

SAVE COLONG bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

18 Argyle Street, Sydney. 2000

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"I know it was not everyone who thought it was a great thing to save the rainforests, but I'll make this prediction here today. When we're all dead and buried and our children's children are reflecting upon what was the best thing the Labor Government in NSW did in the 20th century, they'll all come up with the answer that we saved the rainforests".

The Hon. Neville Wran, addressing the State A.L.P. Conference on 11th May, 1983.

"A scratch across a record, a tear through the Mona Lisa, a stake through the human heart or a dam in the wilderness affects 1 percent or less of the total area involved.

The end result in all cases is the same.

H. Donaldson, of Westbury, Tasmania, in The Bulletin 13th May, 1983.

NO DAM

By the narrowest possible margin the High Court has ruled that the Commonwealth does have the power to stop the Franklin dam. Commenting on the decision, Milo Dunphy, foundation member of the Colong Committee and vice-president of the A.C.F. said:

It is one of the most important conservation decisions in Australian history. It will give support to other Federal treaties such as those on endangered species and wetlands. We must now insist that the Tasmanian Government stops immediately its horrendous destruction of the Franklin River wilderness area. We must ensure that alternative projects do not include dams in the region. We must convince Tasmanians to abandon hydro-industrialisation, which is a failure (S.M.H. 2/7/83).

It was, however, a strictly legal decision. As the Chief Justice, Sir Harry Gibbs said, "The court is in no way concerned with the question of whether it is desirable or undesirable, either on the whole or from any particular point of view, that the construction of the dam should proceed". The dam was stopped because it was ruled illegal, not for any ecological or conservation consideration. The entire campaign to stop the dam, and the resulting litigation, was made necessary because the anti-conservationist Tasmanian Government refused to protect a world heritage area proclaimed at its own request.

The confrontation between the conservation movement and the Tasmanian Government took place because there is no Australian wilderness policy. The reason why

there should be such a policy and how it could be implemented is the subject of the following article.

A NATIONAL WILDERNESS ACT

Wilderness is now one of the world's scarce resources. It has gone from Europe, and vast tracts of Asia, Africa and America. In the U.S. it has been reduced by 98%. As the World Heritage Convention recognises, its preservation is a matter of world concern.

In the U.S. a positive overall approach to preservation was adopted by the passage in 1964 of a Wilderness Act, though this was not achieved before 64 previous acts had been introduced and 18 hearings held over a period of 9 years. An essential concomitant of the Act was a classification of wilderness areas. The Forest Service conducted a Roadless Area Review and Evaluation survey of 1449 areas. The Bureau of Land Management conducted a study of 173 million acres from which 117 areas were dropped from review. During these studies there was strong opposition from anti-wilderness forces, but in August last year a Wilderness Protection Act was passed in the House of Representatives by an overwhelming vote of 340-58. In Australia we have some state studies, but no overall assessment. The Colong Committee has applied to the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment for a grant extending over three years for a national wilderness study.

Delineation of our diminishing wilderness areas would, the Colong Committee believes, be a strong factor in enabling the wilderness movement to adopt an overall offensive stance in place of the piecemeal defensive action taken in the past. Preservation is not simply a local or State concern, as is recognised by the inclusion of wilderness areas in the register of the National Estate. Senator Chipp stated the case for national responsibility cogently when he said on September 15th last year:

"Letting Tasmanians alone - that is, about half the voting population of Tasmania - decide on the Franklin River is about the same as allowing

the population of Alice Springs and Darwin to vote by referendum to have Ayers Rock crushed by bulldozers to make gravel for a road in the middle of the Northern Territory. It is the same as allowing the populations of Townsville, Cairns and Mackay decide that the Great Barrier Reef ought to be drilled for oil. The proposition is absolutely absurd".

The invocation of "State rights" as a bar to the assumption of national responsibility to wilderness protection, is an anachronism. When the Constitution was framed, over 80 years ago, wilderness was abundant and conservation unheard of. There is a strong case, in terms of democracy, for the States to continue to manage those affairs which concern mainly their own residents. but there is no case for them to act against the interests of the nation. This was the essence of federation.

