



# THE COLONG BULLETIN

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THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS LTD

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**PROTECTING WILDERNESS AND NATIONAL PARKS**

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# BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE

by Alex Colley and Henry Gold

*Published by the Colong Foundation for Wilderness*

*Large format 280 x 280 mm, 136 pages, hard cover. High quality reproduction. 60 full page, colour photographs and 28 evocative black & white photographs from past campaigns reproduced in sepia toning.*

**RRP \$50.00**

THE Colong Foundation has just published Alex Colley's story on how the Blue Mountains achieved World Heritage listing. The book, lavishly illustrated by Henry Gold, is a tribute to the Greater Blue Mountains and all those who played a part in their protection. But unlike our previous publications – small volumes with soft covers – this is a large, hard cover 'coffee table' book that adequately presents Henry Gold's outstanding wilderness images.

But it is more than a 'coffee table' book, the book tells the story of the conservation campaigns extending over 70 years that saved the Blue Mountains. If Colong and its allies, like Colo Committee and the National Parks Association, had not prevented many of the development threats to the Mountains, they would not have qualified for World

Heritage listing. This happy conclusion does not belong to any one group, it is a community achievement.

Henry Gold's 60 full page colour images take the reader on a 240 kilometre long visual journey through the Mountains from the Hunter Valley south to the Southern Highlands. In addition, there are Henry's 28 classic black and white images used during the protection campaigns described in the text.

Much of the information for the book came from individual contributions and from articles written by members of the Colong Foundation and contributed to the Colong Bulletin. Chapter I, on the Dawn of Conservation, is derived from a paper by Jenny Ellis. Chapter V, on

*continued on page 2*

It's a disgrace. They could end clear-felling of old-growth forest tomorrow, and they should. They are over-committing Tasmania's forests in a way they will regret in a hundred years... And in their haste to clear the timber they waste and burn and haven't even done any work on the impact on the water system... Places like Launceston are having a dramatic change in the water pattern. It could be a long-term disaster.

**Liberal Senator Bill Heffernan,  
chairman off the Rural and  
Regional Affairs and Transport  
Legislative Committee.**

**SMH 28/6/2004**

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*The hard-leaved Scribbly Gum (Eucalyptus sclerophylla) is common on sandy soils throughout the Blue Mountains. [PHOTO: Henry Gold]*

### Blue Mountains World Heritage from page 1

the Wollemi, was written by Haydn Washington. Chapter VI, on the Nat-tai and Gardens of Stone additions to the park system, Chapter VII, on the World Heritage campaign, and Chapter IX on development threats were heavily reliant on input from Keith Muir, Director of the Foundation. Jim Somerville's detailed critique of the first draft of the book made it much more readable. Pat Thompson of Envirobook, our Chair-

man, provided professional advice that determined its format and is now assisting with the marketing of the book. The authors are also indebted to Rod Richie for editing the book, and to Fiona McCrossin and Bob Walshe who proofread later drafts. The colour map of the Blue Mountains was provided by Australian Geographic's Cartographic Division and was expertly amended by the Colong Foundation's honorary mapping draftsman, George Elliott.

The book was made financially

## ***NSW Land Sale***

In the Blue Mountains Conservation Society's Hut News August 2004 Brian Marshall writes: The Crown Lands Legislative Amendment (Budget) Bill was introduced to the Lower House as a cognate Budget Bill. This ensured that it passed through without amendment.

The Bill enables the Government to sell, for a pittance, more than 1 million hectares of public land, some of it in the Blue Mountains! How can this happen? The Department of Lands (under Minister Tony Kelly) will facilitate conversion of up to 11,500 individual leases, including 2,500 perpetual leases, from leasehold to freehold with a purchase price set at 3% of market value... Due to their high conservation values, some 2,000 of the leases were placed under a moratorium from sale in 1990.

Brian quotes the Premier as saying, in 1983, "There may not be a decision in this Parliament that will reverberate down through the years like this one... If the land is sold and much of it cleared, then there is no comeback... If there is environmental degradation... as a result of that land passing into private ownership, there is no way a future government, no matter how good its environmental contentions, can rectify that wrong."

possible by a generous grant from the Carr Government to assist in promoting appreciation of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Never before has a conservation group produced such a lavish full colour book. It has been two years in the making and we hope you will enjoy it.

Priced at \$50 we believe the book is a bargain, and, if ordered direct from the Colong Foundation office it will be mailed to you post free. This will mean that Colong will receive its full value instead of losing some \$30 in wholesale and retailing costs. Please use the enclosed flyer to place your order. ■

### Order a framed print from the book!

A framed print of any image by Henry Gold in the Book can be yours and would enhance the walls of a living room.

Henry is happy to receive enquires (phone 9451 3041).

To sample some of the images presented in the book, simply go to our website [www.colongwilderness.org.au](http://www.colongwilderness.org.au) and follow the prompts.

# The Trouble with Farming

By Alex Colley

THE State of the Environment Report for Australia, 2001 states that "Land degradation, including erosion, is still a major contributor of turbidity to waterways, nutrients and pesticides as well as loss of soil fertility... Large areas of acidic and sodic soils contribute to poor water quality, secondary salinity and loss of ecosystem function."

