

Research Article

The Role of Government in a Partial Transition from Public to Private in the Expanding Australian Protected Area System

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Abstract

Since the 1980s in democratic societies, neoliberal reforms and neofeudal governance have transferred the delivery of many public goods and services from governments to non-government actors. Privatisation is a core neoliberal agenda, but little is known of the nature and extent of its application to nature conservation through reservation. We investigate the degree of privatisation of the expanding protected area system in our case study areas of Australia and Tasmania, hypothesising that governments have: disrupted public agencies managing the protected area estate by repeated reorganisation; diverted public funds from public to private protected areas; and increasingly alienated public reserves for subsidised private profit from tourism. We found frequent restructuring of agencies managing protected areas. Although Federal Government expenditure on private reserves increased markedly in the twenty-first century, so did expenditure on public conservation reserves. All States except Queensland increased public protected area funding. Direct subsidisation of private reserves by government has not had a steady upward trajectory. In contrast, subsidisation of private alienation of public conservation reserves for tourism may have accelerated in the twenty-first century. We conclude that, while Australian governments see value in protected areas as a source of economic development and electoral advantage, they are agnostic on ownership.


Keywords: environmental policy and governance, nature conservation funding, neoliberal conservation, private protected areas, public protected areas.

INTRODUCTION

“We begin with our basic observation: beware of simple stories about land conservation policy. Things are getting more complex and fragmented, not less so, as the line between public and private continues to move and blur. We need to rely less on the idea that “public” and “private”

alternatives form some kind of clear dichotomy of policy options, and more on the idea that most policies and resulting tenure arrangements are a blend of the two” (Raymond and Fairfax 2002: 635).

Since 1980, many liberal democratic societies have transitioned from welfare states underpinned by public assets and public spending towards a less fettered form of ‘free-market’ capitalism characterised by privatisation of public assets and services, deregulation of financial markets and globalised production networks (Harvey 2007; Aalbers 2013). Although promulgated as the basis for social prosperity, empirical evidence has established that these neoliberal reforms have resulted in upward redistribution of income and concentration of wealth within a small elite (Piketty 2014; Zuboff 2019). The strengthening of the links between these

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super-rich elites and governments has led some to suggest that neofeudalism (sensu Shearing 1983, 2001; Dean 2020) is a better descriptor of the resulting dynamics of inheritance and exclusion than the more common ideological label of neoliberalism.

There is a large literature on effects of the application of neoliberal practices, such as privatisation, marketisation and deregulation on economic processes and the social fabric, with a smaller literature addressing nature conservation (Raymond and Fairfax 2002; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Fletcher 2010; Holmes 2011; Büscher et al. 2012; Apostolopoulou et al. 2014; Castree and Henderson 2014; Apostolopoulou and Adams 2015; Bigger et al. 2018; Büscher and Fletcher 2020). Büscher et al. (2012) suggest that the central axiom of neoliberal conservation is that nature can only be saved if it is profitable to do so, as governments are disinclined to indulge in nature welfare. In an empirical description of the interaction between neoliberal reform and protected area conservation, Apostolopoulou et al. (2014) describe the privatisation and marketisation of the protected area systems of several European countries, finding many differences in detail, but constancy in tendency. They, and others (e.g., Büscher et al., 2012; Holmes 2011), see nature conservation being incorporated as part of the outcomes of a neoliberal growth society, not a defence against it, with many environmental non-government organisations (ENGOS) active players in this process (Holmes 2011). Büscher et al. (2012) strongly criticise the scientific nature conservation planners, who have adopted neoliberal philosophies in advising ENGOS, for their failure to understand the empirical reality of the wider context of their 'closed loop' proposals.

