

SAVE COLONG bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

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"Within 10-15 years under the HEC plans, the northern half of the remaining south-west wilderness would be covered with dams surrounded by powerlines, roads and quarries.

Tasmania and the world would have lost a priceless riverine wilderness for the dubious short-term gain of a sixth set of dams.

It is difficult to conceive of a project which would so devastate the island's remaining natural heritage as this next scheme, the Gordon-Franklin dam."

Dr. Bob Brown, Director, Tasmanian Wilderness Society, (S.M.H. Report).

Here we have, threatened with destruction, one of the world's last great wilderness areas. It is, and has been declared, part of Australia's national heritage. It has been formally nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List, which means that the Federal Government thinks it is a place of international significance and should be preserved for future generations. Throughout Australia, there is ample support for this view. The Tasmanian Government must be forced out of its present obstinacy and into an unprejudiced reappraisal of the alternatives clearly open to it.

S.M.H. 1/2/82.

SOUTH WEST TASMANIA - LETTER TO MR. FRASER

Sir Clarrie Harders, former head of the Attorney-General's department has told a Senate Committee that once Tasmania had been given Loan Council funding for the Franklin River dam the Commonwealth Government could do little to halt the flood. He emphasised that, under section 30 of the Australian Heritage Act, a Federal Minister was obliged not to take any action with regard to South West Tasmania that would adversely affect it unless he was satisfied there was no feasible alternative. Against this the Australian Council of National

Trusts has submitted that the Commonwealth could invoke either the Heritage Commission Act, or the Environmental Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act to prevent the building of the dam. The Colong Committee believes that the proposed dam would adversely affect Tasmania, and that the Commonwealth can take action to prevent it being built. This is expressed in the following letter to the Prime Minister:

Dear Mr. Fraser,

On February 6th, 1981 the Colong Committee wrote urging you to protect the South West Tasmanian wilderness

from destruction. In replying on your behalf, the Hon. Ian Wilson said that land use decisions are primarily the concern of State Governments, and that your government believes that decisions on the development of South West Tasmania are the responsibility of the Tasmanian Government. (Letter 25th February, 1981).

We respectfully submit that this is not in accord with the enunciated policy of your government, nor its actions in matters of land use affecting the national interest. On October 30th, 1980 you described the maintenance of a community consensus on broad objectives as "an important aim of Government." There is no consensus on the building of the Franklin River dam. Despite support by both major political parties, only 47% of Tasmanians voted for the dam. It is probable that the great majority of Australians would vote against the dam, and that this percentage would be overwhelming if you were prepared to finance an alternative power source. The degree of opposition could be ascertained if a survey similar to that on rainforests in this State were commissioned.

Your address to your electorate on June 9th, 1979 in which you acknowledged that "no decree of government.....can save a lost wilderness," and your acceptance of your government's obligation to make decisions on any issue that affects our heritage, is meaningless if the land use of South West Tasmania is to be left to the present minority government in that State.

The listing of this wilderness in the register of the National Estate and your application to have it listed by the World Heritage Council are a direct denial of the contention that the decision rests with the State.

In the interests of conservation you have over-ridden the Queensland Government both on the question of sand mining and oil prospecting on the Barrier Reef.

From the financial angle the approval of funds for the Franklin dam would be quite out of keeping with your determined efforts to curb government spending and reduce taxation. No evidence has yet been made available to show that the sale of electricity

generated will cover interest and maintenance charges, or that the capital outlay will ever be recouped. There is a strong prima facie presumption that the project will be a permanent burden on the taxpayer. It has been estimated that the cost will be \$1,400,000,000 on which interest alone will be over \$200,000,000, equal to over \$400 per Tasmanian and perhaps twice this amount per Tasmanian taxpayer.

We therefore urge that, at the Premier's Conference to be held on February 19th, you oppose the funding of any dam on the Franklin.

