

Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Conservation of Historic Heritage Places

Submission by the Polish Historical Institute in Australia Inc.

Topic: Mount Kosciuszko National Park

1. Background

International Significance of the Australian Alps National Parks

The Australian Alps National Parks, which includes Mount Kosciuszko glaciated area is noted as containing geological and geomorphological values of International and National significance. The Australian Heritage Database [www.deh.gov.au/heritage] includes Mount Kosciuszko Glaciated Area, Summit Rd, Charlotte's Pass [Place ID 103691] on the Register of the National Estate. It states there that Kosciuszko National Park was declared a World Biosphere Reserve in 1977 under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program. The glaciated area is unique in mainland Australia in exhibiting landforms shaped by Pleistocene glaciation.

Mount Kosciuszko National Park as an historic heritage place and natural heritage site

The Park includes built heritage places such as huts, villages and roads; places of historic significance such as Mount Kosciuszko, first established as Australia's highest mountain by the Polish explorer Paul Edmund de Strzelecki as well as its natural heritage encompassing its geology, ecology, flora and fauna.

2. Mount Kosciuszko National Park – heritage issues

This submission provides some examples of negative regulatory activity by outlining decisions by a state government agency relating specifically to Mount Kosciuszko. It highlights the need for regulatory controls at a *national level*. These controls require consultation from stakeholders and should be included in any future policy framework.

Issue 1: Renaming the mountain and park by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service

The NSW Parks and Wildlife Service's (NP&WS) intention to rename the mountain and park was outlined in their *Kosciuszko National Park Draft Management Plan* (2004). This could be to an Aboriginal name or to dual names.

Both the Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand Inc. and the Mount Kosciuszko Inc. provided submissions opposing this. Their submissions can be found, respectively, at:

- the appendix to this letter; this should be read in conjunction with *Bulletin* (Polish Community Council of Australia & New Zealand) ; issue 1 (Autumn 2005), available at <http://www.polish.org.au> under the link *Biuletyn Informacyjny (nowy)*;
- <http://www.mtkosciuszko.org.au/english/Submission2.htm>

The Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand's submission also documents the role of the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife toward the Polish community and the subsequent outcomes. If the Foundation is an independent body from the NP&WS whose mission supports that of the NP&WS, the Institute questions the motives of this body toward the conservation of the Mount Kosciuszko National Park.

The Institute agrees with the position of the Polish Community Council of Australia & New Zealand and of the Mount Kosciuszko Inc. in their submissions that the name Mount Kosciuszko be retained.

We also regard Mount Kosciuszko National Park as being the jurisdiction of the federal government because it is a *nationally* significant historic heritage place important to all Australians not just those living in New South Wales. National significance requires policy frameworks to be devised and administered at a national level. Conserving this area for its economic, social and environmental benefits would require Commonwealth-State cooperation [public and private], which a policy framework could address in a complex and detailed way.

Community representatives, as well inter-governmental representatives, should be considered as stakeholders in management of Mount Kosciuszko National Park.

Issue 2: Removal of plaque by NSW Parks and Wildlife Service

Mount Kosciuszko has two plaques concerning its discovery, description and name. The first and more accurate one made in bronze also includes Strzelecki's contribution, was unveiled by the Polish Embassy in 1940. This was removed by the Service circa 1999/2000 and now resides at the Polish Embassy, Canberra.

A second one (plastic) was substituted by the NP&WS, which is less accurate. It does not state what Strzelecki's achievement were, nor does it mention other members of Strzelecki's party including two Aboriginal guides, Charlie Tarra and Jackey. These details are included in the original bronze plaque.

The Institute questions the motives of the NP&WS. If management of the Kosciuszko National Park was widened to include other stakeholders, such a decision would have been questioned by a larger group of Australians which most likely would have led to a different outcome.

It is imperative that conservation of historic heritage places includes maintaining (or restoring where necessary) the *evidence* of the exploration process of Australia. This is one example.

The Polish Historical Institute in Australia is expressing a wish of a number of Australians of Polish origin in demanding that the original plaque is reinstated and Strzelecki's role in the exploration of this region of Australia is acknowledged.

