

THE COLONG BULLETIN

Bulletin 193

THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS LTD

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PROTECTING WILDERNESS AND NATIONAL PARKS

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"Our report documents in awesome detail the negative impacts on land and water through salinisation, the destruction of coral reefs, woodlands and forests, the contamination of our waters and the overuse of water in certain areas condemning vast stretches of rivers and groundwaters to a state where future uses are put at risk."

Professor Bruce Thom, Chair of the Federal Government's State of the Environment Committee, SMH 29.3.2002

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KOSCIUSZKO The ecologically unsustained park

by Alex colley

THE 690,000 ha Kosciusko National Park covers less than 1 per cent of the area of NSW. About a quarter of the Park is above the snowline. The Sub-alpine area, above 1850 metres, covers 120 square kilometres. This is the equivalent to less than one ten thousandth of the area of our mostly hot, arid and flat continent.

Myles Dunphy first proposed the Park in the early thirties, described as the Snowy-Indi Park. The establishment of the Park was promoted by Baldur Byles, a forester, and Sam Clayton, Forest Soil Conservation Commissioner. Baldur Byles accompanied the then Premier, Mr. (later Sir) William McKell, on a tour of the area in the summer of 1942-3. On his return Mr. McKell, determined to reduce the impact of grazing on the high country, instructed the Minister for Lands to reduce the impact. In



*Ecologically Sustainable Development
- the NPWS Vision.*

June 1943 the Minister invited Myles to submit his plan. It is therefore probable that Myles' plan was the catalyst for McKell's plan for a national park, which was established by an Act of Parliament in 1944. The Park was to be managed for protection of the catchments, recreation and controlled grazing.

It was not until 1965 that a Park Master Plan was adopted. Its main aims were to: protect scenic, scien-

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KOSCIUSZKO

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tific and wilderness areas; protect and rehabilitate catchment areas; develop a complete range of tourist facilities; and control public usage so that the unique natural values of the Park could be passed on for future generations. In 1974 there was a second plan, embodying a zoning scheme to include wilderness, natural areas, development areas and historic areas. Further plans were introduced in 1979 and 1982, reducing wilderness protection, and there were amendments made from 1988 to 2001, but the overall objectives appeared unchanged.

A Perisher Range Resort Plan was published in November last year and another Park plan is on the way. The Colong Committee published its plan in the Bulletin of September 1980. It consisted of 9 points, the substance of which was:

1. Mechanical transport should be restricted to existing surfaced and maintained roads.
2. All private passenger vehicles should be parked below Sawpit Creek and preferably outside the Park. Passenger transport within the Park should be by bus only.
3. No additional overnight accommodation should be authorised within the Park.
4. Charges for private and public services within the Park should be significantly increased to enable sewage to be purified.
5. There should be no renewal of leases for overnight accommodation.
6. No further commercial facilities within the park should be allowed.
7. Fire control of buildings should be achieved by the use of fire proof building materials and the dropping of incendiaries into the national park should cease.
8. Existing huts should be retained but vehicular access disallowed.
9. Ski lifts should be retained in the localities where they are now installed.

The "overriding objective" of the Perisher Range Resort Plan is to protect "the fragile and unique natural environment." The Plan is based on "ecologically sustainable develop-

ment," a term which recurs on every few pages and, of course, a "balance" between resource based recreation and natural resource conservation will result. It provides for "a community viable village" with 800 of the 1320 additional beds approved for Perisher, along with facilities for shopping, recreation and entertainment calculated to provide "significant entertainment, economic and employment opportunities." Access is to be by car, necessitating 4857 car parking spaces to be provided either on ground level or in parking stations. These provisions are a far cry from the overriding objective which could have been completely achieved without additional cost had the Colong Committee plan been adopted.

Facilities for day visitors have been estimated to cost between one fifth and one twentieth of those required for overnight visitors. The Master Plan does not specify the costs involved. In the past the infrastructure necessary for overnight accommodation and commercial development has been subsidised by the taxpayer, but perhaps the Plan will involve charges high enough to yield a surplus for the NPWS. The Plan includes a fire station and sewage treatment plant. The adequacy of the fire station to deal with fires like those which have destroyed two hotels in the past is dubious and the effectiveness of the sewage treatment plant to overcome the difficulty of treating sewage in a frozen environment is not specified. The Plan does not protect the fragile environment but will convert much of the Park to a lucrative real estate development.

The natural environment of the Park has suffered from many other forms of development. The first of these was the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme which entailed sixteen major dams, twelve major tunnels, seven power stations, twelve landing strips, one hundred and thirty kilometres of "aqueducts" and over one thousand six hundred kilometres of roads and 4WD tracks. Many of these works are within the Park. The next assault on the Park occurred in 1967, when 50,000 hectares of prime old growth forest in the northern section were excised

from the park and allocated to the Forestry Commission. Thereafter the main anti-environmental activity has been resort development.

The cessation of grazing is one conservation objective that has been achieved in the face of long sustained opposition from graziers. This has not only restored much of the attractive native flora but halted the erosion which grazing caused. The improvement however may be offset by the increase in the number of feral horses. It is conservatively estimated that there are 3000 within the park. The yearly increase in numbers may be some 20 to 25 per cent, or around 750 horses a year. Although the policy of the NPWS is to remove them from the alpine area, this will be difficult in view of the vast majority residing below this area. The three month trapping trial using salt baits lured a mere 13 horses (SMH, 1.6.02). Such an approach cannot be a solution.

The difficulty in eliminating, or even reducing, the number of horses is created by the widespread view that "brumbies" have heritage value. This 'Man from Snowy River' syndrome maintains that feral horses in Kosciuszko, unlike feral pigs goats and cats, must not be killed. Of course, thousands upon thousands of feral horses are killed in the outback each year to control populations in that largely degraded environment.