Since the early 1970s, nature conservation has been politically important in Australia, as in many other parts of the world (Doyle 2000; Figgis 2003). The conservation of nature was first addressed by the creation of public reserves managed and financed by governments. In the 1970s and the 1980s, private reserves were few, insecure and funded privately. Governments used compulsory purchase if they wanted private land reserved for conservation, as in the case of Partridge Island in 1975 in Tasmania (Kirkpatrick 1988). As has been the case in the USA (Breckenridge 1999), the 1990s saw the emergence of much closer and collaborative relationships between government agencies and conservation ENGOS, with nature conservation increasingly addressed by the creation of non-government nature reserves (Fitzsimons 2015). These reserves were created in Australia largely because environmentalists, such as the founder of Bush Heritage Australia and former leader of the Australian Greens, Bob Brown (2004), were frustrated by the failure of governments to reserve the areas they valued, so set up their own reserves. Since the initiation of the National Reserve System in 1997, ENGOS, Traditional Owners and private individuals have created a protected area estate larger than that encompassed by the public protected area estate, which has not markedly increased in area (CoA 2021).

Change in government leadership on environmental issues has been a constant at both the Federal and State (sub-national)

levels. For example, of the 21 different Federal Ministers for the Environment between 1970 and the early-1990s, 13 served for less than a year (Robin 1994). There has also been little constancy within most States, which have highly diverse bureaucratic structures in both space and time (Robin 1994).

Public conservation management has been hypothesised to be inadequately funded (James 1999; Figgis 2003; Mansourian and Dudley 2008; Evans et al. 2012), as well as being administratively disabled by frequent reorganisation (Kirkpatrick 2011) and subject to funding fads (Somper 2011; Redford et al. 2013). Claims of a decline in National Park funding are regular fare in Australian media (Tlozek 2014; Davies 2018; Davis 2019). Wintle et al. (2019) calculate that funding for the conservation of threatened species, inside and outside protected areas, is only 15% of what is needed. Breaks in management efforts that might result from changes in bureaucratic structures and declines in funding could rapidly reverse the effects of long-term conservation programmes, such as weed control (Cock et al. 2000). A move to shorter-term senior staff contracts and outsourcing to private contractors and consultants characterised Australian public sector reforms under the broad heading of New Public Management in the late twentieth century (Barton 2006; Johnston 2000). These reforms often heightened the severity of loss of corporate knowledge and social networks resulting from restructuring, thereby impeding public programme delivery (Colley 2001). The undoubted inefficiencies and inadequacies resulting from excessive reorganisation in a context of inadequate funds reinforce arguments for privatisation of the protected area estate made by some critics of government (Wamsley and Davey 2020).

In this article we test the proposition drawn from literature on neoliberal conservation that, in the early twenty-first century, there has been a government-led privatisation of protected areas. In this context, we test the hypotheses that: 1) re-organisation of public nature conservation agencies increased in incidence; 2) there was a diversion of public funding from public to private nature conservation; 3) there was a diversion of public funding from conserving nature in public protected areas to servicing private tourism enterprises in public protected areas. We discuss the implications of the answers to these questions for our understanding of the current political and economic processes attending protected areas. We use the case study areas of the Commonwealth of Australia and one subnational jurisdiction within it. We chose the State of Tasmania because it is the State with the highest proportion of its area under protection.

METHODS

Definitions

Our definition of 'non-government protected area' encompasses all protected areas outside of the public estate. Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) are managed by Traditional Owners, usually, but not always, on land or water owned by them. Private protected areas can be owned and managed by

individuals, businesses, land trusts, such as the Tasmanian Land Conservancy or other ENGOs, such as Birds Australia. The IPAs and private protected areas are not free from government oversight or intervention. Governments provide legal constraints and opportunities and can be a vital source of funding for their establishment and ongoing management. In some cases, conservation covenants or administrative arrangements may take the legal form of joint agreements. Similarly, publicly-owned protected areas can be partially privatised where and when non-government entities or individuals are granted legal rights to control access to a part of a protected area, as in an ecotourism resort in a national park, or aspects of management are outsourced.

