

SAVE COLONG bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

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THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF SUPPORTING SOCIETIES

The A.G.M. was held on April 11th. Chairman Jim Somerville described the year's activities as follows:

"Following the resignation of Father Tierney shortly after the last Annual Meeting due to pressure of Parish duties, I was honoured at being elected Chairman in July 1972. Father Tierney's sustained enthusiasm and organising ability was an inspiration to us and we all look forward to the time when he can rejoin us.

As agreed at the last Annual Meeting, the Committee has changed its name as well as its objective. The Colong Committee was formed six years ago to fight a specific project — the mining of Mt. Armour. It has proved a durable and effective instrument and has extended the scope of its activities. The last Annual General Meeting agreed that it should form itself into a National Wilderness Society. The necessary work was carried out during the year and the Committee has now been incorporated as a Company limited by guarantee. This will be particularly useful in the light of the recent amendments to the Mining Act.

Actually the Mt. Armour dispute with APCM did not occupy a great deal of the Committee's time last year. For all practical purposes it appears (and I say **appears** because "there is many a slip 'twix the cup and the lip"), that APCM is prepared to surrender their lease in the area, provided they obtain a suitable alternative source.

The Committee co-operated with others to present evidence to the Mining Warden's Court last year on Bungonia, and were delighted that the warden found against APCM and recommended to the Minister that Bungonia should not be spoiled. The case is now back in the Government area somewhere between the Mines Department, the State Planning Authority and the State Pollution Control Commission. The Committee has made a submission to the Government in support of the mining warden's decision asking that the Bungonia lease be withdrawn.

Convincing proof of the rising tide of public opinion against development at the expense of wilderness areas, can be found in the debate in Federal Parliament last year on the Softwood Forestry Agreement Bill, which provides for a \$21 million Commonwealth grant to the States for pine planting. Our interest was the opposition to the planting of the Boyd Plateau, which we feel should be an integral part of the Boyd-Kanangra National Park. A DLP amendment proposed by one of our members was ultimately very much watered down. However it was passed in this form:

"The State shall ensure that environmental factors relating to the planting have been considered".

The interesting point, however, is that more time was devoted by the Labour Party Caucus to this matter last year than to any other matter including the budget.

The current situation in regard to the Boyd Plateau is that we have an undertaking from the Commissioner of Forests, Mr. J.L. Henry, that

"Insofar as it is within the Commission's power, no action will be taken towards clearing the area for pine planting in 1973 The Commission has prepared no detailed plans and has taken no steps to initiate the usual roading survey which precedes clearing and planting."

The Commissioner has assured the Committee that as soon as the Minister has made a decision, we will be personally informed. The Minister for Conservation (Mr. George Freudenstein) has **not** made a decision because no environmental impact statement has yet been presented to him by the Forestry Commissioner.

Last December Milo Dunphy and I, together with the Minister for Conservation and the Commissioner for Forests spent a day on the Boyd Plateau inspecting the area and, naturally, arguing strongly against planting it with *Pinus Radiata*. Since then both the National Parks Association and the National Trust have come out strongly in support of its inclusion in the Boyd Kanangra National Park.

The Forestry Commission certainly takes the Colong Committee seriously. They have twice issued pamphlets in rebuttal of our claims. What incenses us is that the original claim to need a minimum of 100,000 acres of softwood in the Oberon area for a viable operation suddenly changed this year to 150,000 to 200,000 acres because, apparently due to a slip, the Minister stated that the total acreage either planted or held for planting **now exceeded 100,000 acres!**

CORRESPONDENCE TO: THE SECRETARY, 3rd FLOOR, 18 ARGYLE STREET, SYDNEY. NSW 2000

CORRESPONDENCE TO: THE SECRETARY, 3rd FLOOR, 18 ARGYLE STREET, SYDNEY. NSW 2000
PHONE: 27 4714 • AFTER HOURS: 84 0265

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"The Committee was very interested in the A.G.L. natural gas pipeline proposal and Alex Colley appeared before N. Coffey. We also gave support to the members of the Wilderness Protection Society who were in the vanguard of the protest. In conjunction with the Total Environment Centre and Ecology Action we organised meetings of Blue Mountain Conservation bodies, and there is little doubt that the weight of conservation protest, in conjunction with the public hearing before the State Pollution Control Committee, were mainly responsible for the A.G.L. withdrawing its proposal. We now await the decision of the official enquiry. We have congratulated Mr. Coffey (State Pollution Control Commissioner) on the efficient and fearless manner in which he conducted the enquiry. We now await the decision but are confident that following Mr. Connor's statement, the Wollangambe wilderness will be saved.