The method of removal or killing has also been subject to a selection process based on public opinion. They may be mustered and removed from the park, trapped, tranquilized but not shot. Mustering is dangerous and often injurious, for both riders and horses, though the men from Snowy River enjoy it. It is doubtful that a substantial number of horses could be removed by this method given the steep and forested terrain of all but the alpine regions. This leaves shooting as the most practical and humane means of control. Dr. A. W. English, Head of the Department of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney, in a study of the cull of feral horses in Guy Fawkes National Park, believes helicopter shooting is the most effective and humane method of controlling large numbers of horses.

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The pink dawn of the Green Renaissance

IN JULY 1972 Lake Pedder and its famous pink quartzite beach started going under water. This sad event triggered the resurgence of environmental awareness that led to a major campaign that saved the Franklin River, which was to be flooded next. Lake Pedder, however, was not abandoned. It was included in the South West Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area listed in 1982. The Australian Government referred to the "unique Lake Pedder" in its nomination report. The listing also included the Gordon below Franklin dam site, on the basis that world heritage listing would lead to a change in government policy, blocking further hydro-electric development in the area, which it did.

The movement to restore Lake Pedder, which David Bellamy has termed "the pink dawn of the Green Renaissance" was initiated in Melbourne in 1991, spearheaded by Dr Geoff Mosley and the Lake Pedder Study Group. The Group won the support of the IUCN General Assembly, which resolved in 1994 that the Federal and State Governments

investigate the feasibility of restoring the lake.

By 1995, Dr Jim Thorsell, IUCN's Senior Advisor dealing with world heritage, wrote that "we initially thought it (ie. the impoundment) should be excised from the existing world heritage site but our 1989 evaluation foreshadowed the eventual prospect of restoration and on that remote (at the time) prospect we left it in." The subsequent federal committee of inquiry reported in 1995 that it was technically feasible to restore the lake but did not proceed with this proposal.

The Study Group has produced extensive documentation of the values of Lake Pedder and detailed the rehabilitation processes necessary if Australia is to adequately fulfil its obligations to the Lake under the World Heritage Convention.

Basslink should help reinststate Lake Pedder

The most recent chapter in this struggle is the refusal by Hydro Tasmania in 1999 to assess the impact of Basslink (refer page 8) on the prospects for restoring Lake Pedder.

The Basslink proponent, Hydro Tasmania, is understood to have said that the project would make restoration of Lake Pedder more difficult. However, it could create opportunities to restore the lake. For example, Environment Australia could require, as a condition of Basslink's approval, an operational envelope for the facility that would support restoration opportunities for the Lake. Unfortunately, the people charged by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment to assess the Basslink proposal have so far chosen to ignore consideration of such restoration opportunities. Lake Pedder is not a piece of history; it is unfinished business. The environmental assessment of the Basslink project should consider the restoration opportunities, as required under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1999.

To commemorate the flooding, the Pedder 2000 group has placed a time capsule on the beach of the Lake. The capsule, containing newspaper clippings and memorabilia, will remain in place until the Lake is restored. ■

KOSCIUSZKO

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Horseriding, which is permitted in Kosciuszko apart from its wilderness areas, is another damaging activity. Repeated use of trails by commercial horseriding parties ploughs up the trails, litters them with manure and spoils them for other park visitors. Numerous specific facilities such as compounds, truck parking bays, loading ramps, toilets and camping areas are out of place and have cumulative impacts, leading to a loss

of snow grass cover and weed infestation. The Tantangra-Long Plain region has, for example, seven such facilities providing for commercial horse riding outfits.

The Colong Foundation, anticipating that pressure from "stakeholders" such as resort developers, mountain bike riders and over snow vehicle users, would eventually spread the development blight to the upper Snowy River and Main Range, lodged a wilderness nomination over the area in 1999. The area, which was little affected by the

Snowy Hydro Electric Scheme, was previously zoned as a primitive area in 1963 and again in 1974. This zoning was removed in the 1982 plan, though the area's conservation value was recognised. The proposed addition to the Jagungal Wilderness would create a wilderness 100 kilometres in length extending to Mount Kosciuszko. It would protect most of that unique 120 sq. km. of alpine area. The wilderness would restrict commercial development to the vicinity of present developed areas. ■

Wilderness Under Threat

Oil Industry Invokes National Interest

Government Claims for Giant Petroleum Discoveries

Nature Reserve Rules to be Relaxed

IT COULDN'T HAPPEN HERE - COULD IT?

by Mike Atkinson

DO THOSE headlines sound familiar? Not of course in Australia. They must be related to the Alaska Wildlife Refuge – one of the largest wild places reserved on the planet – mustn't they? The answer – yes ... and no.

These headlines have been used during the last year in the campaign to re-zone parts of the Alaskan Wilderness area for oil exploration, a plan that intensified after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The campaign received a major setback in April this year, when the US Senate quashed the rezoning bill.

However, those headlines are also appearing with more and more frequency in Australia, in an eerie echo of the USA. Persistent lobbying to develop oil, or at least explore for it, on or next to Australia's coral reef system, is an effort in attrition. Sometime, somewhere, someone or something will give, and the powerful oil industry may move in. On dry land the situation is not much better. The much-heralded, and squabbled-over, natural gas pipeline from PNG to southern Queensland is planned to extend for 3,200 kilometres and could cost at least \$6,800 million. However, in June this year, it has lost a bid to fuel a new power station at Townsville in favour of coal bed methane from the central Queensland coalfields. The extraction of methane gas from underground coal seams can have catastrophic side-effects, including damage to water resources. The coal seam methane proposal would not be considered an

environmentally superior alternative to the PNG to Queensland pipeline, which would cut through several high-quality wilderness areas between Cape York and Gladstone. The initial EIS for the project apparently shows the pipeline route passing through wilderness area after wilderness area. The pipeline route could easily be diverted at modest cost.