LOWE BY-ELECTION

We have it on good authority that Mr. Wran was impressed by the number of "NO DAMS" workers at the Lowe by-election. Many party workers at the booths were willing to help the conservationists and the net result was that some 11% of voters wrote "NO DAMS" on their ballot papers, despite the fact that many were deterred from doing so because they thought it would invalidate their vote. Ex P.M. Sir William McMahon, whose resignation caused the by-election, said to one of the conservation workers at a booth, "You shouldn't have to do this."

AUSTRALIA'S FORESTRY AND FOREST PRODUCT INDUSTRIES

- Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Trade and Commerce.
- Reviewed by Alex Colley.

The Colong Committee's opposition to Forestry Commission policy started in January 1970, when a meeting of representatives of 90 supporting bodies directed the Committee "to extend its terms of reference to include a campaign to add the whole of the Boyd Plateau to the Kanangra/Boyd National Park."

Since then there have been 36 public inquiries relating to Australian Forestry and forest producers. Two of these, one on "Pine Planting on the Boyd Plateau" and one on the Border Ranges, were the outcome of Colong Committee campaigns, and many of the others were inspired by the Committee and its supporting bodies. In 1973 debate in the Federal

Parliament on the Boyd occupied 10 hours and 36 minutes of debating time and Mr. Whitlam said that the Boyd issue occupied more of his party's time than any other issue.

An outcome of this debate was the referral of the Forestry Agreement Acts to the House of Representatives Standing Committee for report. The Colong Committee made a lengthy submission, and was represented at the Sydney hearing by Milo Dunphy and the writer. The report of the Standing Committee could almost have been written by the Colong Committee. All the main points of its submission, including criticism of the Forestry Commission, were not only accepted, but emphasised. Our next forestry issue, that of rainforests, was initiated by the Border Ranges campaign started in 1975. In 1979 we adopted the aim of a new charter for the Forestry Commission, under which conservation of forests and rehabilitation of derelict and eroded lands should replace the Commission's declared aim of "getting the timber out," or, in its own words of "logging to the limits of economic accessibility."

The Senate referred "All aspects of Australia's Forestry and Forest Products Industries" to its Standing Committee on Trade and Commerce for investigation and report in June 1978. The Colong Committee made a submission on the financial and environmental aspects of the operations of the N.S.W. Forestry Commission. The submission pointed out that the large deficits and low interest payments of the Commission, with no prospect of loan repayment, amounted to heavy subsidisation of the timber industry. The extent of subsidisation was impossible to determine because of lack of commercial accounting by the Commission. Due to forest mismanagement and interference by politicians the Commission faced a "massive deficit of hardwood sawlogs," which it sought to overcome by "licensing the mills to get into the sensitive steep mountain forests, cut every 'millable stem' and then get out, hoping the abandoned forest would regenerate over the next 100 years." Royalties were too low to cover the cost of forest services provided, particularly in rainforest and woodchipping operations.

The Colong Committee was invited to

attend the Sydney hearing of the Senate Committee. It was represented by Jim Somerville, who was largely responsible for the submission, Peter Maslen and the writer. The Senate Standing Committee gave us a good hearing, about twice the time originally allotted. It adopted a courteous, but critical attitude, as such a Committee should. It questioned our form of organisation, and the factual base of our assertions. What was the value of the Forestry Commission's stock? - Answer, impossible to say because the commercial accounts under preparation for five years had not been published. Did we go out and visit forest sites? - Yes frequently. Did we have a list of forests where sustained yield was impossible? - No, but we recommended that one be made available. Were we against planting of pines? - Only if they replaced native forests. Did we have any proof that sensitive steep mountain forests were being cut beyond the level of sustained yield? - Yes. The Border Ranges, where half the land to be logged consisted of slopes of over 18 degrees. Clear felling was necessary, Senator Archer said, to regenerate sick or dying forest areas. The conservationists were allowing such areas to get sicker. To this the Colong Committee replied with two other questions which it proceeded to answer. Why was the forest degenerate? Was it logged? A good example of a degenerate forest was the Boyd (Konagaroo) which was logged until all the good trees had been taken out. Then the Commission declared it useless and announced its intention of bulldozing it for a pine plantation. The reason for degeneration was mismanagement by the Commission, which had failed to maintain the forest. Some difficulty was experienced in convincing the Standing Committee that we were not against timber production or the planting of exotics. What we opposed was the overcutting and destruction of native forests.

