

SAVE COLONG bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

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"Our wild obsession with growth economics is over-taxing the natural resources and over-polluting the environment now to a very dangerous level."

Professor Daley, chief advocate of the steady state economy, reported in S.M.H. 26/6/80.

"If the Aborigines, who are said to be a dispossessed people, have their sacred sites, why shouldn't the majority of people have their venerated parklands?"

Mrs. Margot Pavey on Glebe Gully, S.M.H. 4/8/80.

THE MANAGEMENT OF KOSCIUSKO NATIONAL PARK

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is, to its credit, doing its utmost to involve the public in the preparation of management plans for the Kosciusko National Park. It therefore behoves the Colong Committee, and its individual members and supporters, to acquaint the Service with their views.

Kosciusko National Park, which has an area of 1,507,400 acres, is the largest park in the State. It extends for 100 miles between the Victorian border and the Australian Capital Territory. It contains Australia's highest mountains and the only extensive snowfield in N.S.W. It is the largest of a few tiny alpine islands in a continent noted for its flatness, heat and drought. Like the Blue Mountains Park system, and so many other major conservation concepts, it was first proposed by the State's greatest conservationist - Myles J. Dunphy, OBE.

Like every extensive natural area in the State, the park has been under constant development pressure ever since its inception in 1944. The first major intrusion was the \$782 million

(some billions in today's money) Snowy Hydro-Electric Scheme. Dams were constructed, necessitating extensive quarrying and flooding of parkland. Pipelines, power lines, flumes and gauging stations were installed. Both the construction and servicing of these installations required an extensive roading system. The next predator was the Forestry Commission, which appropriated 80,000 acres of forested country while Mr. Lewis held the Lands portfolio. Grazing was permitted in the park for many years, and though the snow leases were cancelled, despite strong opposition from grazing interests, the Moriarty organisation, now titled the Association for Protection of Rural Australia, continues their campaign for the resumption of grazing. In the early days of the park, shortage of building materials inhibited tourist development. The Kosciusko Hotel, the Chalet, Betts Camp and the Alpine Hut were the only accommodation provided, and there was one lift, at Charlotte pass. Development soon got under way. Hotels, chalets, ski lifts, parking areas, restaurants etc. proliferated. Then the off-road vehicle merchants got busy. It has proved virtually impossible to exclude them from the far

northern and southern sections of the park.

The aim of creating a national park is to preserve the natural features of an area. Flora, soil, streams and landscape have already been severely damaged by developers both public and private.

Neither the authorities, nor the majority of conservationists, foresaw the scale and effects of tourist development. Now the hour of decision is upon us. Do we preserve the remaining natural features, which should be the prime aim of park management, or do we give in to tourist interests?

Skiing is an extremely popular and health giving form of recreation. So is bushwalking. We believe that both can be enjoyed without unacceptable damage to the park, and that other forms of recreation should be provided outside the park.

Skiing in itself does little damage, because the flora is protected by a blanket of snow except where it is trampled around huts, lifts, parking areas, etc., and there is no way a skier can catch up with the fauna. Constant bushwalking on unmaintained tracks can lead to erosion, and too much camping in the one place can also be damaging. Maintenance of much used tracks, and perhaps some restrictions on camping in the summit area, may become necessary. We believe that, as a general principle, there should be no restriction on bushwalking or skiing in the park. But, if natural features are to be protected the following measures are necessary:-

1. Mechanical transport should be restricted to existing surfaced and maintained roads, and some of the existing roads could well be dispensed with and replaced by walking tracks - e.g. the road to the summit. Extensions of the road system means destruction of flora, fauna and landscape. So does off-road vehicle use. On maintained roads damage is repaired. Elsewhere it is not.
2. All private passenger vehicles should be parked below the summit area, i.e. below Sawpit Creek and preferably outside the park. Passenger transport within the park should be by bus only. Pollution by drainage from parking areas, and further destruction of

flora and landscape for parking purposes, would not then occur.

3. No additional overnight accommodation should be authorised within the park.
4. Charges for both private and public services within the park should be increased sufficiently to enable sewerage to be purified, whatever the cost. (At present Perisher Valley & Thredbo smell and water below these resorts is undrinkable).
5. There should be no renewal of leases for overnight accommodation facilities within the park.

It is regrettable that the Packer interest leases were recently renewed for 45 years, but leases can be bought out. Overnight accommodation should be provided outside the park. This could be to the advantage of lessees. The bugbear of the tourist trade is a low percentage of bed occupancy, caused by the shortness of the snow season. Resorts on the dams below could provide other forms of recreation, such as fishing, golf, tennis boating etc., in addition to mountain tours, and might well attract custom during the warmer months.