In the USA, the Arctic Wildlife Refuge is regarded as one of the finest examples of wilderness left on the planet, both in size and in its range of wildlife. It is often referred to as "America's Serengeti", partly because of the very large Caribou migrations across the area. The original conservation area was declared by President Eisenhower in 1960. In 1968 the largest oil field ever discovered in North America was found at Prudhoe Bay. The field contained some 12 billion barrels of recoverable oil. This sparked a major oil rush, with another 30 small oil fields producing total recoverable reserves of another six billion barrels of oil. For a couple of decades, Alaska has been producing about a quarter of all the domestic oil produced in the USA. In 1980, the original wildlife reserve was expanded to become the 77,000 square kilometre Arctic Wildlife Refuge. It is only 100 kilometres to the east of Prudhoe Bay. Since then seven different studies have tried to guess the amount of oil that may lie below the frozen surface of the Reserve. The most widely accepted is a middle-of-the-road guess from the US Geological Survey that estimates

that the area may have the equivalent of half of the Prudhoe Bay field. In July 2001, a US Congress committee approved a bill that would allow oil exploration along the coastal section of the reserve, covering about 6,000 square kilometres. A local Alaskan senator claimed oil discoveries in the Refuge could be even bigger than Prudhoe Bay. Two months later, after the attacks of 11th September, the oil drilling in the Alaskan Wilderness became part of the emergency national security effort. A geologist, Tim Burnhill, writing in the *New Scientist* magazine earlier this year, noted that research by the US Congress calculated that any oil that might be found could be in production by 2008. The maximum daily rate could reach 1.4 million barrels of oil a day. By this time the total US oil consumption would be 24 million barrels of oil a day, and the new Alaskan wilderness oil would amount to just 6 per cent of US requirements. In another study, the Department of Energy calculated that in 2020, when the hypothetical production from the Reserve would begin to decline, instead of providing a 'national security blanket', it would only reduce dependence on imported oil by two per cent, from 62 to 60 per cent.

George W. Bush was repeating his father's attempt to break into the Alaskan Wilderness area. One Republican senator said that the environmentalists were jeopardising national security by greatly exagger-

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It Couldn't Happen Here

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ating the effects on the wildlife reserve. Environmental groups argued that oil and gas development would forever destroy the wilderness character of the refuge by introducing a year-round human presence and the permanent infrastructure to support it. In April this year the Senate defeated the bill, losing by 14 votes the 60 votes needed to allow the legislation to proceed. However, there are now plans by Alaskan Senators to give the local native American clans the right to allow oil drilling on reserve lands nearby.

Meanwhile, back in Australia...

In NSW, strong legislation and Premier Carr means such exploration could never happen, doesn't it? At the moment, there are plans to push gas exploration through any area of the State that bulldozers can open up. Areas from the Queensland border to the Murray River have been granted to oil groups that vary in their respect for the land they use and the people who live there. Nature does not usually even get a mention. The proposed Pilliga Wilderness area is a case in point. Situated in the southern part of the Pilliga Scrub, it is the largest continuous ironbark forest left on the planet, but the NSW Department of Mineral Resources is doing everything to encourage oil companies to make their mark on the area. Fortunately, none of the larger oil companies have shown the slightest interest in the area since the 1960s, but some of the companies that have become involved, have left more than footprints. Each exploration drill site is at least one hectare of yellow sandy clay with waste pits the size of backyard swimming pools. These are filled with liquids which vary from site to site - milky white through greeny-grey to jet-black. The water in many of these pools is far too salty to drink, which is probably why the small birds do not come to drink there.

Over three years ago, on 21 October 1998, backroom advisers persuaded Premier Bob Carr to announce the biggest gas field in the

State's history, pointing to the Pilliga East State Forest. Inspired by their literary efforts they then proceeded to persuade the then Minister for Minerals and Energy to describe one of these waste sites as the starting point of a new gas pipeline from the Pilliga to the coast. Some time later the company involved quietly slipped away, leaving a slowly growing circle of poisoned trees behind them.

A more recent effort to win stock exchange support, in April 2002, led another company to proudly proclaim that they had just completed the first off-road seismic survey lines in the Pilliga (nearly 40 km of them) (refer *Bulletin 192*). To allow a small fleet of heavy vehicles to travel in a line in any forest requires substantial felling and clearing, and the Pilliga forests are no exception. Undaunted by the lack of share-price reaction, the company has promised to start drilling at least two sites in the Pilliga. So far none of this work has entered the nominated wilderness area. The only intrusion so far has been very low-level aircraft flights over the nominated wilderness area and the Nature Reserve to collect gravity and magnetic information.

The DMR, however, released a report in March 2000 through the 'Brigalow South' regional assessment process that identified much of the eastern half of the Pilliga, including the Nature Reserve and the nominated wilderness area, as having very high prospects for the discovery of gas and even oil. Since that report was written, there has been a gas discovery, or re-discovery, at the site of an old abandoned oil well from the 1960s, north of the Pilliga boundary. Unfortunately the amount of gas found so far is so small there is not enough to put in a pipeline, even to the nearest town. Instead, the local power company has promised to help build two 3 Megawatt gas-fired generators, and buy the electricity produced.

Returning to the title, it is comforting that there could not be any parallels between the Bush Administration and any State or Federal agencies in Australia isn't it? ■

Mountains Scenic Road - not Super Highway

The Greater Blue Mountains are recognised as part of the World's Heritage as an area of international significance and values. The great blue deeps and golden cliffs are a haven of peace and beauty. They are also a major national and international tourism and recreational asset.

The Great Western Highway, which carries a great deal of heavy traffic through the mountains' villages, compromises this asset. Now instead of looking at ways to get freight onto rail and build bypasses, we have the proposal by the federal government (SMH June 17th) to turn the beautiful Kurrajong Bells' line over the mountains into another super highway for juggernauts.

This route provides a charming, scenic drive through forest and fern lined roads with spectacular vistas of unspoilt wilderness and pleasant stops to buy flowers, fruit and local produce. It is a delightful alternative for those with the time to linger and enjoy all the best of this World Heritage environment and an irreplaceable component of the mountains' experience.

A super highway through Kurrajong will be vigorously opposed by the environment movement, joined, I would hope, by a far sighted tourism industry.

**Penelope Figgis AM, Vice President
Australian Conservation
Foundation
SMH 18.6.2002**

Meeting Dates
*Meetings will be held
in our offices at 2pm
on July 25th, August
8th and 22nd,
September 5th and
19th, and October 3rd.*

What is wilderness for? Or is the question a contradiction?
Roderick Frazier Nash says we should value and preserve wilderness
 not for what it can do for us, but on its own terms.

