



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

13th Assembly

SOCIAL POLICY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Public Briefing Transcript

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Amendment Bill 2019

3.00 pm, Wednesday, 21 August 2019

Litchfield Room, Level 3, Parliament House, Darwin

Members: Ms Ngaree Ah Kit MLA, Chair, Member for Karama
Mrs Lia Finocchiaro MLA, Member for Spillett
Mrs Kate Worden MLA, Member for Sanderson

Witnesses: **Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture**
Sarah Kerin: Acting Executive Director Parks, Wildlife and Heritage
Jonathan Vea: Acting Senior Director Park Development and Strategic Projects
Claire Morante: Senior Projects Officer

TERRITORY PARKS AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL 2019

Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture

Madam CHAIR: Good afternoon everyone, thank you for joining us. I am Ngaree Ah Kit, the Member for Karama and Chair of the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee. On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public briefing on the Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Amendment Bill 2019.

I acknowledge that this public briefing is being held on the land of the Larrakia people and I pay my respects to Larrakia elders past, present and emerging.

I also acknowledge my fellow committee members in attendance today: the Member for Sanderson, Kate Worden and the Member for Spillett, Lia Finocchiaro.

I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee from the Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture Sarah Kerin, Acting Executive Director Parks, Wildlife and Heritage, Jonathan Vea, Acting Senior Director Park Development and Strategic Projects and Claire Morante, Senior Projects Officer. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing which is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website.

If, at any time during the briefing, you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask that the committee go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

I will each witness to state their name for the record and the capacity in which they appear. I will then invite you to make an opening statement before proceeding to the committee's questions. Could you each please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms KERIN: Sarah Kerin, Acting Executive Director, Parks and Wildlife.

Mr VEA: Jonathan Vea, Acting Senior Director for Strategic Projects and Park Development.

Ms MORANTE: Claire Morante, Senior Projects Officer.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Kerin, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms KERIN: Madam Chair and committee members, I thank you for the opportunity to come and talk to you today, with my colleagues, in relation to the proposed amendments to the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*. I also recognise, on behalf of my colleagues, the Larrakia people on whose land we meet today.

We are very excited in relation to the potential of these amendments. They will enable Aboriginal ranger groups increased stewardship of their land—more eyes and ears across the Northern Territory protecting and managing country.

In 2016, the Northern Territory government made an election commitment to amend the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* to recognise the role of Aboriginal ranger groups in managing natural and cultural assets across the Northern Territory, and to enable the conferral of enforcement powers to increase the ability of those groups to manage their land.

There are over 46 ranger groups across the Northern Territory and over 1000 rangers in those groups. Some of these groups already have capability powers and are working in coastal areas with the fisheries division of the Department of Primary Industry and Resources. They are working as part of the community marine ranger program—which is known as the fisheries model—which my colleagues and I will refer to today as we go through the briefing. This program recognises and supports those traditional owners to be actively engaged in the protection and management of their sea country. To date there has been no similar program that is land-based in the Northern Territory.

With over 34% of the Territory's land area administered by Aboriginal ranger groups, these proposed amendments will enable the empowerment of Aboriginal people to better protect and manage their land.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned that it will confer enforcement powers onto the 46 ranger groups. Is that a straight conferral—currently all the enforcement provisions of the act allow rangers to enforce them. Is that now just a straight increase to include the ranger groups as well?

Mr VEA: Amongst our park rangers, just as an example, we have approximately 150 rangers. Of that, only roughly 70 rangers are conservation officers. Not all rangers need to be conservation officers and what this amendment suggests is to provide that opportunity for Aboriginal rangers to be recognised as conservation officers and that is dependent on—just like it is for any other ranger seeking powers as a conservation officer—having the training, capacity building and the aptitude to have those powers provided to them.

Within those powers, not all are subject to full powers. Even amongst our own park rangers we have full powers and partial powers. These amendments provide flexibility for the Director of Parks and Wildlife to provide powers that are limited and appropriate for that ranger group and geographical area and what is agreed with the traditional owners or landholders.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Great, that makes sense. How will that power be conferred? Does that just go in a gazette notice or do you just get certified as being a conservation officer.

Ms MORANTE: We have an established administrative process already because we have conservation officers within the Commission.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: So it will just follow the same...

Ms MORANTE: That is right. There is a process whereby they would apply. Their application would be considered based on education, training, aptitude and their experience as well, so it would be an application-based consideration, and then those appointments are made by signature of the Commission.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay. Does this legislation do anything other than allow this process to happen? It does not change what is being enforced, or penalties or anything like that. It is just recognising the strategic importance of the Aboriginal ranger groups, and if there Aboriginal rangers who want to be conservation officers, now that can happen.

Ms KERIN: The amendments are very much enabling. It will enable Aboriginal people and Aboriginal ranger groups to actually become conservation officers and carry out surveillance activities on their land so no, there are no other areas.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is very limited. It is specifically for that and there is no real other change.

Ms KERIN: There are no other changes. It is specifically for this purpose.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay, great. I have no other questions.

Madam CHAIR: That was short and sharp. There are no further questions. Thank you very much for taking the time to appear before us for this briefing this afternoon.

Ms KERIN: Thank you very much.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, that now concludes the public briefing of the three bills we have heard about this afternoon.