6. No further installations should be allowed within the park even for skiers. Current proposals for shops, conference facilities, a village railway, synthetic ice-rink, masseur facilities etc. should be vetoed.

Similarly, the proposed day skiing locations (Mt. Selwyn, etc.) in the centre of the park should be rejected. They would provide an irresistible temptation to future developers and administrations to add over-night facilities.

7. Fire control: Protection of buildings should be achieved by use of fire proof building materials and the clearing of inflammable material from their vicinity. Fire protection of the park should be by carefully controlled burning on the borders of the park, or along-side roads, rather than indiscriminate burning by the dropping of incendiaries.
8. Existing huts could be retained, as already decided by the Service, provided that vehicular access is disallowed. However a few huts,

particularly in the summit area, which are the cause of trampling of delicate herbfields or of pollution of alpine streams and lakes, should be removed.

9. Ski-lifts, though not essential to the enjoyment of the snow fields, could be retained in the localities where they are now installed.

We have no doubt that the above recommendations will be strongly opposed by many skiers and the vested development interests, even though further development will simply down-grade the natural features which make the park so popular. They are the minimum necessary if we are to have a park rather than an alpine slum.

OUR OWN LIVING MUSEUM

"ECOS" No. 24, published by the CSIRO analyses the origin of our rainforests. Until recently the views of Joseph Hooker, expressed more than a century ago, prevailed. The Indo-Malesian component was regarded as an outlier of the great rainforests of south-east Asia. This theory was strengthened by more recent evidence that a land bridge with Asia existed during a global lowering of sea levels some 10 to 14 million years ago. The Antarctic element was regarded as an immigrant from the south.

Dr. Len Webb and Mr. Geoff Tracey, of the Rainforest Ecology Section of the CSIRO Division of Plant Industry, now believe that Australia was not a receptacle for immigrant floras, but a centre, or part of a centre, for the evolution of primitive flowering plants.

Because of the dependence of the many layers of the rainforest upon each other, and the internal environment that it creates for itself, the forest can only migrate as a community. It cannot be transferred in bits, by birds, wind, water etc. carrying seed. There is, however a strong similarity between the rainforests of India's western Ghats and Australia's Cooktown-Ingham region, which share 47 genera, though separated by 8000 km. Dr. Webb believes these forests evolved as part of the flora of the ancient super continent of Gondwanaland from which Australia, India, Africa, Madagascar and South America originated. One piece of evidence to support the possibility that the Gondwanic rainforest spread from a region of which Australia was a part is that, despite

their very small area, the rainforests of north-eastern Australia and nearby Pacific Islands contain the greatest assemblage of primitive flowering-plant families in the world.

Dr. Webb believes the areas of greatest botanical importance are those harbouring the most primitive flowering plants and these are concentrated in northern Queensland. He describes this area as a botanical Noah's Ark - except that this Ark is laden with veritable dinosaurs!

A.L.P. ENVIRONMENT POLICY

The A.L.P. released its environment policy for the next election on September 8th. The early release indicates both that the party is concerned for the environment and that it appreciates the ever-growing importance of the conservation vote. Many of the concepts originated by the Colong Committee have been adopted.

The policy on softwood plantations reflects the Boyd campaign of five years ago. It is that:-

AN A.L.P. GOVERNMENT WOULD STOP ALL PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO REPLACE HEALTHY NATIVE HARDWOOD FORESTS WITH SOFTWOOD PLANTATIONS, AND DIRECT FINANCIAL RESOURCES TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFTWOODS IN AREAS WHERE SUFFICIENT LAND WHICH IS ALREADY CLEARED OF NATIVE FORESTS IS AVAILABLE. FOR INSTANCE, THE COMMONWEALTH-STATE MARGINAL FARMLANDS SOFTWOODS AGREEMENT WOULD BE NEGOTIATED TO ACHIEVE THESE AIMS.

This is good but not good enough. Native species should be used for reafforestation where possible. The annual growth increment of flooded gum for instance is almost identical with that of radiata pine - and the structural quality and life of the eucalypt is better. In addition native trees provide habitat for our fauna which exotic pines generally do not.

The Labor Party policy should be sophisticated enough to state how it will cope with the N.S.W. Forestry Commission, which classifies mature snow gum woodland in the Tumut area as 'derelict grazing and farmland', simply because a previous owner or lessee once grazed cattle between the eucalypts.

The principle of Commonwealth responsibility for conservation projects

of national significance is accepted in the statement on rainforest:

A LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL CONSULT WITH THE STATES TO SEEK METHODS OF PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S RAIN-FOREST.