Reprinted from *New Scientist*, 30 March 2002, pp.43-45

POWER OF THE WILD

MY PURPOSE is to persuade you that wilderness is a moral resource. Human cultures have seen an extraordinary intellectual revolution in recent centuries that has transformed their view of wilderness from a liability to an asset. That transformation has largely been promoted by anthropocentric arguments emphasising the value of wilderness to civilisation; recreational, scenic and spiritual values use man as the measure. But, as Henry David Thoreau wrote, the point of wilderness is that it is the home of "civilisations other than our own". Or, as children's author Maurice Sendak put it more recently, it is "where the wild things are". Conceived as the habitat of other species, not as a human playground, wilderness is the best environment in which to learn that humans are members in, and not masters of, the community of life. And this ethical idea, working as a restraint in our relations with the environment, may be the starting point for saving this planet.

In the beginning, civilisation created wilderness. For nomadic hunters and gatherers, who have represented our species for most of its existence, everything natural is simply habitat, and people understood themselves to be part of a seamless living community. Lines began to be drawn with the advent of herding, agriculture and settlement. Distinctions between controlled and uncontrolled animals and plants became meaningful, as did the concept of controlled space: corrals, fields and towns.

The unmastered lands – the habitat of hunter-gatherers – came to seem threatening to settled folk. Ancient Greeks who had to pass through forest or mountain dreaded an encounter with Pan, the lord of the woods – who combined gross sensu-

ality with boundless sportive energy. Indeed, the word "panic" originated from the blinding fear that seized travellers on hearing strange cries in the wilderness and assuming them to signify Pan's approach.

The origins of the English word "wilderness" reflect this trepidation. In the early Teutonic and Norse Languages, the root seems to have been "will" with a descriptive meaning of self-willed, wilful or uncontrolled. From "willed" came the adjective "wild". By the eighth century, the *Beowulf* epic was populated by *wildeor* – a compound of "wild" and "deor", meaning beast-savage and fantastic beasts inhabiting a dismal region of forests, crags and cliffs.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition constituted another powerful formative influence on Europeans' attitude to wilderness, perhaps especially those who colonised the New World. When the Lord of the Old Testament desired to threaten or punish a sinful people, he found the wilderness condition to be his most powerful weapon.

So the dawn of civilisation created powerful biases. We settled down, developed an ecological superiority complex and bet our evolutionary future on the control of nature. Now there were survival-related reasons to understand, order and transform the environment. The largest part of the energy of early civilisation was directed at conquering wildness in nature and disciplining it in human nature.

For the first time humans saw themselves as distinct from – and, they reasoned, better than – the rest of nature. They began to think of themselves as masters, not members of the community of life.

Civilisation severed the web of life

as humans distanced themselves from the rest of nature. Behind fenced pastures, village walls, and later, gated condominiums, it was hard to imagine other living things as relatives, or nature as sacred. The remaining hunters and gatherers became "savages". The community concepts, and attendant ethical respect, that had worked to curb human self-interest in dealings with nature declined in direct proportion to the "rise" of civilisation. Nature lost its significance as something to which people belonged and became something they possessed: an adversary, a target, an object for exploitation.

The resulting war against the wilderness was astonishingly successful. Today we have fragments of a once-wild world, and with the wholesale disappearance of species. The ark is sinking – and on our watch.

Of course humans remain "natural". But somewhere along the evolutionary way from spears to space-ships humanity dropped off the biotic team and, as author and naturalist Henry Beston recognised, became a "cosmic outlaw". The point is that we are no longer thinking and acting like a part of nature. Or, if we are a part, it is a cancerous one, growing so rapidly as to endanger the larger environmental organism. Our species has become a terrible neighbour to the 30 million and more other species sharing space on this planet. Our numbers and our technology are wreaking ecological havoc. We have become the latter-day "death star", with the same potential for destruction as the asteroid that ended the days of the dinosaurs. This is not really an "environmental problem". It's a human

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Power of the Wild

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problem. What needs to be conquered now is not the wilderness, but ourselves. We need to understand that it is civilisation that is out of control.

Mind-pollution is more serious than chemical pollution. It is time to understand that there is no "good life" without a good environment and that it is a false prosperity that cannot be sustained over the long ecological haul. Growth must be dissociated from progress. Bigger is not better if the system is destroyed. As the deep ecologists recognise, we must now emphasise wholes over parts, and pursue justice at the level of entire ecosystems. A new valuation of wilderness is an excellent place to start.

The transformation that led some to view wilderness as an asset probably began with the Romantics. For example, Byron wrote in 1817 in the fourth canto of his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

"There is a pleasure in pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:
I love not man the less, but Nature more..."

But this insight developed into a largely anthropocentric justification of wilderness, as something to be valued and preserved for people. Recreational, spiritual and scenic values all used man as the measure. And so did the early ecological arguments for wilderness, with their utilitarian emphasis on protecting species that possibly held the cure to cancer. More recently, wild ecosystems have been praised as resources capable of providing environmental "services" and supporting human health. These are the arguments that, sometimes, sell nature on the political stage.

But wilderness is not for people at all. It is where the wild things, the willed things, are.

From this ecocentric perspective, wilderness preservation becomes a gesture of planetary modesty and a badly needed exercise in restraint on the part of a species intoxicated with

its power. Seen this way, wilderness preservation expresses a belief in the rights of nature.

Rightly seen, wilderness is the best demonstration that we are not the only, or even the primary, members of the biotic team. It is a living reminder of the gross limitations of our definitions of "society" and "morality". Our real society is coterminous with life on this planet, a fact that our ethical sensibilities have yet failed to recognise.

In the biblical past people went to the wilderness to receive the commandments with which to restructure society. We need to do so again. Right now we desperately need a "time out" to learn how to be team players in the biosphere. We need to learn- or, perhaps, to relearn- how to live responsibly in the larger community called the ecosystem. The first requirement for this is to respect our neighbours' need for habitat.