Organisational change

We recorded all changes in structure, organisation and suborganisation of the State and Federal bureaucratic units responsible for managing protected areas that we could access between 1998 and 2019. For Tasmania, we extended our data back to the early-1970s when the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service was first established, and before the declaration of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area in 1982. We accessed publicly available government documents, including a symposium on national parks (McConnell 2003), legislation, regulations, and budget reports to identify the dates at which reorganisations of agencies with the task of nature conservation in Tasmania, and the agency to do with the State budget (Department of Treasury and Finance, DoTF) took place, and the characteristics of these reorganisations. We gained some insight into the motivations of changes from published work (Kirkpatrick 2017). We chose DoTF as a comparator with the nature conservation bureaucracies, as it is most central to the operations of the government and influences the entire bureaucratic system. We used χ^2 to test whether there was a difference in the number of changes between the two bureaucratic units.

Funding

We collected funding data from the Australian States, the Federal Government and the largest ENGOs that own and manage private protected areas. Budget papers and annual reports of nature conservation agencies in the Commonwealth and States were examined to record evidence of funding for public and private conservation. We recorded the purposes of major capital expenditures and government grants to private companies for work inside government-run protected areas as these data manifested. The annual reports of ENGOs principally engaged in protected area conservation were also examined (see Supplementary Material).

The absolute amount and proportion of funding for state and federal public reserves, and IPAs and other private or community reserves were regressed against time, both consumer price index-adjusted (CPI) and expressed as dollars per hectare of reserve. Pearson's product moment correlation

coefficient was used to determine the strength and significance of linear relationships between the various measures of funding for the various entities.

RESULTS

Organisational change

The number of bureaucratic reorganisations was similar per decade between most States, Victoria being an exception for the period in which we had data (Table 1). The general tendency was for the interval between re-organisations to become shorter through time towards the present. Department names changed, on average, once every four and half years (Table 1), while there was sub-departmental reorganisation, on average, once every six years (Table 1).

In our detailed case study of Tasmania, there were nine major reorganisations of public servants responsible for protected area management between 1970 and 2019. In the 17 years after its establishment in 1970, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) was not reorganised. The later periods between reorganisations varied between one and six years (Figure 1). There were no reorganisations of Tasmania's DoTF between 1970 and 2018. The difference between PWS and DoTF is a highly statistically significant deviation from random ($\chi^2=9$, $d.f.=1$, $P\text{-value}<0.001$).

The PWS was established in Tasmania in 1970, replacing a Scenery Preservation Board notorious for its propensity to give away parts of parks for development activities, such as logging (Mercer and Peterson 1986; Kiernan 2018). In 1970, 5% of the State was in reserves, with a very small part of this in private Wildlife Sanctuaries. The PWS, under the leadership of its Director, Peter Murrell, a permanent public servant, reported directly to a Minister. The PWS contained expertise in all aspects of protected area and wildlife management, with scientists being intimately involved with managers in seeking to conserve nature (Kirkpatrick 2009) and to provide recreational opportunities aligned with conservation, and

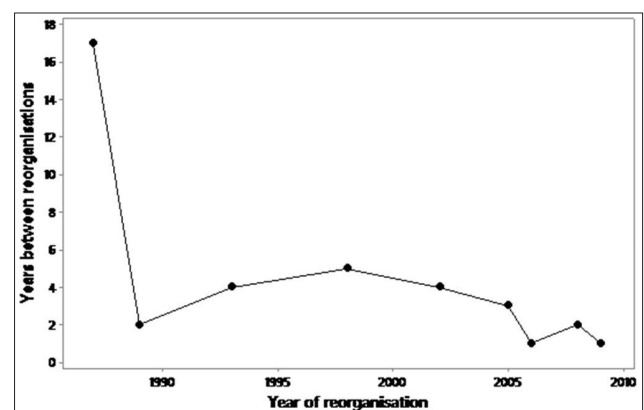


Figure 1
Period between reorganisation related to date of reorganisation for the main State Government bureaucratic units managing protected areas in Tasmania

Table 1
Protected Area Departmental name changes and restructuring by state

Jurisdiction	Period	Number of years	Number of different department titles	Number of sub-department categories in financial statements
SA	2001-2018	17	4	7
TAS	1998-2019	21	5	3
WA	1999-2019	20	4	3
QLD	2010-2019	9	3	3
VIC	2000-2019	19	1	1
NSW	2013-2019	16	4	2
Aust	2000-2019	19	6	2

WA=Western Australia, Vic=Victoria, Tas=Tasmania, NSW=New South Wales, Qld=Queensland, SA=South Australia, Aust=Australian Federal Government

rangers increasingly seeing their role as carers of nature, rather than simply maintaining toilets and other visitor infrastructure. By proposing a Wild Rivers National Park, the PWS staff played a substantial but often overlooked role in the defeat of the plans of the Hydro-Electric Commission to flood much of the western wilderness of Tasmania, a defeat internationally known as a victory of environmentalist protest (Law 2008).