On Lake Pedder the last act of the tragedy is being played by the BURTON ENQUIRY, four eminent Australians appointed by Dr. Moss Cass, Minister for the Environment and Conservation, to enquire into the circumstances leading to the flooding. Another revealing example of official duplicity is seen in the Pedder case. The HEC had been carrying out investigatory work in the Lake Pedder Scenic Reserve almost from the day it was proclaimed in 1955. In 1961, agitation by bushwalkers against their activities, led to the Chairman, Sir Allen Knight's public statement that "the possibility of power development in the area in the foreseeable future is remote". Three years later HEC secured the \$2.5m loan for the road in. Remote? Hardly! This was a statement deliberately designed to put conservationists off guard!

During the year the woodchip industry came under intensive criticism. We participated in a public meeting in the Town Hall which discussed the subject of "Woodchip development - development or destruction?" and have been pressing the Forestry Commission for information concerning the lease to the Japanese company at Eden and the royalties received by the State. We now have the assurance of the State Government that no further woodchip schemes will take place in New South Wales and the assurance of the Federal Government that any further proposals anywhere in Australia will be subject to much closer scrutiny than heretofore. We have been working with Richard Routley from the A.N.U. Canberra who is shortly to publish a book on the Eden Woodchip disaster. With \$10m invested it is most unlikely that the denudation will be stopped but at least more care will be taken in clearing and regeneration.

In our capacity as a wilderness body we have taken an active interest in the Deua-Tuross National Park proposal as well as the Top End National Park in the Northern Territory. You will shortly see slides of another area to which our attention has been drawn - that of Wiangarie Forest which is in the north of the Tweed Valley adjoining the Lamington National Park. One of the controversial matters in the Blue Mountain debate is the Electricity Commission 330 KV line from Wallerawang to Sydney South via Cox's River. We have protested this matter in vain to the Electricity Commission and await an environmental impact study.

It is interesting to observe that those cases in which we have, or believe we have, been successful to date are all involved in the private sector, i.e. Colong, Clutha, the AGL Natural Gas pipeline. The most intractable cases are those involving Government Departments, e.g. Lake Pedder, Pine Planting on the Boyd Plateau, the Electricity Commission power lines. At least we now have the position where a major development with a major effect on the environment is likely to be the subject of public enquiry. Myall Lakes is a case in point. Most of our members either are associated with the Myall Lakes Committee which is endeavouring to stop the mining for rutile of the high dunes in the Park by the US owned Mineral Deposits Ltd. Every year that goes by results in an increasing awareness of environmental problems, and therefore makes it less likely that the Company will succeed. But we must be ever vigilant!

In conclusion, may I quote the Hon. J.G. Beale, Minister for Environment Control. In the draft manual for assessment of environmental impact he states:-

"The Government recognises that an increasingly urgent responsibility rests upon the whole community to preserve the quality of our environment and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony. From industrial and commercial organisation, public departments and educational institutions on the one hand, down to people on the job in the course of their day-to-day activities, there is a need for greater awareness of the impact of our actions upon the environment.

It is Government policy to promote and maintain this awareness.

It is also Government policy that, before any action which could significantly affect the quality of the environment is undertaken, its implications shall be expressly identified and evaluated."

These three questions must now be asked in all major development proposals:

1. Is the environmental impact of major significance?
2. Is the project highly controversial?
3. Is the decision-making authority the originator of the project?

If the answer to any one of these questions is "yes", then the Minister for Environment control must consider the matter in depth and make a recommendation.

May I conclude with the ringing words of the Senate Select Committee Report on the Environment last year:

"Somewhere between conservation and exploitation, a compromise must be worked out which makes the fullest possible use of our natural resources with minimal damage to the environment."

"Remember that any repressive measures by authority against a social movement (and protection of the environment is a very recent social movement), is like wind against a kite — the stronger the wind blows, the higher the kite flies!"

Following the adoption of the Chairman's report, Dr. Carena Clark gave us a report on the progress of the proposed Boyd ecological study. The main objective of the study was the existing eco-system on the Boyd, but the detailed subjects would depend largely on the qualifications of the people available to do the work. It was hoped to study the effect of usages such as pine culture, grazing and logging both on the area actually in use and on surrounding areas as well as the use of fertilizers, herbicides etc. Mapping in terms of geography, geology and vegetation types, in terms of both past and present usage, would be necessary, but much of this could be done from existing information. Having formulated an effective plan, it was hoped that sufficient money could be obtained to supplement University grants and scholarships to cover travelling and other expenses, and so enable qualified people to undertake the study.

