

THE COLONG BULLETIN

Bulletin 219

THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS LTD

PROTECTING WILDERNESS AND NATIONAL PARKS

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Saving wilderness requires your support

Help make this 20th year of the NSW Wilderness Act one that secures wild places from the ever growing number of threats. In this *Bulletin* you will note that our wilderness could be opened up to the damaging effects of horse riding, that the Emirates resort want a piece of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, and even our once pristine drinking water catchments are being wrecked by intensive coal mining. Colong's resources are becoming stretched to the limit as we secure wilderness and address the challenges of climate change, population, development and pollution. Now more than ever we need your help. Staff and a well equipped office are essential to make contact with the media, politicians and the public. So we call upon you once more to renew your subscription and, if you can afford to, please make a tax deductible donation.

Elizabeth Elenius
Secretary, Colong Foundation

At last, the economy meets the environment

GLOBAL warming is as much an issue for economists and econocrats as it is for scientists and environmentalists. That's the underlying message from the report of Sir Nicholas Stern, former chief economist of the World Bank. The other significance of the report is that it shifts the emphasis from trying to estimate the cost to the economy of measures to reduce global warming (not high, but often exaggerated) to estimating the cost to the economy from letting climate change rip (much, much higher).

Ross Gittins, SMH, 6.11.06

A Trip Down Memory Lane

by Elizabeth Elenius

It is now around 40 years since I became involved in what was then the Colong Committee, inspired by a talk given by Milo Dunphy about the threats to Mt Armour and the Boyd Plateau.

I had never been camping, let alone anywhere near Kanangra Boyd National Park. So I set off *sans enfants* with a group led by Milo, to see for myself this special and magnificent landscape. It is now a good 30 years since I went on my last camping trip.

It was with a sense of *déjà vu* (and

trepidation) that, at the ripe old age of 65 and accompanied by my partner, Mark Sceats, I once again joined a party, this time led by Keith Muir, on an inspection of the Newnes Plateau/Gardens of Stone area which is the subject of a Colong reserve proposal. I must say Milo was in my thoughts throughout the trip.

Fortified by Karen McLaughlin's wonderful muffins and fruit, consumed at Dargan, we spent the first day mostly in the car, stopping at various scenic, or damaged sites. The first destination was Bald Trig where we were subjected

continued on page 2

In this issue...

A trip down memory lane.....	1
Independent Inquiry is needed into the Grose Valley Fire.....	3
Environment Minister Bob Debus moves on.....	3
Political thunderings against wilderness	4
Terania Creek, Rainforest Wars (Book review)	4
Heritage Denied	5
World Heritage Land Grab ..	6
Damage to drinking water catchments exposed	7
Celebration of two wilderness gifts	8
NCC Annual Conference.....	9
The State Plan.....	9
Plans of management could be sidelined	10
The Blue Mountains Feral Horse Control Plan.....	10

THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS

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A Trip Down Memory Lane

continued from page 1

to a scene from *Mad Max*, with a tribe of unregistered bikies clad in leather uniforms roaring their machines up and down the fire trail, ripping up the track and deafening anyone within a kilometre. And these are the sort of people the anti-wilderness campaigners want to allow into our parks and wilderness areas!!!

What struck me, right from the start, was the glorious display of wildflowers that this parched landscape displayed. The heathland was a riot of colour from the boronia, isopogon, leptospermum, Patersonia, fringed lily and the prostrate red flowering grevillea. With the rather ominous smokey atmosphere, the bush was flowering like there was no tomorrow.

We lunched at an unnamed lookout, having mislaid the route to a ridgeline of pagodas, but found shade among some pagodas, with an outlook down into Bungleboori Creek country. Then came the climb back to the cars which I made, with a few stops for breath along the way.

Our campsite was among some open woodland adjacent a Newnes Plateau Shrub Swamp which, again, was ablaze with colour – pink kunzia, pink grevillea shrubs, white leptospermum and Patersonia. I didn't venture too far as I didn't have snake protective clothing. We had a very pleasant evening meal, complete with a few bottles of red, and settled down very early (for me) to a peaceful night's sleep. Thanks to Keith,



Mark and I were supplied with a tent and lilos and were able to borrow a gas stove. So we camped in comfort. Not so peaceful for a couple of our more intrepid campers who didn't have tents as they were disturbed by a very brazen, and hungry fox.

Next day, near the high altitude grassy woodlands, we were shocked to see an enormous quantity of water (quality and source unknown) be pumped into what would normally be a dry creek bed which we believe ends up in the Wolgan River. Goodness knows what impact the removal of this water will have on the geology of the area, and what degree of erosion is occurring. Here we were, with bushfires raging in the Grose Valley, and all this water gushing down the hill.

We again were confronted by some appalling damage generated by the users of 4WD vehicles who are obviously so decrepit they can't walk a few metres up to Blackfellows Hand Cave. I was surprised that the handprints were undamaged, given the

disrespect shown to the bush by these vandals.

