



**ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST**

**& CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC.**

PO Box 369, ORANGE NSW 2800

Minister Niall Blair

The Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society is writing to urge you to protect our important public lands for our environment and future generations.

Our group is composed of amateur and professional naturalists and conservationists who have a major stake in the tenure and management of crown lands both as custodians of the flora, fauna and ecological communities that these lands contain and as actual users and stakeholders. We know the value of these reserves as we visit them during regular field trips.

Our main concern lies in the management and long term future of both travelling stock routes/reserves (now being dealt with by the Local Land Services) and other crown lands.

## **1 Travelling stock reserves**

Travelling Stock Reserves form a network that provides key environmental, economic, cultural and social benefits to NSW. TSRs conserve a range of threatened ecological communities and species. Because TSRs have remained publicly owned and generally have not been cleared, many protect remnants of woodland vegetation in the otherwise highly-cleared wheat and sheep farming belt of New South Wales. Often, these remnants contain the best examples of plants, animals, ecosystems and communities that are not well represented in National Parks and other NPWS estate. This is partly due to their frequent placement in lower fertile valleys, with deeper, richer soils, which have been subject to disproportionate clearing and land degradation.

Our group is particularly concerned with the need for the conservation values of these reserves to be properly assessed prior to any leases being granted as well as the finalisation of the draft state plan of management. We understand that in several LLS areas (including North-West, Central Tablelands and Riverina, at least), expressions of interest have already been sent out for the leasing of TSRs on a long-term (3-5 year) basis. These leases should not be granted until the conservation values have been properly assessed as they could contain communities of very high conservation status, such as grassy box woodlands, which could be degraded by set stocking. We are aware that these leases have occurred in the past and the advertising is to improve transparency of process, but we would argue that this provides an excellent opportunity to

change the system to improve the outcomes, both in respect of travelling stock and the environment.

It is not at all clear to our group, why there has been no consultation with environmental groups on either of these processes ie the leasing of land and the plan of management.

## **2 Overall Concerns with the Crown Land Review**

In addition to the concerns we have with the review of TSRs outlined above, our members have concerns with the whole process of the Crown Land Review to date, including the lack of assessment of the important environmental and cultural values of crown lands and the lack of community engagement in the process.

The crown lands estate covers millions of hectares of NSW and offers a range of important conservation values particularly remnant vegetation and habitat connectivity.

Our group is concerned that, if implemented, the 2014 White Paper would remove environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources as key management principles. The lack of transparency and community engagement in the reform process is also very concerning.

We urge you to

- Complete a thorough assessment of the environmental, cultural and social values of Crown lands (groups like ours can help in this process due to our local knowledge)
- Initiate community consultation, particularly with key environment groups, such as the Nature Conservation Council (of which one of our members is the Western Representative)
- Ensure ecologically sustainable principles are maintained as key objectives of crown lands management and that all crown lands are maintained as public land for the conservation of flora and fauna and for the enjoyment and use by future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Stapleton

SECRETARY

Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society

2/7/2015