

SAVE COLONG

Bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

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"Of all the tasks facing conservationists in Australia the most urgent and important is the preservation of some of our remaining wilderness areas. Keeping such regions from so-called 'development' by greedy men, is also the most difficult task undertaken by individuals, organisations or governments who wish a little of our island-continent to remain, so far as this is possible, as it was originally for the sake of generations to come."

SIR MARK OLIPHANT, WHEN OPENING THE FIRST NATIONAL
WILDERNESS CONFERENCE, ORGANISED BY THE A.C.F.,
OCTOBER 1977

COLONG COMMITTEE'S PRIORITIES REVIEWED

By mid 1975 the first two aims of the Colong Committee - the preservation of Colong Caves and the Boyd Plateau - had been achieved and new wilderness preservation priorities were then adopted. These were the Border Ranges, the Greater Blue Mountains and the Alligator Rivers east of Darwin. About one third of the Border Ranges forests are to be included in a new park. With the addition of the country between Kanangra-Boyd and the Cox to the Blue Mountains National Park, and the announcement of Wollemi, most of the Blue Mountains project is well under way. A Kakadu Park has been proclaimed on the Alligator Rivers, and northern and southern extensions are under consideration, though there will be two enormous uranium mines in the middle of the park in the region where Mr. Justice Fox refused to recommend that not a single mine proceed.

In N.S.W. much of the State's wilderness is now in existing or planned reserves, though a number of the areas described in the Helman report remain outside the parks system. Two of the most important are Ettrema and Apsley. The Federation of Bushwalking Clubs is working for Ettrema, and we understand that good progress is being

made with the Apsley wilderness. Three other areas are Binghi, Washpool and the Mann River, and the Committee will look into the prospects of preserving them.

Despite the accomplishment of a substantial part of our original objectives, the Committee remains very active and enthusiastic and support has been stronger than ever. We believe that a principal reason for this support has been our clear, appealing and limited objectives. It was therefore decided to re-arrange our priorities, so that our aims would be known and support enhanced.

In the view of the inadequacy of the proposed Border Ranges National Park, it was decided to continue to work for our original proposal, which was for the inclusion in the park of Wiangarie, Roseberry and Mount Lindesay State Forests. We believe that this magnificent subtropical rainforest, though already severely damaged by logging, is part of a fragile and irreplaceable ecological unit which should be preserved for all time. The Border Ranges therefore remain our number one priority, and further action is planned.

Priority No. 2 is now wilderness management. This is not a new activity, simply one which absorbs an ever increasing amount of the Committee's resources. Experience has taught us that development interests, not content with 96% of the State, are continually pressing

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for access to wilderness. Development interests include companies, such as Blue Circle Cement, Mineral Deposits, Carricks Ltd., and the Australian Gas Light Company; industry associations such as the Australian Mining Industry Council and the Association of Country Sawmillers; and "front" organisations such as the Association of Regional Parks and Countryside Commissions and the few small groups known as Neighbours of National Parks, and the Conservation Society of N.S.W. Government Authorities, such as the Forestry Commission, the Department of Mineral Resources and Development, the Electricity Commission, and the Department of Main Roads promote development in wilderness, or other natural areas. In addition, recreational users such as Off Road Vehicle drivers and shooters would destroy wilderness values. If the little wilderness remaining is to be preserved, even after reservation, all the above interests must be continually resisted. Notable past conflicts include the fight against snow lease grazing interests, the Wollongambe Wilderness Gas Pipe Line, and the Cox valley power line. We have recently participated in a lengthy submission to the SPCC ORV Inquiry and attended the 2 day hearing in Sydney. We have made submissions towards the management plan for Kanangra Boyd and have been invited to do the same for Kakadu. The decision to mine beneath Wollemi and all parks currently proposed by the NPWS is now engaging our attention. In order to protect wilderness against ORV's, shooters, rubbish dumpers, timber thieves, grazing interests with matches and other destructive uses, more staff and money for the NPWS are essential.

