colong bulletin

No. 225 | March 2008

The battle for Deua

KEITH MUIR

OF the wilderness areas being proposed for protection, the Deua stands out as the foremost forest icon. It has taken big hits from the loggers but survived. Its wilderness core remains intact and is reserved as national park. Under normal circumstances this outcome should be cause for celebration, but those maddening details of park management and of wilderness assessment deflate our feelings. The squiggles on a map, which look like a well worn snakes and ladders game, are very, very important to the future security of the area.

The Deua Wilderness could protect full topographic sequence of tableland, escarpment and foothill forest ecosystems, to allow for local movements of native plants and animals under climate change and associated changes in fire patterns. The vision of major movements of wildlife along the Alps to the (mainly cleared) Atherton Tableland is just a misleading hallucination if wilderness areas like the Deua are not kept intact.

Many environment groups have little time for park management, as it's seen as a second order issue, while building wildlife corridor links take priority. But this is mistaken, as both are important. Park management determines whether wilderness is preserved, and the plants and animals they contain flourish. If it is not; then don't worry about the bits of bush that the ecological target hunters, (usually scientists) are excited about. Climate change will hit the smaller bush fragments harder and sooner than wilderness.

We are, as Al Gore said ten years ago, engaged in the struggle for the Earth. Rule number one in such struggles is to hold the centre. Taken in this context, the abandonment of the wilderness idea is madness. Wilderness sits in the centre of thinking on nature-based park management. It rightly belongs along side energy conservation and public transport as the big ideals upon which any truly sustainable vision of the Earth must be constructed.

The Deua Valley is the central part of Myles Dunphy's 1943 Moruya Ranges Primitive Reserve proposal. Former Premier, Neville Wran, and our Patron, mentioned the enduring values of wilderness

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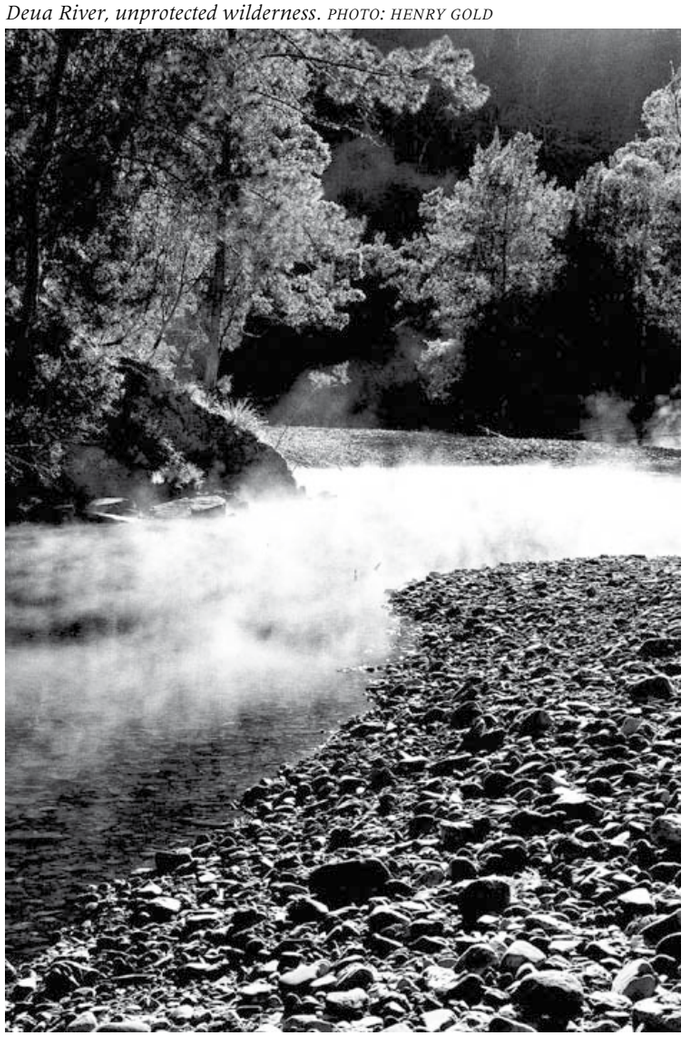
Deua River, unprotected wilderness. PHOTO: HENRY GOLD



The battle for Deua

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as the key reason he protected the area in 1976. Its wilderness values were recognised by Peter Helman in 1976 and again by the Wilderness Working Group in 1986.

Truly representative wilderness has been lost in most other areas of the State due to the overwhelming human impacts of the past 200 years, but it is still possible to reserve the Deua. It is one of those true wilderness areas, bespoken of by Myles and Milo Dunphy, by academics like Peter Helman and political leaders such as Bob Carr and Neville Wran.

In December 1994 the Fahey Government announced the Deua Wilderness as declared, following a positive Cabinet decision, but Messrs Cochrane and Schultz, two right wing hardliners destroyed that bipartisan support. They threatened to destroy the Fahey Government by becoming independents if the wilderness was declared. The Fahey Government had no choice but to renege on the promised wilderness Christmas present.

Bob Carr then censured Premier Fahey in Parliament for failing to keep his wilderness promises. In 1995 the Deua naturally became one of the 16 wilderness areas promised in the Carr Wilderness policy.

The second chance to save it came again in 2002, but the Southern Directorate of the then National Parks and Wildlife recommended against protection, primarily because local park managers do not see wilderness as a high prioity. So the wilderness, which heralded political success for Bob Carr on one of his greatest days in Parliament, was let down.

