

SAVE COLONG BULLETIN

THE COLONG COMMITTEE

Correspondence: Liaison Secretary,
Mark Weatherley, B.A., 18 Begonia Rd.
Normanhurst, N.S.W., 2076. 84 0265

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1. WHO CAN BELIEVE MR. FIFE NOW?

The Minister for Mines, Mr Fife, and his Cabinet Colleagues have consistently stated that Colong Limestone Caves will not be affected by limestone mining in the Colong Caves Reserve.

On April 17, 1968 Mr. Fife advised the General Secretary, The Liberal Party of Australia as follows: The actual Colong Caves within the Reserve are situated approximately two miles to the south of the area demised and prospecting has been disallowed in the vicinity of the Caves. I recently visited the area and I am satisfied that the Company's proposed operations will not affect the caves"

In the Sydney Morning Herald on May 21, 1968 he stated "Colong Limestone Caves are not located within the area leased to Commonwealth Portland Cement Limited and in fact lie some three miles to the south. The caves themselves are within the present proposed boundaries of the National Park, the areas held by the Company are outside these boundaries".

Similarly the Premier Mr. R.W. Askin advised the General Secretary of the N.S.W. Teachers Federation on January 8, 1968 that "the Minister (Mr. Fife) considers that neither the caves nor the Kanangra-Boyd Range will be affected by the mining operations".

And the Lithgow Mercury of July 25, 1968 quotes the Minister for Lands: "Colong limestone caves are not located within the area leased to Commonwealth Portland Cement Limited and in fact lie some three miles to the south".

On July 27 and 28 members of the Sydney Speleological Society explored and mapped the little known caves in the north end of the Colong Caves Reserve.

They found three cave systems parts of which lie under the existing leases; the remainder is included in current lease applications.

One cave is 1200 feet long.

An underground river was found.

Formations include stalagmites, stalactites, oolites, shawls, helictites, terraces and sparkling crystalline flowstone.

Even though the system has not yet been fully explored, the Society, always cautious in its claims, is already able to say that these caves are "comparable with the caves in the South end of the Reserve", and more may yet be found.

In no public statement has the Minister for Mines referred to these important northern caves. It is clear that we are

meant to infer from all his statements that the only caves are those in the south.

Yet the first "Report on Colong Caves" made by Mr. O. Trickett of the Geological Branch in 1899 states that "Caves occur throughout the whole length of the limestone." I beg to suggest that they be called the Colong Caves after Mt. Colong a conspicuous landmark in the vicinity".

In the same report Trickett refers to the Lyttleton Cave at the northern end of the limestone belt. His map shows another cave called the "Mystery Cave" between Church Ck and Billys Ck.

And now it is revealed that a rough survey of a cave 120 feet in length, thought to be the Lyttleton Cave, was made by a Departmental Officer, Mr. D.W. Suppel, as recently as June, 1966.

Mr. Fife's lack of knowledge of major cave systems within the disputed leases and his failure to mention the limited Departmental knowledge of northern caves bring into question his whole credibility on the Colong issue.

2. FOR THOSE WHO STILL BELIEVE MR. FIFE

On May 21, 1968 Mr. Fife stated in The Sydney Morning Herald: Limestone "deposits in the Murruin Creek area have been referred to by correspondents as being suitable but investigation has shown that the limestone occurs in small scattered areas with very limited reserves, estimated at 600,000 tons only."

Later in his statement he refers to "the detailed geological examinations of these deposits (Murruin Ck) carried out by departmental geologists".

The significance of deposits in the Murruin Creek area is that they are just as close to Maldon as are the Colong deposits.

Several months ago the Colong Committee commissioned a leading Sydney firm of geological and exploration consultants to study available information in the Murruin deposits.

The consultants have reported in writing that the deposits probably exceed 50,000,000 tons.

Two of the deposits included are not listed in the Mines Department's files and were referred to the consultants by the Sydney Speleological Society.

