



# THE COLONG BULLETIN

Bulletin 197

THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS LTD  
**PROTECTING WILDERNESS AND NATIONAL PARKS**

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"What I am hearing is in fact an ideological argument against National Parks, instead of something based on facts." **Brian Gilligan on 'The World Today' ABC Radio, 21.1.2003**

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# ***The Environmental Achievements of NSW Politicians***

by Keith Muir

The Colong Foundation does not advise members who to vote for. Instead the following information on the environmental performance of the parties in some key policy areas is provided:

### **Parks and Wilderness**

The Coalition has adopted disturbingly criti-

cal policy positions on national parks and the Parks Service. During the Game Bill debate it advanced amendments to allow hunting in national parks. It has voted for what was effectively a wilderness abolition bill by Malcolm Jones - the third time the Coalition has voted for destructive anti-wilderness legislation since 1993. Late last year the Coalition Par-

ties made repeated media statements demanding environmentally destructive broad area burning of national parks. In addition, Opposition Leader, John Brogden, has called for the Army to bulldoze 100 metre wide buffers around the parks (a program that would clear 6 per cent of the national park estate). Other Coalition members have reiterated a call for

grazing of national parks. These park policies are worse than any advanced by the Greiner or Fahey Governments, or by previous Coalitions, when in Opposition. If the current Coalition Parties gained control of the critical Upper House, their stated policies would obliterate the wilderness estate that this

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## **Environmental Achievements**

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organisation has worked to protect for over 30 years.

By contrast, the Carr Government has created 823,599 ha of new national parks since 1999. This includes 297,000 ha of reserves created in far western NSW, 282,000 ha reserved in Southern NSW, including major additions to the Murrumbidgee National Park, and a further 73,000 ha in northern NSW, bringing the national park estate to 5.9 million hectares. However, wilderness forests were not protected at Badja, Tabletop, the Deua River headwaters, Big Dubbo Hill north of Kosciuszko National Park, and Timbarra and Cataract on the North Coast. It is also frustrating that the 273,500 ha of announced wilderness areas have not been declared, and promised parks for the Central West and the Goulburn Regions were not reserved before Parliament rose in December. The Coalition's response to these initiatives was to repeatedly oppose the enabling legislation creating the new parks. The Coalition also opposed improvements to the protection of endangered species and sought to impose economic considerations on the protection of rare species.

The protection of wilderness has slowed since 1999. At the time of writing this article just 45,936 hectares has been added to the wilderness estate, only one new wilderness being created, the Grose, and one wilderness addition, to Kanangra-Boyd. However, it should be recognised that since 1999 the Government has spent around \$5 million to acquire a further 32,000 ha of wilderness land through the Dunphy Wilderness Fund.

Funding for national parks has increased from an average of around \$42 million under the previous Coalition administration to \$239 million last year. This translates to an expenditure of \$40/hectare on parks. The Government also broadened the nature conservation umbrella by creating a Nature Conservation Trust to foster conservation on privately owned land.

On a more sour note, the Govern-

ment passed specific ski resort development legislation that stripped control of the ski resorts from the NPWS. The recent fires have again demonstrated how resorts do not belong in national parks because of the very damaging back burning necessary to protect them. This is just another example of their expanding ecological footprint, and the new legislation will accelerate these inappropriate developments.

The Government's major review of the national parks legislation was partly a disappointment, which failed to implement promises to strengthen wilderness protection and progress the reservation of wild rivers. The Act provides for 'adaptive reuse' of existing buildings and facilities in park areas and the granting of additional access rights to enclaves of private lands within national parks, and both will encourage inappropriate development. The legislation did, however, tie conservation objectives into the implementation of the Parks Act and clarified park management planning principles by incorporating a vast raft of amendments moved by Richard Jones (52), the Greens (9) and the Democrats (2). The Coalition parties did not oppose the new parks legislation.

In other issues relating to public land, in Sydney, the Government planned to sell off Sydney Harbour foreshores at Olympic Park on Homebush Bay and at Callan Park, Rozelle. The amendments that would have blocked land disposal under the Olympic Coordination Authority Dissolution Bill were moved by Hon Richard Jones MLC (Independent) and the Hon Ian Cohen MLC (Greens) but were not supported by the Opposition or the Government. In the case of Callan Park, the Opposition supported legislation by the Greens, Democrats and other progressive Upper House cross benchers to prevent the sale of foreshore lands. However, the inconsistent application of the Opposition's public lands policy is underscored by the subsequent debate over the new Sporting Venues legislation where the Coalition again missed a major opportunity to safeguard public lands.

## **Land, Water and Fire**

The Government's performance was particularly disappointing on reform of land clearing and water use. Land clearing in NSW continues at unsatisfactory levels (over 60,000 ha was cleared in 2001) and irrigators still have little incentive to conserve water due to generous water licensing, farm dam, riparian and harvestable rights policies. Nearly all western flowing rivers can still be virtually pumped dry, thanks to lobbying by NSW irrigators.

The strong leadership shown in returning 21 per cent of water flow to the Snowy River (28 per cent promised in the long term) has not been translated into other water policy areas. A Water Management Act was introduced in 2000 but it is yet to be effectively implemented. Meanwhile, the Coalition continues its push for farmers to be compensated for any reductions in water rights, even when rivers are more than 100 per cent allocated and there are more "rights" than water. Another very retrograde step was the Government's abolition of the popular Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust that was broadly supported by the community and doing an effective job.

The Government's Game and Feral Animal Control Act allows hunting of feral animals, but in doing so undermines pest control programs, because recreational hunters will work to expand the range and numbers of pest species, for example by releasing pigs onto public lands where they were not previously present.

New legislation was created to establish the Western Lands Advisory Council but the past practice of subsidising lease charges was allowed to continue. The Greens, however, succeeded in securing an amendment to have rental figures reported in the Budget. Richard Jones secured environmental representation on the new Advisory Council, against the loud protests of the Coalition, who described conservationists as the "forces of evil."

New fire management legislation was introduced in 2002 to require

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# Green Gully Wilderness

With your help, Green Gully, the last great stronghold of the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, will become NSW's newest wilderness.

by Keith Muir

EVERYONE can help, because every \$100 donated to the Dunphy Wilderness Fund will protect a hectare of Green Gully wilderness (see the enclosed brochure).