Our third objective was one which we felt our battle tested troops were well equipped to accomplish. We seek a new charter for the Forestry Commission. We believe that instead of logging the forests "to the limits of their economic accessibility" no forest should be logged if there is danger of erosion, or doubt as to its recovery. The Commission should, instead, be primarily a conservation agency, seeking to re-establish worked out forests and re-afforest derelict areas and eroded lands.

We have been in constant conflict with the Forestry Commission, a regrettable confrontation with a body whose aim is stated to be, and should be, conservation. The Boyd Plateau, woodchipping and the Border Ranges are three of the worst examples of Commission management practice. Other scenic natural areas under immediate threat are Bellinger State Forest (the Black Scrub), Terania Creek, The Five Forests (South Coast) and parts of Wollemi. We have made a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Trade and Commerce inquiry into forestry and forest products, and were represented at the Sydney hearing of the Committee by Peter Maslen, Jim Somerville and Alex Colley.

We will continue to report progress in the "Save Colong Bulletin" and confidently expect that our priorities will be accepted with enthusiasm by our supporters.

OFFICERS OF THE COLOG COMMITTEE LTD.

At the Annual General Meeting of the non-profit limited liability Company held on May 10th, the Committee's officers were re-elected. These are:

President:	Peter Maslen
Vice-Presidents:	Jim Somerville Haydn Washington
Hon. Treasurer:	Charles Culberg
Hon. Secretary:	Alex Colley

WILDERNESS RECOGNISED - AND HOW!

It couldn't happen here, because the States control land use, and the Commonwealth is sympathetic to mining industry pressure to destroy environmental legislation, but in the U.S. the national importance of wilderness has been recognised in no uncertain terms.

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act by a vote of 360 to 65. About 128 million acres will be placed on conservation system units, with about 67 million acres protected as wilderness.

"Opponents of a good conservation Bill", reports Edgar Wayburn, Chairman of the Alaska Club Alaska Task Force, "had poured immense amounts of money into their campaign and attempted to match our work in the grass roots. In Washington, their lobbyists were all over the 'Hill' --

the oil and lumber interests, the Chamber of Commerce, the Committee for Alaska Lands, the State of Alaska, and others." (For Australia, substitute the Mining Industry Council, The Country Sawmillers, the Neighbours of National Parks, Local Councils, etc.)

After the Victory hundreds of workers, well-wishers, congressional staff, and Carter Administration Officials crowded into the Club's Washington Office. (Our office isn't nearly so big, but we would extend the parliamentarians and their staffs a warm welcome).

KANANGRA-BOYD MANAGEMENT

In response to the request of the Blue Mountains National Park Advisory Committee, the Colong Committee has made a submission covering both Kanangra Boyd and the 95,000 hectares between Kanangra and the Cox added to the Blue Mountains National Park last year.

The enlarged area is a well defined geographical unit, mostly wilderness and roadless. The Kowmung gorge on the west, the forestry areas on the north, the Warragamba dam to the east and the Board controlled catchment to the south, constitute excellent buffer zones. We believe that this area is ideally suited to become the State's first wilderness park, the only intrusion being the road to Kanangra Walls, which we propose should be used for buses only. We have requested some boundary revision in the vicinity of Mount Werong and Narrow Neck, and the closure of existing Water Board Roads not essential for management. If this is not acceptable we have asked that only Water Board and NPWS vehicles be allowed to use them. We believe that this plan would minimise the management problems of the NPWS.

The Water Board catchment area is probably one of the best protected wild life areas in the State and will be greatly enhanced if the adjacent park areas are managed as wilderness.

In the long term private inholdings in the Bindook area should be acquired by the Service and added to the Park. Indeed, acquisition of several of the most strategic inholdings in the Park would make a most appropriate target for the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation annual appeal.