In 2017, public protected areas were managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service Branch (PWSB) of a Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE). The protected area estate managed by PWSB covered 42% of the land area of the State in 2014 (DPIPWE 2019). Approximately 3% of the land area of Tasmania was in private protected areas. The Deputy Secretary who managed PWSB reported to the titular Director, who was the Secretary of DPIPWE. All upper-level bureaucrats were on short term contracts, rather than being permanent public servants. The PWSB no longer included many researchers, the scientists having been long separated from the park managers into a separate section of the bureaucracy, which, in 2019, was also in DPIPWE.

Change was incremental. The first re-organisation in Tasmania merged PWS in 1987 with the Lands Department in a Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife (McConnell 2003). Before the merger, the Lands Department had set up a well-managed public protected area system that covered much of the coast and the Central Highlands fishing and hunting areas. These reserves were focused more on recreation than nature conservation. Their establishment resulted in a cessation of the environmental impacts that had resulted from previous uncontrolled access (Kirkpatrick 1988). A third protected area system had been established by the Forestry Commission, which owned and managed its Forest Reserves until the second decade of the twenty-first century, when their management passed on to DPIPWE.

The Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife lasted only two years before those managing protected areas were placed in a Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage in 1989. Only four years later, this department was submerged in a Department of Environment and Land Management, which five years later was enlarged into a Department of Primary Industry, Water and Environment (DPIWE). After a lapse of a few years, the government restructured DPIWE into DPIPWE, putting 'Parks' back into the departmental title. Many internal

reorganisations took place under the labels of DPIWE and DPIPWE (Figure 1). In the twenty-first century, the pace of changes increased substantially (Figure 1).

The placing of those managing the protected areas in the same agency as those managing agriculture and fisheries meant that many polarised debates between proponents of conservation and proponents of economic development did not involve discussions between Ministers, rather being resolved by either Ministerial direction to their department or by the department itself. However, mining, forestry and energy production, all in potential conflict with protected area expansion and conservation management, remained in separate government or semi-government bureaucracies throughout.

The individuals who were the titular Directors of PWS under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1970 were the secretaries of the larger agency, whatever its title at the time. Their wide responsibilities meant that they had to delegate most of the functions of the Director to a bureaucrat at a lower level. The main issues addressed by the managers of the PWSB related to the encouragement and facilitation of tourism activities in the reserve estate, with fire and introduced species management also matters of concern (Kirkpatrick 2017). The secretaries and managers followed the wishes of their political masters in the contentious debates over permissions for private tourism development within the protected area estate (Gogarty et al. 2018) or faced the loss of their jobs.

Funding

Changes to public protected area funding differed markedly between State jurisdictions (Figure 2). Western Australia increased its expenditure on the reserve estate between 2000 and 2014, then stabilised. In Victoria, expenditure was stable between 2002 and 2005, then increased rapidly until 2014, after which it declined. In New South Wales, expenditure increased steadily between 2000 and 2018. In Queensland, expenditure on parks increased then decreased dramatically between 2010-2011 and 2012-2013, then stabilised on a lower base than earlier. In Tasmania, expenditure oscillated as was the case in South Australia (Figure 2).