As readers of this *Bulletin* would know, the Dunphy Wilderness Fund was established in 1996 in memory of the conservation efforts of the Dunphy family, and has helped save key areas like Chaelundi on the New England escarpment west of Coffs Harbour.

To help with these wilderness protection efforts, the Foundation for

National Parks and Wildlife, an independent fund raising organisation, has agreed to organise a major fundraising initiative.

## **Green Gully is a special place**

Situated about halfway between Walcha and Port Macquarie, Green Gully lies on the rugged 'fall country' in the headwaters of the Apsley River and is part of the identified Macleay Gorges wilderness area. The property contains some of the most spectacular gorge, spur and ridge scenery in NSW. Its escarpment areas

of rock outcrop, clothed in World Heritage value dry rainforests, create the perfect refuge for rock wallabies.

The 13,000 hectare Green Gully property links with a further 3,456 hectares of currently isolated national park. So acquisition of this property will consolidate 16,000 ha of precious wilderness. In this way the entire Yarrowitch Gorge will be protected, as well as Green Gully.

## **Green Gully inspection**

In October 2000 I visited the Macleay Gorges wilderness and quickly realised that the few remaining large leasehold properties in the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, like Green Gully, held the key to effective management of the area. Green Gully came as a pleasant surprise, as an area of rough rainshadow gorge free of weeds, rabbits and foxes. In November 2002, a year into the drought of the century, Henry Gold and I visited Green Gully and the property still had grass cover. Only a few cattle remained in Green Gully, but there were many Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies.

Most interesting to me was Green Gully's dramatic broad acres that will delight bushwalkers. The property has many classic grassy ridges that lead to dramatic gorges with the occasional swimming hole and, all around, grand vistas of mountain peaks, particularly of Tooth Rocks, which



*Green Gully is the last stronghold of the threatened Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby*

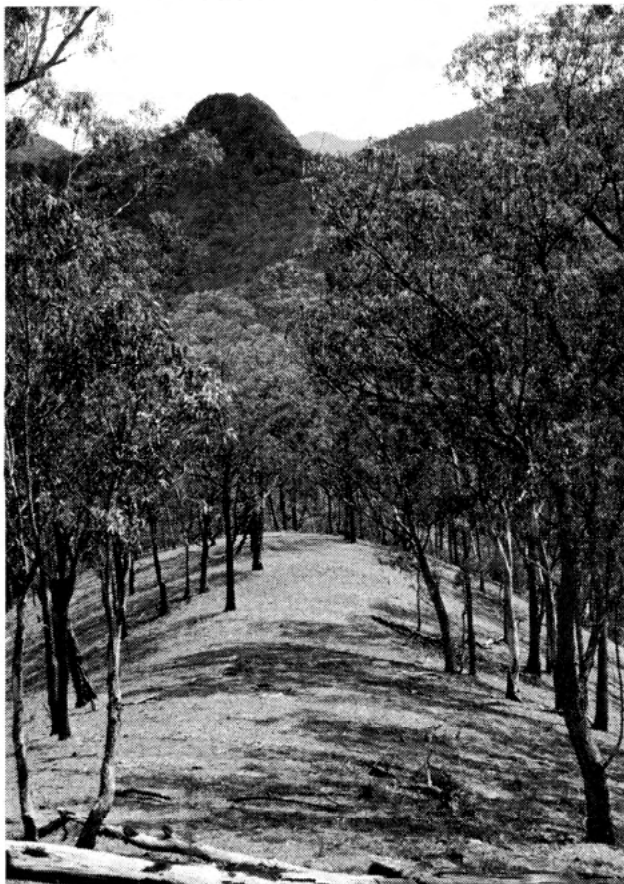
is visible from most places on the property.

The view from the edge of the tableland to the north, out over the Yarrowitch and Apsley Gorges, is particularly spectacular. But then, only a kilometre or so to the south, is another view point over Green Gully to a place laconically called 'The Rocks' which is equally spectacular.

The four days we were there was not enough. Apsley River and Green Gully offered swimming, rock wallabies were found almost everywhere, while in Cedar Creek the last stands of red cedar have survived.

For Henry, the haze of bushfires blazing along the coast made Green Gully particularly frustrating because it was almost impossible to adequately capture the magnificence on film. Time did not permit exploration of the tall open forests and rainforest gullies of the Front Tablelands area, an isolated pendant of the New England Tableland. Another visit is planned to explore that part of Green Gully. ■

*Classic ridges and wild rivers make Green Gully a bushwalkers paradise.*





## **Environmental Achievements**

*continued from 2*

urban planning and development control to consider bushfire risk with areas being zoned: extreme; high; and moderate fire risk. The new law also requires bushfire hazard reduction work to report on any impacts to threatened species or sensitive vegetation, so that environmental risks are considered as well as property risks. The Coalition parties did not oppose the legislation, which is interesting given their subsequent vituperistic criticism of Government performance on managing fire risk.

### **Energy**

Environment groups applauded the Government's Greenhouse friendly legislation that requires energy retailers to meet enforceable greenhouse benchmarks. A first for Australia! The Coalition supported the legislation, and the National Party proposal to tie greenhouse penalty payments to greenhouse gas reduction programs was a welcome initiative broadly supported in the Parliament. The Government also banned the burning of native forests for electricity, including forest residues. Genuine green renewable energy programs encourage expenditure on energy conservation, wind farms and solar energy where the potential for greenhouse savings are greatest. The Greens proposed pricing structures that would encourage green energy. Unfortunately, the major parties did not support this proposal, preferring competition to be focussed on least cost pricing.

### **Transport**

The Government initiated the Parramatta Rail link and, in subsequent legislation, to obtain lands for it to pass through Land Cove National Park, the Greens negotiated the addition of Browns Waterhole to the park for the area of Lane Cove River to be affected. Concern was raised because the deal was made before the environmental impact statement and development proposal had been exhibited.

Bus transport was also strengthened in 2001 by the creation of bus-only transitways and the promotion

of non-diesel fuel buses. On the down side, the Government approved the Cross City Tunnel, a massively expensive underground road project, and the western orbital. Both continue to strengthen the influence of the motor vehicle as transport.