The proposal for a National Wilderness Act envisages a national wilderness system consisting of lands identified in a national wilderness inventory and subsequently adopted under the Act. Our constitution provides an opportunity for the States to manage their lands in accordance with an agreement reached with the Commonwealth. Such an agreement does not need to be made uniformly with all the States at the same time, but could be done so severally. The Commonwealth would offer monetary incentives to the States for its agreement to manage wilderness lands.

Had such an act been in existence, development in areas such as South-West Tasmania, Kakadu, the Windsor Tableland and the marginal wheat lands near Esperance Bay would never have started. These areas would be reserved for the enjoyment of future generations. If wilderness is not to be preserved for ecological reasons, purely economic considerations would justify a Wilderness Act. Once development has commenced, the cost of stopping it is enormous. It will probably cost some \$500,000,000 to stop the Franklin dam, while the cost of saving Kakadu, another World Heritage Area, would probably be greater. If our burgeoning tourist industry, now one of our main sources of foreign exchange, is to

realise its potential, wilderness must be preserved. What attracts the tourists is not our cities, or even our koalas, but the appeal of a "frontier" country of wide open spaces, where wilderness still exists.

BUSHFIRES INQUIRY

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Conservation Inquiry into the environmental impact of bushfires is a welcome opportunity for the environmental movement to present its case for rational control measures. The inquiry will cover inter alia, the environmental impact of bushfires and preventive and control measures (including consequential impact on species diversity and ecological balance), the potential development of zoning and other land use management arrangements to reduce bushfire damage, and appropriate Commonwealth action, particularly in relation to the national and international heritage.

The Colong Committee's policy has developed over many years. One of its first applications was in the autumn of 1975, when it was learned that the National Parks and Wildlife Service proposed to burn the Boyd Plateau. Milo Dunphy and Alex Colley called on Mr. Ted Weir, the Service's Protection Officer, and pointed out that burning the top of the Boyd Plateau wouldn't protect anything, least of all the Kanangra-Boyd National Park. Mr. Weir yielded to these representations and the burning didn't take place.

Our latest attempt to stop the burning of parks - a request to Mr. Anderson, the Minister responsible for bushfire control measures, to stop the burning of 50,000 ha in the Kosciusko National Park, was less successful. The burning will proceed.

The damage caused by any fire in a natural area is obvious, whether the fire is accidental, or deliberately lit to burn off unwanted scrub or create a fire break. It destroys flora and fauna, lowers soil fertility by destruction of humus and bares the soil to erosion. The Committee believes that fire breaks are necessary to protect life and property, but they should be made, not in natural

areas, but on the perimeters of developed areas. This policy is supported by the Forestry Commission's assessment that 95% of bushfires are associated with burning off operations (see Bulletin No. 65). The burning of remote wilderness areas to create breaks is cheap and easy. It is done largely by the aerial dropping of incendiaries. It is ineffectual if fires don't originate there, and few of them do.

Nor do fire trails in natural areas contribute to their protection. They act largely as conduits for arsonists. Many natural areas are too rough for fire control, while fighting fires in them during danger periods is risky and depletes resources available for protection of developed areas.

We believe that most damage to dwellings is due to a failure in planning. Individuals build inflammable homes in inflammable bush, planning authorities let them do it. The consolidation of dwelling areas and the prohibition of buildings in fire prone areas could virtually eliminate the danger. This is being acknowledged by the Department of Environment and Planning which will soon declare certain areas throughout the State as fire risk areas in which the building of homes will be banned or restricted. If any homes are built in such areas councils should insist on the use of fire resistant materials. In the State's most afflicted area, the Blue Mountains, the Mayor, Alderman Peter Quirk, has called for more power for local government to control the building of homes in fire prone areas. At present local government can only advise of the dangers associated with living in particular areas, but this advice is often ignored. Alderman Quirk cited the case of one home owner who built a house against Council's advice only to see it burn to the ground. Since then the owner has rebuilt the house on the same site.