Temporal patterns of federal funding for protected areas differed between the government and non-government sectors (Figures 2 and 3). Federal expenditure on the management

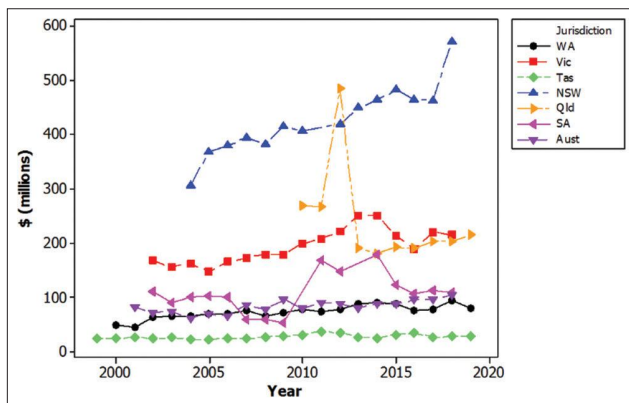


Figure 2

Annual expenditure 1998-2018 (SAUD (million) adjusted by the cost and price index) on public protected areas by State and Federal Governments. Legend: WA=Western Australia, Vic=Victoria, Tas=Tasmania, NSW=New South Wales, Qld=Queensland, SA=South Australia, Aust=Australian Federal Government

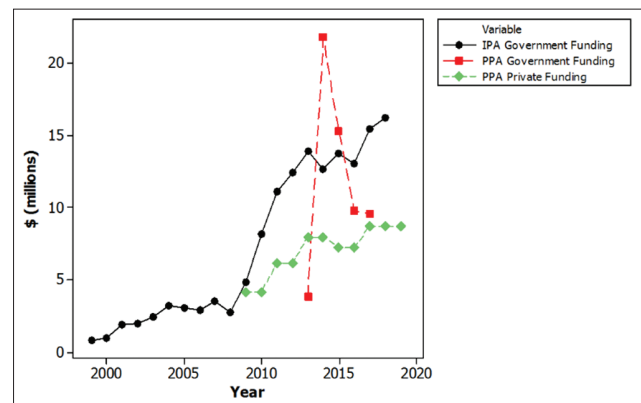


Figure 3

Annual expenditure 1998-2018 (Aud\$ (million) adjusted by the cost and price index) by the federal government on Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) and Private Protected Areas (PPA), and private donations to PPAs

of IPAs increased steeply between 1999 and 2018 (Figure 3). Overall federal expenditure declined until 2004, increased until 2009, then has oscillated around the 2009 level (Figure 2). In the period 2012-2018 government expenditure on public reserves was between AUD 19.00 and AUD 22.00 per hectare per annum, whereas for private reserves it was between AUD 0.50 and AUD 2.70 per hectare per annum.

Government grants for property acquisition to establish private protected areas, primarily through the Federal National Reserve System Programme (NRS), have been highly variable between years, particularly at the individual organisation level. For example, NRS Programme annual reports indicate that the national land trust, Bush Heritage Australia received AUD 3.968 million in 2005-2006, AUD 1.213 million in 2006-2007, AUD 6.631 million in 2007-2008 and AUD 0.601 million in 2008-2009. The high variability of funding for private reserves from government contrasts with the steady increase in funding from private individuals and organisations (Figure 3). The percentage of federal funding for protected areas that was directed towards those not managed by governments increased from 3 in 2001 to 28 in 2014, then declined to 12 in 2018 (Figure 4). The drop in proportion of funding largely related to the cessation of the NRS Programme.

There was a significant degree of synchrony in expenditure between the Australian Government, Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia. Expenditure in New South Wales was positively correlated with that in Western Australia, the Australian Government and Victoria. Government expenditure on Indigenous protected areas was positively correlated with Australian Government, Victorian and Western Australian expenditure on government protected areas. There were no significant correlations involving other government expenditure on private protected areas or expenditure in Queensland. IPA funding was positively correlated with all but expenditure on other private protected areas and expenditure in Queensland.

Funding for private development in government protected areas

Early forms of ecotourism in the twentieth century saw small areas of public land in protected areas given to private control for peppercorn rentals, as in the case of the private huts on the Overland Track, set up in Tasmania in the 1970s (Kirkpatrick 1988, 2001). By the turn of the twenty-first century, public-private partnerships had been established in most Australian jurisdictions to facilitate private tourism operations in National Parks (Buckley 2004). Despite evidence of the failure of many such partnerships to realise promised outcomes (Frost and Liang 2018; Randall and Hoyer 2016), recent years have seen unprecedented subsidisation of private tourist developments in public protected areas.