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

An attractive leaflet is obtainable from The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority which describes the provisions of the Act which became law four years ago (June 1975). It sets out the means whereby different zones are set up with different Plans of Management and the ways in which the public may submit their ideas for control. It requires very careful reading to discover that there is, in fact, still NO Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and that the Act only covers areas BELOW low water mark!

The dry land, belonging to Queensland, does not come into consideration (except for the few small areas now belonging to the Commonwealth).

Appointment by the Federal Government of a Committee of 2 Federal Ministers and 2 Queensland Ministers to recommend which parts of the Reef region are to be Park is totally unacceptable. That is the job the Marine Park Authority was set up to do. Queensland should not be given veto powers over the Authority's recommendations.

The Prime Minister's assurance that no drilling will be permitted on the reef until the results of short and longer term research are known will carry no conviction until the research is under way and exploration ceases. Despite the statement by Federal Attorney-General, Senator Durack, that there had been a moratorium on seismic surveying on the reef since 1971, and Mr. Fraser's statement on June 4th that there should be no further exploration, Mr. Barry Cohen, Opposition spokesman on the environment, has revealed that Geophysical Services International, is in fact surveying on the Reef (Sun-Herald, June 24). No company will pay for a survey unless it confidently expects to be allowed to drill if the survey reveals oil prospects.

The only way to restore the Federal Government's bona fides on the Reef is for the whole of the Reef Region to come under Commonwealth control and be declared a Marine Park now. And the detailed regulations forbidding drilling, seismic explosions, carriage of large quantities of oil etc., should follow quickly.

One matter under Commonwealth control is the passage of oil tankers inside the Reef. There are rumours of close shaves, lack of navigation aids and

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of proper pilotage. If this is so we may expect any day to have ample material for research into the effect of oil on this tender area.

THE S.P.C.C. OFF-ROAD VEHICLES INQUIRY

Five members of the Colong Committee attended the Bankstown round-table discussions convened by the State Pollution Control Commission Inquiry into the Off-Road Use of Vehicles for Recreational purposes. One member, Rodney Falconer, represented the Colong Committee. Haydn Washington represented the Colo Committee, Elizabeth Elenius the N.C.C., Peter Prineas the N.P.A. and Alex Colley, himself.

The Inquiry was given the task of identifying ORV's, their uses, facilities available for them, controls, and problems arising from such use. There was no hindrance to a finding on environmental grounds, as there was in the Border Ranges Review, when environmental preservation was subordinated, in the terms of reference, to economic considerations. It was clearly stated in the terms of reference of the ORV Inquiry that the Inquiry was to "Identify and assess the problems arising from such uses (of ORV's) taking into account environmental and other considerations". The term "other considerations" might have provided a loophole, but, if so, it was not evident at Bankstown.

Another significant difference in this Inquiry was that government authorities were well represented. At the Border Ranges Inquiry only the Forestry Commission was represented. Other authorities, such as Soil Conservation, the Planning and Environment Commission, and Tourism, which should have been represented, took no interest.

It soon became evident that the Colong Committee, inured as it is to fighting the entire establishment, was now on the side of the angels, if government authorities can be so described.

Mr. McDonald of the Forestry Commission described damage by 4 wheel drive clubs on the Boambi fire trail which was so bad that fire crews couldn't get through, and damage to a new unconsolidated road in Conglomerate forest that cost \$4,000 to repair. The reafforestation of unused tracks could not be accomplished if they were used by ORVs and an amendment to

the Forestry Act, shortly to be proclaimed, gave the Commission control of operations of vehicles in State Forests.

Mr. Hill, Shire Clerk of Sutherland, described damage chiefly by trail bikes, to fire trails. One stretch of road, used as a drag strip, had been ploughed up to a depth of 8 inches.

Mr. Wilson from the NPWS said the cost of broken barriers at Kurnell was \$5,000 and the cost of stabilising sand dunes denuded by ORVs up to \$4,000 per hectare. The total cost of restoring the area could be up to \$100,000. John Hibberd, from the same authority, described a survey of 104 National Parks and Nature Reserves. Only 12 of these showed no damage by ORVs.