We should try to define an "ecological contract" that widens the circle of morality beyond the limits of the "social contract" proposed by the 17th century philosopher John Locke. Aldo Leopold, a founder of conservationism in America, would have understood this to give priority to what he called the "land community". The challenge is to advance morality from natural rights to the rights of nature.

And this is where wilderness assumes critical importance. What it provides is precisely this "time out" from the juggernaut of civilisation. Wild places are uncontrolled. Their presence reminds us of just how far we have distanced ourselves from the rest of nature.

We did not, after all, make wilderness. In it we stand naked of the built and modified environment, open to seeing ourselves once again as large mammals dependent not on our technological cleverness but on the health of the ecological community to which we belong. Writing in a pre-ecological age, Thoreau was more correct than he could have imagined about the importance of wildness to the preservation of the world.

The actuality of wilderness reminds us that when we enter it we enter someone else's home. Recall your parents' admonitions; courtesy

is called for; so is respect. Stealing is wrong (but think of the last few thousand years of human relationship to nature). Wild places deserve respect not for what they can do for us but what they mean to our fellow evolutionary travellers.

The concept of wilderness is just as important. It instructs us in the need for a more embracing, environmental ethic. The fact that wilderness is nature we do not own or use can open us to perceiving its intrinsic value. By definition we do not dominate or control wild places, and so they suggest the importance of sharing - which was, after all, the basis of the ethic of fair play that we did not learn very well in kindergarten. A species whose technological cleverness has made it the schoolyard bully desperately needs the ethical discipline that wilderness provides.

Ethics are concepts of right and wrong that work as restraints on freedom in the interest of preserving communities. It is easy to think of the kind of ecocentric ethic that I propose as being "against" human interests and freedoms. But most basic interests of human beings are inextricably linked to those of the greater environmental whole.

From this perspective, less, in the way of human impact on the Earth, can indeed be more. Growth is a good thing that has been carried too far. We spend our ecological capital as if there were no tomorrow and run an environmental deficit. In the relatively near future, some feel, the notes will come due. Our self-interest is very definitely involved. If we sink that ark, we go down too.

Respecting wilderness, then, is prudent as well as ethically enlightened. Its instrumental and intrinsic values converge on the distant perspective point of evolutionary biology. Evolutionists increasingly recognise that species co-evolve - in communities.

In respecting wilderness, we forgo economic advantages. Lumbering, farming and mining stop. Roads and buildings stay outside. We even limit our recreational options: limiting the use of mechanised transport, for example. Indeed the power of "recreation" as a justification for keeping

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Weak Links in heritage protection

THE spectre of hydroelectric development in Tasmania did not disappear entirely when the Franklin was saved in 1983. In the last few years Hydro Tasmania has developed a proposal to connect the Apple Isle to the Victorian electricity grid by an underwater 400MW high voltage cable called the Basslink.

Basslink, if approved, will affect the operation of hydro-electric schemes, including those on the Gordon River within the South West Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The provisions of the Commonwealth Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1999, fail to offer any protection to the World Heritage property arising from potential damages associated with the Basslink proposal.

If approved, the damage by the Basslink proposal will be caused through hydro-power supporting morning and afternoon peak electricity loads in Victoria, instead of

Power of the Wild

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land wild is in its twilight years; the Sun is rising on the new moral and ecological arguments.

Wilderness is the best place both to learn and to express ecological limitation. Its value as a moral resource is not in the least diminished by our staying out altogether. Properly managed and interpreted, designated wilderness could give us the inspiration to live responsibly and sustainably elsewhere. In wilderness is the promise of both biological and ethical repair. ■

*Roderick Frazier Nash is a professor emeritus of history and environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His *Wilderness and the American Mind* is now in its fourth edition (Yale University Press, 2001).*

the base electricity loads supported in Tasmania now. At these times, Hydro Tasmania will pass maximum water flows through the electricity generating turbines of the Gordon scheme. The Gordon River, in consequence, will run at flood levels twice a day to flatten out demand on Victorian brown coal fired power stations, which may then run a tiny bit more efficiently. There is, however, little likelihood of reducing greenhouse gas emissions because a large flow of baseload brown coal-fired power from Victoria into Tasmania will be stimulated.

The rising flood from peak-load hydropower will adversely impact upon the banks of the Gordon River by increasing the so-called "plimsoll line" from 2.5 to 4 metres. This increased flood inundation level in the World Heritage area will cause massive bank erosion, loss and damage to native vegetation, including *Leptospermum riparium* (a rare and endangered endemic plant). While the damage is potentially horrendous, it is perhaps only the loss of this one plant that is at issue legally, because the plant might be considered of World Heritage value. This plant, however, is on very flimsy ground when it comes to World Heritage protection.

Environmental assessment of World Heritage impacts for the Basslink proposal has fallen between the cracks. The proposal was to be dealt with in 1999 under 1974 Commonwealth environment legislation but this law was repealed without any transitional provisions when the new environment laws were proclaimed. As a result, the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 offers no protection to the property, or its values, from the impacts caused by the Basslink proposal.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness has been advised that a development activity may damage a world heritage property provided the resulting significant impact does not affect world heritage values listed in the nomination document for the property. In these circumstances a damaging development can go ahead without the approval of the Federal Minister for the Environment.

The previous Commonwealth legislation protected the World Heritage property, requiring developments to be justified in terms of the World Heritage Convention. The Convention refers to the protection, conservation and presentation of the property. By following the Convention, the original legislation protected the World Heritage property, not just the hard to define and nebulous values within it such as, in this case, the extent of *Leptospermum riparium* populations and whether these are affected significantly.

The Basslink proposal, however, should not be allowed to damage World Heritage simply because of a loophole in the law. The new Commonwealth legislation is a subtle way of re-establishing 'States Rights' over World Heritage areas without seeming to do so. Consequently World Heritage protection falls back almost entirely upon community-based conservation activism and any state laws protecting the area.

