

Submission

No 006

**CONSULTATION ON THE MODERN
MANAGEMENT OF COMMONS**

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Subject: Submissions - Commons

Please find attached a submission from myself regarding the review of NSW Crown Land - regards - Ken Dumpleton.

7.2.2017

This submission is a response to the "Comprehensive Review of NSW Crown Land Management" - unnumbered document dated January 2017.

"Recognising and protecting the values of commons"

This submission refers specifically to the St. Albans Common.

St. Albans Common was recognized publicly just 3 months ago by your then Lands Minister, Niall Blair and our local member and Finance Minister (now Treasurer), Dom Perritet, as deserving special consideration.

It's very frustrating to find that after deciding at that time to excise all Commons from the Crown Land Management Bill and create a new Commons Bill after further (real) community consultation, the government seems to be pursuing its original intention of including Commons in the Crown Land Bill and changing the nature of the usage and management of the Commons radically.

St. Albans Common is not Crown Land, it is Common Land given to the residents of the Macdonald Valley and the residents still hold the original title deeds.

The Common was formalized in 1853 by Queen Victoria but in fact has been used and managed by valley residents for more than 200 years.

Once again, the community has been given minimal information regarding the government's intentions and less than 3 weeks to respond.

I'm forced to make this submission based on 6 very vague dot-point paragraphs in the above mentioned 2 ½ page information sheet.

I have just re-read these paragraphs under the heading "Proposed framework to deal with this issue" and I despair at writing this submission. There is no issue with the St. Albans Common. The "framework" does not give a single assurance or guarantee to the local community and suggests it will be a Common in name only, no trustees, no commoners, no community ownership. If you genuinely want St. Albans Common to continue in its traditional form as a central part of the fabric of this community, then you will change nothing. If you have suggestions as to changes in usage, then put them to the trustees and the community openly and honestly for us to consider.

Despite inferences that the Common will continue "as is" even these vague proposals will change the nature of St. Albans Common forever.

The Common is far from just a piece of land.

As a community, it is our land, not just by the deed of title from Queen Victoria but more so by the judicious management and the sweat and blood of this small community. Generations of voluntary labour have been poured into the common, enabling us to maintain it according to the original grant at no expense to the government or the general public.

Yes, it was recognized in 1824 and formalized in 1853 but it was used informally as a Common for valley residents from around 1800.

St. Albans Common is a piece of living history dating back to the very earliest days of white settlement. Being so close to Sydney, any changes to the management and use of the St. Albans Common need very careful consideration. The St. Albans Common needs PROTECTION, not EXPLOITATION.

The overall Macdonald Valley community attitude is “leave it as it is”. A key element for the community is continued ownership and decision making – local trustees elected by the Commoners. (They are not managers, they are trustees entrusted by the community.

Should the government choose to pursue changes to usage, I implore you not to consider tourism or recreation facilities. The Common, as it is, would be destroyed within a few years.

My personal view is that if the Common must change, it would be best preserved environmentally, historically and culturally as a designated research and educational precinct. That is, it would continue to operate more or less as it is but would be recognized as a valuable space for research and education into wetlands, abundant flora and fauna and the cultural history of community. In this way the Common would be used for a deeper understanding of environment, culture and history which would be shared through academic knowledge with the broader public.

My 40 acre freehold property sits inside the upstream end of the St. Albans Common. I am 70, a pensioner, and I have lived here for 41 years. I have been an unofficial caretaker of this part of the Common. I walk on it most days. I keep an eye on the cattle, collect rubbish and weeds and observe the returning wildlife.

I know the St. Albans Common more intimately than most valley residents and certainly better than any of you making decisions about our future. If you’re genuinely interested in our knowledge and our opinions, you’re welcome to contact me for a deeper understanding of this unique and historic space - St. Albans Common.

Yours sincerely,
Ken Dumpleton