### **Marine Parks**

Fully protected marine reserves were expanded by 13,000 ha during the last four years, with a 4,250 ha no-take sanctuary at Jervis Bay and a 8,650 ha no-take sanctuary around the Solitary Islands. A Cape Byron Marine Park was created, but without a marine sanctuary.

Legislation was passed in 2000 strengthening the Marine Parks Act to allow for park closures where areas are under threat, even where existing interests are present. Also, a provision was created requiring the additional approval of the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Fisheries where development is proposed in a Marine Park. The Greens and Democrats supported the legislation and proposed positive amendments that were accepted by Government, but the Opposition opposed the Bill.

### **Mining**

The State Conservation Area reserve category was created in 2002 by the new National Parks legislation but no additional conservation measures were provided for these areas. Mineral exploration in these reserves is not subject to detailed environmental impact assessment and, once a mining lease is issued, the public cannot defend the park by appealing breaches in operating conditions to the Land and Environment Court. The Government did not support the amendments proposed by the Democrats to ensure more accountable mining operations in these reserve areas.

In a disturbing development the giant Dendrobium Colliery, covering 2,000 ha of Sydney's water supply catchment, was approved. Underground mining in this area will cause major environmental damage, including cracking of creek beds and consequential loss of water supply. Although the mine was approved, a

new regulatory regime was established where a scientific panel will monitor damage and successive mining stages will be contingent on the approval by the Minister for Planning. These new arrangements also led to a broad review of on-going mining approval processes for existing underground collieries that will involve other agencies, including the Sydney Catchment Authority. These controls are a step forward in limiting damage from existing mines.

Overall, the Government made progress in nature conservation and controlling greenhouse gases though many identified wilderness areas remain undeclared, but much more work is necessary for private land vegetation and water conservation. The Coalition needs to be much more positive in adopting effective environment policies, while both the Democrats and the Greens will have to continue to work hard to keep the pressure up in the next term in the Legislative Council. ■

## **Democracy Diminished**

Mr. (Malcolm) Jones 1999 election was not unlawful, but it was emphatically morally flawed. He took the public, even the ICAC, for mugs, and his activity a year ago to establish a new list of bogus parties suggested he thought he could repeat the dose under tightened laws aimed at avoiding a repeat of the notorious "tablecloth" upper house election four years ago. As a result, voters wishing to steer clear of the established players have little idea who or what they are voting for. And that diminishes democracy.

Mr. Jones need not wait for the ICAC's formal findings. The community can see for itself his failure to meet even modest tests of probity for politicians. He should ease the community's pain by "voting" himself from office and resigning forthwith.

*SMH editorial 25-1-2003*

# Paying for Conservation

by Alex Colley

*Our continent is falling apart and it is not caused by drought – it is caused by poor policies and poor management.* The Wentworth group of concerned scientists in "A Way Forward" Nov. 2002

THERE is no question that Australia's natural resources are being depleted at an increasing rate. As the Wentworth Group writes: "Our land management practices over the past 200 years have left a landscape in which freshwater rivers are choking with sand, where topsoil is being blown into the Tasman Sea, where salt is destroying rivers and land like a cancer, and where many of our native plants and animals are heading for extinction. On 23rd. October 2002 one dust storm crossed the Australian continent and blew away an estimated 7 million tons of irreplaceable topsoil. We are taking more resources from our continent than its natural systems can replenish. That, by any definition, is unsustainable."

Many landowners have adopted land preservation methods. The Landcare program and Natural Heritage Trust have provided finance and many conservationists work voluntarily but, depletion of natural resources continues. The reason for this is obvious. The most effective conservation measures are costly to landowners, who would suffer reduced incomes. Billions of trees need to be planted on millions of hectares of rural land to overcome salinity if the 17 million hectares estimated to be at risk are to be saved. This means not only the cost of planting and fencing the trees but a reduction in farm land. Restoring river flow to 50,000 km of streams means a reduction in the water rights of irrigators. Prohibition of land clearing reduces property values. That is why, in NSW, only 2 of

the 705 alleged breaches of native vegetation laws have resulted in prosecution. The Dunphy Wilderness Fund acknowledges that wilderness management deprives land owners of grazing, logging and clearing rights and the same compensation principle should apply to other forms of conservation which impact on rural incomes.

There are two means of financing resource conservation. One is by taxation, which could be in the form of increased income tax or a carbon tax, or both. This would place the cost of conservation on the present generation of consumers, rather than future generations. Voters may initially reject this solution, but it is the only equitable course. For this reason, conservationists should support the proposal of Mr. Rick Farley, former head of the National Farmers' Federation, for an environmental levy. As reality bites, voters will listen. It is very appropriate that this proposal should come from farming interests. Until voters accept economic reality, the only means of finance is borrowing, but better debt than further depletion of the natural resources on which we are dependent. ■

## *Brigalow Belt South Unprotected*

The extremely fragile and significant ecosystems in Pilliga, Goonoo, Bobo and other smaller State Forest remnants of western woodlands are still being subject to poorly managed logging, hunting, trail bike riding, grazing and mineral exploration. The 58 threatened species identified during the assessment process have not been afforded any protection.

Bev Smiles in the  
NPA Journal Feb 2003

## *Alps and South East Forests World Heritage Nomination Update*

by Geoff Mosley

IN his official *World Heritage assessment: The International Significance of the Australian Alps*, Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick concluded that the world heritage values of the Alps rated above those of the Wet Tropics, Shark Bay, Fraser Island and the Central Eastern Rainforests of Australia.

Subsequently, the World Heritage Expert Panel made it clear that the main World Heritage theme of the region was the 'sea to snow' display of the eucalypt-dominated sclerophyll vegetation and that this would need to include the forests of Gippsland and Far South Eastern New South Wales.

With another proposed nomination in South Western Western Australia, the Alps/South East nomination would virtually complete the World Heritage representation of the Australian sclerophyll flora including the closely related heathlands and woodlands.

During the discussion of the Greater Blue Mountains nomination the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) argued strongly for the inclusion of these other areas. The Commonwealth finally conceded that IUCN had a point and said it would first bring the additional areas under new heritage legislation as 'national heritage areas'.

ACF has argued that there is no need to delay the nomination since there is no doubt about their heritage values. Reaching agreement between the four Governments involved (Commonwealth, NSW, Victoria and ACT) is the greatest challenge in Australia's World Heritage history. The end result though is well worth the struggle.