Naive developers and politicians will try their luck at developing World Heritage sites in Australia, but as Martin Mulligan and Stuart Hill, the authors of the *Ecological Pioneers* point out, Australians have a reputation for developing new ways to protect this fragile continent. Development affecting World Heritage could be the trigger for the third wave of environmental reform. ■

Securing Park Protection for Sydney's Catchments

FROM July 1, the NPWS can finally manage lands in key catchment areas of the Blue Mountains, declaring wilderness over the Kowmung Gorge and adding the water catchments at Blackheath and Katoomba to Blue Mountains National Park. In total, 40,000 hectares will be transferred to the NPWS. The additions comprise 20,000 hectares of new park and a further 20,000 hectares that are currently park land but, through historical accident, the rights to these lands were retained by the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA). After transfer the NPWS will continue current management to protect water quality and ecological integrity. One advantage of NPWS management in these inner catchment areas is their traditional "risk averse" approach to development. Relieved of the inner catchments, Sydney Catchment Authority will have more capacity to embrace the challenge of restoring the outer catchment areas. In this way, the two corporate cultures can better complement each other and management duplications for the highly protected inner catchment will be eliminated.

Environmental endurance award

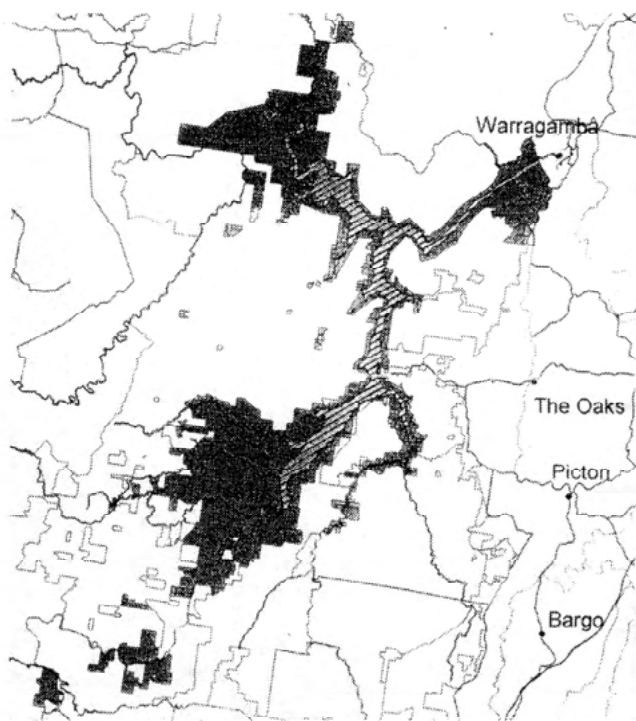
The Colong Foundation for Wilderness has awarded its first award for environmental fortitude to Environment Minister Bob Debus for remorselessly pursuing the transfer of catchment

land to the NPWS. Few ministers would have drafted two laws and developed various strategies and reviews to reform moribund catchment management.

The campaign to transfer catchments to the NPWS actually started in 1994, when the Fahey Government agreed with conservationists to allow the transfer of catchments to the NPWS through the act that established the Sydney Water Corporation. It was assumed that the land transfer would then be a simple formality.

In February 1995, the then Labor Opposition proposed the addition of key water catchment areas in the Blue Mountains and the Kedumba Valley to adjoining national park areas. This election policy intended that Sydney Water Corporation (as it was then called) would pay the NPWS for catchment management services. This minor policy should have been achieved in three months, but due to determined bureaucratic obstruction it took seven years.

In 1998, after preliminary scuffles over the lands in question, Sydney Water Corporation adopted the view that a specific legislative provision to facilitate the land transfer with bipartisan support was not sufficient. The Corporation argued that the transfer was to be at no cost to the Corporation, and financial recompense for its freehold lands was necessary. The Corporation thought it needed compen-



Core areas of the southern division of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area have been reserved in national parks after a 7 year struggle.

sation for lands it would no longer manage. So, while the debate continued, and contrary to the intent of Parliament, the NPWS continued to subsidise the Corporation by providing free visitor, fire and pest species management services for the catchment.

Bug Driven

Bureaucratic Reform

The 1998 outbreak of cryptosporidium and giardia in our water supplies tarnished Sydney Water Corporation's reputation for pure water, perhaps unnecessarily, as no epidemic of belly aches ever developed. The bug issue put catchment management into the spotlight and the subsequent

inquiry by Peter McClellan QC led to the creation of the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA).

McClellan's final report confirmed that the inner catchments should become national park. He also recommended that the NPWS should be "adequately resourced to manage Special Areas."

At the time of the water crisis, the *Colong Bulletin* suggested that the fault may be due to insufficient funding of management and infrastructure renewal, with too much revenue being provided to government by the SCA. Unfortunately, the Sydney Water Catchment

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Securing Park Protection

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Management Act 1998, which set up the Authority, allowed continued payment of dividends to the State's coffers. These concerns are even more relevant today. According to the Opposition, the Authority will have to increase its contribution to the State by eighty percent.

The new Authority had, by the end of 1999, developed a draft Strategic Plan of Management for the water catchments but it was not completed until mid-2001. The Plan ensures water quality and ecological integrity, and also establishes the working arrangements between the NPWS and the Catchment Authority, including the 2,584 sq. km. Warragamba Special Area.

The new catchment management act required that the catchment lands be reviewed and, in June 2001, Minister Debus determined that these lands should be managed as national parks. Then, a further piece of legislation, the National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Transfer of Special Areas) Act 2001, was made to enable the NPWS to manage the catchments and to be paid for these services by SCA.

One year later, and the lands in the 1995 policy have been transferred. For the time being, the Woodford, Woronora and Metropolitan catchments will still be managed by SCA because of unresolved mining and public safety issues. By the end of 2003, when the State Conservation Area provisions of the new national parks act are in effect, these remaining catchment lands will be transferred.