The highlight of the trip (in retrospect) was the walk along the Great Dividing Range via the Stargate Tunnel where we lunched among tree ferns and tall trees among the rocks. Prior to setting out Keith described the walk as relatively flat, but I can only assume he averaged out the steep climbs and descents. Whilst I whinged and complained on the climbs, it gave me a great sense of achievement to manage the 8 km round trip. The views down into the Wolgan Valley, and across to the nearby cliffs and pagodas, were stunning, despite the smoke haze. We assumed we were looking at the freehold site for the proposed Emirates resort in the Wolgan Valley, but have subsequently learned that Emirates propose to build within the Wollemi World Heritage area. This must be vigorously opposed.

Poor Mark barely made it back, uncomplainingly, even though he was stricken with a bad cold and cough.

My New Year's resolution is to get fit so that we can enjoy more site inspections. Perhaps we'll even buy a tent and our own lilos? ■

Above: Trail bikes are unregistered and out of control on Newnes Plateau.

Below left: An upland swamp on Carne Creek supports a nationally endangered plant community containing many rare plants and is threatened by longwall coal mining.

Below right: Members of the Colong Foundation visit Stargate Tunnel.



Independent Inquiry is needed into the Grose Valley Fire

THE Blue Gum Forest, birth-place of the modern conservation movement, was badly burnt by the Grose fire on Wednesday 22nd of November. The extent of the damage was not widely known until three weeks later, when on December 11th the *Sydney Morning Herald* broke the story on page one. The perception that the fire was effectively controlled was shaken by the page one images showing blackened Blue Gums.

The Fire Management Strategy 2004 for Blue Mountains National Park sets out the actions necessary to protect the natural environment, as well as life and property. Yet the fire was not apparently fought according to that Strategy as far as protection of the natural heritage of rainforest, rare plants and Blue Gums were concerned.

Fire ecologist Nic Gellie and former NPWS officer wrote in the *Blue Mountains Gazette* (13/12/06) that whether it is Kosciusko, the Wollemi or the Blue Mountains, our parks are suffering. He urges that we adopt a more ecological approach to fire management that uses rivers, rainforests and natural rocky areas that abound in the Blue Mountains. ‘Perhaps most importantly,

we desperately need to re-think using large and unpredictable so-called ‘back-burns’ as our primary strategy – especially on days official fire ban. It’s too blunt and too risky,’ Mr Gellie believes.

Increased fire is a major threat to the World Heritage values of the Greater Blue Mountains. Unless we develop and implement better strategies to defend the bush, as well as lives and property, then climate change will make this threat much worse.

John Merson, the executive director of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute believes that “With increased fire frequency and intensity, we are looking at a fundamental change in Australian ecosystems. We will lose species... It’s a very tough call for firefighters trying to do what they think is the right thing when the game is no longer the same.”

The Colong Foundation has called for an independent inquiry into the fire to examine what can be done to ensure World Heritage values of the Blue Mountains forests are not lost through over burning. The NSW Coalition supports an inquiry for somewhat

different reasons, and many in the local community want more effective action to protect the bush from fire.

A hundred local residents placed a full page advertisement in the local paper also calling for an independent review of the fire. Rural Fire Service Commissioner, Phil Koperberg, who is standing down to run for the seat of Blue Mountains, has refused these requests, and he is supported by Environment Minister, Bob Debus. The Government still believes it was a good fire and does not need investigation.

Perhaps after the election in March, the issues behind this fire can be investigated. It will no doubt be an important aspect of the bushfire conference to be convened next year by the Nature Conservation Council. ■

Wilderness Preserved

The Canadian Government and native groups have agreed to preserve 3.36 million hectares on the eastern edge of Great Slave Lake and said they would consider other areas off limits to diamond and uranium mining interests.

SMH 16.10.06

Environment Minister Bob Debus moves on

by Keith Muir

BOB Debus, known for his ability to calm difficult situations, will leave the NSW Government in March. Mr Koperberg, the Rural Fire Services Commissioner who lives in the Mountains, has been recruited by Labor to replace Bob Debus. In fact Mr Debus talked him into the job before the fires last November.

Andrew Cox, executive officer of the National Parks Association said: “Minister Debus has been an ardent supporter for the environment. He made a sincere commitment to improving protection west of the Great Dividing Range. Standout examples of this are:

- New national parks created through private land purchases such as the

80,000 hectare Yanga station of the lower Murrumbidgee;

- The Brigalow Belt Decision protecting the Pilliga, Goonoo and other woodlands of NW NSW totaling over 350,000 hectares;
- Starting on the long path to restore dying inland wetlands, such as the Macquarie Marshes with the establishment of the NSW RiverBank program to buy back water for the environment.”

