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# Parliament of Tasmania

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## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE "B"

# REPORT

ON

*The Operation and Administration of the  
Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service*

### Members of the Committee

*Mr Ivan Dean MLC*  
*Mr Kerry Finch MLC*  
*Mr Mike Gaffney MLC*  
*Mr Tony Mulder MLC*  
*Ms Tania Rattray MLC (Chair)*  
*Mrs Adriana Taylor MLC*

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## Introduction

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At its meeting of the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee "B" on Thursday, 29 March 2012 the Chair tabled a letter from the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Sue Smith MLC, in relation to the operation and administration of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Committee considered the President's letter and resolved to establish an inquiry with the following Terms of Reference:

- To inquire into and report upon the operation and administration of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS), with particular reference to –
  - a. The capacity of PWS to manage the current estate under its control and whether the projected 5-year budget is sufficient;
  - b. any significant infrastructure issues required in the next five years and whether they are achievable within the projected budget;
  - c. whether the projected revenue streams will be sufficient to maintain and improve existing infrastructure;
  - d. any forward planning that has been initiated in relation to the proposed transfer of public land to the responsibility of PWS under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Tasmanian Forests and the projected increases in staffing levels and financial costs that have been identified; and
  - e. any other matters incidental thereto.

The Committee received nine written submissions, all of which were high quality, comprehensive documents of great value to the inquiry. The Committee expresses its gratitude to those organisations that took the time and effort to contribute to the inquiry.

Public hearings were held in Hobart on 8 and 17 May and 25 September 2012. A total of eight (8) witnesses gave verbal evidence to the Committee at these hearings.

The Committee met on twelve (12) occasions.

Details of submissions received and the witnesses can be found in the appendices to this report.

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## Background

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On 27 March 2012 the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Sue Smith MLC, wrote to the Chair of Government Administration Committee B, the Hon. Tania Rattray MLC, requesting that the Committee 'investigate the capacity of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) to manage its current estate and any further areas that may be set aside in reserves or national parks in coming months.'

The President's concern was particularly focussed on the potential for the current Intergovernmental Agreement on Tasmanian Forestry (IGA) to add significant areas of land to the estate managed by PWS. Under the terms of the IGA \$7m had been allocated for the management of these additional areas, but there was concern as to the adequacy of this amount to meet the additional land management costs involved.

As the President pointed out:

*'I believe it is important that all Members have a strong understanding of any potential changes in the operations of a government agency which already appears to be struggling to meet community expectations.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Committee was also aware of a range of issues associated with the management of forest estates arising from the 2011 Legislative Council Committee inquiry in relation to 'The proposed transition out of public native forests', and the later inquiry in relation to 'Forestry Tasmania's financial performance'.

The Committee had noted the current uncertainty surrounding the roles and responsibilities associated with the future management of existing and additional public forest estates due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the financial performance of Forestry Tasmania and the declining resources allocated to the PWS.

In addition to general estate management (the management of the trees), specific areas of concern noted by the Committee included –

- (a) the future management of infrastructure (including roads and bridges),
- (b) wild fire management and
- (c) other related community service obligations.

The Committee agreed at a meeting on 29 March 2012 that it would inquire into and report on the matters raised by the President in accordance with the suggested Terms of Reference contained in her letter.

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<sup>1</sup> Hon Sue Smith MLC, President, Legislative Council, *Letter dated 27 March 2012* (see Appendix 4).

The Committee invited a number of key stakeholders to provide written submissions. Details of the submissions received are included in this report at Appendix 2.

In addition, the Committee subsequently held a number of public hearings at which verbal evidence was received from the key stakeholders. The Hansard transcripts of these hearings, which form part of this report, are publicly available online on the Committee's inquiry webpage at the following address: [http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminB\\_Parks.html](http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminB_Parks.html)

These transcripts should be read in conjunction with this report, which contains only key sections of the valuable verbal evidence received by the Committee.

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## The Key Issues

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The evidence presented to the Committee in written submissions and at public hearings was both wide-ranging and detailed. There were some common themes in this evidence and four key issues were identified:

- The current under-resourcing of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) which limits its ability to carry out the Objectives for management of reserved land as listed in Schedule 1 of the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*.
- The possible impacts resulting from any transfer of additional national parks and other reserves to the PWS as a result of the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA);
- The adequacy of the resources provided by the Commonwealth Government under the IGA to the PWS for the management of additional parks and reserves; and
- Resources required by the PWS for fire management in additional national parks and reserves at significant risk of wildfire.