This is good too but entirely lacks an appreciation of the urgency of the situation regarding rainforest. More effective than consultations with the State Governments, which are locked into programs of rainforest destruction, would be the declaration that an Australian Labor Government will refuse export licences and all incentives to firms involved in rainforest logging, and that where possible it will insist on public environmental inquiries into the proposals of such firms.

FINANCIAL AID FOR ACQUISITION, PRESERVATION, MAINTENANCE AND RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA'S MOST SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL PARKS.

This is good news of the continuation of the Whitlam Government's policy. However, the thousands of community conservation societies around Australia are entitled to expect a much more detailed policy for the selection and enlargement of parks. The Colong Committee in particular expects a Federal Government to promote the preservation of wilderness areas with special grants for identification studies, for establishment, and compensation where necessary.

The south-west Tasmanian wilderness region is described as "a priceless national asset", and the party agrees with the Colong Committee that the Commonwealth has a financial responsibility to the Tasmanians for maintenance of prosperity, and expense incurred in foregoing hydro-electric development.

WE BELIEVE THAT ANY DECISION NOT TO PROCEED WITH HYDRO-ELECTRIC PROJECTS SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AT THE EXPENSE OF THE FUTURE GROWTH AND PROSPERITY OF THE TASMANIAN PEOPLE AND THAT ANY EXPENSE INCURRED IN ALTERNATIVE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE PROPOSALS FOR INCREASED ENERGY COSTS SHOULD BE BORN BY THE NATION AS A WHOLE AND NOT BY TASMANIA ALONE.

Environment centres would receive greatly increased assistance:

AN AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL

PROVIDE AN INCREASE OF \$400,000 TO \$750,000 IN A FULL YEAR FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION GROUPS IN THE FIRST FULL YEAR OF A LABOR GOVERNMENT AND PROVIDE AN EMERGENCY GRANT OF \$350,000 FOR THE BALANCE OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1980-81.

AN AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL PROMOTE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION INFORMATION THROUGH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, THE MEDIA, THE AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION, NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT AND INTERPRETIVE CENTRES.

WE SHALL SEEK METHODS OF ASSISTING ENVIRONMENT CENTRES TO PROVIDE ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN A MORE EFFICIENT MANNER BY PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO OBTAIN MODERN PREMISES FOR STORE-FRONT OPERATIONS.

RAINFOREST ACTION CENTRE

This centre has been set up at the Total Environment Centre, 18 Argyle Street, Sydney. Its functions are, firstly, to act as a focal point for the rainforest campaign which involves all major NSW conservation groups; secondly, the Centre is a source of information relating to all aspects of our disappearing rainforests and aims to educate the public on the rainforest issue.

A display of photographs and maps relevant to the threatened rainforests has been set up, and efforts are being made to have an audio-visual exhibition. Books and leaflets relating to rainforests are available. In addition, a petition on the rainforest issue has been drawn up.

At present the centre is short of workers. Volunteers who could give half a day or more of their time would be most welcome. Potential volunteers should ring TEC (27 4714) or preferably come into the centre. The slogan of the Centre is:

STOP LOGGING RAINFOREST NOW !

THE PINK FLANNEL FLOWER

The Committee has received the following encouraging letter from Mr. Bedford in reply to its request that the habitat of the rare pink flannel flower be added to the Blue Mountains National Park.

"Reference is made to your letter of 9th July, 1980, supporting the pro-

posal of the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society that lands in the Kings Table area be acquired and added to Blue Mountains National Park.

The Director of National Parks and Wildlife has advised me that the National Parks and Wildlife Service has identified the area to which you refer as being most desirable for addition to Blue Mountains National Park. The Service is now investigating the matter to determine appropriate action to achieve this aim and you may rest assured that every effort will be made to include the area in the Park.

Thank you for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,
Eric Bedford,
Minister for Planning
and Environment

SUPPORT FROM INTERSTATE AND OVERSEAS

We have received copies of two letters written to members of the State Government about Washpool. Mr. Mel Fackender of S.A. wrote to Mr. Bedford that:

"In the past we have been profligate with our precious rainforests, destroying them with ignorant abandon, even to the extent of burning Red Cedar, as related in Prof. Jock Marshall's book 'The Great Extinction'. A rainforest, Sir, takes many hundreds of years to reach a climax state, and we have so little of it left now in its pristine state. Therefore, I appeal to you to stay the hands of the exploiters, for once it is gone, it is gone forever."

