

colong bulletin

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Nature Report NSW

BY KEITH MUIR

WITH THE NSW State Election fast approaching, the Berejiklian government's handling of its responsibilities towards nature is under review. The first point to note is that it appears that the Liberals have ceded much of the responsibility for nature to their coalition partners, the Nationals.

Energy, Global Warming, Land Clearing and Forests

NSW Energy Minister, Don Harwin says: "The Federal Government is out of touch on energy and climate policy ..." with NSW having an aspirational target of net zero emissions by 2050. However, the state government's actions are at odds with its aspirations. In the last four years, many new coal mines have been approved which will have local and global impacts. Also, the government's planning policies make the economic significance of coal mining proposals the primary consideration, outranking social and environmental impacts. Recent approvals of concern include the massive Maules Creek mine, the restarting of the Invincible open-cut operation in the Gardens of Stone region and Wallarah 2 underground coalmine in Wyong's drinking water supply catchment on the Central Coast. NSW

Labor generally supports expansion of coal mining, but has opposed specific projects, such as the Hume Coal Project near Berrima.

New land clearing laws, which came into effect in August 2017, permit broadscale clearing. The laws enable up to eight million hectares of bushland to be cleared. Paying farmers offset money for biodiversity management of bushland does not balance a vast amount of extra clearing. It's hardly surprising that clearing west of Moree has tripled to over 8,000 hectares since the new laws commenced.

Regional Forest Agreements were renewed in 2018, and signal more intensive native forest logging to make up quotas, with stream buffers and threatened species habitat protections reduced. These agreements also introduce clear-felling, for the next 20 years, to north-east NSW, and affect

forests of the proposed Great Koala National Park. The NSW Government also amended logging rules to allow forests to be burnt for electricity.

National Parks

The proposal to allow the raising of Warragamba Dam water levels is another damaging and costly initiative of this administration. It will degrade 4,700 hectares of World Heritage reserve and further endanger 48 threatened species which inhabit the area. Amendments were made to the Water NSW Act in 2018 to nullify national park protections from artificial inundation. The new law sets another dangerous precedent with the National Party water resources minister amending NSW National Parks legislation, displacing the Liberals from this vital policy area. NSW Labor has strongly opposed the dam wall raising, and this will be an election issue.

Major funding cuts to the National Parks and Wildlife Service have also occurred during the Coalition's time in office, seeing around \$121 million in budget cuts, and lay-offs of 20% of the state's rangers. Labor has promised to reinstate previous servicing and funding levels. The Coalition has recently matched this with a promise of \$150 million to improve national park facilities but it is unclear if this is new money or reallocated from staff cuts.

The Coalition Government has revoked Marine Sanctuaries, and its plans for a Sydney Marine Park have been stifled by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party.

The passage of the National Party's Heritage Horse Act in June 2018 and the approval of horse riding in wilderness further eroded protections of native flora and fauna in favour of introduced species, and sets dangerous precedents for what is, and isn't, allowable in national parks and wilderness areas. The Shadow Minister for the Environment, Penny Sharpe, has outlined 6 steps towards addressing the feral horse problem in

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Monthly General Meetings will be held at our office at Level 2, Fortuna House, 332 Pitt Street, at 6.00pm on the third Wednesday of the month on February 20th, March 20th, and May 22nd. Members and visitors are welcome. The AGM will be held on Tuesday April 16th at 6pm (see separate notice for details).



Photo: I. Brown

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Kosciuszko, including repeal of the Heritage Horse Act. The Opposition also opposed horse riding in wilderness when it was introduced.

The National Party proposal to de-gazette Murray Valley National Park is another flagrant attack on protected areas. Trial logging (called 'ecological thinning') and stock grazing is already approved in national parks along the Murray River, further weakening nature-focused park management.

Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Furthermore, the NSW Coalition has persistently undermined the functioning of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. It will not acquire promised gigalitres of water for environmental flows, which would, among other improvements, help curb massive fish-kills. Add to this, Water NSW's poor enforcement record of on-going water theft – all are matters for which this government needs to be brought to account. The long-lasting impacts of undermining the Basin Plan are a shameful legacy of this government's caving into National Party demands.

On top of this, the NSW Coalition introduced new laws that make it difficult to campaign for nature. The raft of anti-protest laws, and third-party campaigning rules found in the new Electoral Funding Act limit the ability of environment groups to hold the government to account, raise awareness of issues and affect meaningful change. Fortunately, we still have the ballot box to register our concerns. ■

Lithgow's conservation unionists remembered

UNIONISTS and environmentalists came together on December 5th last year to honour renowned conservation advocates in the Lithgow region, Vern Moffitt (1924-2001) and Joyce Moffitt (1930-1999), who were founding members of the Bathurst Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW, Bathurst Conservation Group and the Central West Environment Council.

The Moffitts' legacy was celebrated to help pave the way for an enlightened, alternative future for Lithgow and the Gardens of Stone, to protect both jobs and environmental values.

Members of CRUMA – the Combined Retired Union Members Association – organised the event in collaboration with former Blue Mountains City Mayor, Jim Angel, and the Gardens of Stone Alliance, comprising the Colong Foundation, Blue Mountains Conservation Society and Lithgow Environment Group.

CRUMA strongly supports the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 Reserve Proposal, and made three visits to Lithgow in 2018. Unionists attending the Moffitt celebration were from Unions NSW's Retired Unionists, CFMEU's Retired Members, the Blue Mountains Unions Community Alliance and the NSW Teachers Federation.