Noel L'Orange subsequently exhibited a series of slides covering areas within the Committee's sphere of interest, such as Wiangarie, Pedder and Bungonia. The slides illustrated the urgency of the Committee's work and provided fine examples of scenic photography.

Milo Dunphy, Hon. Secretary of the Colong Committee, then informed members that the West Australian Government had refused applications for coal mining in the Fitzgerald River National Park. (This National Park extends for some 50 miles along the South coast of W.A., between Bremer Bay and Hopetoun).

The meeting passed the following resolutions:

1. This meeting acknowledges with thanks the financial assistance rendered by the Australian Conservation Foundation to its representations in the Bungonia and Marulan mining wardens court cases.
Nevertheless we wish to draw to the attention of the Foundation the damage we believe the Foundation's recent weak and ineffectual public statements have done to the conservation movement.
We call for a clear statement by the Foundation that it opposes mining in the Myall Lakes National Park and in its proposed additions, particularly, the high dunes.
We record our regret that the Foundation's submission to the Pedder Inquiry is a mere 1½ pages.
As a wilderness society we particularly criticize the reported ruling by A.C.F. that the foremost Australian expert on wilderness, Dr. Geoff Mosley, should not appear before the Pedder Inquiry.
2. This meeting expresses its appreciation of the manner in which Mr. Eric Coffey conducted the Natural Gas Pipeline Inquiry and looks for his firm endorsement of the principle that existing parklands must be inviolate.
At the same time the meeting expresses its strongest criticism of the consistent refusal of the State Pollution Control Commission and the Minister for Environment to provide copies of environment impact studies to the Committee. We believe 300 page technical documents which are merely available for public viewing at the Minister's office are not properly public documents. A policy which insists on such restrictions is paternalistic, authoritarian and anti-democratic. To a Committee which has spent thousand of dollars in professional fees in providing evidence which Government ought to have provided in the first place, such a restrictive and unco-operative policy is particularly galling.
3. This meeting calls on The Colong Committee to negotiate with State and Federal Governments in order to bring down Wilderness legislation which will permanently dedicate large areas of wild and natural country for wilderness recreation, the preservation of typical and/or outstanding scenery and for scientific studies consistent with the above.

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE URGES LAND ACQUISITIONS

The Total Environment Centre has written to Dr. Cass, Federal Minister for Environment and Conservation, expressing its full support for his recent announcement of a fund to assist land purchases for national parks. It has recommended the acquisition of the following key areas:—

- * Budthingeroo property on the Boyd Plateau.
- * 16,000 acres in the Oberon area as a "swap" for the Kanangaroo State Forest, on the Boyd
- * Various inholdings in the Myall Lakes National Park
- * The Durras Mountain property — core of the proposed Murramarang Park
- * The Bendethera property on the Deua River, core of the proposed Deua Tuross National Park, threatened by a limestone lease and road and fire trail proposals

* Various inholdings in the Ben Boyd National Park and the proposed Mimosa Rocks State Park

COLONG COMMITTEE'S SUBMISSION TO THE GAS PIPE LINE INQUIRY

Following the transfer of the Moomba-Sydney Gas pipe line to the Federal Government, it is hoped that the Wollongambe Wilderness area and other threatened parklands will be saved. This happy result was rendered possible largely by reason of the successful campaign mounted by conservation bodies. The Colong Committee made a submission on National and Regional land use planning principles. Some extracts from the submission are reproduced below.

Prior to 1788 the whole of Australia was a wilderness area. It is only in a wilderness area that a complete range of native flora and fauna will survive, and, by this definition, it is probable that there are now no complete wilderness areas remaining.

The reason for this degree of exploitation is to be found in our topography and climate. There are no great mountain ranges or other natural features to bar access to any part of the continent. The climate is mostly hot and dry. Snow, swamps or jungle cover only limited areas and are easily avoided. Although distances are often great, roads and railways are cheaply constructed in the dry, flat countryside. Most of the land was developed with horse or bullock drawn vehicles before the use of mechanical transport. The introduction of the internal combustion engine greatly accelerated the process of exploitation. Motor vehicles, moving along roads constructed with motorised equipment, or even in open country, can now reach, or closely approach, any point on the continent.