Although the Federal Government has long had an explicit policy of assisting the development of private tourism, including in National Parks (Productivity Commission 2005), it is often difficult to use available public records to disentangle subsidisation of private tourism operations from funding of the nature conservation and recreational roles of protected areas. In some cases, however, it is possible to identify how capital works contribute to such subsidisation and impact on conservation resourcing. One example was the Federal Government expenditure of AUD 15 million on a sunrise viewing platform for Uluru in 2007-2008 (CoA 2007b), which constituted 25% of the total expenditure for the year. The increase in expenditure on protected areas in Western Australia (Figure 2) under the Barnett Liberal government facilitated substantial tourism activities within reserves, namely AUD 21 million on increased caravanning and camping facilities in reserves in the state south-west and mid-west districts (GWA 2015). These figures masked the simultaneous crippling of nature conservation funding and efforts. For example, in the same year in Western Australia, the budget for Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities dropped by over AUD 6 million (GWA 2015). Similar large funding

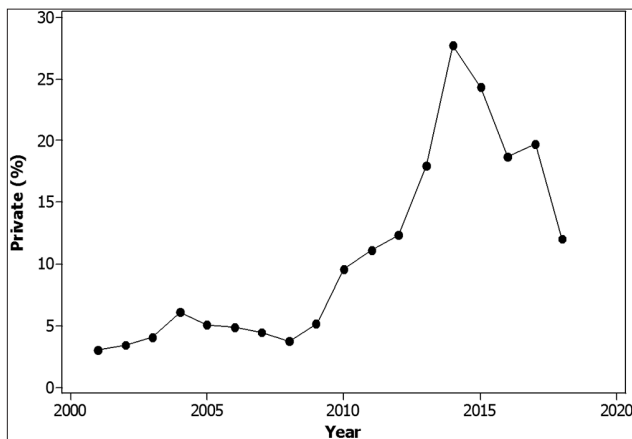


Figure 4

The percentage of federal expenditure on protected areas that was directed to private protected areas.

injections to capital works but not conservation have occurred in Tasmania, where AUD 25 million were expended by State and Commonwealth in 2015 on a new walk, The Three Capes Track, with both public and private luxury huts constructed in the Tasman National Park (DoTF 2014).

Political influences on funding decisions are becoming increasingly evident. Direct subsidisation of private enterprise operating in national parks, even before permissions to operate have been obtained, is a recent phenomenon. For example, during a federal by-election in Tasmanian electorate of Braddon in 2018, the major parties in Australia's two-party system—The Labor Party and The Liberal Party—promised AUD 30 million to construct a privately-run cable car to Dove Lake in the Western Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The Tasmanian State Government donated AUD 1 million to a private organisation to expand its hotel operations further into the Freycinet National Park, and AUD 3 million was gifted to a private walking company to help them plan to build huts along the South Coast Track through Tasmania's largest wilderness area (Hawes et al. 2018). These gifts were for developments that were, predictably, strongly resisted by many of those who appreciate the ecological values of parks.

DISCUSSION

Organisational change

We have confirmed a high frequency of reorganisation of government bureaucracies responsible for public protected areas in most Australian States and the Commonwealth Government and that the rate of change increased for Tasmania in the twenty-first century. This volatility could be partly explained as a response to the highly politicised environmental disputes of the 1970s and the 1980s, which pitted government department against government department/quango, as well as governments against citizens (Doyle 1990; 2000). The loss of economic development opportunities that resulted from the successful conservation campaigns of the 1970s and the 1980s alarmed governments to the extent that it

has been hypothesised that they also sought to establish processes intended to give the appearance of environmental care, while, in effect, subverting its reality (Kirkpatrick 2011). An alternative explanation is that the creation of mega-departments was simply a device to reduce government expenditure (Edwards et al. 2012), with the function of nature conservation through protected areas being collateral damage once parts of the bureaucracy that directly served the economy were adequately funded.

