

# SAVE COLONG bulletin

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## ENVIRONMENTAL IRRESPONSIBILITY IN THE CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

A paper entitled "The Pine planting Program in N.S.W. - an Exercise in Environmental Irresponsibility", has been received from R. & V. Routley of the Research School of Social Sciences, A.N.U. It confirms everything that the Colong Committee has said, and much of what it has suspected, about the N.S.W. softwoods programme.

The study states that the procedure of the Forestry Commission has been to "cast around for evidence to support an already determined conclusion" - the conclusion that the destruction of much of the cool moist forest of N.S.W. which is permanently reserved is "a positive contribution to man's search for a better environment".

A Department devoted to conservation, as the Forestry Commission claims to be, should be aiming to cut consumption to the level of essential use, but this is not so. The Routleys quote A. B. Hanson as follows:

*"In the Bureau's forecasts we tend to assume that the Australian per capita consumption of sawn timber will gradually rise to 150 super feet per head ..... We recognise that this will not occur without strenuous efforts on the part of the sawn timber industry."*

Proof that the programme is designed, not merely to meet demand, but also to stimulate and create it, explains the otherwise puzzling way in which the plantation area "required" has mushroomed from 1 million acres in 1960 to more than 3 million acres now. Where "demand levels" represent not what is really required, but what may be promoted, the sky is the limit.

Examining the main arguments advanced by the Commission to support its pine culture programme, the paper shows that they are all aimed at justifying inflated demand estimates. Population growth is predicted at the rate of 1.9%, which includes growth from immigration. By assuming that immigration will grow at the same rate as natural increase, a figure of 46 million by 2040, 20 million above that achieved by natural growth alone, is predicted. There is no reason to believe that such a rate of migration can be achieved, much less that it is desirable. A lot of the demand for timber derives, not from the absolute size of the population, but from the growth rate, because of the high building rate necessary to house a rapidly increasing population. Given a growth rate of 1 to 1.4%, and allowing for the effect of reduced growth rate on consumption, the demand for softwoods in the year 2000 could be met by the amount of pine already planted - a little over 1 million acres. The Commission's estimates of consumption per head are well above the relatively constant figure of 45 cubic feet which has prevailed over the past 25 years. One of the writers seeking means of lifting the consumption figures, R.W.R. Muncey, "hit on the brilliant strategy of counting our exports to Japan as part of our consumption, so that our 'domestic requirements' for the year 2000 will include not only what we consume, but also some of what the Japanese consume." Another (E.B. Huddleston) "discovered that the disappointing decline in N.S.W. per capita consumption of sawnwood can be rectified by skilful extrapolation, not from per capita consumption figures, but from consumption figures divided by a population figure from 25 years earlier."

Because "planners are committed to the belief that it is their business to attempt to raise consumption of wood products" they assume that we should allow for levels of consumption of the sort currently being experienced in North America. The high North American consumption is largely due to increased use in packaging and increased leaflet and newspaper advertising. "It is difficult to see however," the Routleys write, "why we should deliberately plan to follow the U.S. into a type and level of consumption which is widely recognised as both unnecessary and, in view of the cost of production, environmentally damaging, and which makes only a very doubtful contribution to increasing the real standard of living." The forestry planners have, in fact, taken it upon themselves to decide for us that "a satisfying and diverse environment is less important than more cardboard boxes, excessive packaging and throw-away paper products."

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On the supply side there is considerable scope for reducing the area of required planting by sound conservation procedures, such as recycling, fuller utilisation of felled trees, and substitution of other construction materials for timber.

Evaluating the environmental cost, it is pointed out that the plantations "eliminate much of a beautiful, diverse and rich natural area and forest type, one which is confined to Australia and in extremely limited supply there; and replace it by an environment which is decidedly inferior in every respect ..... Australia, the driest continent, is particularly poorly endowed with cool wet forest .... The current program will in N.S.W. at least, account for a great deal of the remaining areas of this forest type which are accessible, not excessively steep, and not already reserved in national parks; much of what is left may well go in the second round."