Mark Morey, Unions NSW Secretary and Sally McManus, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Secretary sent messages of support. Local

member the Hon. Paul Toole also sent a message of support, as well as Lithgow Mayor Cr. Ray Thompson. Several prominent Labor and Green leaders sent messages, including Senator Kristina Keneally.

The unionists and environmentalists marched together down the main street of Lithgow, carrying their signs and chanting slogans for the protection of the Gardens of Stone. Jack Munday, despite his age, walked in solidarity with his colleagues.

Lithgow Deputy Mayor Wayne McAndrew welcomed the gathering and honoured Vern and Joyce Moffitt. He concluded by asking: "Please don't demonise the industry and the men and women who make a living from working in the mines", whilst graciously admitting that "things had to change". John Koch replied that the union movement is able to discuss difficult issues and that "CRUMA hadn't given up on the Gardens of Stone."

The event came about because former Blue Mountains Mayor Jim Angel had remarked at a previous CRUMA gathering in Lithgow how the lives of Vern and Joyce Moffitt celebrated the history of unionism protecting the environment. He explained how in 2007 then NSW Minister for Environment Bob Debus ensured that prominent pagodas in the Gardens of Stone National Park were named the Moffitts Pagodas, however, a sign identifying the rocks never materialised.

Jim Angel then successfully agitated for a 'Moffitts Pagodas'



sign, and it was installed in December 2018 beside the 4WD accessible Moffitts Trail in the Gardens of Stone National Park. To hold a suitable ceremony, an alternative location was necessary and the Maiyingu Marragu Aboriginal Corporation kindly gave permission to use the Maiyingu Marragu Aboriginal Place off Wolgan Road.

Thomas Ebersoll of Newnes Cabins generously donated the hire of a Lithgow Buslines coach to transport the assembled guests to Maiyingu Marragu for the ceremony.

Aunty Helen Riley welcomed the many guests to Wiradjuri land, and speeches were given by Jim Angel, Bob Debus and Keith Muir – all acknowledging the Moffitts' desire for the Gardens of Stone region to be protected. The replica Moffitts Pagodas sign was then unveiled by the Moffitt family. It was a proud moment.

Peter Drinkall, Lithgow poet sang 'Gardens of Stone' and 'Maiyingu Marragu' songs. Then Aunty Helen invited all to walk between the sacred gum trees, to view the Wiradjuri people's treasured, sacred and

spectacularly beautiful rock art site.

After viewing this heritage, the unionists then boarded the 'Ebersoll bus' and headed to the Clwyd of Vale Club where the Vale Ladies Club served a delicious, old fashioned afternoon tea with homemade sandwiches, cakes, slices and plenty of cups of tea.

Trish Doyle, MP, Member for Blue Mountains was able to attend the afternoon tea as a show of solidarity. Trish graciously announced the raffle winners for amazing 'Gingerbread-Pagoda-Houses' made by Retired CFMEU member Clelia Koch, and overnight accommodation at the Newnes Hotel Cabins and the Fat Wombat Farm Bed & Breakfast (thanks to Tom Ebersoll and Peter Drinkall).

Returning to the Lithgow railway station, the Lithgow Community Choir surprised the unionists with melodic solidarity songs before the train whistle blew.

Above: Deputy Mayor Cr. Wayne McAndrew welcoming the gathering of unionists and conservationists at the Tin Shed in Lithgow. Photo: Dave Noble

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How do you GIVE A DAM?

BY HARRY BURKITT

MOBILISING a volunteer base, fundraising, lobbying politicians, getting stories up in the press and fighting an international World Heritage battle. These are the core ingredients, I believe, that will win the campaign to stop the raising of Warragamba Dam wall. That is because all these aspects have a combined effect of doing one thing: empowering people.

Volunteers. Trying to create a public campaign without the public is very hard – that is why volunteers – especially when they are highly visible to the rest of the community, are so important. They put a human face to the battle and are the voices of Colong's supporter base. But most importantly, volunteers talk with the voters. The trick to mobilizing volunteers is to get them together and generate enough energy and enthusiasm to cut through the many other issues that dominate an average person's life. Basically, you need them to have a passionate answer to one question: why should I GIVE A DAM? Thankfully, in mid-January we had over 40 volunteers gather for a campaign training session in the lower Blue Mountains where they were briefed on the campaign and brainstormed direct actions that will dramatically increase the public visibility of the campaign.

Fundraising. Like a business venture, your income determines your rate of growth, public reach and the material resources available to you at any given time. Same goes for campaigning. While of course there need

to be strategic decisions made about how funds are best spent, it is ultimately an organisation's ability to raise funds that determines the scale of the campaign it can run. There have been many generous donations made to the campaign to date, most notably from Colong members!

Lobbying politicians. The thing you always need to remember is who influences the decision makers. There are two forces working against this campaign: 1) developers and 2) the Insurance Council of Australia. We know within these groups people are speaking (and donating) frequently to politicians, and we have to counter that. Over the last 6 months, the campaign has had many conversations with politicians of all political persuasions. The NSW ALP has committed to not raising the dam wall, and after a strong lobbying effort at the ALP National Conference in December, an amendment was passed to the ALP's platform to protect World Heritage Sites from the raising of dam walls. As for the Liberals, well, let's see...

Media. I love this part! All politicians care very much about what the media is saying, especially during election periods. We use this to our advantage as much as possible. There are many voices in this campaign that many politicians and developers would prefer remain quiet. Be it Gundungarra Traditional Owners, the bird watching community, conservationists, unions – or maybe even the people of western Sydney suffering under the burden of floodplain over-development. Our job is to make sure these

voices are heard over the spin of politicians pushing for the dam wall raising. In the last 6 months, we have had over 25 newspaper articles published about the dam, and press coverage continues to grow. I cannot emphasize how important it is that the general public hear the voices of people that will suffer because of this developers' dam.