Over 300 km forest logging and fire roads dissect the identified but unprotected Deua Wilderness. These traverse many of the major points of interest, including Hanging Rock, the Deua and Dampier Mountains, and increase fragmentation of the area through fire, weed invasion and vehicle access. The maintenance of so many unnecessary roads ignores the restoration purpose of the Wilderness Act and is an unnecessary drain on finances.

A new battle approaches

The Colong Foundation has spearheaded a rescue mission to save the Deua, seeking a wilderness declaration over the Deua Valley and the Donalds Creek catchment.

In 2004 the NSW Ombudsman, noting that 18,316 of the 26,545 submissions were in support of wilderness, found that NPWS had acted unreasonably by inadequately reporting the range of public submissions and was insufficiently transparent in developing its wilderness boundary recommendations. The Ombudsman recommended that the Department expeditiously assess any future nominations for wilderness protection from environment groups regarding the areas of concern. Following this advice, environment groups made a nomination of key wilderness areas in southern NSW, including the Deua.

Two and a half years later wilderness assessment has not being expeditiously assessed at all. The Department of Environment and Climate Change has led environment groups down the garden path. Apparently the Department has decided it got its wilderness assessment and the consideration of public opinion right. Was the NSW Ombudsman wrong after all?

New guidelines examined

The Department revised its Wilderness Assessment Guidelines, but a process to consider the relative merits of conservation versus access was not developed. If the Department had a Wilderness Unit it might have done this job. The Department is unable to advance wilderness protection when a local park manager is unsupportive. In these circumstances the Department can not resolve the competing claims of horse riders and off road vehicles. Two or three objections are all that is needed to justify the position taken by an area manager.

The Colong Foundation has commissioned John Macris to develop a procedure to determine the relative importance of proposed changes to recreation opportunities brought about by wilderness proposals. We hope that the Department will favourably consider John's report and find ways to protect key areas like Deua.

Wilderness, the central organising idea for nature centred park management, should not be given up because the owners of a few 4WD steel dinosaurs want to grind over every rough road through wilderness before Peak Oil prices kill them for good.

These same roads are used by aronists to light fires and off road vehicles have even torn up the turf at their favourite Bendethra camping ground by doing 'doughnuts'. Locals have been more or less condoned by park managers for over burning national park lands, reducing plant and animal diversity. The burning has converted shrubby forests into grassland in the Donalds Creek wilderness. It is all too convenient for these same managers to again reject further wilderness protection for the Deua. ❖

Meeting Dates

General Meetings will be held at our office on level 2, Fortuna House, 332 Pitt Street, at 2.00pm on the second Thursday of the month: March 13th, April 10th and May 8th.

2008 AGM Notice

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is to be held April 24 at 2 pm to be followed by the ordinary General Meeting.

The AGM will:

a) Consider the minutes of the proceeding AGM and those of the extraordinary general meeting of 13th December, 2007;

b) Receive and consider the report of the auditor and annual report of the Colong Foundation;

c) Elect a Board of Directors for the ensuring year, including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, a Treasurer and an Auditor, the nominations for which should be received by Thursday April 10th;

d) Set the annual subscription fee;

e) Consider any other motion received in the hands of the Hon. Secretary by April 10th.

Elizabeth Elenius
Hon. Secretary

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Wilderness and Fire

An edited version of a talk introducing Colong's Policy on wilderness and fire

IAN BROWN

TO consider a wilderness fire policy, you first need to understand wilderness. A lot of people these days say that wilderness has had its day. Not quite like the Dodo, maybe more like orange laminex and flared pants. Well, up to a point I have to agree: they certainly don't make wilderness like they used to. There's much less of it than ever before, it's more isolated, and it's under much greater pressures. Climate change is just another one to add to the list, and it's a biggie.

Not long ago I went for a little wander into the edge of the Wollemi Wilderness, the largest and perhaps the most resilient wilderness in NSW. Not half an hour from the car, I found a complex piece of bush with great trunks of turpentine, smooth-barked apple and peppermints rising out of sandstone edges, with a rich understorey of grasstrees and at least four different shrubs flowering (it was spring). I hesitate to use the analogy, but it was like a densely planted garden, with such a mix of species, shapes and textures that it took my breath away. The air was filled with a chorus of about a dozen different birds and a cacophony of cicadas, and then came a sound I've never before heard in the Blue Mountains – the unmistakable grunt of a male koala.

This patch of dry sclerophyll open forest was last burnt in 1997, ten years ago. Is this particular bit of bush the same as it was 200 years ago? Has it become more diverse or less diverse? Why? Is it healthy? Has it reached its prime now, is it still getting there or does it desperately need another fire? What are the limits to fire regime that will ensure the biodiversity of our patch is retained?

The patch of bush on the edge of Wollemi National Park, last burnt in 1997.
PHOTO: IAN BROWN

I doubt if anyone can answer those questions, not in any definitive way. Not yet. That's partly because of the way natural ecosystems change from place to place and through time. But it's also because we don't really know what the full history of this particular place is, the history of disturbances and processes – most notably fire - that has produced what we see today. We only have some knowledge about the extent and intensity of that one most recent fire.

It's the same for every little bit of bush out there. And if our sample patch was isolated in suburbia, the chance of it surviving in any sort of health in the long term would be grim indeed – with or without fire or climate change. But our patch of bush is not facing the future alone. Because when you climb out of that flowering understorey onto one of those sandstone edges, you get this fabulous view right across the Colo gorge and away to the high peaks on the north-western edge of the Blue Mountains – uninterrupted bush for over 80 km. Bush with lots of patches like our sample patch – never identical, but broadly similar. Our bit of bush is part of a big hunk of wilderness.