It is pointed out "many of the wildlife features under pines that foresters make much of may well prove to be temporary and the survivors, particularly among the birds, progressively eliminated as native plant and understorey species are progressively eliminated." As A.J. Marshall said: "The key to the survival of wild animals and plants is the preservation of their habitat."

Because coniferous plantations result in podsolisation and exhaustion of soil nutrients, expensive measures, which will adversely affect profitability, will be necessary to restore soil fertility.

From the purely business angle, even using the assumptions commonly implied by foresters — that the land they use has no value for any other purpose, and that there are no administrative costs or land rates — the rate of return is below prevailing returns on other forms of investment and less than could be expected from native forests.

This leads to broader economic questions. Why is it necessary to invest public funds in such an industry. Why should Australia, notably deficient in the cool wet uplands necessary for pines, clear these uplands of good hardwood, to plant a type of tree which grows naturally, and at a much lower cost, in many other countries? The forestry argument is that we may not be able to rely on obtaining imports at a reasonable price in the distant future. One place, from which we can be reasonably sure of getting at least half our supply, is New Zealand, which can grow pines better and cheaper than we can, has a large planting programme, and in view of its very unfavourable trade balance with Australia, should be only too pleased to sell us timber. Other countries which will probably supply us for a long time are Indonesia, Canada, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

This brings us to the Commission's trump card — that softwoods account for an annual import bill of \$200 million. But this amount should be put in perspective. It is about 5% of our annual import bill of over \$4,000 million. We buy the remaining \$3,800 million from overseas because they are essential raw materials or we can import them more cheaply than we can make them ourselves. We don't have to grow softwoods to reduce that \$200 million. We could invest in manufacturing industries, which manufacture for export, or we could make at home more of the other kinds of goods we now import. Many of these industries can compete without subsidy. The free land and cheap interest rates available to the softwoods industry represent heavy and costly subsidisation. But, say the foresters, we must create employment. A similar investment in any other industry would create employment, and, in most industries, better paid and more profitable employment.

The fact that we do plant softwoods because the foresters tell us it is the thing to do is a tribute to their promotional ability.

Forty or fifty years ago, when these arguments were first thought up, Australia was a primary producing country, struggling to maintain its balance of payments .. Today we are largely a manufacturing country, and the lucky discoverers of enormous mineral resources. Our overseas balances stand at about \$5,000 million and are rising fast. We have greater natural resources per capita than any nation on earth. Our very limited remaining wilderness areas are all the wilderness areas we have, or ever will have, to satisfy the recreational needs of our expanding urban population. Only a small fraction comprises those cool, wet uplands, rich in wildlife, which are the target of the softwoods programme promoters. To assert that we cannot afford to reserve these areas is just economic nonsense.

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#### HOW MUCH IS A WILDERNESS WORTH ?

"The National Environmental Policy Act requires that Federal agencies take environmental factors into full account in all their planning and decision-making. It requires agencies to describe in writing the environmental impact of their major decisions — along with alternatives to these decisions — and make these assessments public . . . . ."

In some cases, of course, environmental considerations will require the modification or termination of a project. That is why, for example, I ordered a halt to further construction of the Cross

Florida Barge Canal, despite the fact that some \$50 million had already been spent on this project. I concluded, after receiving the advice of the Council on Environmental Quality, that the environmental damage which would result from its completion would outweigh its potential economic benefits."

President Nixon in his message to Congress of Aug. 1971

How about it Mr. McMahon? For a lot less than \$50 million you could buy Lake Pedder from the Tasmanians, restore it to the people of the whole Commonwealth, and win the elections too.

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#### IMPORTANCE OF WILDERNESS RECOGNISED AT THE TOP

*"Wilderness areas are an important part of a comprehensive open space system. We must continue to expand our wilderness preservation system, in order to save for all time those magnificent areas of America where nature still predominates. Accordingly, in August last year I expressed my intention to improve our performance in the study and presentation of recommendations for new wilderness areas.*

*— I will soon be recommending to the Congress a number of specific proposals for a major enlargement of our wilderness preservation system by the addition of a wide spectrum of natural areas spread across the entire continent."*

President Nixon "State of the Union" address January 22nd, 1971

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#### THE GREAT DIVIDE — START IN THE MIDDLE

The Minister for Social Services, Mr. Wentworth, wants a national authority to control and develop Australia's Great Dividing Range. He said the authority should maintain the range as a primitive area and develop it on the lines of a national park. The authority could look after it and control timber-getting and so on.