The consultants emphasise that their estimate is conservative and may be substantially increased with detailed mapping of the deposits.

The Colong Committee has written to Mr. Fife asking how his figure of 600,000 tons was calculated.

In fact we think he is reporting one of the two smallest deposits in the area and that he has accidentally omitted a nought from his figure of "600,000 tons".

If our consultants are correct and we believe they are, the Murruin Creek area which forms a separate watershed, outside the Kanangra/Boyd Park, has the necessary tonnage of limestone to form a valid alternative source to the Colong Caves Reserve.

3. FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE MR FIFE

The cave discoveries of the Sydney Speleological Society togetherwith the geologist's assurance of 50 million tons of limestone in the Murruin Creek area are important new facts in the Colong controversy.

The Colong Committee asks each of its supporters to write a personal request to his or her Parliamentary Representative calling for a review of the leases in the light of this new evidence.

4. THE KOWMUNG DAM CONTROVERSY

The original proposals submitted to A.P.C.M. by their consulting engineers are known to have included the building of a dam of 100 million gallons capacity on the Kowmung River to provide six million gallons per week for the operation of the slurry pipe and other requirements.

In reply to enquiries by the National Parks Association the Secretary of the Water Board wrote to the N.P.A. on 4.4.68 as follows: "no application has been received in respect of the construction of a dam on the Kowmung River, nor is it envisaged that such a structure will eventuate".

On June 3, 1968 (i.e. just two month later), Mr. T. L. Lewis, Minister for Lands, wrote to the N.P.A. as follows: "The National Parks and Wildlife Service is aware that the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board proposes to construct a 100 million gallon dam on the Kowmung River, and is also aware of the construction of a gauging station at the Cedar River Crossing of the Kowmung River".

In a letter to Mr. E.D. Darby M.L.A. dated August 15, 68 the Water Board stated that "The Board does not propose, nor has it ever proposed, that any dam be built on the Kowmung River in relation to proposals for the mining of limestone studies carried out by the Company indicate that its water requirements would be met by pumping on a 'run of the river' basis from the Kowmung part of the requirements would probably be met also from the small pondages created in the silt-arrester dam referred to" (i.e. on Church Creek and possibly Donnelly's Creek).

(Who can believe Mr. Lewis now?)

On the same day, Mr. W.C. Fife, Minister for Mines, also wrote to Mr. Darby: "The proposal to build a dam across the Kowmung River has been reviewed and it is practically certain that a dam will not now be constructed. Water will be pumped from existing water-holes and lagoons of the river for slurry purposes at the rate of about 1-1½ million gallons per week for the present plant capacity of 300,000 tons of cement per year".

This 'solution' is, even to the layman, so obviously unsatisfactory that it can only be a temporary tactic. Both Church Creek and Donnelly's Creek are normally dry! The flow of the Kowmung River itself is known to cease in a severe drought. And A.P.C.M. has advised Wollondilly Shire Council that it hopes to increase its plant capacity from the present 300,000 tons capacity to 600,000 tons. The Committee has written to the Board to try ot obtain some sort of elucidation of this knock-about farce.

It should be repeated that the Kowmung River, the most beautiful in the Sydney region, is the only remaining unpolluted major tributary of the Warragamba reservoir; that its valley is considered to be Sydney's most important wildlife refuge and that its value as such would be seriously impaired by the construction of a major dam.

5. EROSION, SILTATION AND POLLUTION OF THE WARRAGAMBA CATCHMENT

Construction of a far flung network of roads, pipelines, powerlines, workcamps, plant, rubble dams etc across the most rugged portions of the Warragamba Catchment must involve serious problems of erosion, siltation and pollution.

To throw some light on this important problem, the Colong Committee has commissioned a report from a leading Sydney consulting engineer, experienced in the field of water supply.

What other confident, authoritative governmental statements will this independent report upset?