Each of these issues is discussed in detail, but as mentioned, further valuable detail is available in the Hansard transcripts of the public hearings conducted by the Committee.

### **CURRENT UNDER-RESOURCING OF PWS**

Only one written submission, being from Forestry Tasmania (FT), did not address the issue of the current under-resourcing of the PWS. FT stated that:

*'Forestry Tasmania (FT) is not in a position to pass comment on the capacity or otherwise of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) to manage its existing estate and any additional areas, except to say that we enjoy a good working relationship with PWS, particularly in the area of fire management.'*<sup>2</sup>

However, each of the other six written submissions addressed the current under-resourcing and they were in agreement.

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT) wrote that:

*'The level of resources (financial and human) and administrative structures that currently exist within the PWS are insufficient to deliver on policy commitments, reserve management plans,*

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<sup>2</sup> Forestry Tasmania, *Written Submission Covering Letter*, 27 April 2012, p.1.

*Tasmania Together benchmarks, RFA milestones (for a world-class Parks and Reserves System) and community and visitor expectations.*<sup>3</sup>

The TCT submission went on to note that:

*'For many years the area of land in formal reserves and managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) has expanded but the resources allocated for protection and active management have failed to keep pace.'*<sup>4</sup>

In its submission Birds Tasmania called for:

*'An immediate and substantial increase in resources (financial and staff) to improve the management of Tasmania's reserve estate, facilitating an increased management capacity, an increased skills base and the required expertise to protect and maintain our reserve estate and biodiversity, including enforcement and compliance efforts in all reserves.'*<sup>5</sup>

A similar view was put by the Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) which wrote in its submission that:

*'The TNPA has been concerned for a number of years about the ability of the PWS to manage the current reserve estate under its control, and has made public comment on this on a number of occasions as well as recommending increased funding. .... The PWS is significantly underfunded to manage its built assets (infrastructure and built heritage assets), and the projected revenue will do nothing to address this issue, and in fact may exacerbate the issue. .... many of the core areas of PWS responsibility remain greatly under-resourced.'*<sup>6</sup>

Environment Tasmania submitted that:

*'... Tasmania's PWS is significantly proportionally underfunded compared to other departments, and there has been a legacy of progressively de-funding the PWS proportionally compared to other parts of the Tasmanian government budget .... It is also very important to point out that the face-value budget allocation to the Tasmanian PWS is inflated by the significant funding allocation to the specific one-off current projects, such as the one-off infrastructure projects and the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication program, and a range of other grants and short-term projects. This significantly inflates Parks over-all budget*

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<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian Conservation Trust, *Written Submission*, 28 April 2012, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Birds Tasmania, *Written Submission*, 27 April 2012, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> Tasmanian National Parks Association, *Written Submission*, 4 May 2012, pp. 4, 14 & 15.

*allocation, and hides under-funding of core parks management & conservation responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>*

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) submission asserted that:

*'1. Parks and Wildlife service [sic] is currently under funded to adequately manage the more than 2.5 M hectares of land under its control. 2. As the requirements placed on land managers increase it is becoming more difficult for PWS to meet its legal and statutory obligations with the available resources. 3. Funding available for maintaining and replacing assets and infrastructure is insufficient and this situation has been exacerbated by the Priority Asset Management Program concluding and the fact that many of the assets are aging.<sup>8</sup>*

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association submission pointed out that the under-funding of PWS had broader implications for the entire Tasmanian community. It wrote that:

*'If the Parks and Wildlife Services [sic] are not sufficiently funded to meet their obligations of providing adequate land management, the neighbouring farming activities are in clear jeopardy. The TFGA acknowledges that funding has been continuously withheld from the PWS, thereby restricting their ability to meet obligations. Whilst restrictions to funding can be borne for a period, the TFGA assert [sic] that the current inability of PWS to provide services is no longer tenable, and is now a serious and unsustainable threat to Tasmania's productivity and potential.<sup>9</sup>*

This consistent view regarding the funding of PWS and its ability to meet its obligations should be a matter of great concern to the Tasmanian community and the Tasmanian Government. This is particularly so in light of verbal evidence provided to the Committee by the PWS itself. While members of the State Service are understandably cautious in commenting on such matters, the following comments by the General Manager of PWS, Mr Peter Mooney, are significant.

