

SAVE COLONG BULLETIN

THE COLONG COMMITTEE

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1. COLONG CAVES "SAFE"

On 2nd October the N.S.W. Minister for Mines announced the "consolidation" of mining leases at Colong Caves Reserve. His press release began: "There will be no limestone mining or associated works within three miles of the Colong Caves "

The people of N.S.W. should not be deceived - Cabinet's decision involves the destruction of at least one large and well decorated cave system (1500 feet long) and a number of smaller caves at Church Creek - all within the Colong Caves Reserve.

Granting of the new enlarged lease (580 acres in lieu of 120) "legalises" the destruction of caves in a Reserve for the Preservation of Caves.

This is the first time in the history of N.S.W. that a Government has granted permission to a company to destroy caves in a caves reserve.

The gravity of this precedent is illustrated by the fact that only two cave systems in the State have a better form of protection: Yarrangobilly and Coolcman in Kosciusko National Park.

2. THE PRESS WAS NOT DECEIVED

The Minister's press release did not deceive the Press. To be frank, it fell flat. Next Morning the Daily Telegraph headline read: "CAVES 'SAFE' UNDER NEW MINE LEASE". (The subtlety of the quotation marks around SAFE was lost on many readers). The headline of The Australian read "MINING NEAR CAVE CALLED ACT OF PUBLIC VANDALISM". And the Herald editorial simply said: "SO LONG, COLONG".

3. THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD EDITORIAL OF THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1968

"SO LONG, COLONG.

The State Government has confirmed its decision to allow private interests to quarry limestone on public property. Nothing in Mr. Fife's statement yesterday on the Colong Caves dispute will bring any encouragement to the conservationists. The Government is sticking by a bad decision - a decision taken by Cabinet last year when the responsible Minister was overseas, a decision opposed by the Government's own National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Government's latest concessions amount to very little. It has promised that no further mining leases will be granted in the area. It has persuaded the cement company to give up some of the minor leases granted to it by the Labor Government which it did not particularly want in any case. It has raised the rental deposit payable by the company from the ludicrous figure of \$2,000 to the more realistic sum of \$100,000. The amalgamation of some of the company's leases

into a larger lease will help to tidy up the map but will make no difference to the company's basic plans. One of the finest areas of natural wilderness in the State will still be destroyed. The mining will take place exactly as the company first proposed. Mr. Fife boasts that under the terms of the company's new lease, 4,000 acres will be added to the Kanangra-Boyd National Park. But most of this "new" acreage was lopped off the park only a few months ago. This enabled Mr. Fife at the time to claim that the company's lease would like outside the park's boundaries. The Government can hardly make this claim today. In fact, it has allotted a larger area for mining than before.

In at least two respects Mr. Fife's statement is flagrantly deficient. He has always insisted that there will be no mining within three miles of the Colong Caves themselves - as if the caves at the southern end of the reserve were the only ones that mattered. He conveniently ignores the latest evidence from geologists, including members of the Sydney Speleological Society, that equally important caves exist at the northern end of the reserve. These caves will certainly be endangered if mining is allowed. Similarly, Mr. Fife has little to say of the extensive deposits of limestone in the Murruin Creek area. In May he insisted that these deposits, estimated at no more than 600,000 tons, were uneconomical. Now he puts them at 6 million tons. But, according to some authorities, they can be safely put in the order of 50 million tons. Moreover, they are only five or six miles from the Colong deposits and lie wholly outside the boundaries of the park. We will need far more convincing evidence from Mr. Fife before the public will accept that the only deposits of limestone worth mining in New South Wales are those at Colong."

4. MR. FIFE'S MURRUIN CREEK "ESTIMATES"

Mr. F.E. Taylor, Managing Director of Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers, addressed the National Parks Association of N.S.W. on July 10, 1967.

He explained his Company's plans for mining Mt. Armour in the Colong Caves Reserve. He was accompanied by the Company's geologist, a Mr. Lavers. Mr. Taylor referred a question regarding the size of limestone deposits in Murruin Creek (five miles south west of the Reserve) to Mr. Lavers.

Mr. Lavers stated there were "500,000 tons only in Murruin Ck.". A little later Mr. Lavers replied again to the question: "You mentioned three deposits, in fact the figure I quoted refers to those three deposits it was a surface investigation The order of error involved can't be more than 100%".

On May 21, 68 the Minister for Mines, 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".

