group of all species, and if we have another fire or we create fires, we can

actually lose those species in a particular area.

THE CHAIR: The statistics that Mr Zylstra provided were fairly interesting. The ones I remember, of course, were that prior to, I suppose, colonial habitation, there was a major fire perhaps once every 14 years. Since then, we have been back-burning every four years to clear what they call the fuel load. As you mentioned earlier, one quarter of that back burn has been escaping and causing a major fire. There are other major fires occurring almost annually, in comparison to all the years before colonial habitation.

Ms Thompson: May I correct you. It is not that they escape and cause a major burn; they just escape. In some instances, this does go into a major burn. I think the issue is that the fuel lights up well. This prehistory is in 1939 and those fires were created by constant burning and the burns that were going on during that summer. That was the ethos at the time. If you had some bush, you just kept burning it. You lit it. Then they had this holocaust almost, as it were, which was much bigger than what we experienced in 2003.

THE CHAIR: The visual picture that he gave us as well of an area that had been burnt every four years, with low growth, in comparison with one that had not been burnt, which had high, tall growth and no fuel load underneath, was quite interesting, too.

Ms Thompson: Yes. That is a bit of a heartbreak for me really, because, as an older citizen now, we were getting close to some senescence, which is exactly what you are describing. You go from that scrubby undergrowth and you have got a lovely canopy and grasslands underneath. We often wonder how the Aboriginal people traversed or crossed these lands. Of course, they did not have to go through the scrub that we have gone through because we have created it over 150 years or 180 years of burning. Here was I, an ageing bushwalker with a crook ankle, thinking, "In another five, 10 or 20 years I will be walking through the open." Now we are back to square one again.

MS PORTER: Can I take you to the last point that you talked about in your formal presentation, which was your experience on the Interim Namadgi Advisory Board. Do you want to make a further comment about that?

Ms Thompson: Yes. The board came into existence in 2001 or 2002. It was a bit of a surprise element that came out of the Carnell government in the creation of that and the agreements that were put forward.

MRS DUNNE: I wasn't surprised.

Ms Thompson: Anyway, it was an honour to be part of that. I believe that we worked very collaboratively within the board component. I am on a number of committees and I could tell you quite honestly that working with Aboriginal people is a more polite and decent experience than working with a lot of white colleagues on boards. I, as the environmental rep, am always likely to have between eight and 13 people that disagree with me—sometimes 20. It is a natural part of the process.

I would like to mention one in particular: Auntie Agnes Shea, who was an elder. I

believe that Auntie Agnes was a key element in that board. We brought this woman in who, on the surface—and I say "surface" because this is a white person's opinion—may not have known a lot about the park. She was reared in Brungle, in the Yass missions and so on, and taken away from her land. But Auntie Agnes just grew in strength and knowledge. She has always had great patience and forbearance for all people, and her outlook, which was picked up by others, and by the non-Aboriginal people, was that this was a park for everyone and for future generations.

I have to admit that, if somebody like Auntie Agnes had had the educational opportunities that the rest of us had had—however slight some of us might think they have been, or late in coming—we would be living in a much better world. It is a great shame, in relation to the board, that, at the end of the board period, there was a significant degree of dissension between a number of the Aboriginal participants which really has big ramifications for the future of Namadgi and how it is to be managed under a joint process.

I do not have a solution to that. I do not even understand it, because I would have to say that it is a bit like a family. We have all had that: one day you are fighting and the next day you are friends. In the Aboriginal community, this is so. It has been pointed out to me that, irrespective of how much they may fight between each other, if it then comes to a fight between them and us, they will all be together. And I do not blame them.

Again, on the board, I am humbled, from all of the Aboriginal people on it, that, despite the history of white mistruths and changing their positions and arguments and not being honest about things, they could sit there and listen to us and have faith and believe in much of what we said. In my opinion—I think Geoff would support this—the white people were there for the wellbeing of the park. It is a very humbling experience. Sometimes some members had to leave and they would say to me, which I thought was a great honour, "You're going to say it, Di, so we'll leave it up to you." There was not agreement between board members. Most of the disagreement, I have to say, was between me and the other white members. But there was a lot of agreement too.

One of the things that we could have done better, and I said this in my submission, was to have done more field trips. This is part of a funding issue. A lot of funding for the board was drawn off for the need to have parallel board meetings prior to the meeting with the Aboriginal members, which Geoff Butler, the co-chair, also attended. Aboriginal people do not understand that white people deal with things in buckets of money. They have issues of health, recidivism, criminality, wellbeing and housing, and they are trying to solve all of that through this one little bucket we have in the ACT with environment. Environment money cannot solve all of those other issues, yet to them and their wellbeing in life they are inextricably related. Does that help you a little?

MS PORTER: Yes.

Ms Thompson: They were quite passionate about it. A lot of it works so well, and I think our model can be used elsewhere. I have a lot to do with Kosciuszko and I am on the advisory committee there. Because they are bigger and they come out of a

whole New South Wales bucket, we were actually able to develop this intimacy and care within our little group and have that flexibility that came within that. There was also the way that our Namadgi managers and the staff in what is now TAMS and all kinds of other things worked in to help. So we have had some good outcomes.

MS PORTER: Getting back to the second dot point in the terms of reference, do you think that the smallness that you are describing hindered or helped in any way with the actual consultation process?

Ms Thompson: The smallness helped, because, I think, we are a bit inbred in this town and we know everyone and our kids have gone to school with whoever it might be and so on. There is a lot of information that gets passed around between people. There is a lot of knowledge; there is a lot of interest in our community. I am involved with the NPA of New South Wales and they have a meeting and it can be a very narrow meeting; it does not cover all the people of Sydney. I go to a Canberra bushwalkers meeting, or we call a consultation process, and everyone from all over Canberra comes to it. It is much easier. A lot of us have lived here a long time and sort of know each other and how each other works and so forth.

MS PORTER: So what about the competing groups that you talked about at the beginning—the horse riding groups, the four-wheel drive organisations, of which you said you are a member? How can that dialogue happen so that some of these things that you have been talking about could be discussed before it gets to be a problem, if you understand what I mean?

Ms Thompson: It is an idealistic situation that that should occur and they had the same position, knowledge and advantages that we have. It is just that some people cannot see or do not want to see. It is like a war: people go to war believing they are both right and that is the exact situation we have in a democratic society, thank goodness.