*'As the secretary [of the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment] mentioned earlier, we never have the resources we wish to have but we certainly have resources to make do and do the best job we can. .... I think it is fair to say that it is the same as any government agency in that we have to prioritise regularly according to a whole range of categories and we have an order of priorities in those categories. Obviously environmental management is our number one and then community engagement and then we go down to visitor safety*

<sup>7</sup> Environment Tasmania, *Written Submission*, 6 May 2012, pp. 4&5.

<sup>8</sup> Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), *Written Submission*, 4 May 2012, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, *Written Submission Covering Letter*, 7 May 2012, p. 1.

*and OH&S requirements for staff. At the end of the day there is an amount of work which tomorrow may not get done that would have been done today because of the new prioritisation but that is just a fact of life and that is what we have to do on an ongoing basis in the industry.*<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, the current funding of the Tasmanian PWS, on a per hectare basis, is well below the levels of other states and territories and other land managers in Tasmania, such as Forestry Tasmania. According to the written submission from Environment Tasmania, *'PWS is actually being funded at around \$10 per hectare in terms of its recurrent funding for core Parks management responsibilities.'*<sup>11</sup>

The submission goes on to note that:

*' ... [this] is actually well below what is required for good protected area management. \$16 per hectare seems to be generally regarded as the level of funding that would be more appropriate for core Park responsibilities, and has been made by parks in submissions to treasury in recent years.'*<sup>12</sup>

Environment Tasmania has calculated that Forestry Tasmania manages its 319,200 hectares of formal forest reserves and special timber zones at a cost of \$16.50 per hectare, while Parks Victoria manages its 4 million hectares of parks and reserves at a cost of \$51.50 per hectare.<sup>13</sup>

While such comparisons should be treated with caution, similar indications of under-funding of the Tasmanian PWS have been suggested by other organisations.

The CPSU for example quotes a 2007 report by the Australian Senate Environment Committee that shows the Tasmanian PWS lagging well behind its counterparts in other jurisdictions. The CPSU written submission states:

*'A 2007 Report of the Senate Environment Committee entitled "Conserving Australia: Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas" estimated the average cost of managing terrestrial Commonwealth reserves was \$26/ha. The report also found that the equivalent costs in New South Wales was \$37/ha and in Victoria \$30/ha. Based on the 2012-13 budget for the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service of \$45.6M the cost per hectare of land managed equates to just \$18.3/ha - a long way short of the figures quoted for other jurisdictions in 2007.'*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> P. Mooney, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 May 2012, pp. 8&9.

<sup>11</sup> Environment Tasmania, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>14</sup> Community and Public Sector Union, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

Perhaps most significantly, in early 2011 Forestry Tasmania conducted a benchmarking exercise on the cost of maintaining national parks and reserves as part of an application to the Tasmanian Treasurer for community service obligation funding *'associated with maintaining and protecting 300,000 ha of state forests in existing formal reserves or in Special Timber Management reserves.'*<sup>15</sup>

The benchmarking exercise found that:

*'The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) manage [sic] 2.5 million hectares at a recurrent cost (2009/10, before offsetting revenues) of \$39.5 million. To this must be added \$7.1m of capital charges, making a total of \$46.6m or \$18.6/hectare. It is not clear whether these costs fully account for all overhead costs associated with the departmental structure within which PWS resides. .... a comparable benchmark for FT based on PWS data would be around \$22/hectare. A 2006/07 review by PWS suggests an Australia wide cost per hectare, again presumably on a recurrent cost basis of \$18.33/ha, which would be indexed to current values at around \$20.16/ha. Adding in capital charges, this would reach \$24/ha.'*<sup>16</sup>

Forestry Tasmania's application to the State Government for CSO funding stated that *"...FTs proposed CSO can be benchmarked at \$6,422,890/300,000 hectares or \$21.40/hectare, on a gross basis before revenues ... which FT believes is comparable or below known benchmarks"*.<sup>17</sup>

The true significance of all these comparisons was brought into sharp focus for the Committee by verbal evidence provided by Mr Mooney. He told the Committee that:

*'There is a mixture of that project funding that will go into the reserve management, so it's a very complex exercise to say you have a set quota per hectare. For example, for the last several years we've been managing on average at about \$11 per hectare of our reserve estate. That will vary up and down slightly each year. .... For example, the Parks and Wildlife Service budget is \$49 million at the moment but a majority of that is project funding. When it comes down to the basic recurrent funding, it is about \$23.5 million per year that we are provided and we manage within that at the moment. That gives an equation to approximately \$11 a hectare.'*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Forestry Tasmania, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Forestry Tasmania, *Application for Declaration of Community Service Obligation*, 4 April 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Mooney, op. cit., p. 20.