In the meantime it is essential that all plan revisions and resort proposals are considered in the context of the World Heritage values of the Alps/South East Forests. ■

# The Political Ravaging of National Parks

by Fiona McCrossin

IT will be some time before the ecological impacts of the fires in Kosciuszko National Park will be fully realised. While critics, from the Leader of the NSW Opposition to the Farmer's Federation, seek blame and retribution, little media time has been given to the ecological consequences to the Park. While fire fighters on the ground were determined to preserve life and property, each day the NPWS website revealed the increasingly large area of Park burnt. It became eerily easy to predict where the fire would head next, as backburning prioritised the protection of property, including the misplaced resorts of the Park's alpine region.

Blaming the NPWS for the fires became an appallingly transparent and insensitive ploy to oppose not only national park fire management, but the very parks themselves. Anti-conservation rhetoric was thinly veiled behind a "concern" for Park management.

This was no disparate crew espousing new agendas. Rather, the State and Federal Opposition, and the National Association of Forest Industries, used the situation to restate long held anti-park policies, using terms like "locked up" for national park creation and "sustainable management of forest waste" to gain exploitative access to conservation reserves.

As many people grieved while bulldozers pushed more and more emergency access routes into the Park, the anti-park and anti-wilderness lobby lay ready to pounce, claiming a need to keep these roads open after the emergency – the same groups that have always sought increased high impact access.

The Opposition's political ploy of blaming national parks for bushfires is simply a furtherance of their

fire policy, which includes: burning of seven percent or 400,000 ha each year; bulldozing 100 metre buffer zones on parks adjoining homes on the bushland fringe (a total area of 360,000 ha); allowing residents and private contractors to burn, slash and clear vegetation in national parks without any planning or supervision; and excluding "Greens" from Bushfire Management Committees.

Such policies were also evident when the Coalition supported Malcolm Jones' Wilderness Amendment Bill, which would have legitimised 4WD driving and horseriding in wilderness areas and precluded the declaration of any areas affected by any form of development.

#### Over the last five years:

- ☐ Less than 10% of fires that started in a national park moved outside the park boundary.
- ☐ Nearly a quarter (24%) of fires in parks started outside NPWS-managed areas and moved into a park.
- ☐ Most fires were caused by lightning (21%) and arson (19%) or suspected arson (17%).

NPWS website February 2003

During the height of the fire crisis, Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus and the Director General of the NPWS, Brian Gilligan, emphasised that calls for hazard reduction would not provide a magic cure: "The historical records showed that periodic extreme fire seasons, associated with prolonged drought, lead to extensive wild fires. It's the five per cent of really extreme fire weather conditions and extreme fires that cause 95 per cent of the damage, and that's what we have to face... We cannot fire-proof the Australian landscape."

In what must go down as one of the most transparent acts of timber industry opportunism for some time, Kate Carnell, once head of the Liberal Government in the ACT, now representing the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI), argued for Australia to copy a US President Bush initiative which changed the whole way US National Parks were managed – "lots more back-burning, but also active harvest-based management, thinning, getting rid of waste on forest floors in a sustainable manner in sensible areas ... what we're talking about is certainly hazard reduction, but also maintaining trails so there's capacity for fire crews to get into these areas which there isn't at the moment." (*The World Today*, January 21, 2003). The "waste" argument rears its ugly head again – waste for woodchips, waste for charcoal – anything but acknowledging the ecological imperative of a structurally diverse forest ecosystem. Brian Gilligan's reply to the argument was that "a lot of this sounds like a harking back to some good old days when we had grazing and when we had fire recurrently used by grazing operations as part of that regime. And that's something that was debunked by the science ... 50 years ago. And we shouldn't be harking back to that because ... Two hundred thousand sheep and 17,000 cattle in the alpine areas of Kosciuszko National Park didn't prevent the 1939 fires. So why would we come back and try to re-visit that science when it's been reaffirmed by every scientist who's looked at it ever since?"

Senior Federal Government figures claimed that state governments had declared too many national parks and couldn't man-

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## Political Ravaging of NPs

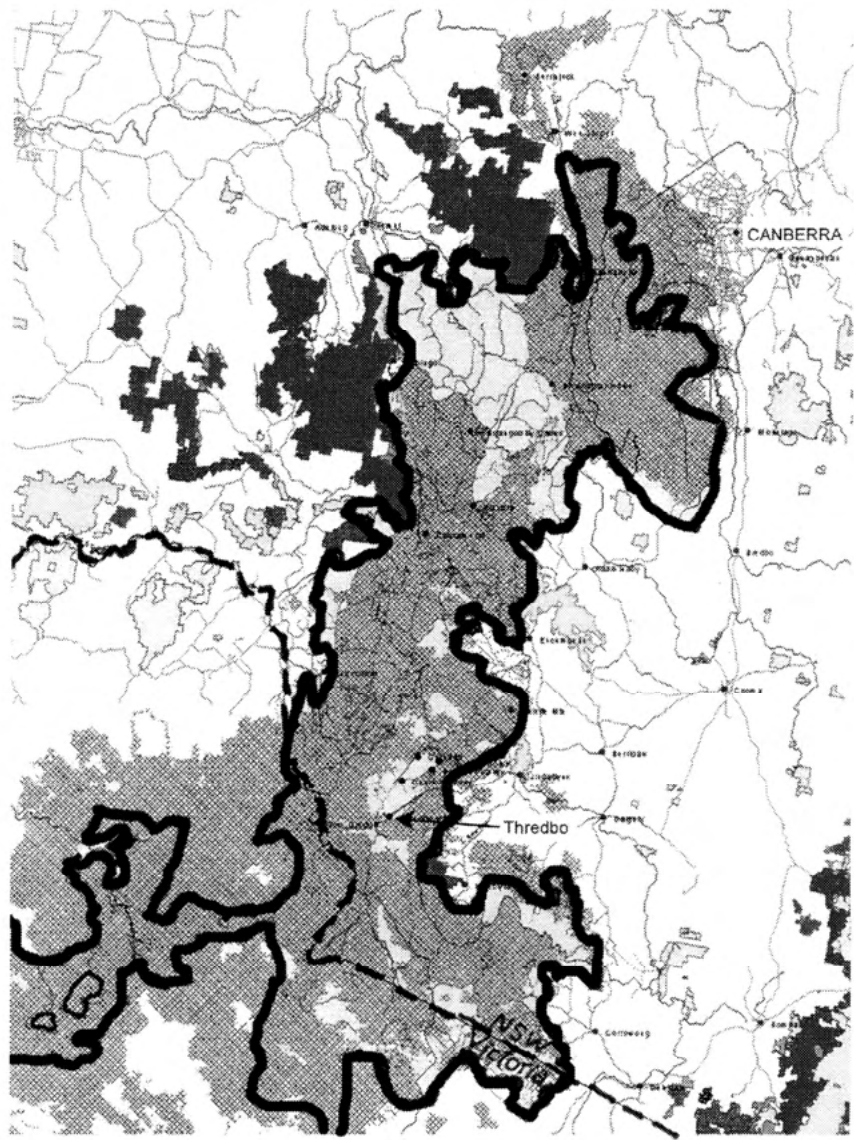
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age them properly and this became the central tenet of the NPWS/ National Park bashers for some time.