On the detailed scale it's very hard not only to keep every bit of bush healthy, but to know how to keep them healthy. But on the larger scale, it is possible to talk in general terms about the broad limits of fire regime that this type of plant community needs to survive, without being specific about one particular bit; to operate on the averages across the landscape and hope for the best. If the pattern of fire in our patch is not ideal, then perhaps it will be better elsewhere.

But only great big chunks of bush give this approach some chance of working. Only large natural areas provide the spatial variability, the buffering and diversity to give ecological sustainability a chance in the face of what are already highly variable natural processes – such as fire – and which are now likely to be undergoing even more rapid change.

Of course it's the same story when it comes to wildlife, which is dependent on habitat survival. We now know that brush-tailed rock-wallabies – comprehensively gone now from most of their former range - are able to hang on quite well in parts of Wollemi partly because there are very few foxes there. The resilience of wilderness includes a resistance to the invasion of introduced species. Sometimes you can still hear koalas.

So to those who think that wilderness has had its day, that it was some kind of 1970s hippie fad, I say: go and spend a little time in Wollemi. Wilderness remains our most secure repository of not only Australia's natural biodiversity, but also natural processes:

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Wilderness and Fire
Introducing the Colong Policy

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like water and nutrient cycles, landscape evolution, species adaptation, and fire.

Moving on to the Colong Foundation's draft policy on wilderness and fire. I just want to address a few broad points.

The policy is based on three premises:

1. that wilderness is important for biodiversity conservation (our wilderness reserves are the arks that we push out onto the stormy waters of climate change);
2. that inappropriate fire is a potential threat to wilderness values of biodiversity and natural processes, so therefore wilderness must be valued in fire management; and
3. that we still don't know enough about fire ecology to make informed decisions about how best to protect wilderness values.

The policy has an emphasis on science, because that's our best guide to how fire should be managed *for the bush*. There's quite a lot of helpful research out there, but not enough of it seems to be getting through to where it counts – to the community and to the firefighters and to fire managers. And we need lots more of it, so that management by myth and assertion is relegated to history.

I would like to quote from my favourite *SMH* columnist: Ross Gittins, the economics commentator. He wrote this:

"What gets measured gets reported and worried about… What goes unmeasured gets ignored."

He was talking about economic parameters of course, but it's just as true in most fields. And it's one of the problems of fire that there's precious little measurement going on.

There's very little post-fire mapping of fire intensities from either wildfires or planned fires. There's not much analysis of the effects of either single fires or fire regimes on particular vegetation communities or threatened species. There's no assessment of whether backburns and hazard reduction burns are actually working. And, of course without all this, there can be no cost-benefit analysis of fire management programs. It is still possible to spend $20 million on putting out a fire and yet avoid spending a small fraction of that properly reviewing the operation. In short, we don't really know very much about what's going on out there in the donga.

View across the Wollemi Wilderness from close to the patch of bush. PHOTO: IAN BROWN

If fire management is to get serious, there needs to be a lot more measurement, and a lot more effort in ensuring that scientific knowledge gets to where it's needed and gets used. The objective has to be that all fire management is evidence-based.

The policy also has some emphasis on fire suppression. Why? When it comes to a wildfire you just put the damned thing out any way you can, don't you? The bush is going to burn anyway, so what does it matter what we do?

The truth is we can no longer afford this sort of thinking. Of course one fire may not matter much, but a sequence of fires does: how often, to what intensity and with what other variables. And some suppression activities can have other long-term impacts like physical destruction by bulldozer. The bush is facing enough problems from fire without suppression adding to them. So how we put fire into a landscape, and how we put fires out in a landscape both matter.

Fire suppression has come a long way, and life and property are being protected better than ever before. My own view is that this is largely due to more effective resources and better organisation, rather than broad improvement in technique. In fact in some ways, technique seems to have gone backwards. When I first got involved in fire fighting more than a quarter of a century ago, there was general agreement that 'adding more fire' in threatening conditions was not a good idea because of the risks and the difficulty of keeping what you started under control. If recent seasons are any indication, this wisdom seems to be giving way to a more hairy-chested style.

During November 2006 there were many serious fires. The fires in Wollemi National Park came under an emergency declaration. One strategy

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Wilderness and Fire

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seriously considered for the Wollemi fires was a backburn around the entire perimeter of the park. That's along the southern edge of the Hunter Valley, down the Putty Road, along Bells Line of Road and up the western escarpment. Think of that: more than half a million hectares of backburn. Now that's a mega-fire. This option was ultimately rejected, not because of the severe impact on the park – burning all of it in one go – but because there weren't enough resources. What if there had been?

There are plenty of guidelines on how fire should be managed in Wollemi, and they are incorporated into local fire plans. But I fear that when it comes to the crunch, there is every chance that all that fluffy environmental stuff will be ignored. Just like some other high-minded aims are being jettisoned under the threat of terrorism.