In relation to the four-wheel drive things, I was asked by the president some years ago to give a presentation on the Kosciuszko plan of management, and the senior officer running the Kosciuszko plan of management process said she would come along with me because he thought it could be a bit of a bloodbath. But when I presented the information, and the way I did it—pictures tell a thousand words—out of the 60 people there I probably had 20 come up to me afterwards and say, “We didn’t realise that park management was so complex” or “I support what you are saying, but I’m not game enough to say it in the group.” When I go and present to other clubs, like the bushwalkers, I do not get a third of them come and pat me on the back and say, “I agree with you.”

So that was a really positive thing. It is a slow process and some of it will never be resolved. You cannot do it in park management. We are all better informed, and we have all been so trained through these two plans of management processes at present, that there are no blinkers on anybody.

Last year I went to the 21st anniversary of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee and they brought all these people in from the states. When I looked around that, there were no horse people, no four-wheel drivers—none of those sorts of people. There was a

group—I was one of them, and I will give you a copy of my book later—of authors/former bushwalkers. I am a statistician and a sociologist and I like to look at people. I looked at these and thought that what we should aim for in the next celebration is to have these other groups in there with the same level of understanding for protection of these natural areas—if only. What was strange was that we got only this one category of people; we did not get any others. That was over a 21-year period.

MS PORTER: To clarify, what you are saying is that, if you can engage those other groups in the same way as the groups you were talking about have been engaged, everyone would be working towards the preservation of the area and there would not be a disagreement necessarily because they would be able to see their needs through the prism of the park's protection, rather than through another prism. Is that right?

Ms Thompson: In a perfect world, Mary. But I have to say that even amongst bushwalkers and conservationists we do not agree either; there is not total agreement. There is an overarching agreement, and that is what I would aim for at this stage in my lifetime.

THE CHAIR: You have also added some comments at the end of your submission regarding commercial operations. Is there anything you would like to add to that?

Ms Thompson: Yes, there is. During the time of the board a trial was put up to take ecotourism things through the Australian Conservation Volunteers. People can have names that give them a not-for-profit, even charitable, status and that includes outward bound, nature conservation volunteers and various other groups and so on involved. Again, it is a bit like the four-wheel drive thing; it is basically people paying for access that they do not normally have, and being allowed into areas that they would not normally be allowed in with mechanical means. Everyone is allowed into these areas; they just have to get in there within the zones. You can drive into this, you can motorbike in that, you can ski in this, you can walk into that—whatever it might be. We have to be very careful. There is a link to this on the fire trails, because some of the fire trails proposed will clearly allow tour groups to do loops through Namadgi, including through the catchment and through the wilderness, and I think there is a great risk with that.

There is another project that you heard about from NPA called the national landscapes project which has been put up through the tourism and transport forum; all the governments are involved and the alps are involved and so on. It basically proposes increased building and commercial use in national parks. It sounds cynical but it is the thin edge of the wedge. It is the high end of town. It is voyages and all of those sorts of things. It is not even dealing with, I hate to say, the small operators like the Peter Cochranes of the world. You will lose what national parks are set to protect.

THE CHAIR: The committee had the opportunity to travel up to Queensland last year to look at ecotourism in parks. We were quite surprised to hear information on how well operators protected their area, particularly on the reef and also above Cairns with the rainforest gondola. We were quite surprised at the amount of work that they put in to protect the area whilst having the operation in place there as well.

Ms Thompson: Yes, and I do not deny this. I use commercial operators out of town

as well. I try to be very selective. We have commercial operators in Namadgi as well. But it is that difference between allowing commercial operators within a certain area, which they are allowed, and not allowing them beyond a certain boundary. So I am not saying no commercial operators. We have them; they do function well—people like Ian Fraser and various other ones around. The horse people would take people through on commercial operations. But on that thing—and thank you for jogging my memory on that—there is actually a price mechanism as well. We do not charge an overnight fee for these operations, and I think we need to look at that, and what has also been developed in Kosciuszko—they have done a review on commercial activities, which will be out soon—and monitor that and try to align ourselves.

That is a fairly typical thing with somebody like Outward Bound. It is no wonder they have a base in Namadgi, because they do not have to pay an overnight fee to camp in it, yet 6,000 of the 8,000 overnights recorded in Namadgi are done by Outward Bound, and Outward Bound only operates from one private school in the ACT; nearly all of the rest are from North Shore private schools. They can afford to pay the extra $4 or $5 a night. That is why they are here and not in Kosciuszko, because they make a bigger profit here. Ask Steve Horsley what he charges them. It is still cheap, $4 or $5 a night; it is nothing.

So I think we need to be mindful of that, and also in relation to that sort of thing, going into another element, are the large group activities—that there be a fee for the use and a fee for the clean-up and a fee that covers the staffing and so forth. We have big events in Namadgi, which I do not support, either by bushwalkers or anybody else. We need to keep those carefully monitored. In fact one of the Aboriginal members came back after one and was mortified at the damage of the single tracking from, I think, a cross-country meet; they do the single track; they all do the same route.

There is a lot of opportunity, and ecotourism brings this out. I have just had a month in New Zealand and the thing that strikes me there is that they have a myriad of little operators, operating all kinds of activities off-park; they use their off-park things—their own farms, their own regions—a lot more. We have a mentality in Australia that if we want to do this it must be in a national park.

THE CHAIR: Brett McNamara, I think, mentioned to us that it is the locked-gate syndrome: you think that because the gate is locked there must be something extra special behind it. He showed us too how these gates are being damaged and the locking processes that need to be looked after.

MS PORTER: I was interested in your carrot and stick analogy, saying that sometimes a carrot is better than a stick. I think that was quite significant in ecotourism in Queensland: very much the carrot was used before the stick. Obviously the stick was there as well, but the carrot was there in terms of "if you are able to do this and if you sign up with these agreements, you will be offered a longer opportunity to do what you do, but you have to sign up to all these things and you have to do all this". So if we can use the carrot and the education as a way of bringing people together—rather like you were talking about before about how people can work together if they all know they are aiming for the same thing in the end.

Ms Thompson: We are lucky, too, in the ACT—and this comes down to the

smallness of our community—that we do not have the same level of bitterness from the people within the city that does operate within the surrounds of Kosciuszko, that they were pushed off their lands. So we can work in a different way, and that is exactly what you are suggesting.

Could I just offer one other element. We talked a lot at the forum and so on about the bogs. Mick did the Amanda Carey award. I would like to show the committee and pass around a picture taken—between my ankle operations, when I did get into Namadgi; and I do not think I will get there again—of the band-aids that are put across the swamps. Did you get to see those from the air or anything like that?