World Heritage. It's sacrosanct, right? Well to us it is, but to many politicians it is far from it. It is important (yet worrying) to remember that an increasing number of decision makers see World Heritage Sites as a wasted revenue source. We know the dam is going to flood in excess of 4,700 hectares of Blue Mountains World Heritage National Park, but what are we going to do about it? The World Heritage Committee meets once a year, and at these meetings they examine threats facing World Heritage Sites around the globe. We will be trying our very hardest to get the threat of the dam raising discussed at the upcoming committee meeting in July this year.

So, in an abridged way that is where the campaign is at! These are the larger elements of the campaign that will (hopefully) lead us to a successful outcome. Some people ask me if I think raising Warragamba Dam is going to be a national campaign like saving the Franklin River was in the 1980s – I often answer that only they, as concerned citizens who can take direct action, can make that so.

Below: Last January volunteers from all over the Blue Mountains came together to Give A Dam about Australia's World Heritage.



Please renew your subscription

Subscriptions to the Colong Foundation fell due on 1 January 2019. If you made a subscription in the last few months, then it will be treated as a 2019 subscription. We hope you will continue to support our wilderness protection efforts, and if you can afford it, make a donation.

The Colong Foundation continues to take the fight for wilderness and better management of national parks to the highest levels of government. We could

not continue to do it without member support. We do not undertake expensive fund raising and our success in achieving our conservation objectives depends on the continued generosity of our supporters. Donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.

Yours sincerely,

John Robens
Chairperson

Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Launch of Destination Pagoda

Our AGM will be held on Tuesday April 16th from 6pm at the Mitchell Theatre, Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney near Town Hall Station.

Tom Zubrycki, Award winning documentary maker, will introduce the Sydney premier of his new work *Destination Pagoda* that tells the story of the Gardens of Stone campaign and how the future of this spectacular region hangs in the balance.

Guest speaker Ian Brown, adventurer, climber and respected park management consultant, will then outline the potential of the Gardens of Stone as a world-class tourism and conservation reserve. The ancient 'pagoda' landscapes of the western Blue Mountains above Lithgow are found nowhere else in the world. The new report *Destination Pagoda* (co-authored by Ian and Elizabeth Dudley-Bestow) outlines a program to create an iconic, rewarding, must-see tourist destination for local people, Sydney residents and international visitors wanting to experience the real Blue Mountains.

Light refreshments will be served afterwards so we can discuss the implications of *Destination Pagoda*, the documentary film and visionary program that promotes protection of this spectacular region.

After the break, the Colong Foundation AGM will be convened at 7.15pm to:

- Consider the minutes of the preceding AGM;
- Receive and consider the report of the auditor and annual report of the Colong Foundation for 2017;
- Elect a Board of Directors for the ensuing year, including Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and an Auditor, nominations for which should be received by Thursday April 3rd 2018;
- Appoint and fix remuneration for the Auditor;
- Set the annual subscription fee;
- Consider any other motion received in the hands of the Hon. Secretary by Thursday April 3rd 2018.

Centennial Coal's plan to fix the Wollangambe River

BY KEITH MUIR

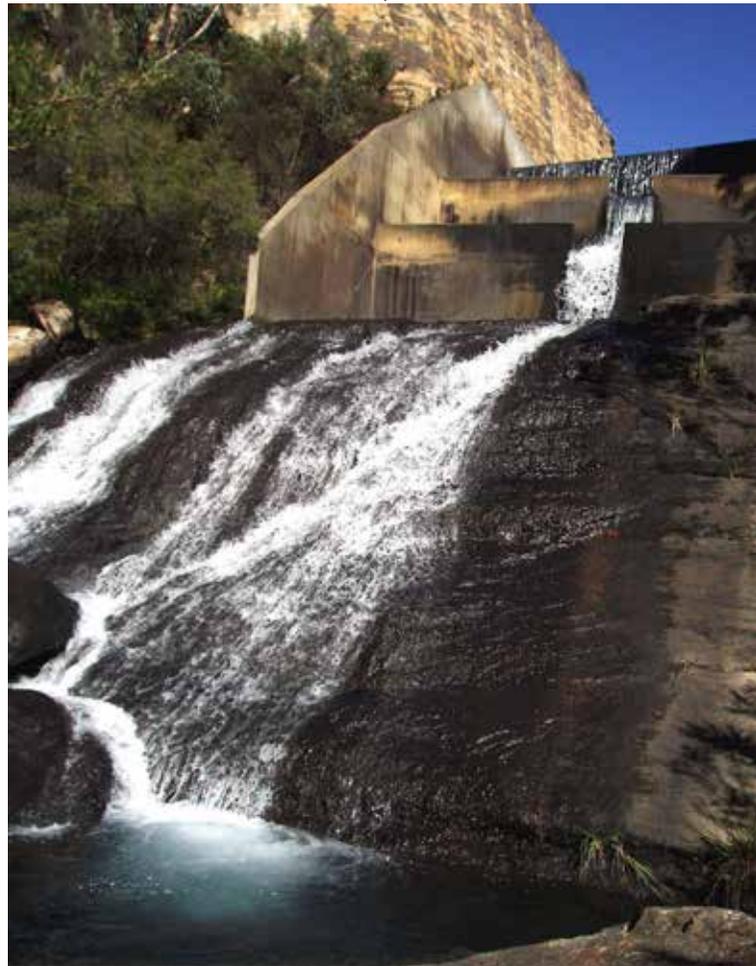
The Wollangambe is a wild river flowing through the Wollemi, the largest wilderness in NSW. It is also a popular canyon destination and for both these reasons it should be protected to the highest pollution control standards. The river has, sadly, suffered degradation from mine pollution since 1976 when Centennial Coal's Clarence Colliery near Lithgow commenced operations.