Meanwhile, the Authority has provided about \$2.8 million to the NPWS for management of these new areas. We understand that the Public Service Association considers the additional money is sufficient for care and maintenance only. The NPWS has sought \$15 million to address pest management and necessary remediation works to ensure our catchments are preserved. The Colong Foundation has proposed a site inspection of the catchments for representatives of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal so that an adequate level of funding can be independently assessed. ■

Paving our Coastal Paradise

by Fiona McCrossin

PEROUSE the real estate section of practically any newspaper in NSW and you will see the persistent advertisements flogging our coast as one big development site: "absolute oceanfront"; "direct beach frontage"; "the beachfront lifestyle that most can only dream of"; "blue chip development site"; "has been approved for 3 apartments - it could carry 4."

Even more insidious is the surreptitious transfer of coastal lands from one corporation to another, in order to achieve rezoning outside a regional planning context. An example of this is the disposal of old colliery land holdings leading to windfall profits for entrepreneurs who obtain the necessary rezoning.

Given the current rate of development, and a predicted coastal population increase of 60 per cent in the next 25 years, it is essential that coastal planning focus on the protection of the remaining natural areas.

The NSW Coastal Policy, released in 1997, stated that coastal lands with conservation values would be assessed and appropriate tenures, reservations, zonings and regulations would be put in place to protect and conserve them. It called for local councils to make new environmental plans consistent with the policy and to adopt planning and development controls specified in the policy "where appropriate". Open space and land with conservation value were to be classified by local councils as community land under the Local Government Act and the NPWS was to negotiate voluntary conservation agreements (VCAs) with landowners. Future expansion or redevelopment of urban and residential areas, including the provision of infrastructure, was to be contained, avoiding or at least minimising, impacts on environmentally sensitive areas. Any "major" rural residential rezonings

in areas with conservation values were to be contingent on rural residential release strategies. Regional open space networks and corridors were to protect natural habitats and environments.

Five years after the policy was introduced, the Coastal Council's annual report still complains of implementation problems, particularly the intransigence of local councils to prepare planning and settlement strategies consistent with the policy's objectives. Many councils consider that pre-existing instruments are satisfactory. For example, a broad range of permissible uses in environmentally sensitive zones remain unchanged, including those adjacent to foreshores and for new rural residential developments. Glaring gaps remain in major vegetation corridors.

In addition, land clearing without consent is continuing, often by landholders seeking to degrade biodiversity values in order to improve opportunities for development. Given such blatant tactics by landowners, it is not surprising that the report also recognises that the process of negotiating VCAs is largely unsuccessful in the coastal zone.

A discussion paper titled "Coastal Design Guidelines for New South Wales" released in December last year criticised the 1997 Coastal Policy for not proposing adequate controls on development applications (DAs) and then attempted to address the visually and ecologically disastrous planning decisions that produce a death by a thousand cuts through development sprawl along coast. Planning controls are too often reactive, responding to developer demand, with little regard for the impact on the surrounding areas. The problem is, the discussion paper may

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Our planners advise that 50 million people in Australia would mean 10.7 million people in Sydney. All vacant land in the region not already constrained by national parks, state forests, water catchment areas and flood plains would be laid over with new multi-unit housing. This would dramatically change Sydney's urban character: high-rise from ocean to mountains; chronic congestion. More like a mega-city than the booming, liveable urban environment we have built in recent years.

Bob Carr, in the June 2002 newsletter of Sustainable Population Australia.

Even suggesting that a future world may not necessarily involve economic growth is enough to cause most conventional economists to hyperventilate. But common sense tells us that we can't go on indefinitely increasing our resource use and putting pressure on natural systems. About half of the earth's surface has now been transformed for human needs. Telling people that growth can go on forever is, to paraphrase Grose, the well-trodden path to political popularity but it is just irresponsible.

Professor Ian Lowe, in the June 2002 newsletter of Sustainable Population Australia.



Paving Our Coastal Paradise

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be little more than an exercise in "raising awareness about urban design principles and how they are relevant to the coastal areas of NSW" and it opens with the obligatory disclaimer about it not being official policy.

The paper deals with different degrees of coastal settlement and the challenges each faces. These range from consolidation and remediation for existing cities and towns to attempting to hold back more of the same for the smaller minimally populated villages and hamlets. Therefore, we move from a pragmatic approach for existing overdevelopment in the towns and cities to a much more sensitive approach to environmental planning and management for areas as yet minimally damaged. The Government should adopt as policy its key recommendation, that containing sprawl around

small coastal settlements will prevent environmental damage.

Further, the paper advocates that planning of vegetation corridors should precede development. If such corridors are to work, developers must respect them. The location and design of corridors must be an absolute priority and should not be restrained to those lands unsuitable for residential development.

While the paper valiantly attempts to protect public land from the encroachment of private settlement, it does not adequately address retention of foreshore areas. For example, in the case of new housing developments, settlements are to be separated from the foreshore by one of either parkland and/or roadway and/or bushland reserve. Surely roads and settlement should be stopped from encroaching on our foreshores? Extensive coastal reserves are necessary to retain land for its ecological integrity and public, not just private use.

In June 2001, the Premier announced an \$11.7 million coastal protection package to provide a planning blueprint for the state's coast. The package foreshadows: a comprehensive coastal assessment (CCA) to be completed over the next three years, which will determine those parts of the coast which are suitable for development and those which require protection; a coastal protection state environmental planning policy (SEPP); extension and updating of the Coastal Policy; and amendments to the Coastal Protection Act 1979. The package seeks to centralise the more contentious planning issues, while leaving the majority of the DA determinations to local councils. It remains to be seen whether such measures work, particularly in relation to the continuing dominance of developer driven local councils in coastal planning. In the future, however, concerned local residents may have more mechanisms to control coastal development. ■