(For further information on Strzelecki visit the Mount Kosciuszko Inc. website at <http://www.mtkosciuszko.org.au>).

3. Role of stakeholders

This submission would like to stress the importance and need to include a range of stakeholders in the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places. They can range from specialists like conservationists, and historians to members of the general

public – with ethnic or Australian ancestry. Some will come from government departments, others from the private sector. Between them, they have wide-ranging knowledge and many man years of experience. This should be utilised.

The issues raised here also highlight the importance of maintaining an accurate record of Australian ethnic history – in this instance Polish Australian history. Although tangible heritage is outside the scope of this inquiry, historic heritage places cannot be divorced from its history, because the intangible can provide insight into a problem, an activity or a solution.

Polish heritage in Australia is much wider than Mount Kosciuszko. It includes such historic places as buildings known as Dom Polski [Polish Houses], found in all state capital cities; churches built from national subscriptions from Polish Australians (e.g. Marayong Polish War Chapel, Sydney); places of historic significance such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground which hosted the 1986 meeting of Pope John Paul II with the Polish Australian community. These too require to be included in the policy framework. State and federal governments do not seem to have good access to umbrella organisations and leaders of ethnic communities in Australia at present. These should be identified as a stakeholder where appropriate and exploited in this role.

To that purpose the Institute provides a list of some Polish Australian organisations interested in the conservation of historic heritage places (contact details can be provided on request):

Polish Community Council of Australia & New Zealand Inc. [a national umbrella organisation with representatives from state umbrella organisations]
Polish Historical Institute in Australia Inc.
Mount Kosciuszko Inc.
Polish Museum and Archives Inc.
Polish Historical Society of Australia
Polish Historical Society of Queensland

Wanda Horky
Director
Polish Historical Institute in Australia Inc.
28th July 2005

Disclaimer

This submission is the opinion of the Polish Historical Institute in Australia and does not represent the opinion of any organisations mentioned here with the exception of the submission prepared by the Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand.

Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand Inc.

**Submission to the
KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK
DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

On behalf of the Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand - an umbrella organisation representing 150,000 Polish Australians - **we strongly object to the proposed naming changes**. They appear to contravene both the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW) ("the Act") and the official Australian policy on multiculturalism.

A detailed discussion and justification of our position on this matter can be found in Appendix A.

The intention to consider a change of Park and mountain names - as presented by the National Parks & Wildlife Service ("NP&WS") of NSW at the beginning of work on the Kosciuszko Management Plan - is, in our view, provoking, unjustified, and even contradicting the Act itself. Such a short-term view expressed is irreconcilable with the longer-term approach usually taken when considering conservation issues.

The highest mountain in continental Australia - Mt Kosciuszko - was discovered and named by Polish explorer Sir Paul Edmund de Strzelecki, who significantly contributed in various ways to the European exploration and discovery of this country. Apart from climbing the highest peak, he discovered gold in NSW, explored Gippsland and Tasmania, and published one of the most important books about Australia of its time – "The Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land".

An exclusive privilege of any discoverer to have the naming rights to his/her discovery is an accepted and well-recognized custom worldwide, and should not be revoked for any short-term political gains.

It is plainly obvious that an attempt to change the name of this significant Australian landmark will upset and alienate Australian Poles and disappoint 60 millions Poles worldwide.

The Australian government has established a successful initiative "Living in Harmony" that brings together various ethnic groups. Who and why is trying to create a potential serious conflict between Aborigines and one of the main migrant groups in Australia?

All this can be avoided if the National Parks & Wildlife Service adheres only to the principles of conservation, and not - as we suspect - other short-term, political agenda.

Our proposals to be included in the Draft Plan

The first objective of the Kosciuszko National Park Management Plan should be to limit the commercial developments in the Park.

The second, to preserve all aspects of heritage in this area including Aboriginal presence in the Snowy Mountains, shepherds culture, scientific exploration, gold mining,

bushwalking, cross country skiing and building of the Snowy Mountains Scheme (SMS). The SMS was built primarily by migrants - many of them contributed their lives to this controversial but major infrastructure.