Although the Colong Committee representatives felt that the Standing Committee was industry oriented, its report has in fact supported not only the main contentions of our submission, but most of the remaining points of our forestry policy. The national interest was placed before the short sighted policy of the timber industry, although only 10 of the 76 submissions

received were from conservation organisations.

The Colong Committee's proposal for commercial accounting by the Forestry Commission, and the fixing of royalties according to costs of production, were accepted. The Standing Committee recommended that the Australian Forestry Council should examine and make recommendations to the State Governments in respect of accounting procedure and the classification and treatment in the forest service accounts of all aspects of income and expenditure. It also strongly urged the forest service in each State to adopt as its method of royalty determination, that recommended by the Finance Panel of the Forestry and Wood based Industries Development Conference. This would ensure that total costs, both revenue and capital, would be assessed and royalties fixed to cover "A margin of profit to ensure a reasonable return." Should a decision be made, for political reasons, to reduce the royalty payments below this level, for purposes such as maintenance of employment, decentralisation etc. "the total royalty income reduction necessary to effect this should be made explicit in the forest service accounts as an industry subsidy." Current royalty levels are described as "a patchwork of historical precedent, arbitrary valuations and impulsive responses to political pressures, with scant regard for the full economic potential and social value of both public and private forests."

The Standing Committee accepted the Commonwealth's commitment to self-sufficiency in timber production, though it did not recommend the development of an export surplus. The present level of planting was far above that necessary for self-sufficiency, a point continually made by the Colong Committee during and since the Boyd campaign. The recommended rate of plantation establishment should be reduced from the 1977-79 rate of 34,800 ha. to an average of 20,700 ha. per annum between the years 1976-90.

Our call for the publication and public discussion of management plans was fully supported. The Standing Committee recommended the publication of a State management plan at regular intervals. The plan should

describe the detailed management regime to be adopted for each and every area of forest under the control of the forest service, be explicit in its requirements and be binding for a specified period. Management specifications containing environmental protection prescriptions should be regarded as a mandatory minimum.

The Standing Committee did not recommend cessation of rainforest logging, though the implementation of its recommendations would almost achieve that result. The Committee saw "little justification for the harvesting of rainforest timbers for general purposes such as exterior plywood, scantling or architraves, particularly where the use is temporary or where the timber is to be hidden in walls or under paint..... For many purposes non-wood products such as fibreglass, aluminium, fibrous plaster and cement are adequate substitutes..... For many furniture purposes, the quantities of rainforest timber could be reduced to a minimum through the use of veneers on panelboard." To secure the long term survival of the rainforests there was an obvious requirement "to reduce harvesting operations to a sustained yield level at least." Since rainforest timbers take centuries to mature the adoption of sustained yield would mean a very low rate of logging. The concluding recommendations that "All areas of rainforest in Australia be conserved, maintaining the characteristic diversity and vitality of the original forests." can be effected only if logging ceases entirely.

The report is critical of woodchip operations. Referring to "the emerging surplus of softwood smallwood" it points out that while much of our plywood remains unused an amount three times the domestic usage is exported to Japan. "The advent of the woodchip industry," the report states, "has provided the opportunity for forest managers to economically dispose of large volumes of over-mature and defective timber from the forests, the legacy of years of selective logging and occasional wildfires. So much for the Commission's previously vaunted policy of "sustained yield" and its selective logging of rainforests. Will they too eventually consist of over-mature and defective timber, fit only for woodchipping?

It is pleasing to note also that the Standing Committee does not consider that the question of forest preservation should be determined in economic terms. Inevitably the report calls for a balance, this time between amenity and aesthetic enjoyment and a product resource. No report is complete without a balance, but at least it is acknowledged that it is "unreasonable to suggest that conservation issues should be considered only on conventional economic grounds..... a democratic society should resort to political solutions of the problem."

It is not surprising, in view of the Forestry Commission's opposition to public debate of its policies, that the Standing Committee complains that its investigation of royalty assessment "have been hampered by the paucity of statistical information relating to the forest and forest products industries." Comprehensive and reliable statistics are essential to informed democratic appraisal and criticism.