The departure of Mr Debus could leave a big hole in the Iemma Government, and as far as environment policy is concerned, with Deputy Premier, John Watkins, the only stand out candidate for the environment portfolio. We hope that the Iemma Government will at least keep the environment portfolio within

the Inner Cabinet, and install strong conservationist members to his cabinet if he wins the election.

The Colong Foundation is pleased that Mr Koperberg is standing. Mr Koperberg has been instrumental in the implementation of environmental reform of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

Mr Debus secured World Heritage listing for the Blue Mountains and helped expand the NSW wilderness estate to 1.8 million hectares. He made the tough call of reserving the 37,000 hectare Grose Wilderness in 2001 against vocal opposition in his own electorate.

We hope that Mr Debus secures more wilderness before he leaves office. He will be missed as the strong voice for conservation within the senior ranks of Cabinet Ministers.

Political thunderings against wilderness

In November last year Opposition Leader, Peter Debman, announced that the Coalition had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with bush user groups that could spell the end of wilderness protection in NSW.

This Coalition strategy appears to be based on a losing set of possibilities. While most people support wilderness protection, some hard core horse riders want to ride in wilderness areas where riding is prohibited by law due to the damage it causes. It is these riders that would benefit from the MOU, and only some of these hard core riders may change their vote. Maybe this number could be amplified by a huge political beat up in the media. This tactic, however, would be likely to backfire as the public votes for, and not against, wilderness protection.

Within three months of gaining office, Mr Debman has pledged in the MOU to write legislation that would, in effect, extinguish wilderness and convert nature reserves into recreation areas so that horse riders could access these precious areas. Under the so-called historic MOU, signed with key bush user groups outside Parliament House, horse riders will assist the Liberal/Nationals in developing these policies.

The Liberal/Nationals have aligned themselves with the Snowy Mountains Bush Users Group, the Australian Horse Alliance and the Snowy Mountains Horse Riding Association. While claiming lock outs, these groups successfully lobbied to increase access to Kosciuszko National Park in the weed prone Karst limestone areas of the park. Thirteen drive-in horse camps have been created over the last four years by Environment Minister, Bob Debus. Andrew Cox of the National Parks Association is also concerned that 'the Iemma Government's rewriting of

the NPWS horseriding policy earlier in the year makes horseriding easier in national parks.'

Bush users also want access to fire trails currently considered too steep or otherwise too sensitive to be used by the public. The soon-to-be-defunct Outdoor Recreation Party also sought to create a National Parks and Wildlife Volunteer Service during the last Parliamentary session. This alternative 'Service' would have been a political vigilante bureau of 4WD users. They wanted to force change through inspections of perceived faults in park management that were previously agreed through an open and transparent process. Wilderness would have been an obvious target of these inspections. Fortunately the enabling legislation did not get up, despite receiving support from the Iemma Government.

The Coalition's new promises go further than just allowing high impact recreation into sensitive wilderness and nature reserves. In the case of the Kosciuszko and Guy Fawkes parks, the leader of the National Party, Andrew Stoner, has announced that they would turn these two parks into virtual equestrian ranches of some sort, where feral horses could roam, and feral horse grazing would be recognised as a key cultural value of these parks. These important national parks, when managed as horse farms, would be ruined for nature conservation in no time.

Whichever political parties gain office next March, they will find, after all the bluff and bluster, that the bush users received more than a fair go in the wilderness assessment and public review processes over the last decade or so. Getting rid of wilderness would mean fragmenting the very last areas of intact bushland we have left. Once they are gone, there will be no sanctuary, either for nature or humanity, from the spoiling forces and pressures of this high-tech world of ours.

Many opinion polls confirm that the citizens of NSW love untrammeled wilderness. Colong will be reminding NSW politicians of this broad support over the next few months. ■

Meeting Dates

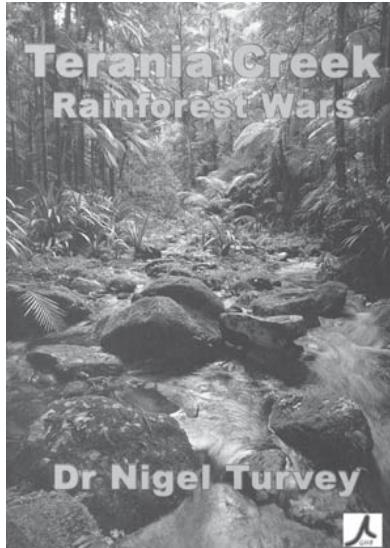
Meetings will be held at our office on Level 2, Fortuna House, 322 Pitt Street, at 2pm on the second Thursday of the month: February 8th; March 8th and April 12th.

Terania Creek, Rainforest Wars

by Dr Nigel Turvey

soft cover; 163 pages; RRP \$28.00
Glass House Books

Book Review by Jim Somerville



Although the NSW campaign for the preservation of our North Coast rainforest ended over twenty years ago, it still excites interest, probably because of the lingering resentment in the timber industries and because it was the most important conservation battle in the State.