The Colong Foundation was heartened by work commissioned by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) examining the toxicity of discharges from the Clarence mine. The Office of Environment and Heritage produced a detailed toxic discharge investigation report in 2015, after a peer reviewed independent scientific paper by Nakia Belmer, Ian Wright and others in 2014 on the subject. This work ultimately led to the EPA imposing a strong Pollution Reduction Plan (PRP) on the mine discharge in September 2018.

Centennial Coal lodged an appeal to the Land and Environment Court and on the Friday afternoon before Christmas 2018, the EPA advised the Colong Foundation that the PRP had been altered, giving Centennial more time to comply.

The EPA and Centennial Coal made a deal on a "revised" PRP for Clarence Colliery pollution discharge. Centennial then withdrew its court appeal.

EPA's stronger September 2018 PRP had required Centennial to cease discharges into the Wollangambe River from a licensed discharge point by the end of this year, unless Lithgow Council did not want the mine water to augment its town water supply. If the Council rejected the mine water, Centennial was then to meet either a low salinity discharge limit for the Wollangambe River of 100



Clarence mine water discharges from this dam shall cease by the end of 2021. Photo: K. Muir

EC by 31 July 2021 or instead discharge its mine waste to the Coxs River.

The "Christmas" PRP requires Centennial to lodge a development application by the end of this year to treat mine water to a salinity of 350 EC and transfer the discharge to the Coxs River. The treatment and transfer facility must be built 18 months after the approval.

This also ensures that salinity levels in mine waters sent to Lithgow's Farmers Creek dam are reduced, and ensures the town's water treatment facility is not overwhelmed by the metals in the mine water.

The new Coxs River treatment and discharge facility will be operational at least a year later than under the September 2018 PRP. A new 25 kilometre transfer pipeline will be built from the Clarence mine to Sawyers Swamp Creek.

The new PRP for Centennial Coal enables termination of the toxic mine water pollution of the otherwise pristine Wollangambe River.

This new mine water transfer proposal will eventually stop the on-going extermination of Wollangambe River's aquatic food chain by Clarence Colliery's toxic mine water. It is a water management solution that will work and Clarence mine water is treated and a third the salinity of mine water from the Springvale mine. So while Springvale and Angus Place mine water is being set to the Mt Piper power plant and will be removed from the Coxs River by the end of this year, the Clarence mine water is proposed to go into the river by the end of 2021. Independent assessments must confirm that Clarence mine water isn't toxic in the Coxs River if it is to be approved. ■

Singleton Army Base brumby cull

BY WILSON HARRIS

THE PROTESTS THAT arose over the RSPCA-approved, humane aerial cull of feral horses at Singleton Army Base again reveals the extent to which public concern for animal welfare is used to twist public sentiment into opposition. Pro-brumby activists have called this aerial cull of feral horses barbaric. Yet these horses lived with the real and constant threat of live bombing, shooting and unexploded ordinance. Anecdotal evidence from past national parks rangers who worked in the Hunter region point to the dire plight that these feral animals faced. Horses were witnessed living with wounds/injuries from shrapnel, and in some cases missing a leg from explosives.

A media release from the Defence Department on the issue of the Singleton Army Base aerial cull, claimed "the feral horses habitually live in an area where live firing takes place and where there is unexploded ordnance". These animals have been suffering awfully cruel and painful existences, but the ideological and political goals of brumby support groups sought to limit an outcome that would result in the least amount of animal suffering.

Claiming the aerial cull of these horses is inhumane, and the wrong course of action, is false. Feral animals shouldn't be living in these areas, particularly when survival difficulties were compounded by the recent drought which has gripped the Hunter region. The horses were putting themselves and soldiers using this area in harms way.

During the controversy Upper Hunter Nationals MP Michael Johnsen's position on the issue listed apparently 'viable' alternatives to the cull. He claimed we should "put [the brumbies] in the national parks" or "get out there and get them a feed" (4BC, 2018). These appear to be anti-

national parks views that seem to be a growing part of the National's policy platform, which is also evident in the debate around feral horses in the Snowy Mountains and the passing of the Heritage Horse legislation. This sentiment has become increasingly clear throughout the past year with introduction of other legislation impacting national parks, including the outrageous proposal to de-gazette the Murray Valley National Park for logging.

There is also a contradictory aspect to the brumby argument. On one hand, there is a sentiment that feral horses should be left to their own devices, with activists claiming that suffering of these animals in the Snowy during the period of drought in 2018 should be met with no response. This is claimed to be all in the name of 'natural processes'. On the other hand, in Barmah on the Murray River and Singleton, pro-brumby groups called for intervention. This was portrayed in reports of activists illegally feeding the feral horses in Barmah National Park, as well as just outside the park. If this is the only way to maintain their health, then it is clear these animals are not suited to living 'wild' in national parks.