Despit its piecemeal criticism of forestry practices, the Standing Committee, in common with the preceding 35 inquiries, fails to answer the real question at issue. What is it all costing us, the taxpayers, both in economic and environmental terms? In view of the lack of commercial accounting and the "paucity of statistical information" the Committee had no means of providing an answer.

The answer is required both in economic and environmental terms. Not only are hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds being sunk into forestry, but there is clear evidence of environmental deterioration in many forest areas. An inquiry (the 37th) should therefore be held by the Industries Assistance Commission Inquiry into the Forestry and Wood Based Industries." An essential pre-requisite to such an inquiry is the publication of commercial accounts by forestry authorities. Commonwealth funds should be withheld until such accounts are prepared. They would evaluate the land timber and other assets held, the debts, the amount of capital, represented by public funds given to the authorities, and loans outstanding. Estimates of annual deficits would include interest subsidies from public funds. A proper evaluation of stock,

in the form of timber, would include increments from growth and deductions for logs removed. Environmental damage, such as erosion, should also be costed.

Whatever the outcome of the inquiry, royalties should be raised sufficiently to counter overcutting. Higher royalties would increase the use of timber substitutes (most of which are unsubsidised). If housing is to be subsidised it should be at the expense of public revenue, not of our native forests.

LANE COVE LIBRARY EXHIBIT

On March 4th, 1982 a talk and slide presentation entitled "New South Wales Rainforests and How to Save Them" was given at the Lane Cove Municipal Library by Rodney Falconer. Although much interest was shown in this by a number of people, not the least of whom was Keith Jordan of the Associated Country Sawmillers, much of the success of this was due to an excellent display prepared by Maston Beard, a Committee supporter.

This display took the form of 5 panels, covered on both sides by informative maps, photos, graphics and other items, such as samples of commonly used rainforest timbers. This latter item, together with some other material, was kindly provided by the Forestry Commission - who also added a graph advocating the ability of rainforest to recover after logging. Some of this information had hitherto been unpublished, including what is arguably the most up to date map of New South Wales rainforest distribution (barring the impending publication of the Forestry Commission's new maps) and many other interesting facts and figures. The exhibit was kept on display at Lane Cove for two weeks.

This excellent exhibit is being kept and made available by the Rainforest Action Centre.

BARRINGTON TOPS

Specific proposals for rainforest reservations have been made for the Border Ranges, Hastings and Washpool areas. No proposal had yet been framed for extensions to the existing misshapen Barrington Tops National Park. The Colong Committee therefore

commissioned Roger Lembit, project officer of the Nature Conservation Council, to make a survey and report. We are now able to recommend additions which would result in the reservation of most of the Barrington Tops wilderness described in the Helman report and a number of wild and scenic rivers. The new boundary would reduce certain management problems.

The State Cabinet Subcommittee will now have before it recommended boundaries of reservations to cover our four largest rainforest remnants.

BEACHES DISAPPEAR ON THE COTE D'AZUR

On France's famous Mediterranean Cote d'Azur some beaches have disappeared and others are shrinking. A spokesman of the French Environmental Department states that "With the growth of concrete developments, the destruction of sand dunes to build tourist facilities, the impact of large-scale sewerage schemes and the ravages of campers we are throwing away our golden treasure".

The environmentalists are having to fight with short-sighted town councils, squeezing every penny out of the holiday hordes which, even on a bad day in summer, amount to 500,000 sunbathers on the sands. But unless a stop is put to building new flats, marinas, beach restaurants, sewerage works and camping sites, the only solution, according to the department, will be the creation of artificial beaches away from the sea.

Paul Webster in the Bulletin, February 9th, 1982.

WATT AND REAGAN GET THE MESSAGE

On October 19th Sierra Club president Joseph Fontaine presented the petitions carrying more than a million signatures to the speaker of the U.S. Senate. The petition, gathered by the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the Massachusetts Audubon Society, called on Congress to replace Interior Secretary James Watt and resist the anti-environmental legislation of the Reagan Government.