In the same statement Mr. Fife referred to "the detailed geological examinations of these deposits carried out by departmental geologists". This information was repeated in many letters by the Minister in June, July and August.

However on 2nd October, Mr. Fife advised a deputation that there was a deposit of 6 million tons in the Murruin Ck. area.

(He thus corroborated the Colong Committee's claim in Bulletin No. 2 that "he has accidentally omitted a nought from his figure of "600,000 tons".")

But in a lengthy written statement dated 2nd October the Minister notes an aggregate of approx 22 million tons in the Murruin Ck. area.

Mr. Fife has thus discovered an order of error of 4,400% in the Company geologist's figure and of 3,675% in his own figure issued so confidently only 4 months before.

But Mr. Fife's new estimate is wrong too.

Surveys by the Mines Department in the Murruin Ck. area are incomplete. They omit to describe two very important deposits.

The Colong Committee once again states that there are more than 50 million tons of limestone in the Murruin Ck. area.

The Committee's geological consultants will substantiate this fact at any Mining Warden's Court, Select Parliamentary Committee or Royal Commission which may be instituted to enquire into the Colong scandal.

5. MURRUIN CREEK DEPOSITS AN ALTERNATIVE TO COLONG

The Managing Director of A.P.C.M. told the National Parks Association: "we are looking for (deposits in) the region of 40-50 million tons."

The Minister for Mines, Mr. Fife, claims the enlarged Colong lease provides 30 million tons for the Company.

If these figures are correct the 50 million tons in the Murruin Ck. area provide an alternative to the destruction of Colong Caves Reserve.

6. RECONSIDERATION BY CABINET

When Cabinet approved the enlarged lease it was not advised of the two major facts uncovered by the Colong Committee and the Sydney Speleological Society:

- 6.1 That valuable cave systems exist under the mining lease and
- 6.2 That viable alternative limestone deposits exist only 5 miles away.

Mr. Fife has refused the Colong Committee deputation's request to refer these new facts to Cabinet.

The Committee therefore asks all its supporting societies to write to the Premier requesting Cabinet's reconsideration of the lease in the light of the newly uncovered facts.

7. THE INCREDIBLE MR. FIFE

Regardless of what action is now taken the N.S.W. Public can no longer have confidence in figures or statements supplied by Mr. Fife. Where he tried to imply there were no caves there are extensive cave systems. Where he stated "600,000 tons only" there are over 50 million tons.

8. "THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ABLE TO IMPOSE MANY MORE SAFEGUARDS AND CONDITIONS IN THE NEW LEASE"

With regard to this claim in Mr. Fife's press release of 2nd October we quote the consultant engineer employed by the Colong Committee:

"Except for para. 25 as to disposal of spoil they appear to be neither more detailed nor more demanding on the Company.

The general tenor of the Conditions is to the effect that the Company shall comply with any instructions (from the Water Board or the Minister for Mines) that it may from time to time receive".

"Clauses 13, 16 and 17(a) purport to require certain matters or actions "as far as may be practicable" or to "interfere as little as possible". While they express commendable objectives, it does not appear that this expression will have a significant effect on the results."

"Clauses 3(a), 12, 24 give no indication as to the nature of any restrictions or requirements in construction and maintaining roads, pipelines and other works. Since the Company could properly have been informed, by expression in the Conditions, of any expensive measures that would be required, there is little reason to expect that expensive erosion prevention measures will be imposed".

"As to the practicability of enforcing all these conditions, I believe that any conditions that are duly expressed and agreed to prior to the granting of the lease can be enforced. However as these Special Conditions are written there is very little to be enforced "

".... Condition 14 relation to preservation of caves. I note that this clause refers to "minimizing" cave damage. I have, of course, no idea as to what directions the Minister for Mines may issue as to blasting operations in the interests of cave preservation and am unable to comment usefully except to say, that, if I were a keen speleologist with a reasonable sense of safety precautions, I would avoid this area for the next few decades."

9. A VERY COSTLY PIPELINE

Mr. Fife has stated that the cost of the 34 mile slurry pipeline proposed between Maldon and Colong Reserve would be \$13 million.

The Engineering Consultant employed by the Colong Committee feels another mistake has been made with the noughts in this figure. He says the cost should be \$1.3 million.

He estimates the cost of an alternative pipeline from the Company's leases at Marulan to Maldon along the Southern Railway Line to be \$1.8 million. The Marulan leases already have electric power. Colong requires a 34 miles power line costing perhaps \$0.3 million.