Katherine Massey, the President of the Hunter Valley Brumby Association claimed aerial culling would have terrible welfare outcomes as "it is the middle of summer, it's just got disaster written all over it". Ironically, hot and dry conditions were the key consideration for the aerial cull, with inaction leading to a real risk of an animal welfare disaster. What was Massey's and her association's plan? No action would have meant the situation would have deteriorated further leading to mass starvation and dehydration. The key alternative proposed to the aerial cull in Singleton,

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21st Century Wilderness

BY KIETH MUIR

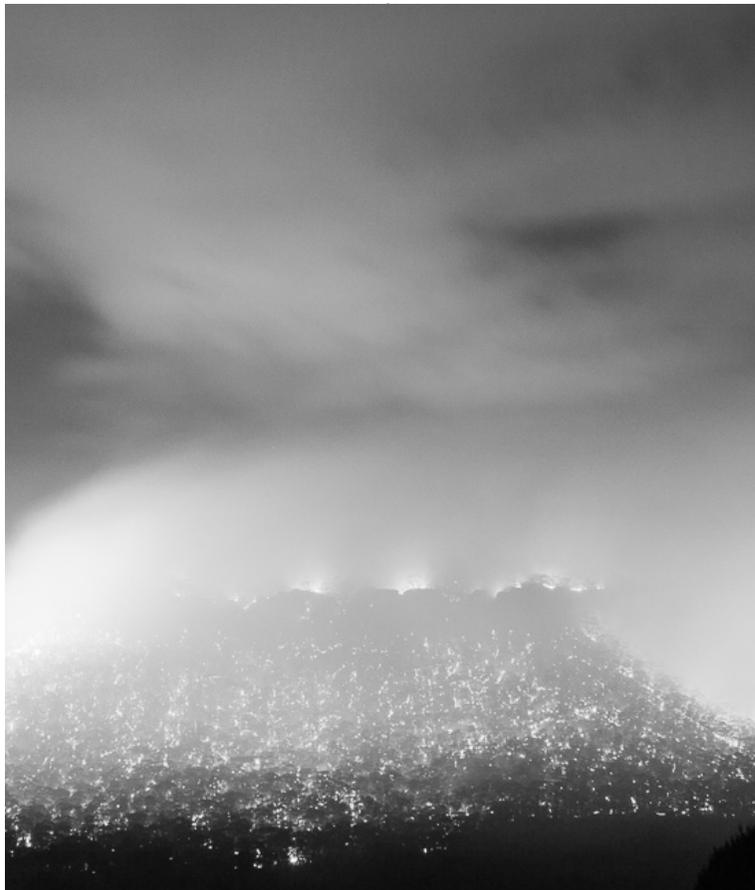
WILDERNESS MUST BECOME a key conservation debate as the threat of climate change shall bring a greater nature conservation focus to reserve management so that wildlife survives.

In recent years, a wilderness 'purity' debate has become a proxy for competing demands such as resource development, vehicle access and horse riding and has led to all sorts of compromises.

Setting aside wilderness from development and exploitation, and managing these lands for nature conservation, as legislation intends, should ensure optimal outcomes for wildlife. Unfortunately, political decisions have resulted in areas excised for logging and mining and easements retained for off-road vehicle use. Despite this, for the last twenty years, protected wilderness in NSW has been relatively safe from further assault, apart from recent incursions by horse riders. However, as we have seen with several recent tourism development proposals in South West Tasmania, we cannot be complacent.

Wilderness is important. It is the only place where we can physically escape our highly structured and rapacious growth-based society. It's the equivalent of a time-machine back to an earlier age where modern influences were absent and nature predominated.

In Sydney, I believe wilderness is highly regarded – many residents know someone who has experienced the



Wollemi Wilderness ablaze 2013. Photo: I. Brown

rapture of the Blue Mountains canyons and other wild delights on our 'doorstep'. Our NSW Police Rescue squad are highly trained and well-practised in the recovery of adventurers from these tight spots – they say "be careful" in the Blue Mountains wilderness and recommend taking a personal locator beacon. They too love the place, and sometimes risk their lives helping those in need, as do our fire services and park rangers. Sydney would be much the poorer without its Blue Mountains wilderness.

Recreation is only one benefit that wilderness brings – we can't afford to disregard its

intrinsic values – maintenance of wildlife, safeguarding threatened species, catchment protection and scientific research are just as important.

The goal of wilderness management, however tempting, is not to freeze national parks in some sort of imagined historical fidelity of arcadia. Maintenance of ecological diversity must be sought by science and secured by effective, adequately funded reserve management.

Like good doctors, park managers must first ensure they do no harm. To avoid widespread degradation, human intervention must come

Singleton Army Base brumby cull, *continued from p. 4*

rehoming, can only account for small numbers successfully removed and rehomed. Given the nature of where these feral horses live, this was never a viable option. As outlined by Defence:

"In 2014, the Department of Defence undertook a trial to capture and re-home a number of the feral horses in the area. The trial was unsuccessful due to the trauma and stress

suffered by the horses as a result of exposure from the live fire and bombing activities on the range. This trauma makes the horses more difficult to train in an attempt to re-home them." (Defence Department, 2018).

Rehoming is presented as a political 'solution' acceptable to brumby supporters. It is a distraction which the public then latches onto in the belief there are viable

alternatives to aerial culling. Feral horses on an army base can't be mustered. It's unsafe. Immuno-contraception is another alternative suggested. Horses live long lives following sterilisation, meaning they will still suffer in drought conditions, destroy the environment and potentially come into harm's way on a live firing range. These alternatives aren't real solutions.

with a light touch. With regard to fire management, no simple prescriptions or formulae such as "five per cent of the state must be burnt a year" will deliver good conservation outcomes. If a wilderness hasn't been burnt for 30 years, managers may perhaps let a wildfire burn, or they may put it out as soon as possible, when it threatens a mega-fire or ecological catastrophe. One thing for sure, effective management is not as easy as tossing incendiaries out of a helicopter window – detailed knowledge of ecosystems, historical records of fire frequency and intensity are required.