THE CHAIR: No, but Brett McNamara described them to us.

Ms Thompson: I also have a picture taken 20 years ago of my daughters, on a rare occasion when they were not fighting, looking down on Rotten Swamp, that same swamp. That was on an NPA Easter trip. That is to show that people can walk in there with families, and what a lovely experience it is for them. It is a remarkable area, and I think our swamps are absolutely extraordinary. We do not have anything like them in Kosciuszko.

THE CHAIR: I am looking at this photo now that Brett gave us of the bogs after the fires. It was passed on with a comment made by Auntie Agnes Shea when he talked about the leftover burnt timber and the grey effect and she said, "It looks like a wise old man's beard."

Ms Thompson: Yes. She is a great lady. We have been very fortunate to work with her and a whole number of the other people on the board.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in. If there are any questions that the committee have for you, we will get them to you as soon as we can, and of course we will also provide a copy of the report to you when it is finalised.

BUTLER, MR GEOFF, former co-chair, Interim Namadgi Advisory Board
PEARSON, DR MICHAEL, Managing Director, Heritage Management Consultants Pty Ltd; and former member, Interim Namadgi Advisory Board

THE CHAIR: I welcome Mr Geoff Butler, former co-chair of the Interim Namadgi Advisory Board and Dr Mike Pearson, a former member of the Interim Namadgi Advisory Board, and heritage consultant, to the committee's inquiry into Namadgi. Thank you very much for coming along this afternoon. You have both read the yellow privileges card and are aware of the details?

Mr Butler: Yes.

Dr Pearson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: 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.
>
> *Amended 5 May 2008*

THE CHAIR: We do not have a submission from you gentlemen as yet, so I guess this afternoon will be your submission. Would you like to make some comments to the committee?

Mr Butler: Yes. We have not put in a submission; we thought we would do it here because it will be fairly brief. We will just address the terms of reference of the

committee. Looking at the administration of the consultation process, the whole course of the consultation for Namadgi has been one of the best I have ever participated in, and I have been involved in environmental committees and issues in the ACT region for many years. Opportunities were made available for all groups and individuals to contribute to the development of the plan and it was a very open and transparent process.

A number of formal sessions were held, organised by the department and the conservation council, plus talks with individuals and various groups, and I know a number of departmental briefings were held for various organisations in the ACT in the course of this. In some ways, the time taken to develop the plan, which was some four-odd years, should give you some indication of how much effort was put into that plan; it was solid going all the time.

I am pleased to say that the department and the secretariat for the board were open and honest with us all the way through and there was not one issue that I can think of that was not brought before the board for us to address in an advisory capacity to the department.

I would also like to acknowledge the secretariat and the people who worked on that, namely Mr Terence Uren and Ms Sharon Lane, for the effort and commitment they had to the process all the way through. The administration of this all the way through really was excellent.

As to effectiveness of the consultation, you only have to look at the number of people who put submissions in to see just how many people contributed to the process. Effectiveness is open to conjecture, I guess, in many respects. People will be consulted. Those who do not necessarily get their way or get their things into the final draft plan will say that they were not listened to. We know that is a process that goes on, no matter what the issue is. I can give you an assurance that the board looked in detail at all the submissions, all the points of view, attitudes, that came to us and they were all examined in detail before we gave any advice to the department.

The board, in reviewing drafts or submissions: as I said, we took them into account. Sometimes the board did modify them; sometimes they were accepted more or less as they were put in, in our advice back to the department.

Nature and level of participation by board members: I, and I am sure all other board members—Di has just spoken about this—were really honoured to be able to participate in this because it is a very large section of the ACT and a very important section of the ACT in the sense of our water catchment. We all know what that means to us at the present time. It was very comprehensive, the participation by board members. I fully support everything Ms Thompson said earlier about the participation of the Aboriginal members of the board; it was a real honour to work with them on this, all the way through.

Believe you me, as the co-chair who ran most of the meetings: there were some fiery arguments. In fact, we had times when I was stumbling, about where we would go to keep the meeting under control, because it got so bad at times. But I am pleased to say that, through all that process, we did come out with a consensus through the board on

pretty much most issues.

There were some things we agreed to disagree about, but it really was a very worthwhile experience working on that board. In some cases we could have probably had a few more outings to see certain things. We did go out a lot to see certain things in the park, but that could have been increased a little. Staff resources, departmental budgets and things like that probably limited that somewhat. However, generally that worked reasonably well. I would have liked a few more issues to be looked at in more detail in the field, but in the background I think it was reasonably okay.

Most members of the board had a reasonably good understanding of all the issues involved. For the Aboriginal board members who had had a little less formal experience of these things, we did, as Ms Thompson mentioned, a pre-board meeting. The day before the main board meeting, I and the secretariat met with the Aboriginal board members to take them through the whole agenda so that they understood the issues. I think that really helped in the discussions at the formal board meeting the next day. Board members attended most of the community forums that were held and some of the other formal consultation processes. We were there to listen to what the community were saying. We usually did not participate but we were there to listen to what was going on.

Namadgi's value as a conservation area and corridor: I do not think I need to go into that in much detail. That should be obvious now, with our Atherton to alps, alps to coast type corridor arrangements that we are discussing, just how important a link Namadgi is in that corridor.

The water catchment values: the board had that as a priority. It was a ministerial instruction; we had to keep that as one of our prime focuses during the whole of the discussions and deliberations and, luckily, water catchment values and conservation of biodiversity values are a hand-in-glove fit. They really fit together very well and I do not think that is a major issue at all.

Fire management is probably one of the most contentious things, other than recreational uses. It will always be that way. I do not think, even with our work on the strategic bushfire management plan version 2, that everything will be sweet at the end of it. There will always be differences of opinion on fire, and that is just something that we have to handle really on an annual basis as certain prescription burning programs and various other things are proposed. There will always be flak. Some people would like to see Namadgi as a burnt-out ash pit every year and other people say that you should not be lighting it at any time. We really have to find some sort of compromise there. You can ask questions on that, if you wish, afterwards.

I think that is all I need to say as an introduction. Maybe Michael might want to say something more on that aspect.