On these figures the capital works required to obtain limestone from Marulan or from Colong are approximately equal in cost.

Supply of limestone by pipeline from Marulan to Maldon therefore is a further alternative to the destruction of Colong Caves Reserve.

10. THE STATE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION TAKES A STAND ON COLONG

On Wednesday September 4 the N.S.W. Shadow Minister for Lands, Mr. Roy McCartney, surveyed the proposed Kanangra/Boyd National Park from the top of Mount Armour. Greg Middleton and Milo Dunphy of the Colong Committee acted as guides for the trip.

Mr. McCartney is the Labor Member for Hamilton.

He planned to introduce a Motion of Urgency to the Legislative Assembly on the afternoon of September 10.

The Colong Committee requested its supporters to attend the debate in force. However on the preceding Friday evening the Leader of the State Opposition was obliged to change the timetable and to raise the Cheysens art theft case instead.

Every possible attempt was made by the Colong Committee to advise conservationists of this change. Nevertheless several hundreds still arrived. Our apologies and thanks to them. But for the change in timetable the Galleries would have overflowed along the street,

However the Motion of Urgency on Colong Caves Reserve was moved on 17th September. The two public galleries were full.

Mr. McCartney moved: "That it is a matter of urgent necessity that this House should forthwith consider the following motion:

"Thatⁱⁿ the opinion of this House, the Government should take immediate action to:

(1) Revoke all mining leases granted to Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers (Australia) Ltd., and/or subsidiary companies to mine in and adjacent to the Colong Caves Reserve, and

(2) Restore the excised area of 5,000 acres, including the Colong Caves Reserve, to the proposed Kanangra/Boyd National Park.

"This matter is urgent", said Mr. McCartney, "because there is still time for the Government to reverse its decision, as work has not yet started on the mining of limestone from the area. Once work commences, the natural beauty of the area will be ruined for ever. It is urgent because the world-famous Colong Caves are only 3 miles from the area to be mined. It is urgent because of the concern expressed by ----- "

Then Mr. Lewis (Wollondilly) interrupted: "On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I submit that this matter cannot be considered urgent as the original leases granted for this particular area ---- "

Mr. McCartney continued: "This matter is urgent because of the great concern expressed by conservationists, not only in New South Wales, but indeed throughout Australia, at the Government's decision. It is urgent because of the opposition to the granting of the leases expressed by the New South Wales Young Liberal movement. It is urgent, also because there are unlimited limestone deposits in other areas, the mining of which would not cause the destruction of the most important wilderness area in New South Wales. Again, the matter is urgent because of the concern expressed by the State Council of the Liberal Party, which resolved that the State Government be asked to ensure that the known caves and the natural beauty of the Colong Caves region be not in any way damaged by any limestone mining and that, if necessary, the mining leases recently granted to a cement company be revoked. It is urgent because of concern expressed at the Government's handling of the applications for leases. Notice was posted at The Oaks police station which was unmanned, and, therefore, no objections could be lodged. It is urgent because of the recent discovery of one of the few bat-breeding caves in Australia within the area of the lease. These caves will be lost for ever when mining commences. It is urgent because of the Government's unjustifiable refusal to allow ----"

Mr. McCartney was interrupted a number of times but he steadily outlined his case until his time expired.

In his reply Mr. Askin said: "I cannot believe that the honourable member really believes it is urgent. The decision to permit mining in the Colong area was taken long before the present Government came to office; in fact, the Commonwealth Portland Cement Company could have commenced mining operations within the three lease areas which were granted during the lifetime of the previous Labor Government and it could have done that without reference to my Government. The point is that the company could have commenced mining in these three areas at any time without reference to the present Government. I do not think the honourable member's case is very strong, particularly when he has to lean on the Young Liberals for support."

Mr. Askin concluded: "If the honourable member wants to debate this issue he can do so by moving a private member's motion at the appropriate time. If he did, the matter could be debated by members on both sides of the House. I do not believe that the honourable member really expected the Government to grant him urgency. I shall not disappoint him. We cannot agree to urgency."

The question of urgency was put and resolved in the negative, Ayes 37, Noes 52.