## POSSIBLE IMPACTS AS A RESULT OF ADDITIONAL RESERVES

Given that the Tasmanian PWS is under-funded and unable to adequately manage and maintain its current reserves estate, it would seem that increasing the size of that estate would only worsen the situation unless significant additional resources were provided.

According to the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, *'an additional 527,000ha of new reserves would result in an area under the management control of the PWS of 3,000,700ha or 44.06% [of the land area of Tasmania].'*<sup>19</sup>

The TCT goes on to outline what this will mean for the PWS, stating that:

*'Apart from the normal management responsibilities with new reserves, the PWS will be presented with an additional and largely new challenge of managing these large, densely forested areas for bushfire risk. This will require the PWS having substantially increased fire planning and research staff as well as fire fighting staff plus specialist equipment. Currently the PWS only manages small areas of dense forests and consequently has little experience managing fire in such environments.'*<sup>20</sup>

In its written submission the CPSU asserted that:

*'A substantial increasing [sic] in funding would be needed for Parks and Wildlife Service to have the capacity to sustainably manage additional land resulting from the Intergovernmental Agreement on Tasmanian Forests along with an up-front allocation of money for initial infrastructure and planning.'*<sup>21</sup>

The CPSU estimated that a *'20% increase in the current budget allocation or \$10M would be a ball park starting figure'* to meet the cost to PWS of taking over responsibility for an additional 500,000 hectares of national parks and reserves.<sup>22</sup>

The union's submission further estimated that:

*'In addition to this there would need to be provision for up front infrastructure and for the initial assessment and subsequent development of management plans. .... This component would involve of the order of 10 staff for the planning period, supported by funds for expert input. .... A very rough estimate of these initial staffing costs alone would be more than \$1 million per annum for at least 2 years and at least \$10M per*

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<sup>19</sup> Tasmanian Conservation Trust, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Community and Public Sector Union, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

*annum to provide ongoing management and development of these areas.*<sup>123</sup>

It would be expected that the prospect of such a major increase in the PWS responsibilities and costs would have prompted some preliminary planning, at least on a contingency basis, by the PWS or its parent department, DPIWE. Members of the Committee were not alone in having such an expectation. In its written submission, Environment Tasmania stated:

*'We would imagine that there has been some internal agency consideration and planning in relation to the transfer of land to the management of the PWS under the IGA. However, any details of what planning has occurred would be a matter for government and/or the relevant agencies.'*<sup>124</sup>

Unfortunately, the evidence provided to the Committee indicates that such forward planning has not taken place within the PWS or within DPIWE. The Secretary of DPIWE, Mr Kim Evans told the Committee that:

*'... it is fair to say that we have not done detailed planning because we do not yet know the results of what is to come out of that [IGA] process ... . Until that work has been done, we are not in a position to comment about the impacts of the IGA on the Parks and Wildlife Service because we do not know.'*<sup>125</sup>

Neither Mr Evans nor Mr Mooney was able to inform the Committee as to the estimated or potential financial or organisational impact of PWS taking on additional land management responsibilities under the IGA process nor whether the additional five-year funding available under the IGA would be sufficient to cover the inevitable increased costs of creating more national parks and reserves. This was despite Mr Evans telling the Committee that:

*'No decisions have been taken about who the land manager will be as yet. If some parts of those were to be made into national parks then it would be logical that it would be the Parks and Wildlife Service that would be the land manager. But those decisions aren't taken. Hypothetically, if those decisions result in national parks then inevitably, I think, they would be managed by the Parks Service.'*<sup>126</sup>

This seems a very reasonable position and it therefore appears to the Committee to be very unusual that there has been no forward detailed planning whatsoever undertaken by the PWS or DPIWE into the implications of any increase of land coming under the control of the PWS.

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<sup>23</sup> Community and Public Sector Union, op. cit., pp 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Environment Tasmania, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Evans, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 May 2012, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Evans, op. cit., p. 18.

## ADEQUACY OF COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FUNDING

It is apparent from the evidence presented that, given its current funding, the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service will not be able to manage effectively if it were granted responsibility for any additional national parks and reserves. Whilst the IGA does provide some additional funding for the management of any land set aside as part of the process, the fundamental question is however, whether that funding would be sufficient to meet the additional management costs.