The third, to create appropriate interpretive centres. One of them could be the Bogong Moth Interpretive Centre where prepared Bogong Moths could be served to the tourists (for conservation reason moths could be collected outside of the Park). This could be a world-class attraction that would provide employment to many indigenous people. It could also be an opportunity to present other aspects of Aboriginal life, as it was centuries ago. Strzelecki relished the Bogong Moth as did some Polish bushwalkers.

The fourth, to protect all the remaining huts in the Park as relics of the shepherds, bushwalkers and cross-country skiers' culture as well as shelters supporting the most valuable activities in the Park. After all, it was bushwalkers and cross-country skiers who were the first conservationists who lobbied for the creation of national parks. Now, they are second-grade visitors (after hotel guests and motorists).

The fifth, as the composition of the Australian population changes rapidly and there are more and more Australian citizens born overseas or from overseas born parents, it becomes essential for the whole governmental structure to implement strategies making these people real, not formal, Australian patriots. It may be achieved in two ways: by acknowledging their contribution to the country; and, by making them connected to the country's way of life and the landscape. The latter constitutes part of youth education in nearly every country. It should work well in Australia.

Millions of migrants should be drawn as quickly as possible to conservation issues, as Australia's natural environment needs their support and help. It can only be achieved by recognition of their potential and contribution in this area.

We came from a country where we lived under totalitarian regime since the end of the World War II. We were subjected to a compulsory political correctness that quickly translated into falsification of historical truth. Children were told lies at schools. Adults were not allowed to claim the truth. The next step was human rights abuses and suppression of alternative views.

We would hate should a similar fate happened to Australia. We will defend the truth and the correct interpretation of history.

Janusz Rygielski PhD
President

Brisbane 18 August 2004

APPENDIX A

Analysis and justification supporting our position

The National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW) ("the Act") in Part 1 section 2A states:

- (1) *The objects of this Act are as follows:*
 - (a) *the conservation of nature, including, but not limited to, the conservation of:*
 - (i) *habitat, ecosystems and ecosystem processes, and*
 - (ii) *biological diversity at the community, species and genetic levels, and*
 - (iii) *landforms of significance, including geological features and processes, and*
 - (iv) *landscapes and natural features of significance including wilderness and wild rivers,*
 - (b) *the conservation of objects, places or features (including biological diversity) of cultural value within the landscape, including, but not limited to:*
 - (i) *places, objects and features of significance to Aboriginal people, and*
 - (ii) *places of social value to the people of New South Wales, and*
 - (iii) *places of historic, architectural or scientific significance,*
 - (c) *fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation,*
 - (d) *providing for the management of land reserved under this Act in accordance with the management principles applicable for each type of reservation.*
- (2) *The objects of this Act are to be achieved by applying the principles of ecologically sustainable development.*
- (3) ***In carrying out functions under this Act, the Minister, the Director-General and the Service are to give effect to the following:***
 - (a) *the objects of this Act,*
 - (b) *the public interest in the protection of the values for which land is reserved under this Act and the appropriate management of those lands*

According to the Act the objectives outlined in subsections (1)(b)(i) and (1)(b)(iii) are equal. It means that one of the objectives cannot be superior over the other.

Places, objects and features of significance to Aboriginal people are important. However, we have serious doubts regarding the appropriateness of the National Parks & Wildlife Service ("NP&WS") to judge whether they are more important than places of historic, architectural or scientific significance.

Australian research indicates that before 1840, the hill between Mt Ramshead and Mt Townsend did not have any significance to either Aboriginal people, who frequented Snowy Mountains to feast on the Bogong Moth which lives in rocky crevices (please note that such crevices never existed at Mt Kosciuszko), or to shepherds, who had better pastures in the vicinity. It was the discovery - through scientific measurement - that made this particular top so unique.