If climate change threatens 'mega-fires' roaring out of the wilderness to engulf whole towns (and I'm being melodramatic), then there is little doubt that wilderness will be sacrificed in the scrabble to save ourselves: a burnt offering – whether it actually helps save life and property or not. Three things will make sure of that: the presently dominant fire culture, the inadequate state of scientific understanding and the level of ignorance in the community (which is fed by a lot of misinformation from propagandists with another agenda). The strongest defence for our wildlands is better knowledge and understanding of what's really going on out there, in the bush, with fire. ❖

2007 Donors

The following people generously made a donation to the Colong Foundation in 2007:

J. Alexander, J. Atkinson, V. Atkinson, C. Austin, R. Badgery, J. Bentley, T. Bidder, J. Blanche, G. Booth, M. Bouman, D. Bowskill, P. Brady, The Budawang Committee Inc., J. Butler, D. Byrne, S. Caffin, J. Cavanaugh, E. Chapman-Wade, P. Christian, K. Clacher, Coast & Mountain Walkers of NSW, A. Colley, C. Colman, P. Cook, R. Coster, G. Cox, I. Cox, L. Coyne, A. Cutford, G. Daly, A. Dixon, B. Dodd, R. Doyle, The Dungalla Club Inc., E. Elenius, M. Ellwood, M. Esson, A. Ewald, F. Fennell, V. Figgis, I. Fretwell, L. Garland, R. Gates, G. Giles, W. Gillooly, J. Greening, G. Hanvin, G. Heinsohn, W. Hellyer, M. Hensen, J. Holt, J. Howell, R. Hume, L. Imhof & M. Smith, A. Kay, A. Keen, D. & J. Kelly, N & H Kenway, P. Krinks, P. Laird, D. Large, J. Lawler, G. Lawrence, M. Lenzen, A. Lethlean. A. MacQueen, B. Marshall, B. Mason, G. Masterman, J. Mayer, P. McBride, W. Midson, B. Miller, M. Mills, M. Moore & D. Bush, W. Muir, J. Mumme, B. Murphy, A. Murray, T. Nixon, C. Nolder, M. Nordon, J. O'Reilly, R. Pallin, K. Parkhouse, H. Paterson & F. Matter, R. Pearson, Randwick College Students' Association, S. Ridd, L. Saville, I. Sefton, A. Shilling, J. Simons, B. Stow, L. Sullivan, M. Tebbutt Webber, P. Thomas, R. Toop, B. Toovey, P. Van Toorn, D. von Behrens, D. Walker, T. Walsh, M. Weatherley, H. Whaite, M. White, J. Whitehouse, F. Winter, J. Wrigley.

The Colong Foundation appreciates the generous ongoing support of our donors.

Petition calls for "In Danger" listing

A petition lodged late last year with the World Heritage Committee states climate change poses a direct threat to the World Heritage-listed eucalypt forests of the Blue Mountains and urgent steps must be taken to protect it.

The petition signed by the Climate Action Network Australia, Greenpeace, the NSW Nature Conservation Council and Friends of the Earth calls for the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area to be listed as 'in danger' and for urgent action to reduce Australia's greenhouse emissions.

Legal co-ordinator for the Climate Action Network Australia, Phillip Freeman said "Our iconic Blue Mountains could turn black if we do not act quickly to limit the impacts of climate change".

Eucalypt forests in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area are among the most fire-dependant forest ecosystems in the world and that more frequent and intense fires as a result of climate change threaten the survival of many species.

"Climate change will increase temperatures and lead to more wildfires. If this happens, the natural beauty and scientific value of the Blue Mountains will deteriorate and this threatens its status as a World Heritage Area," Mr Freeman said.

An 'in danger' listing would result in a program of corrective measures being developed and implemented, including a plan to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

The petition calls for Australia to introduce a price on carbon emissions, commit to reducing its greenhouse emissions by at least 30 per cent by 2020 and increase its renewable energy target from 2 per cent to 25 per cent by 2020.

The petitioners requested that the World Heritage Committee send a mission of qualified observers from the relevant Advisory Bodies or other organisations to visit the property, evaluate the nature and extent of the threats and propose the measures to be taken.

The petitioners also recommended action to review and reformulate Management Plans and Wildfire Risk Management Plans for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area as well as greater levels of monitoring and reporting climate change impacts on the Area. ❖

Net zero immigration

As the mover of the adopted net zero immigration policy (which means immigration equal to emigration) at the NCC annual conference some years ago, I was pleased to read in the October/November issue of the NPA Journal, Karen Jones's support of Sustainable Population Australia, which I regard as one of the most significant conservation organisations. And I greatly appreciated John Bentley's strong support of the policy and Andrew Cox's support on behalf of NPA. I believe it is essential to realise that immigration is the only reason, except in the short term, for Australia's increasing population. Our total fertility rate (i.e. births per females) is 1.8. This means that population will stabilise then fall, thereby relieving pressure on our dwindling water supplies, housing costs and perhaps even traffic congestion.

Alex Colley

The Truth About Wilderness Protection – Making Context Count

JOHN MACRIS

HAVING identified a patch of land as wilderness, the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) then undertakes a consultation process and makes recommendations to the Environment Minister on whether to declare a new wilderness area. Assessing whether an area is suitable to declare wilderness involves informing the Minister of any management issues, and other public opinion considerations weighing into the scenario.

The question arises though: is the process well served by producing a summary of the polarised submissions from wilderness supporters and their access lobby opponents? The government knows that the environmentalists are foremost concerned over the rarity of wilderness, while the access groups are most concerned over their rights being taken away.

What if, rather than just being a documentation of this impasse, the suitability assessment considered a wilderness proposal within its regional context, taking into account the way the public is able to engage in nature visitation within surrounding public lands, as well as the proposed wilderness areas?

The Colong Foundation prepared such an assessment. The work picks up on key aspects of DECC's revised Wilderness assessment guidelines of 2007 and the 2004 Ombudsman's Report into the Southern Wilderness Assessment. Our focus in developing this assessment has been wilderness areas of the alpine and the south coast regions of NSW.

The table below presents a 'reality check' on claims about lost recreation opportunities and can defuse allegations made in the media.