Dr Pearson: I have not prepared anything for this; I came along more to respond to any questions you might wish to put forward. But I support everything that Geoff has said. It was an interesting board to work on, because of that dynamic of half the members being individuals bringing different experience to the board, and the Aboriginal community bringing their experience but also bringing strongly their

representation of the wider Aboriginal community. That dynamic led to a process of interchange, if you like, between people who were there primarily because of a respect and a desire to see the good management of the park and the utilisation of the park for the furtherance of cultural aspirations and those of us who came to it to support our particular interest area or professional area in the park management.

The dynamic worked well but it was a slow process, which is partly why it took the period it did take to work through a lot of the issues for what is a reasonably complex management planning exercise. The board itself had to deal with how it, as an entity, dealt with the wide variety of information being thrown at it, and being asked to comment on a wide variety of information. But at the end of the day it worked well and there were certainly a lot of patient and reiterative processes going on between the parties and the board to work through all of those issues, and I think that is reflected in the plan.

I would also like to support Geoff's comments on the professionalism of the staff preparing the plan. This is an exercise where the board is an advisory board—it is in effect the administration of the park's areas and the department that are actually doing the work—and it is a very complex plan. Some of the policies in each of the sections cover a wide variety of issues—much more wide a variety of issues than one would expect from a specific issue like fire, visitation, heritage or whatever. All of those issues were canvassed through the board. They were all presented in draft form and commented on by board members and then discussed as changes.

I have to say, of course, that we have not seen a draft of this since 2006—

MRS DUNNE: But you will be able to see it now?

Dr Pearson: Yes. The pressure of work and other things meant that copying it off is a slow task. I certainly have not been through it in detail to double check how this draft matches up against the previous drafts we have seen, but the little bit of dipping that I have done seems to confirm that a lot of the issues that we dealt with are dealt with well in here, and I think the board certainly would be happy to support this document.

As to the specific issues, as Ms Thompson raised earlier and as Geoff alluded to, part of the process here was taking submissions from interest groups, particularly user interest groups, and trying to deal with those legitimate perspectives and legitimate desires in the context of an area where one of our primary functions was the conservation of that area and the use of that area by all users, not by specific users. So there will inevitably be disgruntled users who did not get all of what they wanted out of the process. That goes with every planning exercise. Clearly, it is a function of government to understand that, so I am not teaching you how to suck eggs.

The other important point is that the board, while it had individuals with expertise on it in particular areas, was not an expert body, as a body, on any one of those areas. So, when material was put to us, for example, for the fire issues, we listened intently to that material. We were given and questioned the best information we could get from the parks service and departmental people and individuals on the board who had specific expertise in those areas, and fed that into the board. But at the end of the day an advisory board has to rely on the best information that it can get; it is not an expert

body on those specifics. So the plan reflects what the board felt was, if you like in colloquial terms, a good thing in relation to each of those issues.

The policies within the plan, though, rely highly on the ongoing research and the responsiveness of the planning process to research inputs, and that is most clearly shown in the case of fire, I think. It is clearly an ongoing story and this plan will be revised again and again in relation to the outcomes of that. It will also be revised in relation to the monitoring of uses in the park. Some of the policies, particularly for horse riding, for example, allow access to an area where previously there was not access, but it has a one or two-year revision period to monitor impacts. I think that is a very good principle to have in this sort of a plan, that you let your research carry on, you listen to it and instigate good monitoring processes to see what is happening on the ground. And those policies are the ones in there.

I am happy to respond to any questions that you might have but that is basically all I want to say.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MRS DUNNE: Taking up your last point, Dr Pearson, about monitoring and horse riding—and again you are talking to another group of non-experts on the subject and we have to take the best advice—there is a lot of advice around. Having listened very carefully to what Ms Thompson said, and looking at what is in the revised draft management plan and the notion of monitoring that activity, what advice, from one non-expert to another, would you give if we said we were going to have a period of monitoring but as we go down the path of monitoring we suddenly realise that we have a problem? How long do we persist with that? If we go down the path of, say, moving horses to the west of the Boboyan Road and suddenly realise that that is having more of an impact than people envisaged, do we wait until the end of the monitoring or do we sort of pull up stumps immediately?

Dr Pearson: No. I think you have to be responsive. The obvious questions are: what is the damage, what is the cause of that damage and are there quick solutions to that damage? Is it simply a matter that the fence posts on Weston hut have been knocked down because they have allowed the horses to be tethered to the building, even though the plan suggests that that should not be the case? If that is a very simple action in reaction to the issue, you can solve that by imposing separation of horses from the structure, say.

If there are erosion issues in a creek, is it because that is the habitual place where all the parties go across or is it more widespread than that? Are there solutions that can be dealt with at one spot? If they are more broad-brush issues, such as noncompliance with the controlled feed mechanisms and you are getting weed spread, you might have to say, "I'm sorry, but until we get a better way of controlling that, we are going to stop," because clearly part of this relies on the users complying with a self-regulatory process. If it is clearly evident that the users are not complying with the self-regulatory process, some other process has to be put in place, and until that is found the activity, in my view, should be stopped.

Mr Butler: It is really a matter of monitoring and then bringing in adaptive

management. That is really what it is about and I fully agree with what Mike has said. It depends on the issue.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Butler, you are considered somewhat of a weed expert. From your experience in the park and your experience with weed issues, how big a problem are horse-borne weeds at the moment and how much more of a problem might it become if the horses move into those bog lands?

Mr Butler: Based on all my reading on horse use in national parks and so forth, I must admit that I am of the view that weed spread is a very real issue. Weeds are one of the things that we do not pay enough attention to. It is a very non-sexy issue. It is very hard to get messages across about weeds, whereas if you can see pig damage or horse damage, it is something you can get on to much more quickly. The feral pests are handled well, but weeds are not. There is plenty of scientific research that shows that certain species of some of our most noxious weeds will pass straight through horses untouched.

MRS DUNNE: Can you give us some examples?

Mr Butler: Paterson's curse is a good example. Once it is eaten, it comes out of the horse. It is dropped in a nice little pat of fertiliser, ready to get established. You really have to take weeds very seriously with horse use. I am very much of the point of view that the proposals to put them onto the western side was wrong and that we should have retained it on to the eastern side. Weed monitoring for the horses is going to have to be almost a monthly thing for the staff.

This is the other thing about these monitoring programs: it puts a very staff-intensive nature to the whole monitoring process. The environment, I believe, is not really well cared for in the ACT, in the sense that wherever cuts come it is usually the environment that cops it first and then we will have fewer staff on the ground to monitor all these sorts of issues.