The incorporation of high-profile environmentalists as bureaucrats or advisors during the 1980s and the 1990s may also have been part of a strategy to reduce activism against government policy. While Doyle (1990, 2000) perceives this strategy to have been successful, activism continued unabated (Ajani 2007; Law 2008). The success was in suppressing the voice of nature conservation in government, often achieved, as is documented in our results from Tasmania, by placing the protected area bureaucrats in structures controlled by development-oriented bureaucrats. The miniscule area of no-fishing marine reserves in Tasmania, for instance, may relate to Parks being in the same department as Fisheries at a critical period in marine reserve establishment in Australia. In another putative example, in Western Australia, a Department of Conservation and Land Management, dominated by foresters, looked after national parks and nature conservation as well as logging, with excellent outcomes for non-forest conservation (Kirkpatrick 1991), but poor outcomes for forest conservation (Ajani 2007).

The increased frequency of organisational change may have been facilitated by increased political control of public servants (Tiernan et al. 2019). From the mid-1980s, more upper-level public servants were placed on fixed term contracts instead of being permanent, with Departmental Secretaries being made statutory fixed-term appointments from 1994, arguably making them more amenable to political direction (Colley 2001; Edwards et al. 2012). At the same time, under the aegis of New Public Management frameworks (Edwards et al. 2012) expertise in the substantive purposes of public service positions was abjured in selection processes in favour of managerial skills. The high frequency of leadership and organisational changes gives the more long-lived entrepreneurs and companies wishing to develop in protected areas the opportunity to wait for the opportunity to gain permissions (c.f. Buckley 2016).

Funding

The frequent re-organisation of bureaucracies with responsibility for public protected areas makes it extremely difficult to ensure that like is compared with like across Australian jurisdictions when assessing government funding. There are different structures, different inclusions and different exclusions between bureaucracies. Some data are mystifying. In the period from 2013-2018, AUD 385.6 million was allotted to the Working on Country Ranger programmes, most of which is for the management of IPAs. Of this, only AUD 56.5 million of spending was documented by Indigenous Affairs. An Auditor-General audit of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy under which IPA funding was administered found that

the relevant department, Prime Minister and Cabinet, failed to: “assess applications in a manner that was consistent with the guidelines and the department’s public statements; meet some of its obligations under the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines; keep records of key decisions; or establish performance targets for all funded projects” (ANAO 2017: 8).

Despite the deficiencies of publicly available data, we can be confident that the proportionate allocation of federal government funds to non-government protected areas increased until 2014 then declined (Figure 3). The largest absolute expansion of the Australian protected area estate of any equivalent period in history took place between 2009 and 2018, almost entirely through the IPA programme (CoA 2021). The conservation tenures associated with IPA reserves are largely short-term administrative arrangements built on legal recognition of native title and the vagaries of future federal budgets. They are funded at an extremely low dollar per hectare relative to public protected areas. Nevertheless, the overall funding of IPAs outweighs earlier expenditure on non-government reserves protected by covenants on titles that was provided under the Regional Forest Agreement in the mid-1990s in Tasmania (Kirkpatrick 1998) and the Federal NRS Programme under the Natural Heritage Trust and, later, Caring for Our Country programmes between 1996 and 2013 (CoA 2007a; 2013).

In all jurisdictions except Queensland public expenditure on public protected areas has tended to increase in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Figure 2), while federal funding for non-government protected areas increased then declined (Figure 4). Thus, if it were the neoliberal programme to transfer financial responsibility from governments to private actors for the protected area estate, it may be argued that governments failed to make much progress. Alternatively, it might be argued that targeted and modest government funding has resulted in a huge and cheap non-government protected area estate that has drawn in substantial new sources of private funding and become largely self-sustaining. This non-government involvement has enabled Australia to exceed with ease the United Nations’ Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi Target of having 17% of terrestrial environments and inland waters in protected areas by 2020 (CoA 2021). The transfer of protected area conservation to non-government actors has also pushed governments to acknowledge the alignment between nature conservation and the pursuit of Indigenous self-determination. From a neoliberal vantage point, this non-government estate could be seen to compare favourably to the clunky, inefficient and often politically contentious public estate. However, if the focus is on security of conservation outcomes, there are fewer obstacles to change in the non-government estate than with the government protected area estate, much of which requires parliamentary approval for excisions. For example, the non-government estate is not legally protected against mining (Fitzsimons 2015) and, in some cases, resumption by government for other purposes. However, the security