Almost the entire land surface is now being exploited for grazing, agriculture, forestry, minerals, urbanisation, or some other economic purpose. Even in the desert areas, mineral prospectors are active. Only a few remnants of the most inaccessible, or poorest country, remain in anything approaching their natural state. Wilderness is now one of our scarcest resources. It cannot, like other forms of land use, be created by man. Once developed by man wilderness is forever destroyed. Provided there is no serious damage to soil cover and fertility, many of the original species could be restored. But once an area is inhabited, this means displacement of residents, resumption of land, abandonment of capital improvements and potential local resentment. Wilderness may be partially restored for an economic purpose, such as the protection of a water catchment, but its restoration for recreation, scenic preservation, or flora and fauna restoration, is almost a social and economic impossibility (this is exemplified by the situation at Myall Lakes). The economic uses of land may be changed at the will of individuals or planners, but wilderness is a form of land use which cannot be created by human action. The destruction of wilderness is a one way process which is irreversible. It follows therefore that the few remaining pockets of inaccessible or poor country lacking in known resources are all the wilderness we have, or ever will have. Whether reserved or not, most of the remaining terrain that remains in anything approaching its natural state is either in process of development, or threatened by development. The proposal to build the gas pipe line through the Wollongambe Wilderness is only the most recent of the threats to parks and reservations which the Colong Committee is opposing. Other comparable development proposals are:

Limestone mining in the Colong Caves Reserve

Dumping of quarry mullock in reserves on Barber's Creek and Bungonia Creek, near Marulan

The drowning of Lake Pedder, which is situated in a Tasmanian National Park.

The destruction of natural forest on the Boyd Plateau, part of which was previously in a reserve for the preservation of native flora and fauna.

Uranium mining in the proposed Top End National Park.

Looked at from the viewpoint of national land use, the Wollongambe catchment is one of the few remaining relatively unspoiled areas. It has another of the prime qualifications of wilderness - it is uninhabited.

The Preliminary Impact Statement describes the impact over the entire 8 miles of the Wollongambe Wilderness area as "minimal". This claim is based on the fact that the proposed right of way will not be visible from the track between Newnes Junction and Bell, or from Bell's Line of Road between Bell and Bilpin, nor will it be visible from the track between Bell's Line and Mounts Wilson and Irvine, nor the track through Bowen's Creek to Bilpin. Past Mount Tootie it will "veer out of site toward Grose Vale".

The rationale of this is that what cannot be readily seen may as well not exist. If you don't have to get out of your car to see the damage, then it doesn't matter. But a wilderness area is essentially unroaded, because a road network destroys it as a wilderness. It remains a wilderness area whether it can be seen from a car or not, until it is traversed by a gas pipeline.

In section 7.4. of the Preliminary Statement there appears an amplification of this theme which reveals a surprising lack of comprehension of the fundamentals of land use planning, emanating, as it does, from a firm of Town and Country Planners. It is stated that the number of "observation days, (i.e. observations by different individuals in a day) will be higher in routes 1, 3, 4 and 5 than in 2 (the route through the wilderness)". This is both an admission that the pipe line is unsightly, and an argument for locating it in a wilderness area, where it will not be seen. Similar arguments could be used for the location of rubbish dumps, noxious industries, quarries, or any other form of land use which creates visual, auditory or atmospheric pollution - place them in a park or wilderness area where they will not be seen! Parks and wilderness areas are created to protect an area from these or any other forms of exploitation.

The construction and maintenance of a road through the area, for servicing the pipeline, will have consequences far beyond the destruction of landscape and scenic values, or immediate damage to flora and fauna. Fauna will be killed by vehicles travelling on the road, as they are in all roaded bushlands. The road provides access for drivers of cars, jeeps, trail bikes, etc. many of whom will carry guns or dog packs. It will also carry wild flower thieves, fire bugs and rubbish dumpers. Wildflowers (including the magnificent stand of waratahs) and much of the native fauna, will disappear. Thus another wilderness area will be sacrificed to economic expediency.

The submission concluded:

From the viewpoint of national resource policy, it is hardly credible that, having discovered natural resources worth several thousand million dollars, we cannot afford to devote \$10 million to the preservation of one of our few remnants of natural wilderness.

WIANGARIE RAIN FOREST

Mr. Peter Maslen writes that he recently made his annual trip to his home town of Mullimbimby.