THE CHAIR: That was something that we learned, too, on the trip with rangers—not just the resources that they can provide but also the enticement to try and get more people to work there. The wages are not very good at all; they are doing it for the love of the job, I think.

Mr Butler: It is a big issue.

MS PORTER: Chair, can I go back to the consultation process. Mr Butler, at the beginning of your address you talked about a number of processes that were used and you said that a lot of them were really effective. Which would you pick as the most effective, and why?

Mr Butler: To me, the community forums, where you had all the different groups with their differing opinions there in the one room. Ms Thompson alluded to this earlier on, about getting all the groups together. That really is a way of handling the thing much better, because my experience is that people who have certain beliefs and are very strong on them are not strong enough on them to really bring them forward in those forums when they know there is an opposing group there. So I think community

forums are really good and everyone is better balanced in the way they look at things. Also, the opportunities that the department gave individual groups, to go for departmental briefings, to find out where the plan was at, for them to put further evidence to the department, are always useful. We all know that—we have representations about all sorts of things—that is another useful way of handling things.

I am really pleased with the consultation process. Of all the environmental issues that have come up in this town over the years, the Namadgi draft management plan process is probably one of the most thorough that I have ever participated in. I have participated from a different side on this one—

MRS DUNNE: That could be damning with faint praise, though.

Mr Butler: but I think it was a very open process and a very useful one.

MRS DUNNE: It wasn't faint praise?

Mr Butler: No.

THE CHAIR: Mr Butler, in your presentation you talked about some fiery arguments and positions that you had to agree to disagree on with other groups. Would you like to touch on a couple of those for us?

Mr Butler: Once again, I have to draw back to Ms Thompson's comment on this. There were more fights between the European members of the board than the other way round. I think that was partly because we probably had, in some cases, a better understanding of the issues than some of the Aboriginal members of the board.

At times, we had very heated arguments. We had people leaving meetings at times and we had to call a truce for a while to get people back into the room. People with their different opinions about the environment hold them very strongly and are very committed to them. To get to that compromise level where everybody can say "that is an acceptable solution to this issue" takes some work. Yes, we had a lot of very heated arguments.

In some cases, some of the Aboriginal board members had a very limited understanding of the issues, even with the pre-board meetings that we had. In the course of a discussion, some other point would come up and we would be off on a totally different tangent because of that. It was very difficult at times, in some of the discussions that we had, to manage the whole thing.

Dr Pearson: Another issue there that is worth mentioning is that with the dynamics of the board, particularly with the Aboriginal members, there were issues that could come up in discussion at a meeting that might not have been on the agenda, and members brought a local political stance on certain issues which had to be aired at the table. That could be disruptive, and again it is one of the reasons why some things had an iterative life through various board meetings, because you basically had to let it go and then revisit it, hopefully with more discussion and more information and less heat, at a later time.

I have to say that Geoff, who chaired almost all of the meetings, did a very good job at balancing those arguments and dealing with what could have been at some times an explosive situation of simply one group or another spitting the dummy en masse and saying, "This is not working out." It is a board structure that was new to us all and it really did need some working on and some tolerance to make it work, but at the end of the day I think we all felt that we benefited from it enormously by making it work from both sides.

MS PORTER: Having gone through that process, what lessons do you think were learned from that process to apply to another similar circumstance down the track?

Dr Pearson: There are a number of things that are just operational things. From memory, there was a problem in that the structure of the board meant that board members from the Aboriginal side were not recompensed directly for their involvement; it had to be through their representative body. That caused all sorts of problems. Apart from anything else, there was just being able to afford to get there. Also, the non-Aboriginal members in various guises were given sitting fees pertaining to boards; half the board were not.

Mr Butler: It was a very discriminative process.

Dr Pearson: That was sorted out towards the end of the board's life, I seem to recollect. So there were administrative things of working out how a board operates on an equal and equitable basis. I think the board would have benefited from far greater attention to what its riding orders were—what you are here to do and what you are representing, and something that you could pull back to at meetings and say: "Yes, that is a major issue. This is the part of the issue that we are here to discuss. We will set that aside."

THE CHAIR: For example, as you mentioned before, the primary functions of the plan are to keep our water supply and conservation of the park itself.

Dr Pearson: Yes, those sorts of issues. Again, at times, I suspect driven by a perception of using the board as a stance in internal politics, people would say about a particular issue, "No, that should not happen in the park—full stop," and basically saying that it is not going to happen. You have to say, "Hang on. There is legislation that means that it has to happen." I am trying to think of an example. No more fire trails might be one. You can say, "Hang on. There are mechanisms, things, happening in society that might well demand more fire trails, which we as a board cannot control."

We have to be able to deal with that in a planning sense to try and put on the caveats that we can through the planning process. There is no point in simply making policy that is going to fall flat at the first hurdle because it is unrealistic; it does not match reality. So it is working through those sorts of issues at a board level, saying, "Yes, these things we can achieve and these things we can't."

I do not know exactly how you do that. Part of it is clearly having better statements of what people on the board can do, what the role of the board is and how it is going to operate, but also perhaps some attention to actual training of board members. One of

the most successful training exercises, for example, was that all board members went to a cultural awareness workshop exercise with Indigenous communities, which I think affected everybody because it opened perspectives, particularly from the point of view of the non-Aboriginal participants. I suspect that some of the Aboriginal members would have benefited from similar exposure training to how the public service operates—

MRS DUNNE: And how a board operates.

Dr Pearson: and how legislation operates. And those things were not offered.

MS PORTER: Or how decision making is carried out in a white population as opposed to how it is carried out in an Indigenous community.

Dr Pearson: That is right—those sorts of issues. But that comes back to resources.

MRS DUNNE: This only touches indirectly on the terms of reference, so it probably requires a little indulgence, chair, but in the process of putting together a more permanent board, and given your experiences, what would your advice be? You have touched on the sorts of training people need on both sides of the equation, but is there anything else that you think is necessary, that needs to be better resourced than it was in the past?

Dr Pearson: Both Geoff and Di raised the issue of board members having more regular access to the park and issues in the park that you are discussing at the table. There are problems with that, particularly with some of the Aboriginal members because there were members who had health problems or an inability to spend a lot of time travelling in difficult areas to see these places. So that is an issue. But there are many opportunities to experience the park, even with those inherent problems.