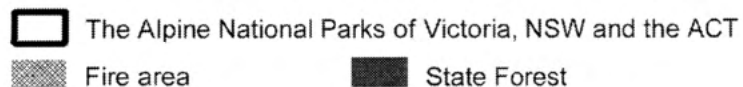
Wilson Tuckey, on ABC Radio's AM Wednesday, January 22, 2003, claimed: "I think it's got a lot more to do with the management of forests." Bob Debus replied "I sometimes think that he won't be happy until we've asphalted over Mount Kosciuszko."

Federal Green's Senator, Bob Brown, on the same program, referred to the argument that too many parks had been created as "bunkum" ... "the national parks weren't created by the New South Wales Government or anybody else. They're magnificent areas of natural wonder which the whole community applauds, wants to enjoy, which have been kept in reserve. There are huge commercial interests which are using the fires to further their own interests. There is no doubt about that. They are going to get worse and the huge social, human, economic costs themselves point to urgent action needed for us to try to be part of a world community reining in global warming rather than simply looking at a blame game on national parks."

A group of scientists from across Australia cautioned against the knee-jerk reactions of blame, recrimination, and simplistic 'solutions'. Speaking for the group, Professor Rob Whelan, Dean of Science at Wollongong University said "National parks are not the reason for these fires. More extreme hazard-reduction in forests will not guarantee protection from fires in severe conditions, but will threaten biodiversity ... the reality is that we are in a flammable, fire-prone environment. We need to accept that and find creative ways of coping. To suggest that these fires would not have occurred if there had been fewer national parks is a ridiculous proposition. These fires have already burned vast areas of grazing, pasture, plantation and native forest land, as well as national



**Extent of Fire Activity, 10th February 2003**



parks. Those of us who have worked in national parks and other reserves confirm that staff devote enormous attention to appropriate hazard-reduction, cooperation with neighbours, fighting wildfires, and protecting lives and property. Alongside this, they are required to manage to achieve effective conservation."

In the same media release, Dr Craig James, the President of the Ecological Society of Australia, which represents over 1,500 ecologists and land managers, pointed to the Society's position statement on fire in Australian ecosystems. The statement emphasised that biodi-

versity losses have been associated with high fire frequency and that there are conflicts between different land management objectives – especially the maintenance of biodiversity and the 'protection' of assets. ... "Evidence here and overseas suggests that weather plays a bigger part than fuel loads in the behaviour of fires burning under extreme conditions. Large areas that had recently been managed for fuel reduction burned in these fires. Areas with virtually no ground fuels carried canopy fires."

The Society's media release obtained little, if any, media response. ■

# Scientific Review of Kosciuszko's Fire Management

by Fiona McCrossin

IN the interim report of the Independent Scientific Committee, set up for the current review of the Kosciuszko Plan of Management, Bruce Leaver presents the early European settlement and grazing era as producing a very hazardous fire situation. Regular low intensity burns to encourage the growth of "green pick" favoured the growth of shrub species. This was exacerbated by the physical impact of grazing, which led to the degradation of ground cover and subsequent erosion. With shrub regrowth at the expense of grasses and intertussock herbs, the graziers were forced into an irreversible cycle of burning and grazing. Fuel loads actually increased due to the shrub and fine litter levels. In addition, the regime was vastly different to that under which the native vegetation had evolved.

The Hume Snowy Bushfire Prevention Scheme imposed three decades of fuel reduction, burning about 80 per cent of the Park, with only the alpine area above the tree-line excluded. Prescribed burning blocks of 6000 – 10000 acres were identified with arbitrary burning carried out each year. It was eventually concluded that the regime, aimed to protect catchments, was actually destabilizing them, through reduction of fuels (litter and herbaceous cover) below a level necessary for soil protection and stability. Further, the objectives for fuel reduction were achieved in less than 10 per cent of the burning blocks.

## The current Fire Management Plan

While the protection of human life and property is one of the Plan's main objectives, it also identifies the potential impacts of different burning regimes on environments, vegetation communities and animal habitats. One of its key objectives is the exclu-



*Main range from Carruthers. PHOTO: HENRY GOLD*

sion of fire from plant communities aged between 15 and 50-plus years. This restriction is in place in order to foster an old growth stage, which is currently restricted to only 10 per cent of the Park due to past management regimes.

A very high level of protection from fire is desirable in alpine, subalpine and frost hollow areas, moist forests and river valleys. For example, in the case of the sub alpine woodlands, this will achieve the age, species and structural diversity needed to provide optimal habitat for fauna. In addition, fire sensitive alpine ash communities require a high intensity fire once in their lifecycle at a frequency of about 100–150 years.

Fire management also has to take into account: the potential impacts to the karst systems such as Yurrangobilly, where smoke and ash may discolor cave formations and impact on cave hydrology; and the erosion consequences of low fuel loads.

Importantly, the ISC report also challenges prescribed burning of

lower elevation forests and woodlands, particularly white box, which actually yield fuel loads of less than the 10 tonnes per hectare quoted as necessary in fuel reduction programmes.