The Blue Mountains City Council's present policy of burning off the perimeters of townships, instead of national parkland, accords with that of the Committee. The B.M.C.C. is, as far as we know the only council to adopt this policy.

Burning of vegetation is not necessary to create a fire break. It is simply cheap and easy. The South Turrumurra Environmental Protection organisation maintains strips of up to 100 feet of fire break by raking out excessive quantities of dead material into heaps, which are then burnt.

At its meeting of June 16th the Colong Committee decided to allocate \$1,000 to the Nature Conservation Council, in consultation with the Committee, for the purpose of employing a full time advocate at the Inquiry to represent the Australian environment movement. As the co-ordinating Council of N.S.W. nature conservation organisations, the N.C.C. was asked to launch a joint fund to finance the project and to apply to the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment for a dollar for dollar subsidy. The N.C.C. called a meeting on June 24th to consider the Colong Committee's proposal. It has allocated \$1,000 for the project and the National Trust has promised another \$1,000. The member organisations of the N.C.C. are being canvassed for support, and it is hoped for some donations from individuals. Peter Prineas, ex Director of the National Parks Association, was appointed as our advocate. Funds in hand are already sufficient to cover the drafting of a comprehensive submission, and it is hoped that enough will be raised to enable Peter to represent the participating organisations throughout the Inquiry.

CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

The Colong Committee made no submission to the National Conservation Strategy Conference, and was not represented at it. One of our directors, Jim Somerville was invited to attend and makes the following report.

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The World Conservation Strategy, proposed by I.U.C.N., the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Wildlife Fund, was launched in March 1980.

This document was a far-sighted recognition that conservation and development are issues of global

importance demanding the attention of every country.

The Australian and State Governments agreed to prepare a National Conservation Strategy and in 1981 a Commonwealth/State Steering Committee was established to co-ordinate its development. A National Seminar was held in Canberra from 30th November to 3rd December 1981 in which 200 individuals participated. 20,000 copies of their deliberations were published.

The next step was taken in 1982 with the issue by the Department of Home Affairs and Environment Steering Committee of a Discussion Paper called "Towards a National Conservation Strategy".

The Conference to decide the actual wording of the Strategy was intended to be held late in February 1983 but was postponed until 9-13th June because of the Federal Elections. The voluntary conservation movement was opposed to participation in the February Conference because of Mr. Fraser's intransigence on the Tasmanian dam issue but by the June Conference, this opposition had largely evaporated and 153 delegates gathered in Canberra University for the fray.

The Minister, Barry Cohen, in opening the Conference, exhorted the assembled representatives of industry, government, science and conservation to reach a consensus "with toleration and forbearance, giving a little here and there in order to accommodate as many dearly held beliefs as possible".

The draft strategy of eleven pages had been prepared in the days of the Fraser Government, when industry representatives on the Steering Committee were able to mould the document to their liking. It was quite unacceptable to the conservationists and some of the scientists and government delegates because of the use of "weasel" phrases such as "wherever possible", "where practicable" and "should consider" which largely deliberately negated the need for positive action. Having lobbied heavily for the escape clauses, industry wanted none of them changed.

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Warren Adcock, of the Confederation of Australian Industry, fired a salvo in his speech by belligerently declaring that "a consensus could not be considered to have been reached on any question unless a majority of industry delegates were in accord".

As conservationists were determined to make changes in the "status quo", consensus was impossible on such matters as standing to sue and freedom of information and these had to be abandoned.