Extract table from report – Critical Examination of "Lost Opportunity" Inferences

	Inference	Validation and Regional Overview
	That declared wilderness denies fishing opportunities	Angling activities do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Wilderness Act. Access to key fishing streams or lakes remains comprehensive in all regions assessed. A very small proportion of total fishing waters are within wilderness, and these remain accessible on foot.
	That declared wilderness denies camping opportunities	Camping meets the definition of self-reliant recreation and so is not precluded by wilderness. As found in this audit, prominent car-based camping sites were not closed off by wilderness proposals in any region. For lower-usage established camping sites, just 3 regions had individual examples where a change to walk-in access to the site would be necessitated by a wilderness declaration.
	That declared wilderness denies opportunities for bush driving	The regional audit showed that, rather than making bush driving impossible, wilderness declarations may place a distance between a preferred base camp location and a driving trail network. This distance ranged from virtually the immediate vicinity (0-5 km) up to 60 km, and tended to average in the lower half of that range.
	That declared wilderness denies opportunities for motorised trail bike riding	The situation for trail bike riding is effectively the same as for other motorised activities noted above. Riding of *unregistered* trail bikes would of course remain prohibited under a suite of land management regulations unrelated to the application of the Wilderness Act.
	That declared wilderness denies horse riding opportunities	The regional audit showed that in the instances where a particular route would be closed off by wilderness declaration, horse riding opportunities in similar environmental surrounds were generally available.

By auditing recreation opportunity, it is possible to reach considered conclusions about the compatibility for each region of the Colong's wilderness protection proposals.

Across eight regions through the south coast and highlands, the following steps were taken:

a) Recognise major visitation nodes – where large numbers of visitors come to enjoy some kind of scenery or spectacle and engage with nature. Nodes are not always part of National Park estate, but where they are, they tend to become a focus of visitor management activity. An established key visitation node is unlikely to be a popular candidate for inclusion in a wilderness declaration, but on the other hand is an important indicator of the ability for the National Park estate to be fulfilling its nature visitation role alongside its nature protection role. For example, when people flock to Fitzroy Falls or Bundanoon Gorge, what they can see fanning out from their immediate surrounds is a large tract of country of high wilderness value. So in many cases, recognising key visitation nodes amounts to recognising co-existence of high visitation and wilderness.

b) Assess Recreation changes - beyond the node areas in the larger expanses of the parks, there are a number of recreation pursuits aspired to, including some that aren't accommodated in declared wilderness. These uses are catalogued at this stage of the process.

c) Geographic scope of alternatives – The identification of where people would have to go to undertake the same kind of activity, and how similar are the natural/scenic attributes of these alternatives.

d) Regional compatibility – Information from the above stages is pooled into a regional profile, so that the region's level of compatibility with the proposed wilderness decision is classified. These four classes represent particular thresholds:

- Broad incompatibility issues
- Moderate compatibility with user-specific issues
- Broad compatibility
- High compatibility

The assessment reveals broad to high compatibility for park usage and wilderness across most regions, and no region plotted in the 'broad incompatibility' class. Does this result herald a smooth and non-controversial run for a future southern wilderness exhibition? It's never quite that easy. There is no suggestion that this process makes wilderness suddenly free of objectors. Obviously to particular recreation stakeholders, any net reduction of opportunity is unwelcome.

What this information base and approach would do is make more difficult those past multi-pronged assaults on wilderness proposals, because we'd be dealing with the full overview of nature-visitation in their regions. In other words, slogans about locking the public out of parks won't wash if you factor in those many areas of our park estate that are enjoyed by large numbers of people on any given weekend of the year.

The approach enables the department to weigh up the merits of competing views on wilderness proposals, as referred to in its assessment policieis. ❖

Black Diamond Raiders

KEITH MUIR

JUST before Christmas the Minerals Council of NSW reported in its *State of the Industry Report* that coal exports had increased by 1,694 million tonnes in 2007. In fact, exports increased by only 1.694 million tonnes, but several other misleading statements in the report, however, cannot be explained away as typos.

It is surprising that a report, with a subtitle 'Shedding the Light on the Issues' does not illuminate the ever growing '*elephant*' of climate change. Instead, attention is primarily focused on economic output measures, such as increased profits and coal production.

The report states that the NSW mining industry only uses 1 per cent of water supplies. While miners' efforts in water conservation are significant, the coal mining is actually reducing the net available water resources by cracking aquifers, stream beds and catchments, as well as adding salt to the Hunter River. And then there's that invisible elephant making things hotter, and that too reduces overall water availability. Coal miners are as responsible as that other group of 'one percenters' – the Hell's Angels.

The Shedding the Light on the Issues report then seeks to shift the focus of public attention from miners protecting streams and catchments to efforts on rehabilitating the damage caused by coal mining. Changing the terms of a debate is a clever communications tactic, provided the new position can be supported by the evidence.

The report makes the mistake of trumpeting a rehabilitation success at Marhneys Hole on the Georges River, which was a favorite local swimming hole for the children of Appin. BHP-Billiton's first rehab effort saw the installation of a tiny cement pond on top of the river's rocky bed, apparently for parched wildlife to have somewhere to drink. Then, BHP-Billion jack hammered a deep slot upstream of the Hole across the sandstone riverbed. The idea was that when the coal was extracted from under the river, the bed would crack there, not at the Hole, which would remain intact. The strategy operates in ways similar to how glaziers cut glass by first scratching the surface and then focusing pressure on the scratch. Well it didn't work. A big boulder fell into Marhneys Hole, most of its water drained away, and that which remained turned bright orange. Local cement contractors were then turned into millionaires as enough cement was pumped underground to make a small city. In the end BHP-Billiton's credibility was patched up, although the Hole is not the same. It has a big rock in the middle of it for a start, and jumping in off the rope swing with wild abandon is no longer an option for the local kids.