The reality is that there must be limited selective intervention. The first priority is to think. What are the key biological vulnerabilities for rare and special habitats sensitive to climate-driven disturbance, like swamps suffering intense drought? Better not burn a swamp if it destroys its dry peaty soils developed over millennia. Fire management must protect remnant old growth, not only forest types but all ancient vegetation types, including older shrub lands. Wildlife requires an age class diverse habitat to thrive.

The historical range of growth stage variability

may prove a poor model of sustainability in the face of climate change, but it remains the only model we have of the dynamics of the environment that has sustained the ecosystems we now have. The historical growth stages of our national parks must be surveyed and understood.

Sustaining whole collections of ecosystems in wilderness and pushing back against the effects of climate change may ultimately prove a management impossibility, but it will buy nature time. Management of fire-prone ecosystems must ensure these environments are more resistant to drastic change.

Resilience thinking must be based on ecosystem health and function, and ultimately comes back to wilderness. Like all species, we evolved within nature, we belong to nature and without it we might as well be dead, so we'd better get wilderness management right.

We are still learning these skills. If we can retain wilderness for a thousand years, and truly learn the read the landscape, listen to it and respect it – our Indigenous brothers and sisters have much to teach us here – we might, with humility, survive. ■

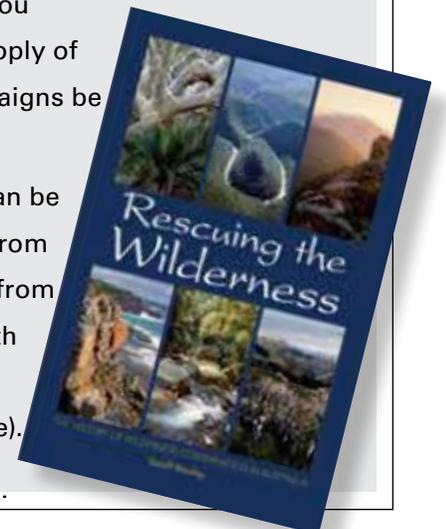
RESCUING THE WILDERNESS

Bob Brown recently wrote to Geoff Mosley congratulating him on 'Rescuing the Wilderness'.

Bob wrote 'It is a remarkably good compendium of both the philosophy and campaigning re Wilderness in Australia – the best study and history by far.

And congratulations on all you have done to make that panoply of successful wilderness campaigns be realised. What a champion.'

'Rescuing the Wilderness' can be purchased in person direct from the Colong office for \$30 or from the Colong website shop with postage added (about \$8.00 depending on where you live).



Rainforest to racetrack, down the Illawarra Escarpment



NPA Illawarra Branch protesting Mountain Bike Track construction at Mt. Keira. Photo: D. Huffton

THRILL SEEKING TOURISM, such as tree to tree “zip lines” and downhill mountain bike (MTB) riding, is prevailing over nature conservation priorities in parks and reserves, often as a result of lobbying by commercial interests spruiking economic benefits or unmet demand. Recently proposals have come forward for 63 kilometres of MTB tracks in the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area near Orange and 82 kilometres of MTB tracks in the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area near Wollongong. These new tracks are in addition to existing bike access to vast amounts of fire roads and public roads in reserves, as well as MTB track courses in Royal and Garigal National Parks.

Where is this alleged, unmet demand coming from?

On the evidence, picnicking and walking are the most popular nature-based forms of recreation in council parks and state forests, as well as national parks (Ipsos-Eureka, 2009). Yet construction of stand-alone downhill mountain bike tracks is being pursued, not these other more broadly popular, nature-focused forms of recreation.

In 2013, Wollongong Council resolved to commission a Bike Park Feasibility Study. This bike park resolution required that steps to be taken to ensure “no

additional damage to native flora, fauna and ecosystems in the Illawarra escarpment and foothills”. If there was an unmet demand, this council initiative should have identified places for downhill MTB courses on private land in the Illawarra, in addition to the commercial Greenvalleys bike park near Macquarie Pass.

At the same time, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) was preparing a plan of management for the 2772 hectare Illawarra

Escarpment State Conservation Area. There was initially no intent by Council to turn the reserve into a bike park – unfortunately this is now proposed.

The exhibited 2011 draft management plan specified no downhill tracks be constructed, except for one or two track sections to enhance mountain biking opportunities. Just one submission was made to the draft Plan that supported bike riding in the reserve, and it suggested ways to minimise

Burning forests worse than burning coal

The Australian Forests and Climate Alliance recently advised that “we are at the point where emissions reductions alone cannot meet our climate goals and we must also draw carbon back out of the atmosphere.” Natural forests do this very well but “Forest protection and stopping land clearing are not substitutes for radical reductions in society’s carbon emissions.”

Ecologically sustainable sources of electricity do not emit greenhouse gases or threaten biodiversity. Burning forests is promoted as a means of reducing logging waste, but production of native forest waste will drive

higher logging rates, just like clearfell logging arose from the production of woodchips. Burning forests creates a carbon debt that will not be repaid by regrowth forests for decades, if ever, as inputs of fossil fuels through tree felling, haulage and processing are not adequately factored into the carbon equation.

Carbon retention in native forests is maximised when they are not logged.

An Australian National University ‘Green Carbon’ research report highlights that Australia’s natural eucalypt forests store more carbon and are more

illegal riding.

Despite this lack of support, the management plan process was delayed to enable input from an Illawarra Escarpment mountain bike track working group. Then a Feasibility Study commissioned by Council in 2017 from Dirt Art (a bike track consulting and construction company) identified many mountain bike track development opportunities in the State Conservation Area. Later the NPWS commissioned Dirt Art to undertake a Concept Plan.