I do not know how much thinking has gone into structuring a permanent board, but I certainly think a permanent board needs to have access to a range of skills brought to it. A fully Indigenous board would bring with it its own problems in that it would not have at the table, other than provided by the secretariat, expertise in the whole range of issues that are critical to the management of the park and to address some of the key purposes of the management of the park. So, in trying to find a mechanism that respects the obvious rights of the Aboriginal community to have control over those areas, that control has to be, in my mind, exercised in a way that brings all due expertise to the table that can be used by the board. I am not saying that that is just necessarily a reflection of the old board but I think there has to be that balance in there.

MRS DUNNE: Are there any models elsewhere?

Mr Butler: There is one very good model—Booderee national park, Jervis Bay—where they have had an Indigenous and European group managing the park.

MRS DUNNE: So we do not have to go very far afield?

Mr Butler: No. In fact, the board did take a trip down there, to see what was going on down there, at one stage, and I was very impressed with the way the thing was

managed. There were still conflicts at times. Cultural differences cause those conflicts and always will to some degree, but in general it seemed to be operating reasonably well. It is not far away to be able to see a reasonably good working example. There is another one in Queensland—I cannot think where it is now—where they have a similar joint arrangement.

I was not going to bring this up, but I think it is very important to do so. I think there are differences between the various clan groups of the Ngunnawal which only the Ngunnawal can solve. I am very disappointed at the way the government just dropped this, in the way they did the draft management plan and getting the permanent board into place. It has been some two years since the draft was put out. I recognise that probably one of the main reasons for that has been the troubles between the Indigenous people's groups and that it has been a hard one to resolve, and it will be a hard one to resolve. But the government needs to put a lot more effort—a lot more effort—into that side of things and get this permanent board into place for the park. It has to be done.

MS PORTER: Going back to the resourcing issue, what support did you get as a co-chair in dealing with some of those issues that you talked about? You said that you chaired most of the meetings. That must have been fairly stressful. I have chaired lots of meetings over the years and I know what a feisty group of people a board can be. What support did you get—a place to debrief, supervision for yourself—

Mr Butler: Yes. I guess I had to draw on a lot of my past experiences in dealing with various different views in conservation groups, because they can be equally bad at times. If I had not had a sympathetic secretariat at the time, I think I would have dropped the ball and gone home. To be able to talk to people—professional public servants of the quality of Sharon Lane and Terence Uren—helped me enormously, and other white colleagues on the board too. When we had difficulties, we were able to discuss things. When it was really bad, we could discuss the issues and sort of get back to something. There were a couple of times when I just said: "Okay, we're now going to stop for a 15-minute break," and I went outside, just to get out of the room. That happened on a few occasions.

MS PORTER: You said that sometimes the issues were not necessarily the ones that the board were dealing with but still were there amongst the people that were meeting and had to be dealt with because they came out in the open and needed to be dealt with, otherwise you could not progress. I presume you are referring to some of the Indigenous issues, but it could be other issues as well. Were there sometimes other sub things that did not come out in the open which you sensed were there nonetheless but could not be dealt with because they were personal agendas that just could not be dealt with because they were not being brought out into the open?

Mr Butler: Yes, I think that did happen from time to time. It is very difficult. To me, Aboriginal business is Aboriginal business and we should not get involved with it. There were clashes between some of the Aboriginal board members from time to time that were basically irresolvable, and we really had to just drop it for a while. I can even remember some meetings where we dropped an issue and brought it back to the next meeting so things could cool down and I had a chance to discuss issues over the phone with some of the other board members.

One of the other things that I found most annoying during this whole process was that some of the Aboriginal board members were uncontactable between meetings; their cultural ways meant that they went to different places. It was really hard to contact some of the Aboriginal board members from time to time. That was an inconvenience more than anything else. I really do not know what to say. I do not want to go too deeply into it. It is not my business; it is really their business to resolve and there is not much you can do about that.

Dr Pearson: There were other issues that were also core to the concerns of the Aboriginal community generally—things like problems with youth within their community.

Mr Butler: That is the big thing.

Dr Pearson: That was probably one of the driving ones. The Aboriginal members were always conscious of looking at the planning process into the park as a mechanism to find ways to improve the lot of their young people. In some ways, the board was very successful in doing that, by encouraging very much the engagement of Aboriginal trainee staff within the system. It was a very good thing to do anyway, but it was a very useful thing to do in the context of the board, because in a way it confirmed to the Aboriginal board members that this was being taken seriously. But at times I think there were subtext policy issues in the minds of some of the Aboriginal board members, or board members as a whole perhaps, as to how aspects of the park could be used for youth rehabilitation centres and that sort of thing, which would come up from time to time. But they were never really well formulated to the point where they came to fruition.

There were some things that we looked at very carefully as to whether these things would work. Gudgenby homestead, for example: one of the issues that came up was whether it was suitable, and after consideration the Aboriginal board members involved basically said that they did not think it was going to be suitable. But there may well be other mechanisms through more of the social support mechanisms within the ACT government where there can be cross-activities to involve the Aboriginal community members so that all the eggs are not put into this one basket, in their minds. A lot of the issues were legitimate aspirations, but not really best achieved through the park. We need to find mechanisms to expand the opportunities for the Indigenous community members to progress some of those issues.

Mr Butler: At some stages during all our discussions the Ngunnawal people thought Namadgi was going to be a saving grace for their community, and of course it cannot be, not Namadji in itself. To get those traineeships up and so forth really helped cooperation on both sides in all of the discussions we held. It was a really successful part of the whole thing, and it should continue.

MRS DUNNE: Is it continuing?

Mr Butler: I have not heard much more about it since the board has just dissolved.

Dr Pearson: I do not know what it is like within parks, but certainly in some of the

other agencies there is still a reasonably high Aboriginal employment ratio, which was in part through this process as well.

MS PORTER: We seem to have concentrated a lot on the Indigenous issues and some of the conflict that may have arisen through that, but I do not think that the Indigenous people are exclusive in that area and I would have thought that a number of the people on the committee from other directions would have had their own pet agendas for things that they wanted particularly to achieve. That is my experience with boards.

Mr Butler: Pretty much all 10 people around the table here.

MS PORTER: Everybody has something that they particularly want. That is their self-interest and the reason why they are really glad that they are there often. Of course, they are working for the larger picture as a whole board, but was it your experience that everybody was passionate and working hard together and wanting to achieve—

Dr Pearson: Absolutely, and please do not take my comments the wrong way. The reason I have spoken more of the Aboriginal members' experiences and issues is that this was a unique board in my experience. It was the first time I had ever been on a board which was fifty-fifty in its representation and had a driving mandate to really make that work. I am passionate in my hope that the next board does work. Not quite the dirty washing, but some of the realities of working on that board, need to be exposed to the committee, because it was an unusual animal. It does work but it takes a whole new set of operational mechanisms. For example, you do not use the internet for communication—forget it; half the board do not have it. There is a whole range of things that you are used to in other operations that do not apply in this one, and you have to recognise that and work with it.

