



Government of South Australia

Department of Environment,  
Water and Natural Resources

SA National Parks and  
Wildlife Council

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11 August 2014

Hon. Ian Hunter, MLC  
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation  
GPO Box 1047  
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister,

Please find attached a submission from the National Parks and Wildlife Council (NPWC), in response to your letter of 1/8/2014, in which you seek advice regarding the future role and function of NPWC.

As the attached submission suggests, NPWC has found this a useful and productive exercise which has helped to clarify our vision as to how the Council role could be refreshed to maximise its benefits to government and the community in the future.

This vision and commitment from the Council are offered for your consideration in the context of the review of boards and committees in your jurisdiction.

I know all of the NPWC members will have appreciated the opportunity to contribute, as part of this vitally important process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Bill McIntosh'.

Mr Bill McIntosh  
**PRESIDING MEMBER**  
**NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE COUNCIL**



**SUBMISSION TO THE MINISTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION (MSEC)**

**NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE COUNCIL (NPWC)**

**AUGUST 2014**

**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 NPWC has found this review a useful and productive exercise which has helped to establish its vision for a revitalised future role for Council as follows:**
- 1.2 NPWC will innovate under a broader scope, helping to refresh the Park's brand, and ensure relevance to the community.**
- 1.3 NPWC will endeavour to work so that the value of National Parks is elevated and opportunities are encouraged to build community engagement in Parks, with the return of revenue, both for government and the surrounding community.**
- 1.4 NPWC will foster dialogue with stakeholder peak bodies on contentious issues to provide the Minister with another way forward, finding common ground or the right solutions.**
- 1.5 NPWC will provide the Minister with critical advice via a small, highly experienced and independent board which has a diverse skill set that works collaboratively across sectors eg agriculture, conservation, mining, brand marketing, land management, natural resources, indigenous partnerships & tourism.**
- 1.6 As a step removed from the Department, the NPWC will seek to maintain an ongoing successful track record in ensuring that community feedback is dealt with fairly and appropriately by the Department. It is set up well to increase this role.**

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 National Parks and Wildlife Council (NPWC) was established under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 to provide advice to the Minister on any matter relating to the administration of the Act.**
- 2.2 MSEC requires a case for the Council in response to the Premier's initiative to abolish boards and committees where their ongoing purpose cannot be justified.**
- 2.3 The Council must demonstrate efficiency, ability to add value and reasons why its functions should be independent and require a level of separation from government.**
- 2.4 This submission will address three separate aspects in relation to the vision of the NPWC:**
  - Reserve management and the need for objectivity;**
  - Efficiency and effectiveness;**
  - Adding value & innovation.**

### 3.0 RESERVE MANAGEMENT

- 3.1 South Australia's Protected Area Network and wildlife populations are a discrete area of responsibility which should not be bundled or integrated with the greater NRM system. Whilst it does fit within the ambit of NRM, management of the public estate in the form of the Parks and Reserves System must be achieved sustainably in the landscape alongside neighbouring land uses, because the health and viability of other land uses is dependent on well-managed and functional natural areas.
- 3.2 A conflict of interest for government and mixed messages to the community will occur if Reserve management is not seen as a discrete area where people can easily and directly engage.
- 3.3 The NPWC is prepared to actively support programs such as Nature Play, that have the valuable potential to engage the community with SA's Parks and Reserves system. In this way, many more South Australians can understand, support, enjoy and appreciate their Park and Reserve areas. Finding ways to maximise this engagement is essential if these fundamentally important assets are to be adequately resourced and managed into the future.
- 3.4 It follows then, that a necessarily discrete area such as Parks and Reserve management, so dependent on a fully engaged community, can benefit from a dedicated approach to obtaining key advice and to maintaining strategic links to important groups and contacts in the community. There is a risk that government officers alone will not have the range of contacts, time or independence and community trust to drive this process to the extent that it is necessary. *NPWC believes that this indicates a clear opportunity for a refreshed role for the Council which would guarantee the skills, links and objectivity which will be so valuable to government in this community engagement area.*
- 3.5 Council membership with its 'outside' experience and networks is well positioned to identify and explore new opportunities for responsible park use.

### 4.0 EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

- 4.1 NPWC can facilitate dialogues with a diverse range of stakeholders including Primary Producers SA, Resources and Energy Sector Infrastructure Council, SA Chamber of Mines and Energy, Country Fire Service, hunters and field-game organisations, Conservation Council, Wilderness Society and others. This provides a clear and independent pathway for the Minister's message to stakeholder peak bodies and for their messages to the Minister.
- 4.2 NPWC can provide an independent, informed, and global assessment of contentious or competing issues and represent these to or on behalf of the Minister.
- 4.3 The NPWC regularly considers the effectiveness of its functions and additionally in May 2014 undertook a self-performance review. Identified strengths included a strategic approach to agenda setting, good levels of understanding between members of their

role, along with good standards of managing business and resourcing by the Department.

- 4.4 NPWC considers that its ability to use its key skills, contacts and links to networks can play a very important role in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department. Whilst underutilised to date, this can help in many ways, most noticeably in delivering key messages and providing representation on issues that are sticking points or hot spots for the Government.
- 4.5 The independent, skilled and experienced nature of NPWC membership provides a complimentary means (alongside government agencies and employees) of exchanging information and enabling active engagement early in the development of advice which could avoid controversies before they occur.

## 5.0 ADDING VALUE & INNOVATION

- 5.1 NPWC can add value for DEWNR by virtue of its collective perspective amongst members. This can be achieved through its independent stance, knowledge, diverse experiences and ability to provide balance and objectivity to any situation. A small group such as the NPWC can also positively challenge and support DEWNR in ways that the public cannot. The NPWC provides a cross-regional perspective, independent of NRM regional, Local Government or Departmental boundaries.
- 5.2 NPWC membership with its 'outside' experience and networks complements the technical and policy oriented skills of DEWNR. This allows NPWC to be well placed to help the Department reinvigorate the Parks brand so that it becomes increasingly relevant to the community.
- 5.3 NPWC adds value to the quality of DEWNR decision making by providing expert comment on the established Park Management Planning process, the often sensitive Duck and Quail Open Season quotas, goat shooting in national parks, and multiple-use scenarios for parks.
- 5.4 Rapid technology changes have opened up a range of options for Government to receive comment and input from community stakeholders. To some extent this could replace the more traditional way that government receives advice and comment about parks. Whilst the government may receive a large amount of individual comment in these electronic forms, this comment will be quite diverse and largely disorganised in nature. A risk associated with becoming wholly reliant on this form of feedback from the community is that it will not necessarily present a readymade case for a way forward *or replace the considered advice of a skilled advisory group such as NPWC*. NPWC can further enhance its role and add value by analysing and evaluating such electronic feedback and ensuring that the Department has handled this input fairly and appropriately. The Council has a successful track record in this area with regard to community and stakeholder input to Management Plans for Parks & Reserves.

## **6.0 SUMMARY**

NPWC recommends that stewardship and management of the public estate in the form of the Parks and Reserve system is seen as a discrete area of responsibility, which requires quite targeted advice from an appropriately skilled group. Thorough engagement of the community is a key unavoidable part of this task and this also needs special advice and assistance. Retention of the NPWC will represent good value for money, providing considered objective advice, interpreting community feedback and adding value to agency decision making.