



**Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc**  
**9 Thompson Drive**  
**Tathra, NSW. 2550**

*Sustainable future fishing for trout and native fish*

## **Re: State Strategic Plan – A Vision for Crown Land 2020**

This submission on the proposed State Strategic Plan for NSW Crown lands 2020 is submitted on behalf of the members of the Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc. The Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc (MAS) of NSW is a voluntary organisation primarily concerned with the development and maintenance of freshwater fisheries in the south-eastern sector of NSW. The MAS is a primary stakeholder with the NSW Department of Fisheries. The MAS has been in existence for over 70 years and participates with NSW Fisheries in: the stocking of freshwater lakes and rivers with trout and native fish, maintenance of habitat, and policy and legislation development that affects fishing in NSW. The MAS is the pre-eminent organization concerned with angler access to rivers and lakes for the Snowy Mountains / Monaro Region of NSW. The MAS has 19 Branches with over 600 members and is a foundation member of the NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers Inc.

Each year members of the MAS stock over 300,000 trout into the waterways of the Snowy Mountains / Monaro Region. This is done on a purely voluntary basis with our members contributing their own time, vehicles and fuel to keep the waterways of this region adequately stocked for the public's benefit.

The MAS is the Manager for the Paddys Corner Reserve located on the Thredbo River, Jindabyne NSW and as such we will be impacted directly by the Strategic Plan.

The MAS recognises the important natural values of our crown land estate. It is especially important to anglers who rely on the access that this estate provides to many fishing locations in saltwater and freshwater locations. If this access was removed the fishing community would be severely affected and there would be a significant flow on affect to the tourism industry.

Much of this public land provides a repository of original environmental values in a sea of ever-increasing development. Many economic benefits flow directly from preserving the natural values of crown land through tourism opportunities for people who wish to see and participate in this natural state rather than a developed one.

Anglers benefit from access to pristine rivers and streams through undeveloped crown land. As a collective we contribute over \$70 million annually to the Snowy Mountains Regional economy alone.

The MAS acknowledges that there are some particularly good points in the proposed plans, however there are just as many concerns. Our approach here will be to focus on the concerns we hold for the future of Crown Lands under the proposed Strategic Plan.

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The MAS is concerned that the overarching tone of the proposed plan is for broadscale economic development of Crown Lands. In the majority of statements, the word “economic” precedes environmental, social and cultural. The subliminal message here is worrying and the proposed plan needs to strike a better balance across these four domains.

At Page 28, point 3.2, sub-point 1, the last sentence notes *“Where possible we will seek opportunities that deliver multiple benefits simultaneously.”* It is our long-held observation that when it comes to our green spaces, economic opportunities frequently clash with environmental, social and cultural ones and the latter generally lose out to the economic / commercialization opportunities.

If there is conflict between these opportunities Page 13 provides an insight with: *Where there are competing claims, we aim to resolve them in a way that is fair, equitable and aligned with government priorities.*

However, without understanding Government priorities and how they will change from time-to-time we are unsighted on balancing the priorities of managing crown lands.

However, we gain a hint on how competing priorities might be managed at Page 30, Point 3.3 “Priorities for Crown Land”, which states:

*Enable jobs growth, commercial opportunities and sustainable economic progress in regional and rural NSW.* Again, the focus is on economic and commercialization opportunities and we make the assumption that these priorities are in line with those of the Government, so our conclusion is that with competing priorities resolution will favour jobs, commercial and economic over environmental, social and cultural. We find this very concerning.

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Page 32 to 36 reveals a strong call for monetizing the crown land estate. The short piece on tourism focusses on accommodation etc. and does not address the wider approach to enhance tourism through improved access to crown land for activities such as fishing bushwalking, photography, birdwatching etc. The narrow focus on the economic activity of providing accommodation needs to be balanced with other non-developmental activities that rely on the natural environment.

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Page 41 speaks of *“publish maps of crown lands and encourage crown land managers and the public to help identify land that could be used in a different way.”* It calls on this in the specific context of *“to expand green and urban space”*. We hope that the scope of such mapping will be expanded to include environments other than the urban. There are many crown lands reserves and roads that provide access to waterways for fishing and other activities but since the inception of the crown estate these places have been kept hidden from public view. The result has been that many of these places have been left neglected because the public does not know they exist. Many of these parcels of land have been given to nearby landholders under a system of leases and permits. In many instances these landholders, over time, have come to believe they “own” these crown

lands and have sought to keep the public out by the erection of “keep out” signs, illegal buildings and developments.