Sunday Telegraph 10/9/72

*Bravo! Bravissimo!! Let's start in the middle, with the Boyd Plateau, and extend north and south from there.*

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#### EXTRACTS FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (U.S.)

To encourage State control of land-use issues transcending local importance, the President has proposed a National Land Use Policy Bill. It would provide \$100 million over five years to aid States in assuming land-use regulatory authority over areas of critical environmental concern.

The Secretary of the Interior has proposed legislation to the Congress to establish a land-use policy and management programme for the 450 million acres of the public domain. The guiding principle of this policy would be to protect the quality of the environment of these lands.

The President's budget request for the Department of the Interior Land and Water Conservation Fund is for the full \$380 million authorised by the Congress . . . . The fund is used both to finance Federal park and other land purchases and to aid State and local governments in acquiring the developing recreation areas.

During the past year, the President asked the Congress to add 14 areas, totalling 1.8 million acres to the country's Wilderness system.

In June 1971, Delaware enacted a far-reaching Coastal Zoning Act prohibiting new heavy industrial development and strictly regulating all other new industrial development within a 1 to 6 mile strip along the 100 mile Delaware Bay coast and along the State's 25 mile Atlantic coast. The law flatly prohibits additional oil refineries and petrochemical complexes, basic steel manufacturing plants, pulp paper mills, and offshore bulk facilities . . . . The Delaware law embodies a clear-cut decision to preserve for recreation and tourism — and to reject as a site for major industry — a large area uniquely suited by geography for either purpose (Another Jervis Bay? — Ed.)

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### THE SOFTWOOD FORESTRY AGREEMENT BILL

Although not reported in the daily press, the debate in Federal Parliament on the Softwood Forestry Agreement Bill occasioned a furore in the Party Rooms in Canberra. As long ago as May 17th, Maximilian Walsh, writing in the "Financial Review" on the Labor Party's Parliamentary Executive and Caucus meetings discussion of the Bill, said: "It is my understanding, and nothing has been said to throw any doubt upon this — that the debate in the executive was conducted in terms of contemporary environmental considerations versus the traditional development at all costs approach. Dr. Patterson, who argued the development case was defeated."

The Second Reading and Committee stages of the Bill occupied the time of the Senate between 4.55 p.m. and 10.8 p.m. on Aug. 16th, most of this time being taken up in the discussion of an amendment, inspired by the Colong Committee and moved by the D.L.P. The amendment was that Clause 9 be deleted and replaced by the following:

9 — The State shall ensure that planting during each year is carried out efficiently and in conformity with sound forestry, environmental and financial practices.

9A — The State shall ensure that natural forests shall not be cleared for planting softwood unless the particular proposed clearing has beforehand been the subject of an environmental impact study made by an independent expert on behalf of the Australian Forestry Advisory Council and the Council after considering the report of the said study has approved the particular clearing.

In opposing the amendment, Senator Cotton, who introduced the Bill for the Government, said:

"the most significant factor in relation to existing indigenous forests is that based on a prediction that 3 million acres of softwood forest will have been planted by the year 2000, less than 1 per cent of indigenous forests will have to be cleared to make way for such a planting programme."

This assertion provokes queries:

- (1) Where are the 300,000,000 acres of indigenous forests ?
- (2) How much of the 300,000,000 acres have the national park potential of the Boyd ?
- (3) If there is all this land which might be used, why pick on this comparatively insignificant area on the Boyd ?

