



NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc.

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“Fights for fairer access to land in NSW and represents the interests of prospectors and fossickers”

NAPFA Submission to OEH, NPWS’ request for comment on the Draft Plan of Management for the Crookwell Reserves.

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About NAPFA

The NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association (NAPFA) was formed in response to the progressive decay of prospecting and fossicking opportunities in NSW and the ACT. Prospecting and fossicking has made a significant contribution to the prosperity and heritage of the State and country since 1788. It forms an integral part of State's traditional activities. Many families, hobby groups and picnickers enjoy fossicking in the Australian bush and have done so for hundreds of years. As such it is a denial of traditional Australian values and customs to restrict recreational activities such as fossicking in public lands. NAPFA is committed to retaining the long established, customary, tradition of fossicking and prospecting.

The Crookwell Reserves

The Crookwell Reserves include the area described as the Nuggetty State Conservation Area. The long established traditional use of that Reserve has been in the support of prospectors since the mid 1800s. It is alarming in the extreme to see the draft recommendation:

"2.5 Fossicking is not permitted in the Reserves"¹

propose that the traditional use of the reserves should be brought to a sudden and unjustified end. The reserve fringes upon the old townsite of Upper Tuena which is a favourite and cherished location among fossickers. The Nuggetty Gully area is renowned for its contribution to the rise of gold mining in the Tuena area and should not be closed off to the fossickers of NSW who wish to follow in the footsteps of the people who made this State great. The Tuena Creek passes through this area and the Tuena Creek has afforded recreational activities for many outdoor groups such as endurance riders (of horses) four wheel drive clubs and prospecting/fossicking clubs such as the Prospectors Home Club Inc which visit the area occasionally.

Economic Hardship

The surrounding towns of Bigga, Binda, Crookwell and Tuena look to the tourism market for much of their clientele. The Parsons' general store in Tuena in particular sells such items as gold pans, camping supplies and fuel. The tourism patronage to that shop, the only retail premises remaining in Tuena, helps to keep the business viable. It is with regret that we acknowledge that lack of patronage seem to have been the principal reasons for closures in

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the last 2 years of the only hotel in Tuena and one of the hotels in Crookwell. Any further impairment to the attractiveness to fossickers of the Tuena Creek and surrounds will have significant impact on the prosperity of the remaining local businesses such as the Crookwell caravan park.

Prospecting/Fossicking Environmental Impact

A typical 1 gram gold deposit found and removed by a prospector using a metal detector occupies about the same volume as a single raindrop. Alluvial gold found and removed by a fossicker with a gold pan typically amounts to a few flecks of about the same order of magnitude as the head of a pin, if he is so lucky as to find any. Gold, being an inert metal, offers no nutritional value to either plants or animals and as such its removal can not possibly disadvantage any of the ecological targets that these reserves are seeking to protect.

The removal without disadvantage of such insignificant gold targets contrasts markedly with the concomitant removal by the typical metal detector operator of a wide range of more harmful targets in the areas being explored. Detectorists routinely remove acknowledged harmful objects such as lead bullets, sharp and rusty pieces of iron, lead shot and rubbish left behind by generations of explorers before them. Any claim, such as may be made by critics of fossickers, that the pursuit of fossickers' activities are anything other than in the best interests of maintaining the environment, is simply not sustainable.

NAPFA recognises and respects the need to protect sensitive ecosystems. It is also essential that decision makers acknowledge the history that has preceded the present situation. All those ecosystems, especially the frogs and owls have already withstood a far greater impact of human activity than anything that is likely to occur in the future. The area encompassed by the reserves has previously been subjected to the impact of cyanide, mercury, explosives, higher levels of lead and zinc and raw sewerage from a large and transient mining population. Thankfully the flora and fauna in existence throughout those times are ALL still with us today. Compared to what the flora and fauna populations have already accommodated the likely impact of modern day fossickers is absolutely negligible. The impact of naturally occurring events such as floods and animal burrowings far and away exceeds the foreseeable impact of fossickers.

Community Health

The NSW government has promulgated several initiatives to encourage outdoor recreation and fitness activities. These have included "Life Be In It", obesity awareness and "Share the Weight". The physical activity encouraged by prospecting and fossicking activities all serve

to reduce the demand for public health services and enhance the quality of life experiences for families. Prospectors and fossickers not only enhance their own health levels when being encouraged to use the Crookwell Reserves but also furnish a community benefit by removing poisonous lead leeching into water courses and eventually into drinking water supplies.

Precedents

There are many existing precedents that demonstrate the co-existence of ecological protection with fossicking. NSW State Forests authorise, by virtue of a permit system, fossicking activities in State Forests. In addition, fossicking is also encouraged at designated locations such as at the Abercrombie Caves also under NPWS control in the vicinity of the Crookwell Reserves.

Submission Objective

It is the intent of NAPFA to pursue continued access for fossicking and prospecting in all of the 5 Crookwell Reserves in the subject Plan of Management. We reserve the right to pursue this matter in other forums and to take it up with higher authorities if any adverse recommendations such as banning fossicking are made in the Plan of Management for the Crookwell Reserves by The Office of Environment & Heritage, NSW National Parks & Wildlife.

Yours faithfully,

Ernie Mollenhauer

Secretary

NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc.

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