'Shedding the Light' then spotlighted BHP-B's Dendrobium colliery as a model mine with 'some of the strictest environmental controls in Australia'. The report does not tell you that this model mine's environmental impact statement predicted that cliff lines would fall, creek beds crack, there would be landslides and slumping of soil, and rock pools starved of water. The company's surface subsidence experts were predicting these impacts for what where supposed to be the specially protected water supply catchment for Sydney. The approval of this mine immediately set this appalling level of abuse as the new lower standard, so that whenever there were subsequent cliff falls etcetera they were 'within the predicted limits' of the development consent. Meaning it was OK to keep right on mining. However, last year giant cracks more than one metre wide opened up, spoiling BHP-B's strategy of lowering the bar of environmental acceptability.

Undeterred, BHP-B propose a significant expansion for the Dendrobium colliery in the vulnerable water supply catchment behind Wollongong. The twenty or more upland swamps, the fountainheads that supply water flows during low rainfall, are at risk. BHP-Billiton's modeling says that the upland swamps will be safe, but large swamps on three creeks have been wrecked by adjoining coal mining operations at the old Elouera mine. As mining at Dendrobium is much more intense than at Eloura, common sense suggests that the swamps will be anything but safe.

Add to this the recent approval of Appin colliery's precedent setting scheme to mine directly under the Upper Canal, which puts essential water supply infrastructure at risk. Appin is another BHP-Billiton mine.

The previous industry wide practice secured the state's essential infrastructure within protection zones, where mining could not cause surface subsidence. For essential infrastructure, the consequences to society from mine-related surface subsidence damage were too high, even if damage was a rare event. The way for coal mining to proceed was to avoid putting essential infrastructure at risk in any way. Not any more.

Miners now take risks with essential infrastructure, for the same motives that some bankers take risks with credit security. Mining will take place under a fragile 19th C cast iron aqueduct and induce surface subsidence affecting the gravity fed Upper Canal that supplies 20 per cent of Sydney's water. Water does not flow uphill, at least not in an open canal, and causing the Upper Canal to subside is a pretty risky exercise.

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STOP PRESS

Vale, Dorothy Butler

Patrick Thompson

It is with sadness that I report the news that Dorothy Butler died in the early hours of Thursday February 21. Her family was at her bedside and her death peaceful.

Dorothy was a great friend of the Colong Foundation having given substantial donations to assist with our work as well as being a volunteer on *Colong Bulletin* distribution days for many years. My own memories were particularly of Dorothy's wonderful 'bush sandwiches' with their fillings from her vege garden.

Her many bush walking friends who wish to commemorate her life are welcome to attend a scattering of her ashes in the Warrumbungles at Easter.

Details regarding the Easter wake will be available from Shirley Dean (email – Shirley.colongwilde@bigpond.com), after March 10, 2008

Black Diamond Raiders

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But for me, the State of the Industry Report really pushed the credibility envelope by reporting Centennial Coal's Green Globe Award for its 'Springvale-Delta Water Transfer Scheme'. The Scheme's award is really an embarrassment. The Scheme claims to save Sydney 15.55 megalitres of water a day. Everyday Centennial's coal mines, including Springvale, sucks 37.25 megalitres of water from Newnes Plateau, or enough to fill at least 25 Olympic swimming pools. It may sound better to use this groundwater that would otherwise flood into these mines in powerstation boilers, but the water use comes at a price. Every litre to the powerstation is one less for stream flow elsewhere.

Mining water at this rate will suck the Plateau dry and, along with the ever growing invisible elephant, the mining under critical infrastructure and sensitive environments; the ultimate question is when are we going to run out of luck as coal miners take more risks? If the miners were instead your teenage sons and daughters, you wouldn't be getting much sleep these days.

The black diamond raiders aren't worried, with coal prices booming they've upped the ante! The industry plans another 25 new coal mines and additions, some under prime agricultural land, and Newcastle's coal export capacity will greatly increase.

Deep down everyone knows what's going to happen. Sometime in the next few years or so, as the world seeks to tame that invisible elephant and communities get fed up with mining abuse, the NSW's highly coal dependent economy is going to hit the wall. When it does no doubt the Minerals Council will say it was all the fault of the greenies. ❖

It's Time

Despite growing public awareness, carbon emissions are growing three times faster than they did in the 1990s...

DAVID LOCKWOOD

THE Election of a new federal government probably gave many Australians' cause for optimism that our country would finally wake up and take big steps towards tackling global warming; steps that would produce tangible progress.

By the time the Bali Climate Conference was over a number of people may have been bracing themselves to be disappointed. The new Government has deferred key decisions until its expert report is delivered mid 2008. So we will probably see little progress before the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference.

Below is a list of things Australians could be doing about global warming. They constitute "a war effort" to address what Al Gore called "the hardest thing humans have ever had to do." Some people may argue that these measures will damage economic growth. Well, so what if they do? As Bob Brown said at the National Press Club last year, "No environment, no economy". In other words, if we don't fix the climate crisis, we won't have an economy and there won't be anybody in a position to argue that carbon trading will shave 1 percent off future economic growth.

We need to do what California did. They looked at the Bush White House not doing anything and said "OK, if they won't do anything then we will." The climate policies of California have unleashed a wave of innovation in renewable energy. People there believe that this could be the next internet. Australia should be riding this wave. Will we implement the measures we need to? Who knows, but imagine what will happen if we don't.