The IGA specifies under clause 35 that:

*'The Commonwealth Government will provide an immediate payment of \$7 million to the Tasmanian Government in financial year 2011-12 to support management of the additional reserves. Following formal legislative protection by the Tasmanian Government of the areas of reserve identified in Clause 29, the Commonwealth will provide \$7 million per financial year, indexed to CPI, with a review of the base funding after 5 years.'*<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note that the \$7 million per annum under this clause has been promised regardless of the amount of land that will eventually be set aside in new reserves and national parks. It should also be noted that the additional funding commitment is for a period of five years. Past history would indicate that the review of base funding after 5 years may result in the funding burden being shifted from the Commonwealth to the State of Tasmania.

The evidence presented to the Committee indicated that \$7 million would be insufficient to cover the additional costs incurred in managing what could be almost 600,000 ha of new reserves and national parks.

On Thursday, 23 August 2012, the Legislative Council, in response to a Question without Notice to the Leader of the Government from the Member for Apsley, the Hon. Tania Rattray, was informed that:

*'The most recent official data on reserves area [in Tasmania] is as at 30 June 2011. The area of reserves in Tasmania as at 30 June 2011 was 3 064 500 hectares. The area of native forests in those reserves as at 30 June 2011 was 1 513 000 hectares. The area of reserves ... represents 45.0 per cent of Tasmania's land mass. The area of native forest reserves represents 49.0 per cent of the total area of native forest in Tasmania and 22.2 per cent of Tasmania's land mass.'*<sup>28</sup>

In its written submission to the Committee, FT stated that:

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<sup>27</sup> *Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Tasmania*, Launceston, 7 August 2011, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Hon. Craig Farrell MLC, Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, *Legislative Council Hansard*, 23 August 2012, p. 8.

*'While it is reasonable to assume that new reserves will be created through the TFIA [the IGA] process, the extent is still unclear. However, on the figures provided, if the eNGO [sic] claim for 572,000 ha was successful, the gross cost to the land manager would be in the order of \$12m per annum.'*<sup>29</sup>

In verbal evidence to the Committee, Mr Ken Jeffreys, the then General Manager of Corporate Relations and Tourism at FT, elaborated on this estimate, stating that:

*'... we did a lot of work comparing our costs of managing reserves to, not only Parks and Wildlife within the state, but also other jurisdictions. Our estimate of the requirement would be about \$20 to \$21 a hectare. I know that's about \$10 more than Parks and Wildlife say they are managing their existing reserves for, but it's a vastly different story when you are talking about state forests. We have a lot more infrastructure. We have 5 000 kilometres of road in the 572 000 .... We have a lot of infrastructure to take care of. We also have a lot of recreational facilities and we probably don't have the preponderance, or the level, of buttongrass plains ... that Parks and Wildlife currently manage. We don't see any inconsistency, necessarily, between the \$11 quoted by Parks and Wildlife and the \$20 to \$21 that we have suggested ...'*<sup>30</sup>

The 'vastly different' nature of the forest land which could end up in reserves managed by the PWS was also acknowledged by its Director, Mr Mooney, in his verbal evidence to the Committee. He stated that:

*'The reserves that Forestry look after now are genuinely quite different from our reserves. The main point of difference is they have a large number of access points and roads constructed into them for the logging requirements, bridges, all sorts of issues like that, so we would have to have a very good assessment of all those types of infrastructure. Number one, are they are still required, and number two, are they used much now? For example, the honey industry must have access to all these sorts of areas so that is one industry we would have to continue to work with. .... as I said, most ex-Forestry reserves have an enormous road network in them that our current reserves that we look after do not have, and there are all sorts of requirements attached to road and bridge maintenance at a higher degree than what we have in our present system. So it just all depends what is presented to us at the end of the day.'*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Forestry Tasmania, *Written Submission*, 27 April 2012, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> K. Jeffreys, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, pp. 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> P. Mooney, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 & 24.