Mr. Harrington of the Soil Conservation Service said that shallow soils in arid areas were particularly fragile and subject to damage by vehicles. In coastal dune complexes breakdown of vegetation rapidly expands and could be irreversible. The Botany cone had been damaged by motor vehicles, resulting in the enlargement of the uncovered sand area, now moving increasingly.

Mr. John Wrigley from the Water Board, which controls large areas of restricted access land, described the frustration of rangers unable to take action because of the difficulty of identification of unregistered vehicles.

Mr. Smith, from the Planning and Environment Commission, described the necessity of environment impact assessment, public comment and right of appeal provided in the new planning Bill. Special areas for ORVs would be subject to this procedure.

The case presented by the ORV representatives was fragmented. There was some discussion between them as to whether damage was done by 4 WDs or trail bikes. Representatives of the 4 WD clubs stressed that they were responsible organisations, and that the excesses attributed to 4 WDs were attributable to the majority of owners outside the clubs. This assertion was thoroughly debunked by Peter Prineas and Elizabeth Elenius who simply quoted - from the submission of the conservation societies - a number of instances of damaging activities reported in magazines published by the Clubs. Advertisements for vehicles, stressing environmentally damaging activities were also quoted. Mr. Shannon, for the 4WD clubs, said that the clubs had objected to these

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advertisements and they had been withdrawn, but Peter Prineas was able to prove that they had been repeated.

The good works claimed by the 4 WD clubs, such as road clearing and rubbish collection, were acknowledged by the authorities, but it was pointed out that the good deeds were outweighed by the bad. Mr. Barrett of the NPWS said that effects of the clean up at Kurnell were soon cancelled by a new accumulation of rubbish left by other vehicles. The effects of use by irresponsible groups outweighed good works. The annual cost of cleaning up Kurnell had risen from \$3,000 in 1977/78 to \$6,500 in 1979/80 and sand dune rehabilitation from \$4,000 to \$19,000.

John Hibberd pointed out that the mere existence of an activity was not a reason for providing facilities for it, as for instance, with hunting. Nor was any attempt made by the ORV representatives to describe their operations as necessary or essential. There was a claim that it enabled drivers to take their families, but several conservationists said that they too took their families into the bush - on foot. Alan Catford (A.C.F.) said that the purpose of a national park was nature conservation and passive recreation. Vehicles had no right of access to these areas which was a privilege, not a right. Elizabeth Elenius described ORV drivers as "pitting themselves against the environment", not seeking passive recreation. Parks were for people, and people are allowed in, but parks were not for vehicles.

All authorities in control of land agreed on the need to restrict vehicles to formed and maintained roads designated by them for public usage, the need for registration of vehicles and the allocation of areas for ORV use. These are also the principal control measures advocated by the conservation societies.

Mr. Morgan of the Crown Lands Office said that one of the responsibilities of his department was to provide lands for recreational use and his department would be prepared to set aside such areas, having regard to environmental protection, particularly in fragile situations. It was pointed

out by a conservationist that any off road vehicular access must cause some damage either by destroying vegetation or by making tracks which could later become runnels, and that all authorities represented wanted vehicles restricted to formed and maintained roads. In view of this could he say what type of land would resist damage by ORV usage, and, if possible, where it was situated? Mr. Morgan replied that one such category of land was gravel pits.

The willingness of the Department of Lands to provide facilities raises a point of interest. Had the ORV users campaigned with the same enthusiasm as the conservationists they may well have been allotted adequate areas for their recreation.

The Inquiry was, as with former S.P.C.C. Inquiries, very fairly conducted, and everybody had an opportunity to present their views. This was the case also with the Border Ranges Inquiry. It was the decision made on non-environmental grounds, imposed by the terms of reference and the haste of decision in that Inquiry to which the Colong Committee objected. Dr. Gilpin, who conducted the ORV Inquiry, assured us that he and his two assistants were reading the submissions assiduously, and we look forward to the recommendations with the hope that the main points of our submission will find a place in them.