Dr Nigel Turvey's book *Terania Creek: Rainforest Wars*, which was launched at Dymocks in Sydney by Neville Wran on the 22nd of November, is an excellent objective study of the violent confrontation there in August 1979 and subsequently in the Washpool and Nightcap rainforests. The author's research took two years, was very comprehensive and examined both sides. Three executive members of the Colong Foundation were interviewed at length and the Colong Committee (as it then was) receives favourable mention even though we only supported the 'alternatives' after the physical violence began at Terania.

With feeling still running high on the far North Coast, it was considered desirable to hold separate launches of the book – conservationists at Byron Bay and the timber industry at Lismore! The book is available at Dymocks in George Street, Sydney. It is highly recommended and excellent value at \$28.00.

Heritage Denied

by Geoff Mosley

THE protection of Australia's national and world heritage has ground to a virtual halt. Blocking further progress is a federal government whose priorities are clearly elsewhere.

The latest addition to the heritage road block was the Environment and Heritage Legislation Amendment Bill which passed through the Senate in its last session for 2006. Euphemistically described as a bill to streamline the process of heritage assessment, it is seen by most environmentalists as yet another brick in the massive wall which is obstructing heritage recognition in Australia.

The tragedy of the situation is that the queue of places waiting for the grace and favour of heritage assessment includes some of the nation's most outstanding areas, such as the Australian Alps and nearby forests. This proposal includes a chain of protected areas providing the best display in the world of the sea to snow changes in vegetation which occur in the eucalypt dominated forests. Also in the queue are the wonderfully diverse forests and heaths of South West Western Australia, the Australian Antarctic Territory, the Great Ocean Road, the Burrup Peninsula's art treasures. The long standing proposals for the extension of the World Heritage Areas in Tasmania and in the Great Sandy Region of Queensland and the recognition of the outstanding values (geoheritage, natural beauty and cultural associations) of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area continue to be held up as well. A government that was truly committed to the protection of such places would be tearing down the road blocks to make sure that such areas received their due recognition, not strengthening them.

As things stand with the government's minimalist approach only very small sites are likely to be heritage listed. The recent listings of Royal/Garawarra, Warrumbungle, Ku-ring-gai Chase, Stirling Range and Grampians (Gariwerd) National

Parks are the exceptions that proves the rule. Announcing these additions to the National List the Minister, Ian Campbell said "we expect to build the list up to maximise out at around 200 properties".

So how did this situation come about? It all began during a period with very different values from those of today which was reflected in the Whitlam Government's appointment of the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate and to the passage of the Australian Heritage Commission Act of 1975. This legislation set up the Register of the National Estate (RNE). Although there were difficulties, the approach was generally bipartisan and by 2003 some 13,000 nominations for the RNE had been received. The other main strand of heritage protection was the World Heritage Convention which Australia ratified in 1974. For a period the pace of nominations for the World Heritage List was also good.

The first obstruction to the world heritage nominations was master minded by Paul Keating in the mid nineties. Responding to a loggers' road block of Parliament House and seeking a way around the ALP policy of phasing out wood chipping he embraced the idea of Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) with the states. It was a course of action that was warmly embraced by John Howard after his party's victory in 1996.

In forested areas, world heritage assessments were now to be carried out under the terms of the RFAs. Not surprisingly, no such assessments have been made.

If that was the first part of the road block, the second was erected in 2003 when the national heritage function was transferred to the provisions of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The first stage of abandonment of the RNE (with about half of the nominations still not assessed) was commenced and in its stead was set up a new system of heritage protection involving National and Commonwealth Heritage Lists. This new law, which also replaced the Australian Heritage

Commission with an Australian Heritage Council, came into effect in January, 2004. The public, in effect, was asked to start nominating areas for protection all over again. Over a hundred nominations had been received by October, 2006 but only about a third (mostly the smaller sites and some longstanding national parks) had been assessed. It was at this stage that the Howard Government introduced the amendments to streamline the assessment process and do away with the Register of the National Estate. Anyone with a gram of insight into the way governments work knows that the proposal in the amendments for streamlining and 'priority assessment' is double speak for increased ministerial control.

The scope for this was already strong because the Howard Government had also decided that places must be on the national heritage list before they can be nominated for the world heritage list. For places already subjected to the RFAs this amounts to a triple hurdle.

To give you an idea of what all this means at the on site level, take the example of the coastline of Norfolk Island. Quite apart from its natural beauty this was the first piece of the Australian coastline to be the subject of a deliberate protective action, taken in 1794 by Superintendent King. The area was nominated for the RNE by the Australian Conservation Foundation in 1996, but had still not been assessed when that system was replaced in 2004. A new nomination for the National Heritage List has suffered the same fate. If this is how an incredibly significant historical site is treated, then what hope is there for any other?

