

Park 'veil of secrecy'

BY ALASDAIR MCDONALD

THE vice-president of the National Parks Association's Far South Coast branch has criticised the state government's recent management of national parks staff.

Kim Taysom said recent cutbacks are impacting park operations and come at a time when "both threats to the natural environment and nature based tourism and park visitation are increas-

ing".

"The loss of expertise in remote area firefighting, the recent purging of regional managers across NSW, who have traditionally served as incident controllers, has seen the loss of over 300 years of combined experience," he said.

He said the association is concerned over time the cutbacks will see the region lose out in the areas of "corporate memory, expertise and exper-

ience", with rangers cut by a third over the last five years.

"Park rangers do much of the heavy lifting in terms of on ground work such as camp site supervision, wildlife monitoring, weed and feral animal control, and visitor interaction," Mr Taysom said.

"Furthermore, the morale of remaining NPWS staff is being adversely affected by the protracted nature of this restructure and the veiled

secrecy in which it is being conducted.

"The general lack of consultation and respect shown to NPWS workers is regrettable."

A former Far South Coast national parks employee has also criticised what he said was lack of consultation with staff, and the loss of hundreds of years worth of firefighting experience from the region.

A spokesperson from the

Office of Environment and Heritage said the process has been consistent with public sector guidelines, and "any proposed organisational changes would be subject to a period of consultation with staff".

"Any proposed changes to the organisation will ensure that NPWS is much better positioned to deliver those frontline services," they said.

Mr Taysom said Far South Coast tourism is growing by

between six and seven per cent each year, well above the state average, with most of it nature based.

"Despite increasing park visitation there is ongoing de-commissioning of infrastructure such as toilets and picnic areas," he said.

"Funding cuts have also resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in opening hours of the NPWS Merimbula headquarters, which is the main interface with the public."