FT was not alone in indicating that the \$7 million Commonwealth funding would be inadequate. The CPSU estimated in its written submission that the PWS would need at least \$10 million to meet its needs if significant new reserves were created. The submission stated that:

*'In very broad terms 500,000ha represents around 20% of the land already under management by PWS so a 20% increase in the current budget allocation or \$10M would be a ball park starting figure. In addition to this there would need to be provision for up front infrastructure and for the initial assessment and subsequent development of management plans. Up front infrastructure would be very dependent on pre-existing and proposed use(s). If these areas are being solely managed for their natural values and have limited accessibility then these costs may be relatively low. The more costly managed reserves are reserves that have higher level allowable human activities and impacts. This may require a higher level of management and could include roads, tracks and visitor/tourist interpretation centres. The initial costs for areas proposed to have minimal access and/or development would include boom gates and signage and follow up patrols and enforcement of activities within these reserves.'*<sup>32</sup>

It is highly likely that the Tasmanian PWS would be placed under significant financial pressures if it was handed responsibility for management of the new IGA national parks and reserves without appropriate ongoing resourcing. The additional funding made available under the IGA appears to be well short of what would be required, especially given the nature of the land and infrastructure being set aside.

## **FIRE MANAGEMENT**

Other evidence presented to the Committee demonstrated that greater fire management responsibilities and costs would be imposed on the PWS if it was given responsibility for large parcels of land consisting mainly of fire-prone native forests.

As the written submission from FT highlighted, the current fire fighting system in Tasmania's native forests is provided cost-effectively by utilising FT staff whose primary duties relate to forest management. The submission stated that:

*'The integrated forest management system enables Forestry Tasmania to provide fire fighting services cost effectively [sic]. For example, trucks used for road maintenance and other forestry related activities during winter and autumn are converted to water tankers in summer to fight wild fires across*

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<sup>32</sup> Community and Public Sector Union, op. cit., p. 7.

*the estate. Similarly, in addition to their regular duties a significant proportion of the workforce is also trained fire fighters. This arrangement means the organisation is able to deploy an efficient and sizeable fire fighting force when the need arises.*<sup>33</sup>

Of course, FT is not solely responsible for fire fighting in rural Tasmania as its submission noted:

*'The Tasmanian fire fighting force is unique in that it operates as a tri-agency resource involving Forestry Tasmania, Parks and Wildlife Service and the Tasmania Fire Service. While this approach is innovative and commendable there are practical constraints. Forest fire fighting, particularly in tall forest and steep country, requires fire fighters well trained and experienced in the specialised techniques and equipment used. Tasmania Fire Service career and volunteer fire fighters provide a world-class level of protection for the Tasmanian community as a whole. However, their training is focused on the protection of lives and structural property. They are neither trained nor experienced in forest fire fighting, nor are they equipped to undertake this work except in the easiest of circumstances. In practice, FT contributes 80 per cent of the forest fire fighting capacity in the state.'*<sup>34</sup>

The Tasmanian Fire Service (TFS) raised similar concerns. In commenting on the tri-agency Protocol, the TFS submission indicated that:

*'Should any of the agencies, PWS, FT or TFS be reduced in its capacity to fulfil its agreed obligations under the Protocol it would seem logical that the overall capacity to manage bushfires in Tasmania could be compromised and place additional workload and responsibilities on the other agencies.'*<sup>35</sup>

It is evident that any transfer of responsibility for fire-prone areas of land will have significant impacts in terms of resourcing. In relation to the maintenance of infrastructure and the likely impact on community safety, TFS outlined:

*'... anecdotal advice that some of FT's current infrastructure including fire breaks, fire trails, bridges and water storages are now in poor condition and likely to deteriorate further into the future. In some remote communities there is a degree of reliance on forestry roads as an alternate escape route for community members who might need to evacuate from a threat of fire. The quality of future fire management planning for these areas is somewhat unclear but TFS would have the view that*

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<sup>33</sup> Forestry Tasmania, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>35</sup> Tasmanian Fire Service, *Written Submission*, 24 September 2012, p. 2.

*appropriate resourcing and funding is required if community safety is to be maintained*'.<sup>36</sup>

A further major difficulty is the significant drop in FT and PWS employee numbers available for deployment as fire fighters: The FT submission stated:

*'However, fire protection in state forest is now of particular concern. In the past five years, Forestry Tasmania's workforce has fallen from 546 to 424 at the end of the last financial year. It is now down to 360 employees. Of the remaining 360 employees, only 205 (55 per cent) have passed the medical and physical fitness screening required for active fire fighting. Contractors also provided an additional fire fighting resource but the recent rapid and significant downturn in the forest industry has resulted in a sharp decline in the size of the contractor workforce available to undertake fire fighting. The Parks and Wildlife Service's fire crew has also declined from 50 employees in its heyday to 12.'*<sup>37</sup>