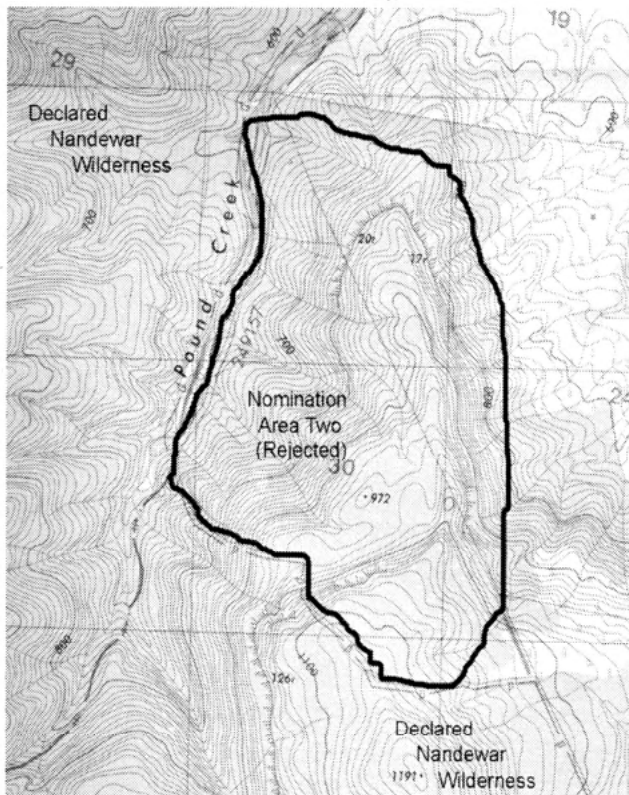
The Kaputar Kafuffle

by Keith Muir

THE NPWS Kaputar wilderness assessment apparently has every farmer in the state hopping mad, or so NSW Farmers, a rural lobby group, would like you to think. The upshot of an awful lot of local farmer hysteria about national park land grabs and falling property values produced precisely what they wanted. It yielded a compromised wilderness assessment that omits wilderness land located on private property adjoining the Kaputar National Park.

The Kaputar wilderness assessment is so flawed that it is hardly worth the effort of making a submission on it. The proposed additions total only 8,877 hectares and are perhaps manifestations of the NPWS wanting to get the assessment over with as soon as possible. When the assessment report was open to public scrutiny, this rushed approach actually caused many times the controversy and conflict.

The NPWS failed to identify any wilderness in its assessment report. Instead, it sought the opinion of its farmer neighbours, thereby empowering the strongest wilderness opponents to put a strong case for excluding their land from the formal identified wilderness area. Further, the affected farmers were also not informed that by gifting the rugged peaks, gorges, rare moist forests and cliffs that the Colong Foundation nomi-



Pound Creek Gorge, one of the spectacular areas rejected by the NPWS. The left side of the gorge is protected wilderness, while the cliff-lined right side has been rejected.

nated as wilderness they could receive a big tax break from the Federal Government under its new philanthropy scheme. These very steep and uncleared bushlands around Kaputar National Park are virtually useless for stock grazing.

Under the new tax concessions, farmers can be financially better off by gifting lands with no commercial production potential to wilderness protection. As a result, NSW Farmers' anti-wilderness campaign actually disadvantages farmers.

So everyone's a loser. For this reason, the Colong Foundation has asked Environment Minister, Bob Debus, to ensure the wilderness is reassessed

properly and that affected farmers understand that wilderness protection can benefit them. Unfortunately, elements of the NPWS believe that Kaputar farmers hate wilderness so much that no amount of new information would change their current attitude. This is simply wrong. Self interest is a powerful motivator, and even if some farmers do hate wilderness, they may like the savings gained by reducing their tax burden.

The missing wilderness areas of concern

Reassessing the wilderness would add about 7,000 hectares of wilderness over private lands to the identified area. All

these lands are very steep, adjoin the existing wilderness national park and could not be cleared without massive soil erosion.

The omitted areas include: Castle Top Mountain, which is a cliff-lined peak (hence the name) – adjoining the north-western part of the park, it has been a mecca for bushwalkers for many years; Deep Creek gorge, where the current wilderness boundary cuts across the ravine; Pound Creek gorge, where one side of the creek in the gorge is in the wilderness and the other is not; and various northern outliers of the Nanadawar Range and wet forests that were excluded in the east around Bobbiwaa Peak.

The South Coast charcoal woodchipping mill will threaten catchment values, 150 existing sawmill jobs, the fishing industry, oyster growing and the 6,200 nature tourism jobs in the region. In return the forest miners are promising somewhere between 20 and 50 jobs. The charcoal plant will more than double native forest logging in the region. There is already an unsustainable supply of up to 65,000 tonnes per year of woodchips taken to the Eden chip mill from the South Coast Forests.

David Trinder, *The Sydney Bushwaker*, June 2002.

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PROGRESS OF THE FOUNDATION

The Colong Foundation is the longest-serving community advocate for wilderness in Australia. It has initiated or been part of Campaigns that have secured over a million hectares of national parkland, most of which is wilderness. But a further million hectares of wilderness in eastern NSW is still not reserved under the Wilderness Act, although much of the area is now in national parks.

Now more than ever the Colong Foundation needs your support. Well financed anti-conservation lobbies, representing resource development, 4WD enthusiasts, equestrian and commercial tourism interests, have greatly increased development pressures on wild places.

The Foundation originated as the Colong Committee which was appointed in 1968 by a meeting of conservation societies to prevent quarrying of Colong Caves. Shortly afterwards the committee extended its objective to cover the saving of the Boyd Plateau from becoming the site of a 15,000 acre pine plantation. Both objectives had been achieved by 1975 when three new

objectives were adopted. The first of these was the creation of a Border Ranges National Park, an objective which escalated to become the rainforest campaign. The other objectives were the creation of a Greater Blue Mountains National Park and a Kakadu National Park. The rainforest parts and Kakadu are now World Heritage Areas. The Greater Blue Mountains Park is in being in

fact, though not in name. Campaigns for the Gardens of Stone and Nattai National Park have been successful. The Foundation's proposal for a Wilderness Act was accepted in 1987. It has been supplemented by the Red Index of Wilderness now being up-dated and extended to other states. It has successfully campaigned for the listing of the Blue Mountains as World Heritage.

It is at present working for the protection of threatened wilderness in NSW; the preservation of national parks from commercial development and damaging use; and the preservation of old growth forests.

THE COLONG FOUNDATION

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