The first challenge to Sir Rupert Myers' style of chairmanship did not come until the final plenary session, when Murray Wilcox, QC, President of the A.C.F. and chief spokesman for the conservationists, jumped to his feet saying very forcefully "With great respect Sir Rupert, that was NOT consensus!" Sir Rupert then adopted the very successful technique of sending a few of the speakers on a contentious issue outside to work out an acceptable compromise. Given what appeared to be an impossible task, the Chairman, with admirable tolerance, finally succeeded in producing a 15 page document, despite the drama of the last few minutes when Murray Wilcox's brinkmanship almost resulted in the complete deletion of the vital opening statement. The situation was only saved by the conservationists backing down.

The two main opposing sides held caucus meetings each evening and numerous private discussions took place during refreshment and meal breaks. Personal hostilities tended to diminish as individuals or small groups negotiated in an endeavour to reach an acceptable accommodation of the other point of view.

Even the most vociferous individual advocate of a particular position was worn down in the end, for if he or she pushed too hard, there was a distinct danger that the whole clause would be deleted for lack of consensus. This did in fact happen on a number of occasions but with the case of rainforest (one of the sticking points), a form of words was finally agreed which was acceptable to both sides despite the inclusion of the dread word "urgent"!

Soil conservation and protection of native vegetation were probably considered by most of the delegates to have the highest priority for immediate action.

Each State Government is now being encouraged to develop its own Strategy concerning specific issues of importance within its borders. A high level discussion of the problem areas in New South Wales must do some good even if it is only educating the decision makers that we do have problems. The final National Strategy goes before the 1984 Premiers Conference for ratification but will soon be publicly available.

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ANOTHER OPINION

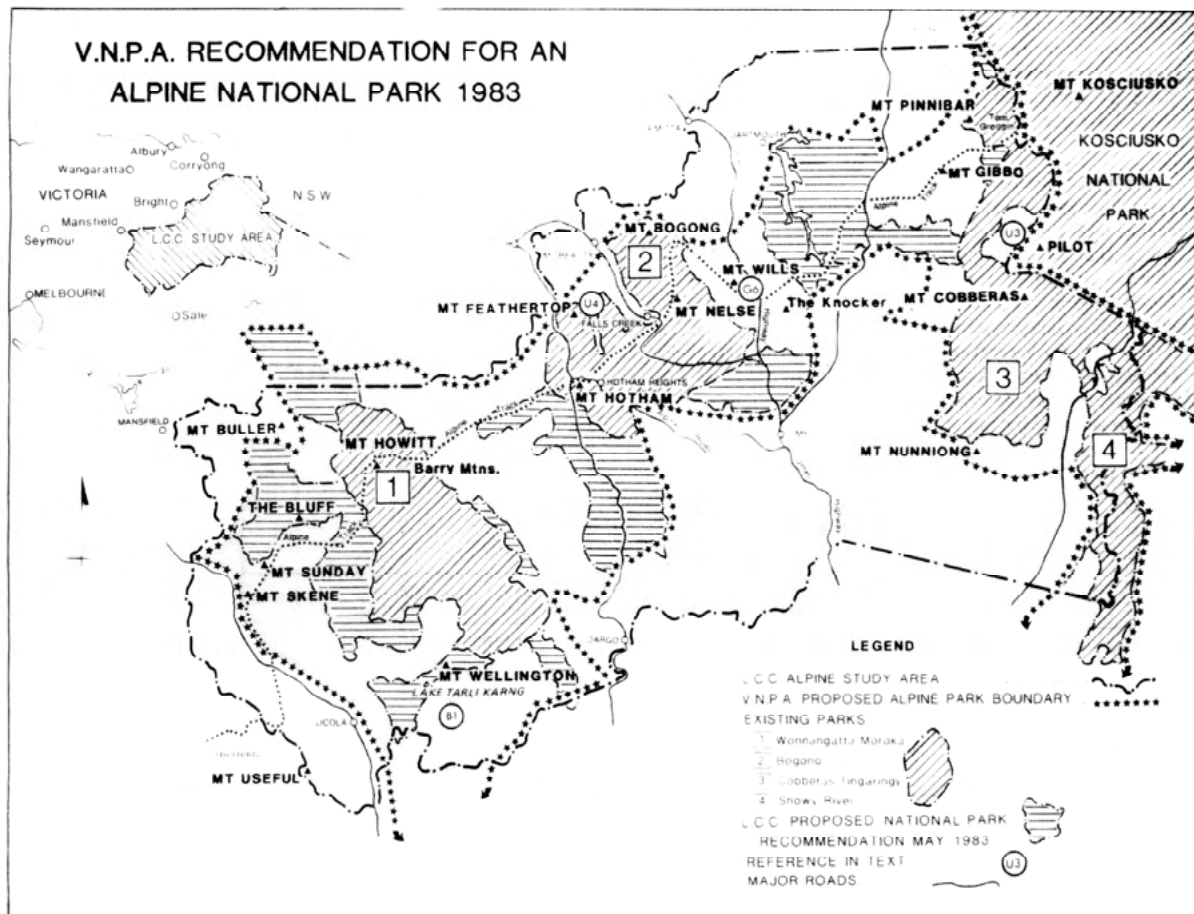
In a letter to the A.C.F., which we quote with his permission, Jack Munday reached a different conclusion:

Though the Conference was a failure, I believe that the conservation delegation attempted to be constructive and made positive proposals.

There was a strong argument on supporting a walkout near the conclusion of the Conference, when it became obvious that the Chairman 'was not impartial'. Though confusion reigned amongst the conservation delegates, such a walkout would have done more to show our dissatisfaction with the weekend's proceedings as well as letting people know our position, and put pressure on the new government to give the Strategy a higher priority.

AN ALPINE NATIONAL PARK

The Kosciusko National Park of over 1½ million acres covers most of the alpine land in N.S.W. Its natural environment has suffered considerable abuse since it was established, nearly 40 years ago. Some of the worst abuses such as dam construction, logging and grazing (except along stock routes) have ceased, though resort development, "control" burning and off-road vehicle damage continues. In most of the Victorian Alps exploitation continues much as it used to before the Kosciusko Park was created.



The State Government's policy is "to establish a large continuous Alpine National Park". The matter has been referred to the Land Conservation Council, which has recommended some additions to existing national parks as shown in the above map.

The L.C.C. recommendations would produce a fragmented park with many deficiencies. Logging will continue in a number of historic areas, alpine resorts will be managed by an independent Commission and grazing will continue over almost the entire area of the additions. Mining exploration will continue. The Victorian National Parks Association summarises the proposals as follows:

The Proposed Recommendations are a start, but as you have read they have many serious failings and will not achieve even the skeleton of an Alpine National Park if they are not altered

in the next round of discussions prior to the issue of the Final Recommendations of the Land Conservation Council in December this year.

This Association and many other organisations are doing all they can, but it is hard going against the continuing assault by the well financed lobby groups of the grazing, logging and mining interests.

ONLY YOUR PERSONAL SUBMISSION CAN ACHIEVE AN ALPINE NATIONAL PARK AT THIS STAGE. We cannot over-emphasise how utterly critical the submissions of individuals are in persuading Governments to act on important conservation issues.

The Victorian National Parks Association urges its supporters to help in the following way, and is also appealing for funds:

ACTION

1. Write your personal submission to the Land Conservation Council. (It need only be a half-page letter headed 'SUBMISSION - ALPINE AREA').
2. Put down your arguments in your own words. If you are not sure what to write, read this information sheet again, and select issues which appeal to you.
3. Write your name and address on the letter somewhere.
4. Before 26th July 1983 mail your submission to the
LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL
464 ST. KILDA ROAD
MELBOURNE VIC 3004
5. Persuade your friends and colleagues to do likewise. Every submission received by the LCC helps persuade that body and the Government that the public really does want a large single Alpine National Park.

If you need more information ring the VNPA Office on (03) 663 2091 and ask for Carmel McPhee who will be able to help you or your group. We can be found on the 1st Floor of the Victorian Environment Centre at 285-287 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000.

DEVASTATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

After a visit to the Solomons, John Seed writes:

Two of my hosts were Paul Scobie's friend Job Dudley, a community leader and Vincent Vaguni, a member of the Western Solomons provincial parliament. They are largely responsible for the recent motion in the W. Solomons parliament calling on Unilever to get out - passed without any dissenting votes. Unfortunately, the power in the situation lies with the central government. Unilever are currently clearfelling 5,000 ha or 250,000 Cu.m/year of this precious jewell New Georgia and shipping the whole logs to Japan leaving devastated, eroded vine covered wasteland, and this against the wishes of the customary owners.

HONORARY RANGERS

Summary of proposals to the Director of the National Parks and Wildlife Service from Mr. Roger Lembit representing the Nature Conservation Council of N.S.W. and Mr. Patrick Thompson, honorary ranger, and member of the Colong Committee.

It was a disappointment that the revived Honorary Ranger Programs initiated by the Service in 1978, and following an enthusiastic start ended abruptly with the publication of Honorary Ranger Talkback No. 2 in March 1979, being the date that the Service last communicated with all its honorary rangers.

It is believed that an agreement was reached between the Rangers' Vocational Service and senior management of the Service in September 1980 that no more appointments would be made of honorary rangers excepting under special categories, such as: Wildlife Refuge owners, Aboriginal sites' property owners, etc. The reasons for this decision are best known to the Service.

We believe that in the light of the Service's inability to provide adequate patrolling of national parks and reserves due to the current District Office policy and overall staff shortages that strong grounds exist for revitalising the Honorary Ranger Program, and that the Service should be encouraging honoraries to play a more active law enforcement role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Service appoint an officer responsible for Honorary Ranger matters;
2. That the Director reverse his previous decision not to appoint further honorary rangers from the public;
3. That the Service support the formation of an Honorary Rangers' Association;
4. That the Service give such an Association financial assistance to allow it to recommence

publication of the honorary rangers' newsletter Talkback;

5. That the Director will consider favourably, recommendations for appointment of honorary rangers forwarded to him through the Association;
6. That the Service will renew contact with its honorary rangers, preferably outlining its willingness to assist in the above matters.

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DEVELOPERS NEVER DESIST

Pressure for the resumption of sand mining on Fraser Island has continued despite the action of the Fraser Government. "Moonbi", the Newsletter of the Fraser Island Defence Organisation, reports however that Federal Environment Minister, Barry Cohen told Federal Parliament that mining on Fraser Island should be forgotten. On other fronts environmental abuse continues unabated. There are two rezoning applications, one for an airstrip and another for a subdivision of 160 acres. A "squatters' camp" continues to operate and to go ahead with unauthorised "improvements" such as a substandard shanty village, telephone line, and bus sheds on a public roadway. Timber interests, backed by the Forestry Department are advancing the same specious arguments which were used in N.S.W. during the rainforests battle. The Harvey Bay Chamber of Commerce says "People are More Important than Trees". It is argued that "since logging has gone on for more than 100 years, so it must be sustainable" though (as in the N.S.W. rainforests) it will take 500 to 1,000 years for Nature to fully repair the damage of logging and produce a mature forest. The Forestry Department asserts that forests are not being damaged and the yield is sustainable, but refuses to reveal its "Inventory of Fraser Island Timber". Elsewhere an enormous softwood plantation has been planted for a pulp mill which will not now be established. In addition to this the Fraser Island logging is subsidised by the taxpayer, as is

wood chipping in N.S.W. Grazing has continued, but will now be terminated, not for the sake of the environment, but because of the Department of Primary Industries T.B. and brucellosis eradication campaign.

* * *

We gratefully acknowledge the receipt of donations from the following supporters during the half year to June 30, 1983.

J. Ambler (2)	A. Keen
V. Attenbrow	J. Kelly
W. Bell	H. Kilby
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R. Hayes	I. Williamson
J. Howell	J. Wrigley
E. Kaub	
The Beswick Family Fund	
Far South Coast Environment Group	

In addition the following have made donations to the Australian Conservation Foundation during the same period, enabling the Foundation to make grants to the Colong Committee.