Ayes

Mr. Bannon	Mr. Haigh	Mr. Neilly
Mr. Bedford	Mr. Hills	Mr. Peterson
Mr. Booth	Mr. Jackson	Mr. Quinn
Mr. Bowen	Mr. Jensen	Mr. Renshaw
Mr. Cox	Mr. Johnstone	Mr. Ryan
Mr. Crabtree	Mr. Jones	Mr. Sheahan
Mr. Degen	Mr. Kearns	Mr. Simpson
Mr. Durick	Mr. L.B. Kelly	Mr. Sloss
Mr. Earl	Mr. R.J. Kelly	Mr. Southee
Mr. Einfeld	Mr. McCartney	Mr. J.J.T. Stewart
Mr. Ferguson	Mr. Mannix	Mr. Wade
Mr. Grassby	Mr. Mahoney	

Tellers: Mr. Cahill; Mr. K.J. Stewart

Noes

Mr. Askin	Mr. R.A. Dunbier	Mr. Mason
Mr. Barraclough	Mr. Duncan	Mr. Mauger
Mr. Jack Beale	Mr. Fife	Mr. Mead
Mr. Brewer	Mr. Freudenstein	Mr. Morris
Mr. Brown	Mr. Griffith	Mr. Morton
Mr. Bruxner	Mr. Healey	Mr. Mutton
Mr. Chaffey	Mr. Hough	Mr. O'Keefe
Mr. Clough	Mr. Hughes	Mr. Osborne
Mr. Coleman	Mr. Humphries	Mr. Punch
Mr. Cowan	Mr. Hunter	Mr. Ruddock
Mr. Crawford	Mr. Jago	Mr. Stephens
Mr. Cross	Mr. Lawson	Mr. Taylor
Mr. Cutler	Mr. Lewis	Mr. Waddy
Mr. Darby	Mr. McCaw	Mr. Walker
Mr. Deane	Mr. McGinty	Mr. Willis
Mr. Doyle	Mr. Mackie	Mr. Wotton
Mr. M.J. Dunbier	Mr. Maddison	

Tellers: Mr. Cameron; Mr. Jackett

The packed galleries provided an appropriate comment, disregarded by Hansard, to the Premier's refusal of Mr. McCartney's motion: a long sustained hiss.

11. THE NATIONAL TRUST RECONFIRMS ITS OPPOSITION TO MINING IN COLONG RESERVE

The annual general meeting of The National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) passed the following resolution without dissentients (Mover: Mr. Guy Moore, seconder: Judge Colman Wall):

"This Annual General Meeting of The National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), in grave disquiet at the continued loss of natural, historic and scientific areas in the unique Hawkesbury Sandstone Zone and in particular, supporting the 50 conservation bodies in New South Wales in their unanimous opposition to the granting of mining leases in the Colong Reserve, deplores the continued refusal of the Government of New South Wales to place their decision in the hands of the body appointed to control such areas, i.e. National Parks and Wild Life Service or to hold a public enquiry.

In the light of recent confirmation that there are sufficient supplies of limestone available within a few miles of the Colong Reserve to meet all stated future requirements of the company concerned, we record concern at the recent extension of the area leased to the company without any discussion with conservation bodies concerned.

Further Cave complexes of scientific importance in the area to be mined have been discovered including a bat cave and a community of the rare Brush Tailed Wallaby, under the new and enlarged lease and notes with extreme concern that the present Government is the first in the history of New South Wales to allow the mining of caves in a reserve for the preservation of caves.

The meeting requests the Minister in charge of National Parks and Wild Life to present this resolution to the Premier for his consideration in conjunction with the public Petition of 8,000 names presented to Parliament and looks forward to his necessary action to preserve this area inviolate both for the benefit of Scientific research and the untroubled enjoyment of all citizens."

12. NEW SUPPORT FOR THE 'SAVE COLONG' CAMPAIGN

On October 10 the Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers Union, Mr. T. Wright, stated to the Labor Council of N.S.W.:

"Our Union supports the protests of the Colong Committee and asks that the Labor Council call upon the Government to revoke the lease so that the Colong Caves Reserve be kept inviolate. The following is suggested as an appropriate resolution:

"That this Council deplores the decision of the Government in the face of mounting opposition from many informed quarters, to consolidate the mining activities of a particular cement company in the Colong Caves Reserve and within the confines of the Kanangra/Boyd National Park."

"It rejects the claim of the Minister for Mines that safeguards introduced into the new lease will ensure that 'the most important wilderness area of N.S.W.' will not be ravished, and demands that all work in this area be halted pending a full public enquiry into all aspects of the matter".