The Senator was, however, consistent in his argument. He went on to prove that the Boyd was not worth saving, stating that:

"The Boyd Plateau is an area of native hardwood forest which was practically destroyed in earlier years by man himself for the purpose of grazing. It was a fine, open park-like forest, but gradually the process of being burnt every year for summer grazing produced a total destruction of what might be called good stand. It reverted substantially to wattles and low grade types. In the end its use as a forest was so low as to be almost a joke ..... The forest was destroyed in the first place by people who burnt it for summer grazing. Then the forest went through a very disastrous stage. Something very unusual happened to it ..... There was an infestation of a huge insect called phasmid which denuded the forest two years in succession. It defoliated the trees. The forest is a great mass of dead standing timber that has been killed by the infestation of insects that were quite uncontrollable. What is proposed to be done out there is to take a lot of useless forest — and it has been proved to be so — and to plant it with pine trees."

What Senator Cotton omitted to mention is the damage done to the Boyd Plateau by logging operations conducted by Timber Industries Ltd. Senator Cotton holds the controlling interest in this firm. As our readers will know, the firm logged thousands of acres of Reserve 67062 (for preservation of Native Fauna and Flora) as well as other Crown lands on the plateau. But much of what Senator Cotton said is unfortunately, right.

It was burnt regularly for grazing purposes, it was invaded by phasmids, and, if you consider forests that have been ruthlessly logged as useless, then it is useless. But can the Senator tell us of any other forest area of comparable terrain and inaccessibility that has not been exploited for timber and grazing and burnt regularly ? If so we should be delighted to add it to our list of wilderness areas, because it would be the only one of its kind. There was a comparable, though much smaller area, on Mount Coricudgy, but that was "clear felled" to use the foresters callous term, some 25 years ago. Much of the Kosciusko State Park was dead timber when the park was created, but it is improving rapidly. The Royal National Park was logged near the end of last century and it is burned pretty often. Should we then clear it for pines ?

Nor is the picture anywhere near as bad as the Senator paints it. If he hasn't been there lately we should be pleased to send him some of Henry Gold's recent photographs. Despite the tell-tale stumps, much of it is still very pleasant and the phasmids have gone. This is far from "the end".

Make it a national park, keep out the loggers and the graziers, and it will soon be a "fine, open, park-like forest" again. It will still be useless, of course, to those who consider wilderness areas and national parks useless.

Senator Byrne said that the type of investigation proposed in the amendment appeared to him to be "completely logical and wise" and "in consonance with the new sensitivity of this nation in relation to environmental protection." He continued that he was "at a loss to know why the Government should not be prepared to accept the amendment." Why, indeed, was it prepared to insist that the States carry out the planting "efficiently and in conformity with sound forestry and financial practices" but not prepared to add that all important word "Environmental"? It can only be inferred that it didn't care about the environmental aspect of the planting programme.

Senator Byrne was followed by Senator Mulvihill, who not only quoted from the "Save Colong Bulletin", but sought, and was granted leave, to have a substantial section of "Park or pines" incorporated in Hansard.

The amendment finally adopted by the Senate was, to say the least, a rather watered down product. The amendment now states: "and shall ensure that the environmental factors relating to the planting have been considered."

However, the environmental honours in this debate must be awarded unreservedly to the D.L.P. The A.L.P. deserves credit marks for coming down on the right side, but this was not easily achieved. Mr. Whitlam told a press conference that the Bill had been discussed by the parliamentary party no less than five times. He said it had taken up more of the time of Caucus this year than any other single Government proposal — including the budget. At least the A.L.P. put the matter in its right perspective. The Liberal Party, unfortunately, doesn't score at all. This is regrettable, seeing that the great majority of the Party members, as represented in the State Council, are right behind us.

In view of the very valuable help afforded us by the D.L.P. we quote some of the priorities determined by that Party at its Federal Conference. These are recorded in Hansard, twenty pages behind the "Park or Pines" quotations:

- (iii) requiring that the presentation of an environmental impact study be a condition precedent to the approval of any development.
- (iv) the adoption of the principle that polluters (be they Governments, manufacturers or private individuals) be responsible for the cost of cleaning up their own pollution.
- (v) the widespread establishment of national parks and nature reserves (including historic sites) particularly — for recreational and educational purposes — along the coast and in close proximity to large centres of population, but also — and of no less importance — for the scientific study, habitat for wild life and the simple preservation of wilderness and:
- (vi) the retention so far as possible of what relatively little remains of our natural forests and landscapes instead of destroying them whether in order:
  - (a) to sell wood chips abroad or
  - (b) to mine for minerals of transient value (so often for the benefit very largely of overseas investors) or
  - (c) to drown large tracts of land under the waters of uneconomic hydro-electric schemes or
  - (d) to replace natural forests by specially planted exotic forests which would be better planted on farm and grazing lands no longer economic.