The final 2018 Plan of Management for the State Conservation Area, published after a “whole of government” decision to insert the bike strategy into it, reversed the previous position. The MTB track construction lobby then reoriented a further round of public consultation onto its strategy, which unsurprisingly benefits its aims. Promising MTB rides new free facilities will certainly gain support, but is it right? It will compete with the Greenvalleys bike park, where users pay.

The Dirt Art plans are likely to be the basis for MTB tracks which will see up to 16 hectares of reserve cleared during construction. Cool temperate and subtropical rainforests, the latter being located around Mount Keira and Mount Kembla, will be affected by the build. The proposed network of

parallel MTB tracks will also clear and badly fragment forest habitat.

If this scheme proceeds, the construction of exclusive-use, downhill MTB tracks will divert limited NPWS funds to a sport that damages park values. Walking, the most popular, accessible and appropriate form of enjoyment of the park’s heritage values, will remain under-funded.

The degree of proposed clearing is incompatible with this reserve’s management principles, and also the objects of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974 that protect nature. If adopted, the bike track proposals will turn this reserve into a ‘bike’ park, compromising fifty years of voluntary effort to protect the escarpment.

Downhill mountain bike track construction is no more appropriate in a state conservation area than ovals or golf courses. The experience of downhill mountain bike riding overwhelmingly relates to “technical challenges”, not nature. Council’s 2013 bike park resolution was correct, and a bike park mustn’t be established in a reserve protected for nature. It’s that simple.

Reference: Ipsos-Eureka social research institute, 2009, Greater Sydney nature based outdoor recreation demand and preferences. ■

resistant to the impacts of climate change than plantation forests. The logging of natural forests results in three times more carbon dioxide emissions than previously estimated, and if left to regrow, natural eucalypt forests would remove an amount of CO₂ from the atmosphere each year equivalent to 24% of Australia’s total greenhouse gas emissions in 2005 (B. G. Mackey et al., 2008, Green Carbon: The Role of Natural Forests in Carbon Storage, ANU Press).

The coal industry promotes carbon capture and storage technology where CO₂ is liquefied and pumped at high pressure over two

kilometres underground with considerable energy expense. Currently there’s virtually no take up of this technology by the world’s fossil-fuelled power stations. Plants, however, pull carbon out of the atmosphere at a much greater scale – expansion of forest plantations is a proven method to do just this. Done well it also produces wood products, good jobs and profits. Protecting natural forests and expanding forest plantations are an integral part of an ecologically sustainable solution to climate change. It will buy us time while we reduce emissions from other sectors of the economy.

Leak inquiry discovers water losses from Sydney's drinking water catchments

PETER HANNAM, FAIRFAX environment editor reported in the *Canberra Times* (7 Jan 2019) that the initial report* of the Independent Expert Panel for Mining in the Catchment (the Panel), released before Christmas, found it "plausible" that the Dendrobium underground coal mine between the Avon and Cordeaux dams south of Sydney, was diverting 3 million litres of water a day into its workings. The nearby Metropolitan mine's inflows were put at half a million litres a day, diverted from Woronora Reservoir.

The Panel found that total mine water inflows to the Dendrobium mine increase with rainfall, meaning there's a hydraulic connection between the underground mine workings and surface water catchments. The Panel undertook a reservoir water balance for Dendrobium Mine area that estimated surface flow losses to longwall mining to be 2.4 ML/day or 3% of the incidental rainfall.

In response to this report, Labor's mining spokesman Adam Searle said, if elected

in March, his party would reinstate the original "neutral or beneficial effect" test for all developments in the drinking water catchment, weakened by the Berejiklian government in 2017. The Colong Foundation believes this test should be extended to ensure no loss of catchment water flows as well.

The Panel also concluded that the Dendrobium's 20 year old consent maximised mining dimensions (i.e. mining intensity) which reflected the high percentage extraction of the coal resource, the high level of vertical surface displacement and the significantly higher daily water inflow than at Metropolitan Mine.

The Colong Foundation is disappointed that the independent report did not provide maps of streams and swamps damaged by the Dendrobium and Metropolitan mines. The reason for this may be that there is no agreement about how impact is measured. For example, a stream that can't hold water in pools between rainfall events may not necessarily be significantly impacted according to consent conditions for these mines.

The conditions define steam significant impact as a function of incoming rainfall. Of course if the pools in a stream dry up soon after it stops raining it will lose its dependent aquatic fauna and flora. This clever definition arises because mining companies draft their own consent conditions for approving authorities to consider, and what looks reasonable is usually waved through.

The Colong Foundation is pleased the Panel recommended a review (read reduction) of mining intensity to avoid significant environmental consequences for watercourses. It also recommended that the definition of significant stream flow impacts be "on meaningful surface water loss performance measures". So twenty years down the track after the Dendrobium coal mine's approval, the government agencies may now get on top of effective regulation for the mine.

One criticism of the Panel's report is that it is too complex. Few regulators or politicians will adequately understand it. This is not the fault of regulators or politicians, the Panel should have found a way to make the report more accessible. The complex language is a reflection of the highly contested and political nature of mining in water supply catchments. Controversy often forces use of conditional language on the authors.

