

NSW Travelling Stock Reserves State Planning Framework 2016-19 Draft for public consultation

This document is a recipe for ongoing mismanagement and environmental degradation. Apparently it relates to future management of two million hectares of land comprising mostly remnant native vegetation. The actual area concerned is not clear from the document because it contradicts itself by stating that “There is a total of 1,985,908ha of TSR” and also that “Local Land Services had care, control and management of 490,927ha of TSR, valued at \$426,817,539. Crown Lands had care, control and management of 97,490ha of TSR and 1,397,563ha of other tenure (mostly being Western Lands leases)”. I will assume that the document relates to management of two million hectares of crown and leasehold land, but whatever the area, the framework is fundamentally flawed.

Section 2.1 indicates that Local Land Services employs 850 people and spends \$175 million a year to “better manage natural resources”. My observations, as expressed in a number of scientific publications referenced below, are that mismanagement of crown lands in accordance with a wilderness mentality and flawed ecological theories, is a major cause of environmental degradation in Australia. Woody thickening, loss of biodiversity, chronic tree decline, pestilence and megafires are rampant as a result of ‘passive’ management of our natural resources, particularly exclusion of burning and grazing.

Section 3.2 of the framework states that: “passive uses ... do not remove resources from the reserve and therefore do not compromise alternative uses” ...

“Examples of passive uses include:

- environmental conservation (such as protection of riparian areas)
- cultural heritage conservation (such as protection of identified cultural sites, both Aboriginal and European)
- biodiversity conservation (such as the presence of listed or locally important species)
- aesthetic enjoyment (such as exposure to main roads, proximity to town)
- passive recreation (such as family barbeques, bird watching and bushwalking)”

In fact, passive management, i.e. neglect, compromises environmental protection, cultural heritage, biodiversity, aesthetic enjoyment and passive recreation because woody thickening and accumulation of litter and fallen timber choke out biodiversity, destroy cultural values and aesthetics, interfere with recreational activities and promote disastrous megafires (Jurskis 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Jurskis and Underwood 2013).





Fig. 1 Tree described by Edward Curr in 1843

Frequent mild burning, and use of natural resources were fundamental to Aboriginal culture and economy for 40,000 years and maintained the open, diverse and resilient ecosystems that were sought by European pastoralists. After Aboriginal burning was disrupted, grazing, camping, firewood collection and other active uses helped to maintain environmental and cultural values, especially ancient trees. For example, Fig. 1 shows an ancient tree of great environmental value as well as Aboriginal and European cultural heritage value (Jurskis 2015, p. 225) in Barmah National Park that has been maintained by slashing and firewood collection in a high use recreational area on the Banks of the Murray River and Broken Creek. Fig. 2 Shows an ancient stand of red gum maintained by grazing and burning and by firewood collection by fishermen (Jurskis 2015, p. 207) on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River in Currawananna State Forest. Another photo of this stand showing regeneration where an old tree had fallen was used to exemplify healthy river red gum in the Natural Resources Commission Assessment Report.



Fig. 2. Ancient river red gum woodland maintained by grazing, burning and firewood collection.

Fig. 3 shows a near dead ancient red gum tree and chronically declining early mature trees in 'passively managed' cherry scrub on the bank of the Murray River in Gunbower National Park.



Fig. 3 Outcomes of passive management in river red gum national park.

Table A of the framework indicates that areas with the highest ecological and cultural values should be the most passively managed or most neglected. The folly of such a strategy has already been demonstrated in the loss of ancient manna gum woodlands on the Monaro to so-called dieback after grazing was excluded from TSR's and other remnants (Fig. 4; Ross and Brack 2015, Table 1). It is also evident in the chronic decline of 'protected' woodland on the doorstep of our National Capital (Fig. 5, Jurskis 2011a).



Fig. 4 End stage of chronic eucalypt decline in a 'protected' TSR near Dalgety.



Fig. 5 Middle stages of chronic eucalypt decline in a ‘protected’ TSR at Hall.

Inexplicably, Section 4.2 of the framework which deals with Aboriginal cultural heritage does not mention burning, which was the most important activity in Aboriginal culture and economy. Section 5.1 indicates that passive management doesn’t generate revenue and therefore requires external funding. This section should explicitly state the facts that active management is essential to maintain ecological, cultural and aesthetic values and that the most cost-effective forms are grazing or active recreation. If these forms of active management are to be excluded from areas of high ecological and cultural value, it is absolutely essential that frequent mild burning be carried out to maintain these values. More cost-effective forms of active management must not be excluded from TSRs unless funds have been allocated for burning.

Section 6 states that monitoring and improvement are vital and that desired outcomes must be clearly stated. This is correct, and monitoring has already shown that native vegetation and biodiversity are deteriorating because outcomes desired by ecologists such as ‘structural diversity’ (e.g. Ross and Brack 2015) are not in fact ecologically, socially or economically desirable (Jurskis 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Jurskis and Underwood 2013).

Section 8 states that LLS Regions will prepare regional management plans consistent with the framework. For this to achieve improved management, the framework must embrace active management including the option of frequent burning, and LLS staff need to be educated in firestick ecology so that they can make sensible plans that specify ecologically desirable outcomes such as open, healthy, diverse and resilient ecosystems rather than seeking to maintain homogenous scrubs full of fallen timber and litter. Monitoring must incorporate completely revised assessment criteria that recognize the value of healthy trees, bare ground and small herbs and grasses. They must recognize that an abundance of tree seedlings and saplings is a symptom of declining trees and that dense stands of tussocks, shrubs or trees and fallen timber and litter choke out biodiversity. Staff also need to be educated in fire management.

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