The MAS is supportive of an accessible mapping system that identifies all crown lands so the public may obtain access to them as is their right. This comprehensive mapping will enable the public to make a significant contribution to identifying lands that could be used in a different way.

However, mapping is only part of the issue. It is one thing to see a line on a map, it is another entirely to be able to find that spot on the ground. The MAS would also support a system where managers and lessees of crown lands (in every form) be required to erect signage on the land identifying it as crown land. This could be implemented as part of their lease or management agreement or license.

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Page 44 and beyond proposes a very narrow view of community connections. Beaches get a mention but not our rivers or other wilderness places that form part of the crown estate. The consequence of this is a very constrained list of “Community Connection” ideas on Page 66.

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Now back to page 13. The Outcomes here refer to regional tourism, but then on Page 65 the only tourism element is the very narrow support for showgrounds. We note here that there is intention to “*Conduct a portfolio review in collaboration with the tourism industry*”, however we have no idea what this means or what it would entail.

It is well-documented that fishing has more active participants in NSW than any other recreational activity and many access points to fishing venues for both fresh and salt water are on crown land. It would improve the tenor of the document if it recognized that continued access to unspoiled landscapes for recreational pursuits such as fishing, bushwalking will be at the least maintained and at the best improved.

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At Page 30, under Outcomes *Strengthen and uphold compliance to ensure a fair go* and at Page 48 *Strengthen and uphold compliance to ensure a fair go*.

For many years, the MAS has been aware of and involved in fighting for fair access to some crown lands. Specifically, these disputes involve a nearby land holder who has a non-exclusive lease and has tried to bar public access. In many of the instances we have found the willingness of the Lands Department wanting in enforcing the legislation it operates under. In many cases the benefit has been given to the landholder who “howls the loudest”. We can only hope that this proposed strategy will embolden the Department to administer its legislation to ensure that illegal restrictions on access to crown lands are dealt with swiftly. In this context it would be good for the plan to identify what the terms “strengthen” and “uphold” mean, as they are very general terms.

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As stated, the MAS is a current crown land manager. Over the past few years, we have sought to manage additional crown lands for the benefit of the public. We have been frustrated by the lack of access to Lands Department staff to assist us in this process. It seems that our area falls under the jurisdiction of the Goulburn Office, but there is no easy way to communicate with this office. Generally, trying to engage with the department has proven frustrating and does not reflect well on the department. Once again, we can only hope that this proposed plan will see the department invest more in its estate managers and provide adequate support to them.

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### Western Division Crown Lands

The MAS notes that “fishing” is not a designated activity for access to crown lands in the Western Division. Many representations have been made by various fishing organisations over this anomaly, but to date the Department refuses to correct this imbalance. Fishing in the Western Division is generally limited to rivers and billabongs which form part of Western Division leases. While locals may have some access through friendships they have developed with lease holders, visitors wishing to fish are generally excluded. This proposed plan makes some mention of improved tourism. Providing access to the thousands of kilometres of river frontage in the Western Division lands for fishing would be a huge tourism boost to the small communities that dot the Western Division landscape.

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Overall we see that this proposed plan overwhelmingly seeks to expand the economic and commercialization of crown lands, but fails to adequately support the vast swathes of crown land that provide environmental refuge and contribute to social well-being through the natural quality of these places. We note that many crown lands border farming land and we are concerned that the proposed plan will encourage leaseholders and managers to economically develop these lands rather than focusing on preserving them in their natural state. The plan would be better received if it sought a better balance.

Our recommendations are:

1. Clarify how competing opportunities will be handled.
2. Place as much recognition on rural crown lands as you have done for urban.
3. Increase the recognition of social and environmental values for crown lands and associated activities.
4. Expand tourism to include activities beyond showgrounds and accommodation.
5. Commit to the publishing of a comprehensive and accessible map of all crown lands in NSW.
6. Provide dedicated Departmental staff to service the needs of land managers.
7. Streamline the process for community groups and current land managers to add to their managed lands portfolio for public benefit.

8. Expand the narrow view of Community Connections.
9. Commit to providing responsive and timely compliance action.
10. Commit to opening Western Division lands for the purpose of fishing.
11. Commit to providing a system where crown lands can be identified on the ground.

Steve Samuels  
President  
Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc  
8 August 2020