The big question is whether Labor could do any better, or will it become once more obsessed with the resource development priorities like it had been when it was last in Government? ■

Geoff Mosley, a former head of the Australian Conservation Foundation, is a heritage consultant who has been involved with heritage protection since he served as a consultant to the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate in 1973/74.

WORLD HERITAGE LAND GRAB

THE Emirates gave conservationists a little Christmas surprise by proposing to relocate their high class Wolgan Valley Resort onto the World Heritage listed Wollemi National Park. This move would set a big precedent, as there are no resorts in Blue Mountains national parks. If approved, future resort proposals would be free to move from private land onto a national park during a 'minor' planning review process. These actions increased the environmental controversy of the Emirates proposal to an explosive level. Legal advice obtained by the Colong Foundation from the Environmental Defenders Office states that approval of the resort on national park land would be illegal.

Planning Minister, Frank Sartor, should insist that the resort proposal stay wholly on the thousand hectare private property in the Wolgan Valley, over which the Emirates have placed an option to buy. The resort is clearly not consistent with the Wollemi National Park plan of management and for that reason would appear to be illegal*.

The proposed relocation into a national park of the resort, already approved for development on private land, is not justified or even well explained by the modified plans. The Emirates modification report does not contain basic information on what parts of the resort would be situated within the national park, and where. Buried in the documentation is a map that reveals Donkey Mountain and Mount Wolgan, a magnificent sandstone mesa complex within the Gardens of Stone National Park, would be effectively be alienated by a proposed feral animal proof fence.

The modified proposal seeks to build a huge dam that would receive water transferred from the Wolgan River and other sources. Horse riding is proposed, but the location of bridle trails are not specified and could include national park areas; this may also be illegal in regard to the Wollemi plan of management.

The best information on the resort proposal is provided by a letter from Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus, that outlines his in principle agreement to the leasing of national

You shall not covet ... anything that is your neighbour's... You shall not desire your neighbour's house, his field... or anything that is your neighbour's.

Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21.

park land. The letter explains that there would be a dam, roads, six villas with guest pools, a reception building, support infrastructure and fencing in the World Heritage Area. The Minister's letter warns the Emirates that their lease could be open to litigation.

Most of the future patrons would probably travel to the proposed 6-star resort by helicopter. The rich just won't consider traveling for three hours by road after a long international flight. A noise impact assessment was not done for the resort's proposed helicopter operations. The Emirates have dismissed helicopter activities as infrequent and below the statutory trigger for environmental

assessment work. The Colong Foundation now has grave doubts about that argument, and believes that the intensification of helicopter operations may emerge once the resort is built.

Four million may have been spent on studies, but there are many unanswered questions on top of the outrage of relocating into the national park.

Readers should write a protest letter to the Hon Frank Sartor, Minister for Planning at Parliament House asking that he protect the World Heritage Listed Wollemi National Park from the outrage of an approved resort development relocating onto a national park. Approving the resort relocation proposal would compromise the future security of our national parks and wilderness areas.

* Section 81 (4) of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974 No 80* states 'Despite anything in this or any other Act or in any instrument made under this Act, if the Minister has adopted a plan of management under this Part, no operations shall be undertaken in relation to the lands to which the plan relates unless the operations are in accordance with the plan.'

The 'Greenhouse mafia' named

by Dr Frederick C. Bell, former Senior Lecturer in Climatology and Applied Science

The 'Walk Against Warming' in November last year highlights the Australian and U.S. Governments' refusal to ratify the United Nations' Kyoto Protocol, and their various other actions to defuse or obscure the global warming problem. These actions are alleged to include political pressure to suppress public statements on the issue by CSIRO and other scientists, as reported in the media earlier this year. A subsequent investigation by some Canberra journalists and academics concluded that Australian Government policies on global warming have been determined for years by a small group of energy industry lobbyists, apparently proud to be known as the 'greenhouse mafia'. The members of this group, identified in *The Australia Institute News* (Issue No. 46, March 2006) as

the 'main culprits' for the policies, are:

- Hugh Morgan, CEO Western Mining
- John Eyles, formerly of Alcoa
- Ron Knapp, CEO Australian Aluminium Council
- Alan Oxley, former trade ambassador
- Peter Walsh, former Federal Labor politician
- Meg McDonald, head of corporate affairs, Alcoa
- Chris Mitchell, editor-in-chief of *The Australian*
- Ian MacFarlane, Federal industry minister
- Alan Moran, Institute for Public Affairs
- Malcolm Broomhead, CEO Orica
- John Howard, Prime Minister
- Barry Jones, Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association.

(The above Barry Jones is NOT the former Federal Labor politician).