On February 21st Watt announced that the Reagan administration will seek legislation to ban energy and mineral development in the nation's wilderness

areas through the end of the century. The U.S. Wilderness system consists of 80 million acres of designated wilderness and 61 million acres of proposed wilderness.

This is a great advance on the New South Wales position where wilderness areas are designated only in the management plans of national parks, and there is no legislation to protect them from prospecting and mining. The Sierra Club, however, believes the policy is a "Trojan Horse" from which attacks will be made on wilderness not yet designated.

AUSTRALIAN WORLD HERITAGE SITES

At its meeting in Australia in October last year, three of the eleven sites selected for inscription on the World Heritage List were in Australia.

Kakadu was chosen because it possesses outstanding aboriginal art, in addition to the best example of a range of ecosystems unique to northern Australia, the Great Barrier Reef because of possesses the world's longest stretch of coral reef, as well as the world's most diverse faunal collection, and Willandra Lakes Region the richest fossil site in Australia, which includes both the arrival of homo sapiens and the extinction of the giant marsupials in its time span.

REPRESENTING THE PUBLIC INTEREST

In 1972 Mr. K. S. Anderson ruled in the Mining Warden's Court inquiry on Bungonia that our representative, Milo Dunphy, could appear and give evidence "in the public interest." In Queensland, in 1974, John Sinclair appeared in the Queensland Mining Warden's Court to oppose mining leases on Fraser Island. The Warden said that Sinclair "has not shown that he represents the public interest."

The Fraser Island Defence Organisation unsuccessfully appealed to the Queensland Supreme Court. It then appealed to the High Court, where, in May 1975, the appeal was unanimously upheld. The judgement was that "One person can be held to represent public interest."

"IMPROVED" FORESTS

The New South Wales Forestry Commission describes the clear felling of forests as "improvement". In the Sierra Bulletin of Nov/Dec. 1981, E. M. Sterling describes the "improved" forests of north west America as follows:

The great mountain forests of the Northwest are being scarred by ever-increasing clearcut logging on both private and public lands.

Checkerboards of burned-over clearcuts, some covering hundreds of acres and visible from 50 miles and more, mar every vista. Except in parks, or where forests have been legally protected as wilderness, the ubiquitous clearcutting leaves few slopes undamaged.

Many residents of the West seem not to notice the growing ugliness. In fact, some have come to accept the logging blotches as necessary, unavoidable and even essential to the landscape.

Recently Dorothy Butler, a Colong Committee supporter, went for a walk in British Columbia. The start of the party's route was through a forest being clear felled. On their return, several days later, there were already erosion channels 6 feet deep in the clear felled area.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE BY THE COLONG COMMITTEE

(Price includes postage)

The Save Colong Bulletin	
Per Annum	\$5.00
Kakadu Coloured Poster	\$1.50
Border Ranges Poster	
(Black and White).	\$1.50
Wilderness in Australia -	
Helman et al	\$5.00
Coloured Rainforest Posters:	
Single Poster.	\$2.50
5-49 posters	\$1.50
50 or more (each).	\$1.10
Wilderness in Danger -	
Michael Bell & Associates.	\$5.00
Habitat - Border Ranges Issue.	\$1.00
Rainforests - National Parks &	
Wildlife Service.	\$4.50

FORM FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS

*The Secretary
The Colong Committee Limited
18 Argyle Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000*

Dear Sir,

I enclose \$5.00 being my subscription for all issues of the Save Colong Bulletin during the calendar year 1982.

I enclose \$. being a donation to the Colong Committee's Fighting Fund.
I enclose \$. being an interest free loan repayable at 4 weeks notice.
I have donated \$. to the Australian Conservation Foundation, (672B Glenferrie Road HAWTHORN VICTORIA 3122) expressing a wish that my donation be spent for the purposes of the Colong Committee. I would like the grant which this enables to be allocated to the Committee's Fighting Fund/Investment Fund.

NAME: (Mr./Mrs./Miss)

ADDRESS: POSTCODE

SIGNED: DATE