The NPWS has developed a hazard risk assessment process to determine where fuel reduction burning should be undertaken. Other areas of the Park have been identified for prescribed burning for vegetation and habitat manipulation. The report emphasises, however, that there are limitations to the effectiveness of prescribed burning and uncertainties as to whether fires will increase or decrease with global warming.

As was seen in the months leading up to the fire events in Kosciuszko National Park a burning program may not be achievable because of weather conditions. Further, the impacts of the prescribed burning may be as bad as the wildfire it was meant to exclude. Finally, reduced fuel loads will not reduce the rate of spread of wildfire in extreme conditions. ■



# Yengo Planning Principles & Precincts

The NPWS acquired the 1,582 ha Big Yango property in 2000 and has recently exhibited a 'Precinct Plan' for its development. The only problem is that the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, does not cover such plans. Precinct Plans have been used in town planning, but in this case the only claim to legitimacy is a two line reference in the draft plan of management. Apparently 'Precinct Plans' are an add on extra for the management of park visitor areas, but surely it would be better to publish an amending draft plan that would comply with statutory processes, particularly when proposing to increase park access and development.

The Precinct Plan proposes horseriding and 4WD vehicle access around Mount Yengo, that would, if approved, preclude the mountain, the central feature of the park, from inclusion in the Yengo wilderness area.

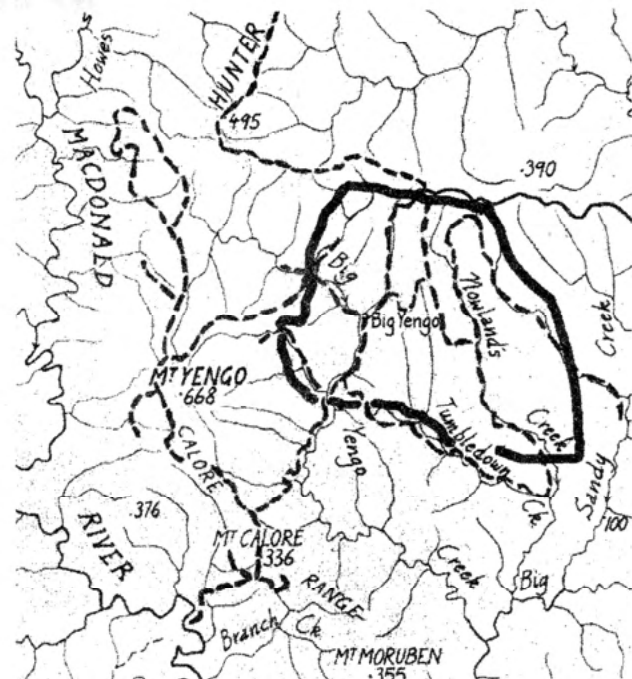
The Colong Foundation had proposed a two way road from the Big Yango property to the base of the mountain to provide vehicle access for Aboriginal cultural and environmental education purposes. This would permit the mountain and its surrounding high ridges to be declared as wilderness and it would also protect Aboriginal cultural sites from inadvertent damage by horseriders and 4WD vehicles. Horseriders could eas-

ily wander unaware over the rock engravings while looking for them and vehicle access has damaged stone engraving heritage sites elsewhere in the park.

The 'Precinct Plan' proposes to control access by permit, but the arrangements would be difficult to supervise, as there are simply too many users, keys and gates. Use by 4WD clubs, commercial operators, appropriate Aboriginal communities and the 'Friends of Yango' would over time disintegrate into unregulated use.

In effect, the 'Precinct Plan' cuts the eye out of the park and gives it to the 4WD enthusiasts and the horseriders. The homestead, an associated hut, and two or three vehicle-based campsites have been earmarked as a commercial opportunity. A business plan is to be developed for these facilities. Several 'trails' proposed in the 'Precinct Plan' for these high impact recreation uses pass through the identified wilderness, preventing wilderness protection in these areas.

The purchase of the Big Yango property should have been for nature conservation outcomes, not for high impact users. The Precinct's management is user-centred, with yards, paddocks and bridle trails identified for future use. Money spent on acquiring park land is wasted if the land is not used for preservation of the natural environment but for develop-



--- Big Yango 4WD vehicle and horseriding trails  
 — NPWS Identified Yengo Wilderness Boundary  
 (The Big Yango property was excised from the wilderness area)

ment of activities which could well be located outside the park.

Declaring Mt. Yengo and the adjoining scenic high ridges as wilderness is the best way to protect the Aboriginal cultural heritage of this outstanding area from the damage caused by horseriding and 4WD vehicles. Wilderness declaration of Mt. Yengo and the high ridges south and east would be consistent with the draft plan of management, protection of cultural heritage and wilderness values. It would meet the aspirations of the Aboriginal community to undertake tours through their country and to the mountain. It would also meet the aspirations of the community

at large who would have access to the broad open areas of Big Yango and the many opportunities to explore tracks and trails within the property, without compromising the wilderness area. ■

## MEETING DATES

*Meetings will be held at 2 p.m. in our Kent St. office on March 27th, April 10th and 24th, May 1st, 15th and 29th. The Annual General Meeting will be held on April 24th at 2pm followed by the general meeting.*

# Consolidating Blue Mountains Parks

A SCHEME for rationalising the public lands around the Blue Mountains townships has been developed by government agencies and the Blue Mountains City Council. The project is in two stages, with the first stage currently proposing 4,000 ha of additions to the national park estate, as well as 1,790 ha of regional parks. Stage 2 involves other more complicated parcels of public land that are currently divided between two or more government agencies.

The national park additions involve lands at Mount Irvine, Mount Wilson, Bell, Blackheath, Katoomba, and Leura, as well as the lower Blue Mountains. Mount Tinpot, above the Cocks River, is one of the planned additions, as well as the lands associated with many of the classic nature walks, waterfalls and lookouts of the Upper Blue Mountains. Other additions of interest include the Coachwood Reserve, Double Echo Point and East Megalong, through which the Six Foot Track passes, and Sassafras Gully and Florabella Pass near Springwood.

It is disappointing that several

areas of Crown land were omitted, such as Canyon Colliery, one of the most scenic abandoned mines in the world, and the Bonnie Doon lands at the head of the Six Foot Track, which was specifically acquired for addition to regional open space in 1994.