"I was considerably disturbed at the amount of fresh clear felling of rainforest which has occurred in the Nullum and Whian Whian State Forests. On the 2nd January my father took me to an area on the Tweed Range, an extension of the McPherson Range which he felt would interest me. Once more we found the Forestry Commission (or more correctly their contractors) hard at work in The Wiangarie State Forest logging in completely virgin rain forest. It is with regard to this destruction of rainforest that I write this letter.

The Tweed Range and The Wiangarie State Forest can both be located on the Army Survey map No. 9541-3, edition 1, series R753, Tyalgum. The Tweed Range is a southern spur of the McPherson Range and borders the southern side of the Lamington National Park. It is my suggestion that this area be added to that park or made a separate National or State Park in its own right. The forest is a rare mixture of a warm temperate and a subtropical rainforest.

It is probably the only rainforest left in New South Wales which has not been disturbed by man in any way (until recently). There is still time to save it before too much has been damaged by the N.S.W. Forestry Commission's selective logging. Theoretically this is a process where 50% of the upper canopy is retained and a full species diversity in the remaining stand is maintained. This process works quite well at low altitudes but at altitudes above 2500 ft, severe dieback in the remaining exposed crowns of the trees is experienced and the character of the forest is lost. Repeated logging merely removes the valuable species with the resultant down grading of the forest as seedlings of the remaining species fill the areas left. This is quite easily seen in areas of the Nullum forest. The end result is poor quality forest whether observed from a forestry or a scientific point of view.

Not only is the Tweed Range one of the last surviving rainforests in N.S.W. but it is probably the most northern area in Australia (and therefore the world), where Antarctic Beech are found. Antarctic Beech are a hangover from the ice age and are now only found in areas which are above 3000 ft at this latitude and have an annual rainfall in excess of 100 inches. This alone is an important point for the preservation (and not conservation) of this area if only at altitudes above 2500 ft or 3000 ft. The Antarctic Beech has at least one other species of plant which relies on the beech for its existence. The *Dendrobium Falcorostrum* Orchid live almost exclusively on the boughs of the beech.

The general atmosphere and character of this rainforest is completely different from any I have seen in my travels as far north as Cooktown and west to Ceduna. The trees and vines are typically rainforest with the exception of the Antarctic Beech but the point of uniqueness is that these trees and vines are covered with mosses, lichens and similar vegetation giving the whole forest an eerie aspect.

I, along with numerous other people from the north coast of New South Wales and Southern Queensland, consider this forest worth saving. It would appear that many people in the area are concerned about the logging. In addition to the locals, this forest is of interest to people outside the surrounding districts. Botanists from the Botanical Gardens and Universities are known to have an extreme interest in this area along with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The time to act is now to prevent any further logging and exploitation of this unique area. We must not allow the Forestry Commission and the contractors to repeat their devastation of State Forests like Mullum and Whian Whian."

The Colong Committee has adopted the project of saving Wiangarie forest, and a member of the Committee intends to visit the area next month.

NORTH ENTRANCE PENINSULA

Though the Colong Committee has taken no part in the campaign to save the redgum forest at North Entrance Peninsula near Tuggerah Lakes, the result is highly significant. The Wyong Council sought to save the forest by imposing a Tree Preservation Order and secured from the N.S.W. Equity Court an injunction which prevented Associated Minerals from mining the Peninsula without Council approval. Council then submitted the matter to the State Planning Authority, which has, with Council approval, recommended mining of a restricted area.

Council is to be congratulated on its firm stand. It probably achieved the maximum result for which it could hope. It should be clearly realised, however, what compromise involves - a reduction of wilderness area. Wilderness areas are never extended at the expense of other land uses.

TASK FORCE ON THE NATIONAL ESTATE

The Committee has written to Dr. Cass, expressing its wholehearted approval for a Task Force on the National Estate. It has drawn attention to the need for a national inventory of wilderness areas and suggested that the Task Force might commission or undertake such a study. A list of areas requiring immediate attention has been submitted, and the Task Force asked to prevail, if possible, on State Governments to stay development within these areas, at least during the nine months which will be required to compile its report. It has quoted the premature flooding of Lake Pedder as an instance of a state "jumping the gun" to forestall preventive action. All information at the disposal of the Committee has been offered to the Task Force.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Readers of the "Save Colong Bulletin" who have not yet renewed their subscriptions, are again reminded that they are due. The amount is \$2, payable to

The Hon. Treasurer
The Colong Committee
3rd Floor
18 Argyle Street,
Sydney. N.S.W. 2000.

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