Damage to drinking water catchments exposed

by Keith Muir

THE Waratah Rivulet, a stream that used to provide a third of the water to the Woronora Dam, has ceased flowing due to structural damage caused by underground coal mining. The Dam supplies the Sutherland Shire and Helensburgh with drinking water. The rivulet, which is within the Woronora Special Catchment Area, had contained until recently pristine pools hundreds of metres long and up to three metres deep. Since being mined these pools are sandy hollows surrounded by rocky bars, covered with many transverse cracks over which the stream once flowed.

Dave Burgess of Total Environment Centre, who inspected the stream with me last November, reported that riverbed is cracked in hundreds of places and drained to a point where it now runs dry... "While other rivers and streams in the area are running well, the Waratah Rivulet is bone dry for nearly 2km of its length," he said.

Waratah Rivulet has been subjected to intensive longwall coal mining over the last three years by the Metropolitan Colliery. The mining has destroyed the stream's ability to effectively collect and transmit water. The colliery is currently owned by Peabody Energy, the world's largest coal mining company.

The cracking of the streambed of Waratah Rivulet is not an isolated incident. It is similar to the damage in other parts of the water supply catchment that has been subjected to longwall coal mining. Five years ago, I blew the whistle on similar extensive damage of Wongawilli and Native Dog Creeks in the important Metropolitan water supply catchment further to the south. Cliff falls and major surface cracking have also been reported at the Dendrobium Colliery also in the Metropolitan Catchment Area.

The Iemma Government needs to direct its mining engineers to give priority to catchment preservation before coal extraction. More coal needs



Following recent longwall coal mining operations, this empty channel is all that's left of a three metre deep pool on Waratah Rivulet.

to be retained to prevent the surface movements that have caused the stream bed cracking and water pollution in the drinking water catchments. It is vital that protection zones are applied across all drinking water supply catchments.

If we allow the coal mining damage to continue, we will need more than a desalination plant to secure adequate water resources. Our formerly pristine water supply catchments south of Sydney are an irreplaceable resource. The Metropolitan and Woronora catchments are situated above the Illawarra Escarpment that receives the most reliable rainfalls in the Sydney region. Fresh, pure water from these catchments must not be polluted or diminished by coal mining if a major water supply crisis is to be averted.

The Government's limp response of calling an inquiry ignores the seriousness of the problem and apparently seeks to defer any extra control on mining until after 2010. Deferral of action will only make the coming crisis worse. A moratorium on mining approvals must come into immediate effect, and operate until mining companies agree to stronger controls that are needed to

prevent damage to our drinking water catchments.

The independent inquiry into underground coal mining in the southern coalfield stretching from Sydney to the Southern Highlands, which was announced by the NSW Government on December 6th, is likely to be a whitewash. The terms of references do not even mention the water supply catchments.

On announcing the inquiry Planning Minister, Mr Frank Sartor said that from 2010 all proposed extensions to underground coal mining leases would require approval under Part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. So the inquiry will have no immediate benefit.

The directions of the Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, to the inquiry's panel of experts appears to suggest he is more concerned with employment and the State's economy than stopping coal mining related damage to essential water supplies.

Essentially the inquiry has been asked to trade off environment

continued on page 8

Celebration of two wilderness gifts

ON November 16, representatives of the Colong Foundation, local conservationists, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife and the Yuin people (traditional owners) came together with the Department of Environment and Conservation to celebrate the living legacy provided by two generous women: Ms Catherine White; and Mrs Genevieve Little.

The bequests from these two women enabled the purchase of over 2000 hectares of wilderness quality lands in Morton National Park (see *Bulletin 215*, p4 for a map). The two bequests filled large holes in the park that could otherwise have become exclusive hideaways at risk of development, particularly now that the Nowra to Nerriga road is being sealed.

Dr Tony Fleming, Director-General of the Parks and Wildlife Division said that “[t]he Dunphy Wilderness Fund also supported, as one of its last contributions, the acquisition of the blocks... It is also important that I recognise the support of the previous owners of the land and their willingness to work with the Foundation (for NPW) so that the land would be added to Morton National Park...”.

Dr Fleming honoured the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife: for without “the efforts of their dedicated staff, such bequests and donations would not be possible. I wish to thank the Foundation Directors, the people who have provided legal support, and Foundation staff. I know that Leonie Gale (the Foundation’s executive director)



Director of National Parks, Dr Tony Fleming (right), and Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife Board Member, David Davis, unveil the commemorative rock for Catherine White's wilderness legacy, while Alex Saeck, representing the Saeck family, the former owners of land at Sassafras, and Lema Bloxome of the Yuin people look on.

has put in an immense effort to see these acquisitions come to fruition.”

The good news is that while the Dunphy Fund remains unfunded, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife is still fund raising for national parks acquisitions with considerable success. The Colong Foundation for Wilderness is playing its part by lobbying for further government financial support for the Dunphy Fund. ■

Damage to drinking water catchments exposed

continued from page 7

protection with the social and economic importance of coal mining. The inquiry has not been given directions about the paramount importance of catchment protection.