of reserves may lie as much in the people willing to fight to protect or destroy them than as in any legality. In this regard, ENGOs and Indigenous communities involved in the non-government protected area estate have large and politically influential constituencies. A recent example of this is the large and successful Country Needs People campaign that forced the continuation of Indigenous Ranger Programme funding linked to the IPA programme (see www.countryneedspeople.org.au/).

The many short-term oscillations in the funding data for the smaller States are partly explicable by expensive projects, such as the Rabbit and Rodent Eradication Programme on Macquarie Island (AUD 24 million), and the Three Capes Walk (AUD 25 million) in Tasmania. However, the major reason for changes of slope under all jurisdictions may be changes of the political party in government. The most striking example of such a change was the decrease in funding caused by the election of the Liberal Newman government in Queensland (Figure 2). This atypically large short-term change illustrates the potential for State governments to set and change their own courses with nature conservation, although the positive correlations between the expenditure data for most State governments and the Federal government indicate a high degree of conformity. Alternations of Liberal and governments in New South Wales have barely affected the Labor growth in funding.

The examples we have given above indicate a recent willingness of governments to subsidise profit-making tourism operations in public protected areas, as well as giving the operations exclusive use of land. In the twentieth century, there was limited subsidisation of business activities in conservation reserves. The subsidisation consisted of the provision of infrastructure used by others than the customers and peppercorn rents for any exclusive occupancy. The developers were expected to pay for their infrastructure and their investigations for approvals. Thus, although Australian governments in the twentieth century were as dedicated to business activities in protected areas as much as governments in the second decade of the twenty-first century, there were few businesses that could afford to establish infrastructure in protected areas beyond already developed areas, limiting privatisation for tourism. This encouragement of privatisation through subsidy fits the concept of neofeudalism, or the collaboration of political and economic elites, better than it does the concept of neoliberalism, which emphasises a desirable over-riding role of markets.

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that governments have increasingly reorganised their protected area bureaucracies to make them subservient to both politicians and resource exploitation interests. Surprisingly in this context, government expenditure on public reserves has largely increased rather than declined. Nevertheless, the alienation of public reserves for private profit appears to have accelerated, with

government protected areas appearing to be regarded by governments as an underutilised resource ripe for capital accumulation and gifting. It remains to be seen whether democratic forces will reverse this tendency, although public resistance is certainly strong. We suspect that this government attitude will mean that public protected areas will be less effective for biodiversity and geo-diversity conservation than the non-government protected areas managed primarily for this goal.

Raymond and Fairfax (2002) describe the land trust conservation movement in the United States at the turn of the millennium as not so much an example of privatisation of nature conservation through protected areas, but an extension of the multilayered interweaving of public and private property rights that characterises the public protected area estate. Neoliberal natures are not strongly evident in systems like those of both the United States and Australia in which government funding and regulation provide shifting motivations for protected area establishment beyond the satisfaction of the greener utilities of individuals. The data we have presented better fit accounts of neofeudalism than of neoliberalism, being the outcome of a political class unsympathetic to nature conservation responding to nature-sympathetic constituencies in a way that maximises their primary goals of maintaining power and sustaining economic growth.

Author Contributions Statement

Conception or design of the work: JK, JF Data collection: JF Data analysis: JK, JF Drafting of manuscript: JK, JF, AD, LP, BC Critical revision of manuscript: JK, JF, AD, LP, BC Final approval of the version to be published: JK, JF, AD, LP, BC

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Declaration of competing/conflicting interests

The authors declare no competing interests in the conduct of this research.

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Research Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this part of the larger project.

Data Availability

Data are publicly available (see supplementary information).

Preprint Archiving

None

Supplementary material

<https://bit.ly/3oRsJtq>

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