The highest mountain in continental Australia - Mt Kosciuszko - was discovered and named by Polish explorer Sir Paul Edmund de Strzelecki, who significantly contributed in various ways to the exploration and discovery of this country. Apart from climbing the highest peak, he discovered gold in NSW, explored Gippsland and Tasmania, and published one of the most important books about Australia of its time – "The Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land".

His human qualities were equally impressive. The British Queen knighted him for his great effort to save the lives of so many Irish people during the potato famine. In his book while describing physical Australia, he included numerous observations relating to the life of Aboriginal people. He bluntly informed the British readers:

“The manifold calamities, - but more particularly the decrease and final annihilation of the great majority of indigenous races which has followed, and always does follow, the approach of the whites, - is a fact of such historical notoriety, that the melancholy instance of the Australian natives affords but a farther corroboration of the fearfully destructive influence which the one race exercises upon the other.”

How many other scientists took such a stand at that time?

As the Park Service states itself, another Polish explorer John Lhotsky also played an important role in the early exploration of the Snowy Mountains. Strzelecki and Lhotsky contributed to both, Australian and Polish heritage.

Kosciuszko’s name given to the highest peak by Strzelecki is a gift given to humanity. Thaddeus Kosciuszko led Poland during her independence war with tsarist Russia and was one of the greatest American generals. In 1983/84, when the Kosciuszko National Park concentrated on conservation rather than on secondary issues, it published an article “Who was Kosciuszko”. The paper explained to millions of readers why it was an honor to the country to have its highest mountain named after him. In the current political context, it is worth mentioning that Kosciuszko donated his American estate to the cause of freeing the African Americans from slavery.

In 1997 the NP&WS approached the Polish community in Australia through the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife and asked for a \$55,000 donation. It stated:

“In return for the Polish Community’s support the following recognition will be given:

- *The community will be acknowledged in relevant publications regarding Mt Kosciuszko*
- *The community will be acknowledged in all press releases regarding the donation*
- *The community and Sir Paul Edmund de Strzelecki will be appropriately acknowledged on signage on the track and the top of Mt Kosciuszko*

Finally, should the Australian Polish Community agree to raise the money for this important project it will be the first time a specific community group has joined forces with the Foundation and Service to enhance & protect a historical piece of European history in Mt Kosciuszko. In other words the work being done especially the signage will be the flower Sir Paul Edmond Strzelecki picked from the mountain for his sweetheart in Poland to remind people who visit the ‘notion of freedom, patriotism and love’”.

The Foundation made a commitment on your behalf:

“ The Foundation in conjunction with the Service would like to help the Polish Community in Australia to maintain, preserve and promote this important historical ascent to Australia’s highest point.

The work being done includes signage would be an excellent way to promote to the current Australian Polish Community and future generations the historical aspect of Mt Kosciuszko. Further it would educate visitors to Mt Kosciuszko on how, by whom and when was it discovered.”

At that time the Polish community was unable to raise the required payment within the time allotted. One could speculate about linking this outcome to the later action undertaken by the Kosciuszko National Park Service. Two years later The Service removed the historical bronze plate from the summit and replaced it by a plastic one with an inscription questioning Strzelecki’s achievement. At the same time the mayor of Tumberumba demanded publicly that the name of Kosciuszko be changed either to honor Aborigines or shepherds. The next step was the introduction of a dual-name legislation for geographical names in New South Wales. Now we have the new draft plan emphasizing the role of Aborigines in the Snowy Mountains while ignoring the historical evidence with regard to the Bogong Moth.

If - in 1998 - the NP&WS was honest and well meaning, what is happening now? If - in 1998 - the NP&WS tried (through the Foundation) to entice the Polish community, what kind of game is being played by the National Park at present? How does this relate to the objectives of the Act?

An official Australian multiculturalism policy has been published on the government website. It has been defined as follows:

“Australian multiculturalism is the philosophy, underlying Government policy and programs, that recognizes, accepts, respects and celebrates our cultural diversity. It embraces the heritage of Indigenous Australians, early European settlement, our Australian-grown customs and those of the diverse range of migrants now coming to this country.”

The above, much like the Act, clearly equates the heritage of Indigenous Australians with that of other settlers.