PROPERTY MATTERS - PARKS DON'T

On May 17th Jim Somerville, one of our Vice-Chairmen, wrote to the S.M.H. The Letters Editor replied that the letter "was considered for publication but the subject has been well covered in previous correspondence". Fair enough - readers must be considered as well as the Colong Committee. However, what the "Herald" won't publish, the Colong Bulletin will. This was the letter:

"In accord with the State Opposition parties policy of resistance to extensions of the national parks system, the shadow Minister for Conservation, Mr. Tim Fisher, in his letter of April 30th, expressed no support for the new Wollemi National Park. He said it 'would be applauded by a great number of people,' but gave no indication that these would include the Liberal or Country parties. His concern was, not that this magnificent wilderness area has been reserved for the enjoyment of

the people of N.S.W., but that a few property owners might be affected.

Mr. Landa, in his reply of May 8th, gave the oft repeated assurance that there would be no compulsory acquisition of private property, and that only a very small number of private land holdings, with homes, would be affected.

Mr. Fisher's solicitude for the landholders of Wollemi ill accords with the freeways policy of the opposition parties. They are prepared to resume and tear down thousands of homes to make way for cars, but would not acquire any properties for the purpose of creating a national park. The Opposition will have to do a good deal better than that if it wants the conservation vote."

THE ACID TREATMENT

When Ranchers Exploration and Development Co. decided in 1972 to reopen its Old Reliable mine in Arizona it tried something new. Instead of clearing the old tunnels or digging an open pit, Ranchers blasted the mountain just enough to loosen the ore, sprayed on a solution of sulphuric acid that would dissolve the copper and then waited for gravity to draw the metal down the mountain. In two years, more than 10 million pounds trickled down. (Janice Simpson, in the "Wall Street Journal".)

ARMCHAIR WILDERNESS LOVERS

When John Wayne was interviewed by Michael Parkinson, he said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable locations for the

outdoor type of film which made him famous. These films are mostly taken in wilderness or near wilderness areas. So too are the "Westerns" popular for over half a century. Many recent Australian films and T.V. shows - e.g. "Ben Hall", Harry Butler's "In the Wild" and the Leyland Brothers films feature wilderness. The popularity of such films proves the appeal of wilderness, even to those who seldom venture beyond TV range. For those who recognise no values beyond those measured in money, it would be well to contemplate the market value of entertainment based on wilderness. It may well aggregate billions of dollars.

FOREST DESTRUCTION

In a "Worldwatch" report, Eric Eckholm estimates that the Earth's forests are now annually decreasing in size by at least 11 million hectares - the area of Bulgaria. In addition many standing forests and open woodland are undergoing "massive degradation of timber and other biological resources". (as is occurring in the Border Ranges) "The continued loss of forests", he states, "will accentuate the environmental costs of denudation already apparent in many countries - erosion, desertification, siltation, flooding and the extinction of species." He is of the opinion that deforestation may rival fossil fuel burning as a source of atmospheric carbon dioxide. A consequence of deforestation is the rising price of wood - 4% per annum in the seventies in real terms - and this has been a major driving force behind inflation. (Depletion of oil reserves is having a similar effect).

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE BY THE COLONG COMMITTEE (Price includes Postage)

The Save Colong Bulletin, per annum	\$5.00
Wilderness in Danger - Michael Bell & Associates	\$5.60
Kakadu coloured poster	\$1.50
Border Ranges poster	\$1.50
Habitat - Border Ranges issue	\$1.00
Forest Ecosystems - F.C. Bell	\$5.20
Rainforests - NP & WS	\$5.20
Wilderness in Australia - Helman et al	\$5.00
Colo Wilderness - Henry Gold & Peter Prineas	\$8.50