We hope that the Panel's subsequent reports will define what must be done to stop mining damage to our catchments. If effective limits that stop the damage are not set, then mining in our drinking water catchments must cease. ■

* Initial report on specific mining activities at the Metropolitan and Dendrobium coal mines, 12 Nov 2018

Congratulations Harry Burkitt – our young environmentalist of the year

Harry Burkitt rose to prominence as the inaugural secretary of the Save Cliefden Caves Association in 2014 at the age of 17. Last October, the internationally significant Cliefden Caves and its fossils were finally protected when the proposed Needles Gap dam was quietly dropped, and the State Government listed the caves on the NSW Heritage Register.

Also in October, the Bob Brown Foundation presented its Young Environmentalist of the Year award, with a \$2000 prize, to 21 year-old Harry for his work as our campaign manager against the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall.

The Bob Brown Foundation Environment Awards honour environmentalists from across the world and around Australia. The awards were established in 2012 to acknowledge environmentalists campaigning to protect the natural world, with a particular focus on activism and a preparedness to confront environmental destruction head on. This award further established Harry's reputation as a pre-eminent campaigner.

Harry was also recognised by his peers as the prime mover of Colong's notable Wild Rivers campaign, when he was presented with the 2018 Marie Byles Award by author and architecture critic Elizabeth Farrelly, at the Nature Conservation Council of NSW Environment Awards.

The citation read: "... the Wild Rivers [Give a Dam] Campaign ... challenged the Berejiklian government's move to change the National Parks and Wildlife Act to allow the flooding of the Blue Mountains National Park ... Representatives of the campaign have met with World Heritage Committee delegates in Bahrain and written a joint letter to the NSW Premier with signatories including former Australian Environment Minister Peter Garrett, UNSW ecologist Professor Richard Kingsford, businessman and environmentalist Geoff Cousins and (former NSW Environment Minister) Bob Debus. Raising Warragamba Dam wall would push several Australian threatened species towards extinction ... There are 65 kilometres of wilderness streams within the World Heritage area that would be drowned by the raised dam, and Colong is working tirelessly to fight this."

The Colong Foundation is extremely proud of Harry's achievements and his well-deserved recognition.



Harry Burkitt receiving the Young Environmentalist of the Year Award from Bob Brown.

Cliff collapse caused by Dendrobium Mine at a waterfall. Photo: K. Muir



THE COLONG FOUNDATION

SUPPORT THE COLONG FOUNDATION!

To: The Treasurer, Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd., Level 2, 332 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
The enclosed remittance or advice covers the item(s) indicated by a tick. (One cheque payable to the Colong Foundation is sufficient to cover subscription and donation.)

- Membership application for individuals or households (\$30) to 31 December 2019
(NB Membership application covers Bulletin subscription)
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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION Why not join or invite a friend to join?

- Yes, I wish to become a member of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. I subscribe to the Foundation's aim of preserving Australia's wilderness remnants. I accept the liability provided in the Colong Foundation's Articles of Association to guarantee \$20 should it be needed in the event of the winding up of the Foundation. Signed

A BEQUEST

Please remember us in your Will.

The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording... "I bequeath the sum of \$... to the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd.

for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the treasurer for the time being of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. shall be complete discharge to my

executors in respect of any sum paid to the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd."



ABOUT THE COLONG FOUNDATION

The Colong Foundation, the successor to Myles Dunphy's National Parks and Primitive Areas Council, is Australia's longest-serving community advocate for wilderness. Its proposal for a Wilderness Act was accepted in 1987. To supplement this legislation, our Red Index, audits NSW wilderness areas; identifies threats and formulates site specific protection remedies. There are now 2,100,000 ha of protected wilderness in NSW. However, many beautiful and environmentally highly significant wilderness areas are not protected, such as the Pilliga and Goonoo on the north west slopes, the Deua Valley on the South Coast and the Tabletop and Main Range in the Snowy Mountains.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness has had a long and successful history. From its foundation in 1968 until 1975 it was the fighting force that prevented limestone mining and the destruction of native forest for pine plantations in the southern Blue Mountains. The Foundation not only played a leading role in realising Myles Dunphy's plan for a Greater Blue Mountains National Park, it pushed for its World Heritage listing, as well as the reservation of a Border Ranges National Park and Kakadu National Park. It has initiated successful campaigns for the protection of over a million hectares of wilderness in NSW. The realisation of Myles Dunphy's vision of a comprehensive system of national parks with protected wilderness areas remains the primary objective of the Colong Foundation.

Now, more than ever, the Foundation needs your support. Well financed and powerful rural interests, miners, loggers, resort developers, as well as four wheel drive enthusiasts, horse riders and others, have greatly increased the threats facing Australia's wild places.

Only with your help, through continued membership and donations, can the Foundation continue its campaigns for the preservation of the natural environment and effective nature-based national park management, and by concentrating on wilderness, these rare areas can be kept safe from development and misuse.

SENDER: THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS
Level 2, 332 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000



PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE COLONG FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING WILDERNESS

Edited by Ian Brown, this spectacularly illustrated book with 46 full-page colour wilderness photographs by Rob Jung, David Neilson, Rob Bakers and Ian Brown is essential reading for wilderness supporters (120pp)

60.00

WILD PLACES

The meticulously researched, beautifully written book on wilderness by Peter Pirneas with photographs by Henry Gold (285pp)

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BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE

Alex Colley and Henry Gold's description of the 67 year campaign culminating in World Heritage listing. (136pp)

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Alex Colley provides his vision on a sustainable future. (90pp)

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A Conservationist's Tale. Geoff Mosley's memoir

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THE GARDENS OF STONE VISITORS MAP 10.00
A full colour double sided touring map and guide to the attractions of the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal

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Geoff Mosley's account of the genesis of the nature conservation movement and saving of the Blue Mountains environment (174pp)

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