The claim that the inquiry will provide a sound technical foundation for the assessment and long term management of underground mining in the southern coalfield is misleading. The inquiry is lacking leadership to ensure water supplies are preserved. I expect that the inquiry will vindicate current intensive

underground coal mining practices and discount the damage being caused to water catchments.

Only one decision needs to be made; and that is how best to preserve the specially protected drinking water catchments from the spoiling effects of coal mining. The Government must act to ensure that the pristine waters of our drinking water catchments will flow unabated and unpolluted forever.

Meanwhile Peabody Energy intend to lodge a proposal in 2007 to mine under further reaches of the Waratah Rivulet and under the Woronora Dam itself. Elsewhere destructive longwall mining operations continue unabated. ■

Horses In National Parks

I have been stunned by the announcement of the Beattie Government, which proposes to allow horse riding in National Parks. This organisation opposes this move most vehemently. Current government regulations state that feral animals are not allowed in National Parks, and that includes horses.

John Bristow, President NPAQ, in *NPA News Sept 2006*.

Saving Wilderness is Economic Sense

Our relentless conversion and degradation of natural habitats is eroding human welfare for short time private gain. In these circumstances saving as much as possible of what remains of wild nature through a judicious combination of sustainable use conservation and where necessary compensation for resulting opportunity costs, makes overwhelming economic and well as moral sense.

Andrew Balmford and colleagues, p. 953, 2002

Nature Conservation Council (NCC) Annual Conference

THE Colong Foundation submitted several motions to the Conference. The following motions were passed, with minor amendments:

■ THAT this Conference support the recommendations for political parties described in the report *Protecting the NSW Environment* by the Environment Liaison Office; and

■ THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW encourage its member groups to approach their member(s) of State Parliament, to present the report and seek action and undertakings regarding the report's four critical areas necessary to reverse the current environmental decline, namely:

- Real and sustainable reductions in greenhouse gases in line with the target of 60 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2012, starting with a moratorium on new coal mines and coal-fired power stations and a legislated renewable energy of 15% by 2012.

- Full delivery of the promised end to broad scale land clearing through closure of loopholes in the *Native Vegetation Act* and Regulations, and rigorous monitoring and enforcement.

- Vigorous protection of our natural environment, by creation of national parks along the Murray River and the South East forests; protection of environmentally significant Crown leases; new wilderness areas and marine sanctuaries, and urgent delivery of increased flow to our State's rivers and wetlands.

- Environmentally sustainable plans for the metropolitan and coastal regions, which protect all high conservation areas, provide for effective corridors for wildlife and limit the footprint of development. Stop land developers dictating planning decisions to government.

Two motions calling on the NSW Government to declare nominated wilderness areas were passed, with slight amendment. The amended

motions were:

■ THAT the NCC call on the NSW Government to:

- (a) remove from the Brigalow and Nandewar *Community Conservation Area Act* any provisions which prevent the nomination, assessment and declaration in accordance with the *Wilderness Act 1987* of the Bebo and Pilliga wilderness areas in northern NSW; and

- (b) allow the Department of Environment and Conservation to process the nomination and assessment of the Bebo and Pilliga Wilderness Areas in accordance with the *Wilderness Act*.

■ THAT the NCC support the protection of the Giro and Carracubundi wilderness areas in the upper Manning Catchment, jointly nominated by the Colong Foundation and the National Parks Association on May 10th 2006.

Another motion called for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the NSW *Wilderness Act, 1987*:

■ THAT this Conference request the incoming Executive to ensure that in 2007 NCC takes appropriate steps to mark and celebrate the 20th anniversary of the NSW Wilderness Act, including promoting the achievements made as a result of the Act, to stress the continuing importance of wilderness reserves which help to conserve nature and landscapes and provide many other benefits.

The Colong Foundation also called for the reservation of the Metropolitan and Woronora Special Area Catchments State Conservation Areas:

■ THAT the NCC support the reservation of an area totaling approximately 97,500 hectares in the Woronora and Metropolitan Special Areas, exclusive of dam walls and major Sydney Catchment Authority infrastructure, as the Woronora State Conservation Area and Metropolitan State Conservation Areas, respectively. ■

The State Plan

The recently released NSW State Plan is a description of the government's good intentions, past achievements and some specific plans for the future. It assumes that natural resources will continue to provide for the aim of achieving economic growth. Climate change is described as drought, which assumes that, despite the desiccation of the west, the drying of the Alps and the CSIRO prediction that rainfall will fall by another 20-25% by 2030, NSW will return to normal.

The problems the state will face are overpopulation, global warming and resource depletion.

As the Commonwealth immigration program will increase the population of Sydney by some 50,000 a year, and \$2.8 billion of the GST collected in NSW is given to other states, we suffer transport congestion, unaffordable housing and further aggravation of the water shortage. Overpopulation does not rate a mention. Targets have been set for the reduction of greenhouse gases and natural resource management, but how they are to be achieved is not described.