We need to understand that it was endless economic and population growth that have caused global warming. Solutions that ignore this inconvenient truth won't work because they won't fix the root cause of the climate crisis.

Despite growing public awareness, carbon emissions are growing three times faster than they did in the 1990s. It now appears that the lowest increase we can hope for is a 2 degree temperature increase over pre-industrial levels. This will bring drought, hunger, disease and floods to millions of people on a global scale never seen before.

As the atmosphere warms, it has tightened the vortex of the winds that swirl around the poles. Water that historically evaporated from the southern ocean and rained down on south eastern Australia is being drawn southwards towards Antarctica. This has dried out southern Australia and our major food growing areas and is promoting the build up of Glaciers in Antarctica. This seems to be the only place on Earth where glaciers are increasing. However given the unexpected speed with which Antarctica is melting, the future rate of sea level rise is now expected to be much higher that previously predicted.

If the latest reports are accurate, the window of opportunity for remedial action to repair the atmosphere will close within 10 years. In fact, many of the future impacts that climate scientists predicted are arriving much sooner than expected. What we need from our leaders is a sense of urgency. Only Greens leader, Bob Brown, has this so far. When are rest of the leaders going to catch up to Bob? ❖

STEPS TOWARD AVOIDING DANGEROUS CLIMATE CHANGE

1. No new coal fired power stations.

❑ Prove that clean coal will work fairly soon or stop spending money on something that may prove to be a dead end.

❑ Reduce our dependency on coal fired electricity by the rapid deployment of wind and solar energy projects. Increase the MRET to 25% by 2020.

❑ Abandon plans to woodchip forests and feed these chips into power stations.

❑ Retain forests as carbon sinks.

2. Establish a series of solar energy research centres around Australia with the goal of making Australia a world leader in solar research and development.

❑ Follow the example of California and build solar energy baseload power stations.

3. Move the timber industry out of native forests and onto plantations.

❑ Retain forest cover wherever possible by ending broad scale land clearing.

❑ Use old growth forests as carbon sinks. End industrial logging in these forests and give them formal reserve status.

❑ Reject the Gunn's Pulp Mill in the Tamar Valley.

❑ Introduce tighter regulation of forestry carbon offset schemes (which often promise more than they can deliver).

4. Expand that National Park system.

❑ Provide large increases to the land acquisition budgets for the Parks Services in each of the states and increase their operating budgets so they can employ the staff to manage the increased work involved.

5. Mandate by legislation a requirement to produce vehicles that produce zero emissions by a realistic future date.

❑ Legislate to require higher fuel efficiency standards.

❑ Develop and produce electric cars which can be charged using solar energy coming from solar power stations.

6. Introduce a cap and trade emissions trading scheme for stationary energy.

❑ Stop talking about emission reduction targets and introduce them with ongoing reporting to make transparent their success or failure.

New Survey – The Native Fauna and Pest Species of Greater Southern Sydney

Overview by Ms Julie Ravallion, Information and Assessment Section, Metro Branch, DECC, Hurstville

THE Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) has just completed a significant study into the native animals and pest species of the Greater Southern Sydney Area. The survey effort covered some 800,000ha extending from the rainforests, woodlands and coastal habitats within Wollongong, up the escarpment to the sandstone and heaths country on the Woronora Plateau, out onto the grassy woodlands of the Cumberland Plain and then up onto the sandstone country within Nattai, Kanangra Boyd and Blue Mountains National Parks.

The work involved an extensive and comprehensive fauna survey which was then combined with vegetation mapping and other remotely sensed information to produce habitat models and regional corridor mapping. The following statistics give an idea of what was involved:

- Consultation with over 60 wildlife, pest species and land management specialists;
- Traversing 470km, spotlighting for terrestrial mammals;
- Adding 25,000 new animals sightings to the Atlas of NSW Wildlife;
- 163 nights spent surveying for owls; and
- Examining 603 scats of introduced predators were analysed to see what they were eating.

The survey found 446 native vertebrate species and 35 vertebrate pest species. Habitat maps and profiles were created for 75 native and 15 pest species and 10 individual corridors identified. The pest species modeling is particularly important as they show not just where pests are now but the extent of their potential habitat.

Feral pig. PHOTO: DECL

The work discovered a previously unknown koala colony in Nattai National Park, confirmed the existence of another koala population in Upper Nepean State Conservation Area and identified of a wildlife corridor that allows koalas to move around the edges of south-western Sydney.

The study has found a new population of brush-tailed rock-wallabies which was, until then, considered extinct in the southern Blue Mountains. This population is now part of a statewide monitoring program for this species.

The study confirmed by many bird watchers already knew – the area supports an amazing diversity of bird life. A third of all Australian birds were found in the study area due to its wide diversity of local environments. Birds have adapted to all of them including cave-nesting birds in the sandstone country, fruit-eating pigeons in the rainforests and fish-eating birds in the coastal wetlands.

The study was reassuring in many respects. Over 80% of the native fauna species present were found to be well represented in national parks and catchment lands and, provided they are managed well, should thrive into the future. Eleven species, however were found to be either locally extinct or potentially approaching extinction including Eastern Bristlebird, Bush-stone curlew, Ground Parrots and Long-nosed Potoroo.

Some threatened species such as Yellow-bellied glider and Powerful Owl were found to be locally common within reserved lands while others, particularly those species associated with grassy box woodlands, were found to be poorly represented and heavily impacted by clearing.

Some areas were found to be particularly important for nature conservation. For example, the Burragorang and Wollondilly River Valleys were found to contain extensive areas of healthy grassy box woodlands which, unlike this environment in other parts of NSW, still support a diverse array of native fauna.