#### THE TOP END — NATIONAL PARK OR URANIUM MINE ?

One of the mining companies in the area is convinced it can be both. The Canadian-owned Noranda Australia mining company, which holds uranium leases at Jim Jim, says the company will undertake to restore its area to its natural state "as fully as possible" after mining, according to a recent press report. We've heard that kind of talk before from other mining companies !

Noranda's Jim Jim holdings are only part of a complex of uranium mining and mineral exploration leases in the East Alligator River area of the Northern Territory, involving companies like Queensland Mines, United Uranium, Pan Continental, Project Mining Corporation, and Peko-Wallsend Industries.

Plans for a large top end National Park have been under official government consideration since the Northern Territory Reserves Board suggested its establishment in 1965.

The area is rich in wildlife and scenic value and is a prime example of northern Australian tropical wilderness. The proposed Park abuts the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve and includes the Arnhem Land escarpment which is also rich in aboriginal art.

It has been stated that the area has the potential to be the Australian equivalent of South Africa's Kruger National Park. As such, parts of it would be developed, but large viable samples of wilderness would remain.

But before long there may be nothing worth preserving because the Federal Government has already issued prospecting licences over much of the proposed Park.

Though the Northern Territory Legislative Council passed a bill providing for a National Park of 1,210 square miles on the Alligator River this year, the Federal Government obviously has its eyes on uranium and nothing much else when it comes to this area.

In a letter to the Council, the Minister for the Interior, Mr. Ralph Hunt, (who incidently has been sitting since 1971 on a report initiated by his own department recommending the establishment of a large northern National Park) said the Federal Government had deferred a decision on the future of the area.

All he could promise was that the situation would be reviewed at the end of 1973 when more would be known about the minerals in the area. If they find enough uranium, we all know what price the Federal Government will place on the magnificent wilderness value of this unique area. A large fat zero !

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#### COLONG COMMITTEE BUSHWALKS

The first of The Colong Committee's Escorted Weekend Bushwalks happened on the weekend of October 7th and 8th when five Committee members escorted a mixed bag of 20 or so ecology students about the Boyd Plateau and Kanangra Tops on an easy two-day walk.

The itinerary included a Friday night camp at Boyd Crossing, Saturday lunch on the Kowmung below Ross Hill, Saturday night camp on Box Creek above Dungala Cascades and Sunday visits to Kanangra Walls, Mr. Maxwell, Merrilman Heath and Mt. Pindari.

The students, young and old, enjoyed themselves and thought the weekend well worth the \$2 fee charged. The weather was magnificent, and wildlife fairly abundant — so everything contributed to the success.

The recent severe ground level fire, particularly on the west side of the Kanangra walls road and around Boyd Crossing was the only 'black' mark on the weekend. According to the chairman of the Park's local Advisory Committee, Professor Hatherly, about 5,000 acres was burned, and letters of appreciation from The Colong Committee have been sent to the two men principally responsible for containing and finally extinguishing the blaze — the Park Superintendent, Mr. Mel Williams, and the Oberon District Forrester who assisted him.

The next Colong Committee Escorted Bushwalk will be to Bungonia on the second weekend in December, Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th. The itinerary includes camping Friday night at Bungonia Lookdown and on Saturday, walking down Bungonia Creek (after inspecting the Canyon) to the Shoalhaven River where we'll camp Saturday night. Sunday we return via a different route to the Lookdown starting point. The fee is \$2 per head and all reasonably fit readers are more than welcome. The walk is not arduous, although there are some steep hills. Most of Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning will be spent on the Shoalhaven.

Bookings can be made through Noel L'Orange (642-1349) or Noelene Bearns (53-9812) up to a week before. Walkers will be supplied with itineraries, gear and food lists and material on the Bungonia area and its conservation. Hope to see you there.

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