The Katoomba Airfield at Medlow Bath and the large block of land associated with the partly rehabilitated South Katoomba Sewage Treatment Plant are not part of this project but should be earmarked for later addition to the national park by rezoning the lands as a future national park addition.

## Aboriginal land claims

Much of the vacant and reserved Crown land in the Mountains has been subject to Aboriginal Land Claim and we understand that about 90 per cent of these claims will be granted to various Aboriginal Land Councils. Hundreds of hectares of land on the Blackheath Plateau are involved. Land adjoining the Jellybean Pool at Glenbrook, and other land containing upland swamps, Blue Gums and rainforests have also been claimed. These areas are nearly

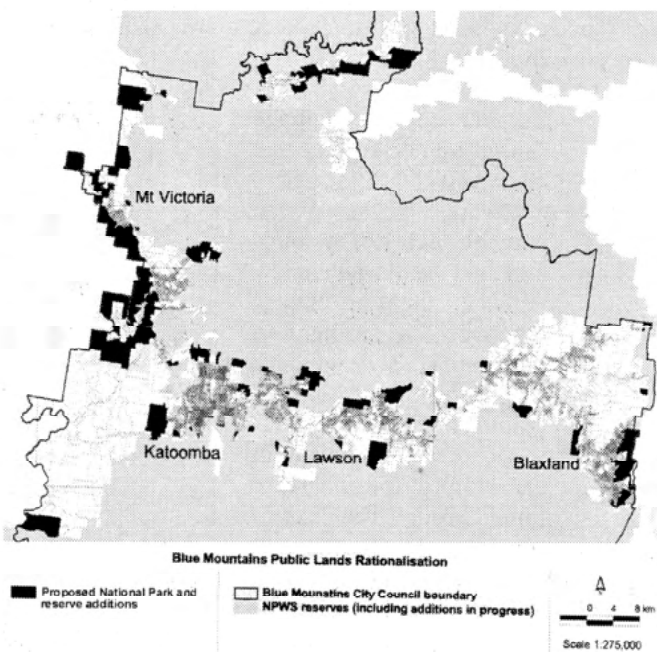
all zoned for environmental protection and should never be developed, but the pressure of paying council rates will no doubt attract calls from the Land Councils to rezone at least some of the land for development. There is also a risk that there will be a major disagreement over the fate of these lands between the local community and conservationists on the one side, and Aboriginal communities on the other.

There are several ways to resolve this problem, including voluntary Government acquisition of the land and rate relief. Voluntary acquisition of the affected lands by the Government may not be expensive because current zonings prevent development, including clearing. Another possible alternative is to trade development privileges within the towns for conservation of more sensitive lands, but this solution may compromise environmental outcomes.

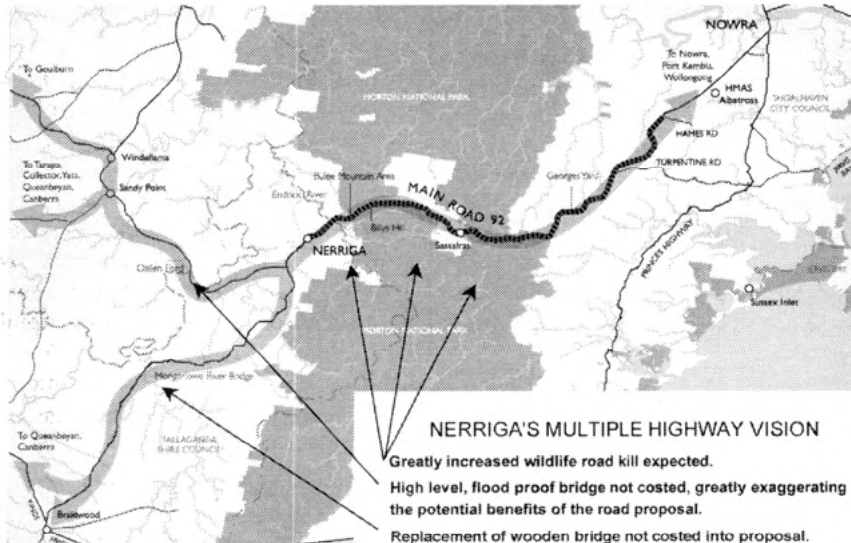
## Escarpment lands

The land rationalisation also includes some 460 ha of public land, possibly for addition to the Yellow-mundee Regional Park on the eastern escarpment overlooking the Cumberland Basin, but a much greater proportion of the remaining Crown lands are under Aboriginal Land Claim.

The more pristine and environmentally sensitive western escarpment from Shipley Plateau to Mount York is proposed as a new 1,660 ha regional park. Some of this area, particularly around the Shipley Plateau, has sufficient conservation value and integrity to be reserved as national park. The western escarpment is also a very popular rock climbing area. The proposed regional park should be strategically designed so that suitable areas of low environmental sensitivity and high resilience are identified and set aside for the climbers, under an appropriate NPWS management plan. ■



# ON THE ROAD TO NOWHERE



IN DECEMBER an unholy troika of the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, Shoalhaven City Council and the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services lodged a development application for a highway from Nowra to Braidwood. If the highway proceeds it will cut through the Morton National Park between the Ettrema and Budawang wilderness areas, causing a serious increase in wildlife road kills and heralding inappropriate development of remote rural villages such as Sassafras and Nerriga.

Not only does the project establish a development road through wilderness, the highway, that few would use, would be a tremendous waste of taxpayers money. Instead of reducing congested traffic for Shoalhaven's coastal communities, this proposal upgrades a remote dirt road, empty of traffic. The proposal's cost of \$80 million would be better spent on the Princes Highway where it would benefit many more people.

To make the project appear viable, traffic estimates assume that virtually every truck and tourist going to Canberra or Melbourne from the Shoalhaven area will use the road. Even increases in caravan towing tourists, and travellers diverting

from Sydney to Canberra's airport, are been factored in, along with a very healthy population growth. The net results of these assumptions are very modest road use estimates that really do not justify the investment.

Hidden project costs include expensive bridges over the Mongarlowe and Shoalhaven rivers that will be necessary to ensure the road is used by freight trucks. The economic assessment of the project omits the cost of the bridges but not the economic benefits that would flow from their use. But even with these assumptions the project is hard pressed to demonstrate an adequate positive benefit from the money invested. Ninety cents of every dollar invested in the project is lost, as the project returns only ten cents in benefits for every dollar spent.