Mr Butler: The proof of the pudding is that it did work. We got to that point. We got there. After all of those discussions, we got to that. That is the success of the board, and in my view it worked extremely well overall. Yes, we had to go through some hard patches, but I went through as many hard patches with Di Thompson as I did with any of the Aboriginal board members. That is the way it is; that is what we were there as an advisory board to do—get down to a point where you could—

MS PORTER: As I said, everybody has their passions that they bring to the table.

Mr Butler: Absolutely, and so they should.

I want to re-emphasise one last thing. I was very disappointed, as the co-chair of the board, who took most of the brunt of managing these meetings, that the government at the end of this did not even send us out a little letter to say, "Where is the board? What are we looking at for the future?" It has been two years, and the only thing I have ever heard about a permanent board arrangement was a phone call from a minister's office to ask, "Would you be prepared to take on a role in a permanent board?" I wrote back and said that, yes, I would "in any position that you so desire". But nothing—absolutely nothing—since, and that is a real disappointment, after the effort everybody on the board put into this document. That really needs to be looked

at.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that and for coming in this afternoon. If there are any further questions members have for you, we will get them to you as soon as possible, and of course we will provide you with a copy of the transcript and the report when they are finalised.

Meeting adjourned from 2.29 to 2.45 pm.

SCULLY, MR GRAHAM CHARLES, private citizen

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Mr Scully, and welcome to the planning and environment committee's inquiry into the Namadgi national park draft plan of management. Thank you for coming along. You have had an opportunity to read the privilege statement in front of you and do you understand the implications?

Mr Scully: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: We have a copy of your written submission, but would you like to make some opening comments?

Mr Scully: My first comments are on the effectiveness of the plan's consultative mechanisms. Of course I have not been as deeply involved as some of the previous people have been in the consultation on Namadgi. I decided that I would just suggest that those responsible for drafting the plan of management for Namadgi look to Victoria and New South Wales and take note of the aims of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee, which includes the sharing of research and knowledge and promotes consistency and uniformity across the alps. This has been achieved in areas that I am aware of in signage, feral animal and weed control, sphagnum bog rehabilitation and other things like that.

I have been involved in the recent plan of management review process for Kosciuszko national park, which has quite a significant range of consultative mechanisms. Then I have written, in brackets, "apart from two advisory boards separately established". These consultation mechanisms include consultation with organisations such as the Rural Lands Protection Board, catchment management authorities, bushfire committees and brigades, infrastructure providers, tourism promotion, local communities, local families and voluntary organisations; there could well be more.

I then go on to say that, with my background and interest, I am particularly interested in the conservation of cultural heritage, both Aboriginal and European. A couple of the features in the Kosciuszko plan of management that I am impressed with are that a permanent management partnership be set up with Aboriginal people and heritage management partnerships to formalise local community involvement in heritage management. I understand from talking with the parks service that that could be a heritage management partnership with perhaps one family looking after one hut, or it could involve a management partnership with a whole community such as Jindabyne and all the culture in that particular area of the park. Those heritage management partnerships are intended to be flexible.

The Kosciuszko plan of management outlines specific policies and actions and at the end, chapter 17, requires that the annual report for Kosciuszko has to report on plan implementation. So the annual report for the park legislatively has to address the priorities that are established in the plan of management.

I would like to comment on three other issues. The first is huts. When the Kosciuszko plan of management was being developed, there was a parallel process to produce a huts conservation strategy. I saw Mary Porter and gave her a CD of this particular fat document. I have another copy CD if you would like that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Scully: The huts conservation strategy provides guidelines for the maintenance of huts and other European cultural items in the park and it also provides a method by which an assessment can be made, if a hut is destroyed in any way, as to whether that hut can be rebuilt or not.

My next point is on camp fires. As far as I understand it, the current management requirement is that, if one goes walking in Namadgi national park and wishes to light a fire, one has to apply for a permit, regardless of whether it is in a wilderness area or another area of the park. My preference would be for that to remain rather than have a blanket prohibition forbidding fires in wilderness areas.

My next point, being a member of the National Parks Association as well as the huts association, is that the point was made to me, and I agreed, that in the original draft there were some limits placed on large-scale events, which are apparently not in the new plan. I would support that being reinstated into the plan.

Horse riding is currently permitted east of the Boboyan Road. I understand it is now proposed that a trial be done for part of the national equestrian trail to be routed through the Grassy Creek area. This has been argued for horse and rider safety reasons. I am not happy with this proposal. I believe it will result in, firstly, an increase of weeds and, secondly, an increased risk of damage to huts and their immediate environment. I would be pleased if an alternative route could be designated to keep the riders east of Boboyan Road. Those are my comments.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I would like to go to your ideas on fires. We learned on our trip that it is now a policy that the government do not want people to stay in the huts; they are quite happy for them to go to the hut and spend an evening there, but to stay overnight outside, for the very reason that they are concerned that fires within the huts may be left unattended and then take over and destroy the huts. Have you seen that occur and do you have any comment on that?

Mr Scully: Yes, I have. In Kosciuszko, huts have been burnt down. Particularly in Kosciuszko, illegal four-wheel driving is more prevalent; it is easier to control four-wheel drivers in Namadgi than in Kosciuszko, and several huts have been burnt down from illegal four-wheel drivers going in and building fires that were too big.

One of my favourite huts—I did a work party on it—is Rowley Gregory's hut in the Orroral Valley. On 1 July, I got a phone call from Brett McNamara telling me that the hut had been burnt down. Some very red-faced university students went in, incredibly cold. The hut had an internal wooden fireplace, they made a fire that was too big, and the hut burned down.

MRS DUNNE: That is usually the way; it is usually fires that are too big for wattle-and-daub fireplaces.

Mr Scully: Yes, and in Kosciuszko more and more open fireplaces are being replaced by pot-belly stoves, slow combustion stoves. Like most people who use huts—I do

quite a lot of ski touring and I carry a pack, ski around and go to a hut—I like to get into a hut, have a fire, cook our meal and socialise, but we literally sleep outside in our tents because they are warmer than the huts. Very inexperienced people will sleep in huts, only to discover that they are very cold. The Kosciuszko policy is that sleeping in huts is only to be done as an emergency thing, so I would support any similar process with huts. I do not think it should be open slather.