Werner and Doreen Grossmann wrote to Mr. Wran & Mr. Bedford from Switzerland:

"We have just learnt of your Forestry Commission getting ready to log the Washpool Wilderness. We wish your Government to know that not only Australians are deeply shocked by this project. We here in Europe envy those countries that still have forests of the grandeur of your rainforests and we like to think that Australia, unlike developing countries, appreciates such magnificent remnants of wilderness and does everything to preserve them. As the Colong Committee say in their review of the chapter on Lamington Park in my book 'Down to Earth', it is such things as your rainforests that - if preserved, will

become your most precious tourist attractions, rather than your big cities, or even your vast arid open spaces or your beaches."

We believe that such letters showing the concern of conservationists beyond our State borders are particularly effective.

PUBLISHER SOUGHT

Werner Grossmann is seeking a publisher for a translation of his book "Zurück Zur Erde" (Down to Earth). Should any of our readers have contact with a potential publisher, we should be glad to follow it up with more information about the book. We have received several requests for Frank Vanry's translation of the chapter describing Lamington.

FORESTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Somerville, Vice-Chairman of the Colong Committee has been appointed to represent conservation interests on a Committee which has been set up to advise the Minister for Forests on current and future use of forested land, research priorities, potential areas of conflict and ways of ensuring a continued supply of logs.

BRAVO 2SM

Inspired by David Attenborough's statement that the saving of rainforests is the single most critical conservation issue facing the world today, announcer Brian White visited the rainforests of northern N.S.W., put on an hour long documentary on the subject, and persuaded station executives to follow this up with a week-long editorial campaign to stop further logging.

OFFICE RENTAL GRANT

Our thanks to the Paddy Pallin Foundation for again making us a grant of \$500 towards the \$1,350 a year rent we pay to the Total Environment Centre. A centrally situated office is essential for our work and meetings.

CITIZEN'S LAND RIGHTS

It is possible that the Yungngora people's fight to preserve their sacred site at Noonkanbah attracted more sympathy from conservationists than from the rest of the community.

Many sacred sites may well be older than any cathedral, or even than the pyramids. The aboriginal considers himself part of the land, and it is probably his understanding and respect for ecology which preserved flora, fauna and topsoil until the European occupation. Many Australians of European descent now feel a strong affinity with the land. Do the spirit beings of the aborigines reach out to them too? Who knows? Exactly what is meant by "sacred" is hard to define. A dictionary definition is "dedicated or reserved or appropriated to some person or purpose". It is a purely spiritual concept, as dear as life itself to the aborigines. There was a time too when Christian armies crusaded to save their most sacred site - the Holy Land.

There is a striking similarity between the efforts of the aborigines to save Noonkanbah and the efforts of a community of conservationists to save Terania Creek (or Glebe Gully or Middle Head). Nobody would describe Terania Creek as "sacred". Practically nothing is so described in our modern society. Yet Terania Creek undoubtedly has spiritual significance to the demonstrators. Its preservation certainly offered them no economic reward. Tribal organisation has disappeared from our society, but its modern equivalent is special interest groups.

There are many more interest groups in our society than there were tribes pre 1788. Many of them seek only to exploit natural resources. A growing number now seeks to preserve them. The exploiters have wealth and the means to deploy an army of mercenaries. The conservationists who, like the aborigines, put spiritual values first, have little money and depend mainly on volunteers. Those who allocate resources, who we are pleased to call our "servants", or our "representatives", almost invariably favour the exploiters.

Aboriginal sacred sites cover only a tiny fraction of the total land which has mineral potential. Wilderness areas have even less economic significance. They are the areas that it has not paid to develop. Much is being made of the projected \$29 billion of development expenditure, which will leave in its wake vast areas of devastation and pollu-

tion. The State Government has just announced a \$2.6 billion development programme. Nothing has been said about how much will be devoted to conservation. Our rainforests are being logged for the sake of employment. Just a few mere \$millions (not billions) would save them. Employment is to be found for 1200 persons to be replaced by the rationalisation of small freight operations in the State Rail Authority. Nothing can be done to re-employ the 500 workers dependent on rainforest logging.

No doubt this will be described as "balanced" development, as it always is, and so it will be when the chief balancer places the fulchrum an inch from development side of the balance arm and a mile from conservation.

ALEX COLLEY

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The Secretary,
The Colong Committee Ltd.,
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SYDNEY. NSW. 2000

Dear Sir,

I enclose \$5.00 being my subscription for all issues of the Save Colong Bulletin during the calendar year 1980.

I enclose \$..... being a donation to the Colong Committee's Fighting Fund.

I have donated \$..... to the Australian Conservation Foundation, expressing a wish that my donation be spent for the purposes of the Colong Committee.

NAME (Mr./Mrs./Miss)

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