These areas emerge as key focal points for investment in biodiversity conservation and have been targeted for investment in the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Action Plan. Likewise the reports provide a sound basis to direct the Departments recovery planning efforts for threatened species and its pest control strategies. It should also provide an invaluable resource for land-use planning and development control.

The program came out of the joint management arrangements that were put in place in 2001 between the Sydney Catchment Authority and the then NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure co-ordinated land management across the catchments and in recognition of the dual natural heritage and water supply values of the land.

One of the first initiatives of joint management was comprehensive vegetation mapping that was completed in 2003. Comprehensive native fauna survey and mapping was then undertaken.

DECC was keen however that the project deliver more than just technical reports and data layers for specialists. For that reason a non-technical version of the reports was prepared that outlines in everyday language what the native fauna values of the region are, the

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Why We Need Wilderness

DAVID LOCKWOOD

HUMANS are relentlessly taking over the Earth, tearing down ecosystems to create food in our quest for endless growth. In the process we are driving most of our fellow species towards extinction.

Although there have been other extinction events in the distant past, this extinction is like no other.

Tropical rainforests are disappearing at the rate of two percent a year. Ninety percent of the large fish species in the world's oceans have vanished since 1950. Most primate species have almost vanished from the wild. So what is the current state of the planet?

Between 1800 and 2000 the global population increased six fold. The global economy expanded fifty fold and energy consumption increased 40 fold. Thirty to fifty percent of the earth land surface is now occupied and exploited for farming, forestry and mining. In addition most of these changes have been caused by the twenty five percent of people who live in affluent industrial nations. The industrialisation, which is now occurring in countries such as China, will dwarf the impacts we have witnessed up to this point in history.

Does any of this matter? Why should we care if plants and animals vanish in remote areas that we will never visit?

1) Rainforests. The destruction of rainforests will accelerate global warming;

2) Ecosystem services. Ecosystems around the world provide nutrient cycling, soil formation, water purification and oxygen formation. As we degrade these systems by turning them into farmland they can no longer provide these services we have taken for granted. Over half of the ecosystems are now operating in a degraded state worldwide.

3) Oceans. Half the oxygen we breathe comes from ocean phytoplankton (the other half comes from land plants). Pollution and warming water can kill phytoplankton. As they disappear, they reduce the ocean's ability to absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. This will accelerate global warming.

4) Coral reefs. These provide large amounts of food for humans and buffer coastlines against erosion. Reefs are now in danger of disappearing.

5) Medicine. Rainforests are warehouses for potential proteins and enzymes which offer a variety of medicinal advances. Of the 250,000 known plant species only five percent have been tested for potential medical properties. Many of the untested plants may vanish before we find out what they could have done for medicine.

However, we shouldn't just protect plants and animals because they have some economic value. In the end our future will be bleak if we don't protect our fellow species. Exotic diseases will multiply, medical cures will be lost, carbon will gradually accumulate in the atmosphere, food sources will dwindle, crops will fail and clean water will become rare.

How can we combat this trend? By increasing reserves around the world. Protect the remaining wilderness areas as biodiversity arks and create links and corridors between them.

In NSW the state government wants to sell off crown leases. *Bulletin 224* reported that the Crown land for disposal includes 162 parcels of wilderness land totaling around 120,000 hectares. This sale makes no sense at all. It would raise trivial amounts of money and will result in the loss of large amounts of biodiversity. It will fragment the reserves we are trying to protect.

If we are serious about protecting biodiversity as a way to slow the impacts of climate change then these wilderness crown leases should be protected. The leases should be purchased and then transferred to the National Park estate. ❖

New Survey – The Native Fauna and Pest Species of Greater Southern Sydney

◀Continued from page 9

pests that are threatening them and the actions everyone can undertake to help. We hope this report will move all who read it to marvel at the diversity of southern Sydney's native fauna and be inspired to do something about it.

In summary the study has produced:

■ A General audience report titled 'Threatened and pest animals of Greater Southern Sydney' for all people interested in native fauna and pest species. This summarises some of the main findings of the project for a general audience,

■ a series of five technical reports for environmental consultants, students and professionals in environmental planning and management, staff in councils and natural resource management agencies including the Hawkesbury Nepean and Sydney Metropolitan catchment management authorities,

■ a CD with copies of all technical reports along with GIS layers of habitat models, priority fauna habitats and fauna corridors.

Copies of the general audience report, the 'Threatened and pest animals of Greater Southern Sydney' can be purchased for $40 plus GST from Environment Line or via ShopNSW at www.shop.nsw.gov.au

Copies of the technical reports, maps and other data layers can be purchased from DECC's Hurstville office on 9585 6678.

Copies of all reports can also be downloaded from the Department's website at http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatspec/faunasouthsydney.htm

All data is available through the Atlas of NSW Wildlife. www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

We hope to undertake similar work across Greater Northern Sydney in the near

Stand made for last Rock Wallabies on the Shoalhaven

A brush tailed rock wallaby, 'Roxy' by name, is the last female in a shrinking colony on the Shoalhaven River (*Telgraph,* 21.11.07). The southern rock wallaby is considered a sub-species. The situation is desperate, so another female and two males were brought in from Cessnock to build up the colony numbers, despite the impact on the genetic diversity.

The Shoalhaven colony has been the subject of a recovery program for three years but this has not stopped the loss of numbers from foxes, dogs, hunters and competition from goats.

We hope that the introduction of new genetic stock and the flush of growth with all the summer rain will give this colony a fighting chance.