The Committee is concerned that any reduction in FT's responsibilities and resourcing could also impact on the fire spotting services provided. The TFS advised that:

*'Forestry Tasmania is the predominant manager of fire towers around the state...*

*Importantly, these towers provide integrated coverage across all land tenures and report smoke sightings to FireComm (TFS). This provides accurate cross-bearings and rapid location of fires even during periods of poor visibility (cloud haze, looking into the sun). Forestry Tasmania carries the cost of operating these towers and all Tasmanians benefit from the early warning and protection provided by Forestry Tasmania's fire towers and detection flights.'*<sup>38</sup>

The importance of fire management in any new national parks and reserves was highlighted by the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, which expressed concern in its written submission about the lack of PWS experience and resources in dealing with fire in dense forests. It wrote:

*'Apart from the normal management responsibilities with new reserves, the PWS will be presented with an additional and largely new challenge of managing these large, densely forested areas for bushfire risk. This will require the PWS having substantially increased fire planning and research staff as well as fire fighting staff plus specialist equipment. Currently the PWS only manages small areas of dense forests and*

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<sup>36</sup> Tasmanian Fire Service, op.cit., pp. 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Forestry Tasmania, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Tasmanian Fire Service, Letter dated 12 October 2012, p. 3.

*consequently has little experience managing fire in such environments.*<sup>39</sup>

No evidence was received to indicate that the PWS or any other potential manager of the new reserves was currently properly resourced and funded to manage the fire risk or to fight a major fire within the extensive forests that would exist within any new reserves.

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<sup>39</sup> Tasmanian Conservation Trust, op. cit., pp. 3-4,

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## Findings

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1. Funding for the management of the current reserves and maintenance of the existing infrastructure to access those reserved areas is not adequate to fulfil the Management Objectives listed in Schedule 1 of the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*.
2. The Parks and Wildlife Service is currently funded at approximately \$10 per hectare for its core management responsibilities. The evidence suggests that \$16 per hectare would be a more appropriate level of funding.
3. Additional management responsibilities with increased parks and reserves would require substantially increased ongoing resourcing.
4. No detailed forward planning in relation to the management of any additional reserves has taken place in the Parks and Wildlife Service or within the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment.
5. The infrastructure requirements for managing Forestry Tasmania's reserves differ substantially from reserves managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service.
6. The Parks and Wildlife Service has limited experience in managing fire in dense forest.
7. The State's fire fighting capability is compromised by the reduction in capacity of the members of the tri-agency Protocol – the Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry Tasmania and the Tasmanian Fire Service.

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## **Recommendations**

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**The Committee recommends that, regardless of any time frame -**

1. Detailed assessment and planning be undertaken prior to any decision being made to transfer the management of additional national parks or reserves to the Parks and Wildlife Service.
2. The State Government ensures that adequate ongoing resourcing is provided to the Parks and Wildlife Service to manage its current national parks and reserves.
3. The State Government ensures that adequate ongoing resourcing is provided to the Parks and Wildlife Service if it is required to manage any additional areas.
4. The State Government ensures adequate funding to maintain and repair infrastructure within the forest reserves for the purposes of fire fighting, tourist access and emergency egress.

**Tania Rattray MLC  
(Chair)**

**13 November 2012**

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**Appendix 1****List of Witnesses**

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**List of Witnesses****Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment**

**Mr Peter Mooney**, *General Manager of the Parks and Wildlife Service*

**Mr Kim Evans**, *Secretary*

**Forestry Tasmania**

**Mr Ken Jeffries**, *General Manager of Corporate Relations and Tourism*

**Mr Michael Farrow**, *Chief Operating Officer*

**Mr John Hickey**, *General Manager, Forest Management*

**Mr Tony Blanks** *Manager Fire Management*

**Tasmanian Fire Service**

**Mr Andrew Comer**, *Deputy Chief Officer*

**Mr Andrew McGuinness**, *Acting District Officer, State Operations*

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**Appendix 2****Written Submissions**

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1. Forestry Tasmania
2. Tasmanian Conservation Trust
3. Birds Tasmania
4. Tasmanian National Parks Association Inc.
5. Environment Tasmania
6. Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU)
7. Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA)
8. Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment  
(DPIPWE)
9. Tasmanian Fire Service (TFS)