The state has committed \$9.1 billion to ensure energy reliability. How this will be achieved without increasing greenhouse emission is not explained. Despite transport congestion, the transport network was described in the draft plan as "smooth flowing." The strategy of protecting areas of high conservation value is at odds with the promotion of resort development in Kosciuszko National Park.

Letters Count

Apart from opinion polls, Ministers, the media and administrators have little indication of what people want. Letters from concerned people are therefore very significant. As Shane Lacey, Team Leader of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland's Wild Life Protection Program writes, in the Society's *Winter Newsletter*:

"We could have a much greater influence if all our supporters could take five minutes to write their own letters to the media, urging them to make the environment a priority. Write a letter to our own environment minister stating your concerns – I truly believe that things can happen if we all stand together on this. I have three children aged 16 and 12 and I would really like them to have a beautiful future – this can only happen if we all stand united to make change happen."

Plans of management could be sidelined

by Keith Muir

NATIONAL park plans of management are recognised by all who use them as being satisfactory to very good. The Department of Environment and Conservation, however, has commissioned the University of Queensland to review the management planning process following criticisms from the NSW Audit Office in 2004.

If the recommendations of the review are adopted, then national park planning could become more complex. Imagine values-based land use zones in plans of management, with regional plans operating above these plans, and a greater number of subsidiary plans below them, so that several grey layers are added to the planning process. Meanwhile, state budget reviews would reset the planning agenda each year by funding identified priority actions. On top of this, the 'level of service' would be defined for each park to ensure that some parks got more money, while other parks got less. Yet while recommending all this, the paper paradoxically says that park plans of management will remain the cornerstone of reserve management. Well I don't think so.

In any event, the usual two drivers appear to be behind these changes: the desire to formalise political intervention in park planning; and provision for more intensive use and development of reserves.

No doubt the Department is trying to regulate processes that have evolved under its nose to cope with political pressures, such as commercial use, high impact user group demands, and international thinking on park management that is influenced by the lowest common denominator needed to accommodate park management in poor countries.

The consultants have reaffirmed the Departmental intention of keeping the plan of management as the cornerstone of the process but the methods of dealing with the above political developments require the erosion of the central position

held by these plans (i.e. say one thing, and do the opposite).

The factors in the review report that could undermine plans of management are:

- Limiting to eight the number of park values to be managed in each park so that the subsequent values-based planning process could allow parts of national parks without the identified values to fall through the regulatory cracks;
- Values-based management makes it easier to justify major development within park boundaries, by claiming that the identified 'values' themselves are not harmed by the proposal;
- Setting management prescriptions by values may mean that areas without 'identified' values could receive less than the current national park level of protection – and so the definition of park values, and standards for their management, would become more difficult and political;
- The proposed park zones offer less certainty of outcome and park security when compared with proposals that locate specific developments in specific places under the current plan of management process;
- Under economic imperatives, park zones would inexorably ratchet park areas up the use categories toward increasing development (just like zoning of private land responds to economic pressures);
- The values-based/zoning methodology ensures that the entire park will not be considered or managed as an integrated whole;
- An 'adjunct document' that would 'cherry pick' park management actions would allow budget-based Ministerial intervention to reset management priorities for the State every year;
- Identification of "levels of service" for each park that would ensure parks with the identified chosen values or more visitors received more funding.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness does not support these initiatives. Management planning should instead ensure that national parks and nature

reserves generally remain unmodified natural areas, with specific prescriptions in the plans of management allowing for appropriate vehicle access on defined routes, and small, low impact camping areas and other facilities, generally restricted to the edges of parks. No zones that would legitimise resorts, or recreational horseriding or 4WD vehicle use across board areas of national parks are necessary or appropriate. ■

The Blue Mountains Feral Horse Control Plan

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has developed a plan to remove all the feral horses from the southern Blue Mountains. The plan, however, proposes to only focus mustering effort on a small area of the Kedumba Valley. As feral horses have previously extended over a wide area of the southern Blue Mountains, this effort should be considered a pilot project.

Given the rugged terrain, the proposed mustering method may be ineffective. The control plan could be made more effective if it identified the past and present areas frequented by feral horses (i.e. harbourage areas), so that the full extent of the potential feral horse problem can effectively be gauged.

The significance of the impacts from the feral horse population in the Warragamba catchment is increased by the importance of water quality, and ecological integrity in this critical inner catchment to Sydney's main water supply. For this reason, control of feral horses should be a high priority, be well funded and use the most effective control methods.

The NPWS needs to be funded by the Sydney Catchment Authority so that it can identify the harbourage areas of feral horses, and conduct humane aerial shooting operations that will protect this important and environmentally sensitive area from future water quality impacts.