About 46 hectares of heavily forested national park land will be excised and bulldozed to make way for the road. The environmental assessment predicts "large numbers of native animals" killed in traffic accidents. The project, being poorly funded, does not have purpose built wildlife underpasses. Instead, wildlife kills will be monitored in a particularly insensitive way, identifying key wildlife corridors after the

## *Environmental Disaster Averted*

Among the more grandiose proposals being promoted at present is a resurrection of the Bradfield Scheme - a 70 year-old plan to turn Queensland's coastal rivers inland across the Great Dividing Range to "drought-proof" the arid west. The Bradfield Scheme has been considered in great detail on numerous occasions over the decades, but, unfortunately, the concept does not withstand scientific or economic scrutiny.

Also, turning rivers inland would harm the environments of the rivers and the Great Barrier Reef would be lost, and at the same time we would be creating an inland salinity time bomb.

**The Hon Stephen Robertson, Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, quoted in ONPA News, Feb 2003**

road money is spent.

Like the railroads of the 19th century, the proposal reflects a 'Cargo Cult' mentality that considers highway construction will bring economic growth. The development cult extends to flogging off remote, fourth rate, unserved subdivisions near Nerriga. This proposal is mentioned in the environmental assessment and reflects an opportunism of the worst kind. The tiny Tallaganda Council has only 2,600 rate payers, half of which are absentee owners of rural small holdings, so the Council is very keen to develop more small holdings to collect rates (but not provide services to absentee landowners) so as to subsidise the unsustainable.

The Colong Foundation has never seen an environmental impact statement for a proposed highway that presents so many images of an existing picturesque, but totally empty road to explain the various issues and impacts related to its upgrade to highway status. The usual images are of congested roads to be relieved by an upgrade. Surely there are limits to our obsession with motor transport. A road to nowhere really is beyond what can be credibly supported by politicians, even with an election looming. ■



## Widespread hazard reduction burning **NOT** the answer

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service justifies frequent broadscale burning of the Fraser Island World Heritage area, which it describes as "ecological burning". In Wambaliman, the newsletter of the Bundaberg Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Merike Johnson describes the "senseless burning of native bushland" as follows:

*It is hard to believe that the Service does not know that frequent burning results in a loss of biodiversity and it creates a more fire prone environment. In an undisturbed forest, under a natural fire regime, the "fuel load" does not keep on building up with time but comes to an equilibrium where the amount of litter fall is balanced by the rate of decay. Natural ecosystems have their own fire retardant mechanisms which reduce the fire hazard but in regularly burnt areas these mechanisms are destroyed and more fire prone vegetation develops which creates a fire hazard.*

Johnson writes of the Christmas 2001 NSW fires that they "had little to do with 'fuel loads' but everything to do with the extreme weather conditions." He quotes Bob Debus, Minister for Emergency Services who said "It is just not possible to do fuel reduction programs that will overcome that kind of power. It is futile to expect that hazard reduction is going to do very much at all to stop fires of the magnitude we have experienced." He also quotes Phil Koperberg, NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner, who said "We are not about scorched earth policy, you don't want to get to a point where every square inch of NSW is burned every couple of years." These comments are equally relevant to this year's fires. The higher temperatures, increased climatic unreliability and increasing fire frequency forecast by the CSIRO are no doubt augmenting the effects of drought.

## Annual Conference of the Nature Conservation Council

AT LAST year's conference the following motions submitted by the Colong Foundation were carried:

- ✓ That the NCC call on the NSW Government to commission an independent scientific inquiry on how dingoes interact with the fox, dog, pig, cat and other introduced animal populations, and how to reduce their rate of predation on native animals.
- ✓ That the NCC urge the NSW Government to take the steps necessary to ensure that landowners with property identified as wilderness are informed by the NPWS of new taxation benefits under the Commonwealth Government's philanthropy programme where gifts of land and other assets made to the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife attract significant tax concessions.

- ✓ That the NCC write to the Minister for the Environment urging that:

(a) "wild horses" or 'brumbies' be defined as feral animals in plans of management and NPWS policies for all reserves established under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

(b) these feral animals be managed to reduce their numbers, with the aim of eradication in the shortest possible time frame, using the method which is the most humane and effective, that is aerial culling.

(c) the NSW Government remove the ban on the aerial culling of wild horses, so as to reduce animal suffering and achieve the National Parks and Wildlife Amendment Act 2001 nature conservation objective in a manner consistent with ecologically sustainable development.

- ✓ That the NCC inform the NSW Government that Memoranda of Understanding between park user groups and the NPWS are being misused to gain inappropriate access to parts of national parks already closed to access, identified wilderness and protected water catchment areas; and urge that these agreements be terminated.

Other motions of particular interest to the Colong Foundation were the National Parks Association pro-

posal for a Melbourne to Brisbane Conservation Link, a motion by the Wildlife Preservation Society to stop land clearing and a motion by Haydn Washington to create the Moffitt State Conservation Area over the Genowlan and Airly Mesas in the Capertee Valley. ■

## Hinchinbrook Channel Inquiry

*As reported in the November*

*Newsletter of the Wildlife*

*Preservation Society of Queensland*

The inquiry found that the Port Hinchinbrook development was 'a clear case for government in how NOT (our emphasis) to consider and deal with development applications in sensitive areas.' The expectations of the community, conservationists and scientists, were not met in this World Heritage Area. The serious environmental risks had been played down by various governments (state, federal and local), and those risks are ongoing. The state and local government attempts to short cut due processes have resulted in substantially increased costs in time, money and degradation to all parties.

## Religion Embraces Conservation

The Green's zeitgeist is the ecological belief that all of life is interconnected and that we are dependent on a system of relationships that are universal. The spirituality that flows from such a belief is to nurture and attend to these relationships - both those of the natural and human worlds.

This belief can function like a religion in giving a "meaning map" and hence a disciplinship path to walk that comes from awe for the organic interconnections.

Can the church acknowledge its need for renewal and be dislodged from its privileged place of playing chaplain to progress and religiously consecrating its triumphs? ... Scripture teaches that all of creation bears the image of the Creator, not just humans.

**Tim Costello - SMH 23-12-2002**

# THE COLONG FOUNDATION

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