MRS DUNNE: You seem over the years to have had a lot of experience with huts, both in Namadgi and in Kosciuszko. There have been waves in the policy in relation to huts. Probably in the late seventies and early eighties there was a policy of wanting to do away with huts in the wilderness, for some of those reasons you have touched on—inappropriate use and things like that. And then there was the view of the Kosciuszko association that they served an important heritage role. For the bushwalkers they were places in extremis, and there have been instances where bushwalkers have arrived at marked huts to discover that they were not there any longer and that has put people in jeopardy. For someone who has been around and seen these waves of policy, how would you see the best management of huts, as a user and appreciator?

Mr Scully: I think the best management of huts is a cooperative maintenance program between the managers of the park and the people who use the huts. In Kosciuszko, we have what are called caretaker groups, people who have been looking after a hut for something like 20 years. But what is also happening in Kosciuszko, and I think it has happened more there than it has happened in Namadgi, is families coming back and starting to look after their own huts.

MRS DUNNE: The original pioneer families, or their descendants?

Mr Scully: Yes. They are coming back. One of the big reasons for the turnaround in Kosciuszko was that I think we all got a huge shock in the 2003 fires when 19 huts were burnt down. I think, too, that in the 1970s there were some elements of the environmental movement who we said were iridescently green and very anti hut. But of course our world has much more serious environmental issues than just little huts in the wilderness now and we found during the huts conservation consultation that there were very few anti hut protests. So society has changed. In Kosciuszko, families are coming back. When they were thrown out off their snow leases, they did not want to have anything to do with the park or whatever; but they are now coming back. It is almost like Aboriginal land rights: the European people too are starting to see this as their land and this as their hut, and they want to make connections back with them.

MRS DUNNE: On the same subject, you have a large book about hut conservation. Thinking of the huts, say, in Namadgi that have been destroyed recently, what are the sort of things that we should be looking at to re-establish huts? Is it important to re-establish huts if they have been destroyed?

Mr Scully: The Gregory family built two. One was in Rendezvous Creek and the other was in Orroral, and they have both been burnt down. One of the criteria in the huts conservation was the extent of family connection with the hut and the area and the interest that they had. The other point is the use that, for example, the girls grammar school used to make of the huts. When we were doing our work party on the

hut in the Orroral Valley, we were visited by a group of 15 to 19-year-old girls. It was a pretty awful day and it was good that they could go in the hut and shelter. They had their lunch and then they kept walking on. So the educational use and safety use for young groups is well worth while.

MS PORTER: Going back to your discussion early in the piece about the consultation processes that were used by the Kosciuszko national park, was there any particular process that you thought was most effective and also could you explain about the two advisory boards that were separately established? Were they at different times or running at the same time?

Mr Scully: My understanding is—I could well be wrong—that they were both set up at the same time in such a big park. One is based in the Tumut area and the other in the south. I will ask Di Thompson how many people were on them. It was 13 on the Snowy Mountains region and 17 on the south-west slopes, the northern part of the park. There were two Aboriginal representatives on each board, but it can be more.

MS PORTER: Okay. You said there was a significant range of consultation mechanisms. Can you recall not necessarily what they all were but the significant ones, the ones that worked the best?

Mr Scully: With the organisation that I know best, the Kosciuszko Huts Association, we have been having informal meetings once or twice a year with park managers. That has now been formalised into a memorandum of understanding, and that was signed for the first time at the beginning of this year, so that is one consultative mechanism that I am aware of.

The ones that are suggested here, the heritage management partnerships, are going to happen in the future and they have a two to five-year time frame to be established. I cannot give you the detail about the arrangements with the Rural Lands Protection Board, catchment management authorities and bushfire authorities, but those are listed. They meet a lot with bushfire authorities and landholders whose land adjoins the park.

MS PORTER: You talked about large events. According to the draft plan, a large event is more than 10 individuals. Is that your understanding or were you thinking of larger groups than that?

Mr Scully: I was thinking of larger groups than that. Ten is not particularly big.

MS PORTER: I wondered what a large event really was. It says that large events permitted any time of the year may be limited. I am wondering, if you were limiting them yourself, how many you would limit them to.

Mr Scully: One large event—I do not know if it is still going—in Kosciuszko was a race up Hannels Spur, which is probably the highest vertical climb in Australia. Hundreds of people would pound up that spur. So many people went up it that they would have no doubt caused damage to vegetation and some erosion control. That is one that I certainly would not approve of.

THE CHAIR: Could you, if you have the knowledge, touch on the permanent

arrangements in Kosciuszko and how that operates in comparison to the Namadgi plan?

Mr Scully: Are you referring to the permanent management partnership with Aboriginal people?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Scully: That does not exist yet but it is proposed. The plan of management does not go into any more detail than that.

THE CHAIR: When you refer to that process for Kosciuszko, do you think perhaps with Namadgi, if there were a permanent board in place with Indigenous representation, that that would satisfy that need?

Mr Scully: Yes, I think it could. I would see disadvantages in separating Aboriginal people from non-Aboriginal people.

MS PORTER: Sorry to go back to the large events issue, but there are competing demands, obviously—the hut people, the horse riding people, the four-wheel drive people, the bushwalking people—and then there is the pressure for ecotourism, which could be used as a way of educating people so that they know what is in there worth protecting, so that you could have a buy-in, which is what they are using very effectively in Queensland, it appears from our trip there. Some of those events that I am talking about—the horse riding et cetera—have the potential for that large event component, don't they?

Mr Scully: They do. I think each one would need to be assessed. If, for example, a large group of horses wanted to follow the fire trail in the southern part of the park and they stayed on the fire trail all the time, the damage would be fairly minimal really. Fire trails have to be regraded from time to time.

MS PORTER: So just on a case by case basis you would—

Mr Scully: I would think it would need to be looked at on a case by case basis.

THE CHAIR: The final plan says that it allows for special access arrangements to management trails for tour operators to all except zone 1, which is the wilderness zone, but there still has to be an approval process for them.

Mr Scully: Okay. I was not aware of that.

THE CHAIR: As there are no further questions, I thank you, Mr Scully, for coming in. We will get a copy of the transcript of the *Hansard* to you as soon as we can and, if there are any further questions members have, we will put those to you as soon as we can as well.

The committee adjourned at 3.08 pm.