M. Bouman	A. Lethlean
D. Butler	M. Mills
E. Cadzow	P. Millard
A. Colley	J. Rentoul
P. Conaghan	R. (Dick) Smith
A. Correy	J. Stephenson
G. Davidson	P. Tafe
M. Flattely	M. Way
P. Laird	

"The decision (on the Franklin Dam) is not only a victory for the Commonwealth but also for the majority of Australians who voted for the Hawke Government and the Australian Democrats in the last election. That decision, by the people of Australia, showed that we have reached a stage of intellectual maturity whereby we believe that the incredible beauty of the Franklin River and South West Tasmania is something worth fighting for, not only for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren and the generations which will follow them. Australia has come of age.

"It is also a victory for those incredible people who supported the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, the Australian Conservation Foundation and other conservation and environmental groups across Australia, and indeed the World, and who gave up so much of their efforts to save this area from the mindless vandalism of the Tasmanian HEC. We are all indebted to their tireless efforts".

Senator Chipp.

ORDER FORM

To: The Secretary, The Colong Committee Limited, 18 Argyle Street, Sydney, 2000.

Please send me.....copies of your publication "How the Rainforest was Saved".
Enclosed is.....to cover cost, including postage.

NAME: (Mr/Mrs/Miss).....

ADDRESS:.....POSTCODE.....

SIGNED:.....DATE:.....

FORM FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS

The Secretary, The Colong Committee Limited, 18 Argyle Street, Sydney, 2000.

Dear Sir,

I enclose \$5.00 being my subscription for all issues of the Save Colong Bulletin during the calendar year 1983.

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:.....

NEW SUBSCRIBERS SOUGHT

Because of the essential role of the Colong Bulletin in publicising our views and encouraging financial support, we are anxious to increase circulation. If you know of any potential subscribers, we would be pleased to send them a complimentary copy. Please give below the name and address of any you know of:-

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THE NATURE CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF N.S.W. ANNUAL DINNER

The Annual Dinner of the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales will be held on Saturday 29th October, 1983 at the Masonic Centre, Corner Castlereagh and Goulburn Streets, Sydney. Pre-dinner drinks at 7 p.m. and Dinner at 7.30 p.m. Tickets will be \$16 per head.

For more information or tickets please contact:

The Environment Centre of N.S.W.
399 Pitt Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
Phone: (02) 267 7722

* * * * *

A VOICE FOR THE WILDERNESS

A film about a rainforest, its beauty, its ecology and its scientific value.

A film about all rainforests and remaining wilderness areas, focusing on the untouched forests of the Hastings River on the East Coast of Australia. A fast moving film which demonstrates, through its photography, the unsurpassed beauty of this area and the life it supports.

We are introduced to the ancient Antarctic Beech, a living relic of Australia's connection to the Antarctic continent, and become the intimate audience at a performance by the elusive lyre bird.

Screening along with A Voice for the Wilderness will be a delightful animated film "Bushed" by Stephen French by courtesy of Swinburne College, Melbourne, about a displaced aborigine and a misplaced kangaroo, plus one other short which has not yet been selected.

To be screened at ANZAC HOUSE AUDITORIUM, 26 College Street, Sydney (near the Australian Museum) on July 29 and 30, and August 5, 6, 12, 13, 19 and 20 at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., except on August 13 - 6 p.m. only.

Admission \$5 or \$3 for pensioners, students and unemployed.

Rental and sales of the film from the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative, St. Peter's Lane, Darlinghurst, 2010, Telephone: (02) 33 0721.

Sessions will be hosted, in turn, by the N.P.A., the A.C.F., the Tasmanian Wilderness Society and the National Trust, who will receive royalties from screenings.

A VOICE FOR THE WILDERNESS

Produced by Chris Wilcox
Directed by Chris Wilcox and
Michael Balson