Most of the degradation of rural land that occurred in earlier days went unrecognised, but in recent years problems such as salinity and water pollution have become fully recognised. Nevertheless the practices which caused degradation, such as land clearing and over allocation of water, have continued. Farmers cannot be held responsible for the land clearing of earlier days, but they are responsible for its continuance. Twice as much land was cleared over the past 50 years as previously. Land clearance is the cause of salinity and, because forests attract rain, it contributes to prolonged drought.

At the NSW 2004 Farmers Association Annual Conference many complaints were voiced. The COAG decision that farmers should not have to

bear the full cost of reductions in water allocation was approved. Over allocation was the fault of the Government, not of the farmers. This does not prove, as the farmers assert, that this should be a precedent to compensation for not clearing land.

The chairman of the Association's Conservation and Resource Management Committee, Rob Anderson, said it was time the Association "stood up to the pathetic decisions" of the Independent Scientific Committee on threatened species because of its decision to list black box trees as an endangered plant community.

The Conference also decided that landholders should be allowed to store up to 20 per cent of the rain that falls on their land rather than the 10 per cent now allowed. The effect of this increased storage on river flow was not considered.

Mr Mal Peters, President of the Association, claimed that over 10 years (since Land Care started), the planting of trees by 600 farmers was proof of farmers' commitment to the environment. "This commitment to the environment," he said, "far outweighs any contribution from koala-suit-wearing greens collecting

money for the environment in Hyde Park". But a University of New England study found that Land Care had failed to make farmers any greener. Only 10 per cent of farmers had been actively involved in Land Care.

The National Farmers Federation has also claimed that Land Care has had "a huge effect." Nevertheless it has joined with ACF in advocating the expenditure of \$60 billion dollars of public funds to repair land degradation and \$2.5 billion to restore river flow.

The NSW Association's hostility to the environment movement is expressed in its opposition to national parks, which farmers describe as fire hazards and feral animal habitats. The Association has proposed that future parks should be State Parks, used for forestry, grazing and tourism for five years before becoming national parks, a proposal that would mean the destruction of natural value before the parks were declared. National parks consist mostly of land unsuitable for farming. NPWS management provides fire and feral animal controls which would not otherwise be available. ■

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## Legacy for Wilderness

From 1996 to 2003 the Federal Government gave \$15 million to the World Wildlife Fund and, over the ten years to 2003, \$5.56 million to the Australian Conservation Foundation. The Colong Foundation received nothing. The Federal Government has cited its funding to WWF as proof of its green credentials and, as the Australia Institute reports, there is natural suspicion that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The WWF recently published its plan for Tasmania's old growth forests, including the logging of the

Styx Valley. Proof of independence is a valuable attribute. As Stephanie Peatling writes in the SMH July of 28th:

*NGOs must therefore give careful consideration to accepting money that might be seen to be tainted or have strings attached. The strongest taint attaches to money from funding sources that are believed to have objectives that are contrary to those of the NGO.*

There can be no doubting the independence of the Colong Foundation. The State Government has acceded to our policy rather than the

reverse. Our independence and influence depend on voluntary finance and work, and our effectiveness can be greatly enhanced by increased funding. That is why we are appealing for bequests.

We shall be pleased to send our pamphlet, *Legacy for Wilderness*, which describes five means of making a bequest, to anyone interested. Making a bequest is one of the best ways of leaving a wilderness legacy for future generations and the booklet has been produced to explain the options and to make the job easier. ■

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The following continues Haydn Washington's *Wilderness Resurgence* paper from Bulletin 206. This paper, and five others, can be down-loaded from the Colong website [www.colongwilderness.org.au](http://www.colongwilderness.org.au)

Wilderness Resurgence – Discussion Paper, March 2004 continued...

# Criticisms of wilderness

## Postmodernist criticisms

*Wilderness is the idea of rich, white, chauvinistic males (Cronon 1996)*

HW: There is not much argument or examples behind these assertions. They are presented as 'evident truth'. However, many wilderness advocates are neither rich, white or male.

*Wilderness creates a 'dualism' between wilderness = good nature, and non-wilderness = bad nature which is inherently bad as it creates a barrier to recognising the values of nature in non-wilderness areas (Adams and Mulligan 2002, Mulligan 2001, Cronon 1996, Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992)*

HW: Not all dualisms are bad. In any case, is wilderness a dualism? To perceive wilderness as the wild end of the natural spectrum is a sign that people can still perceive wildness. This a hopeful sign. To give it a name 'wilderness' is not to ignore or devalue non-wilderness such as urban bushland. By naming it and defining boundaries, it makes it possible to actually *conserve* such areas. For Postmodernists, drawing a boundary is inherently bad, but in the real world it is often necessary.

*Wilderness is a cultural creation or cultural landscape, a human artifact (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Rose 1998, Langton 1996, Flannery 2003, Adams 1996)*

HW: Wilderness was here before we were, it is not an artifact made by humans. In fact one might say that in evolutionary terms humans are a wilderness artifact – that is we evolved from wilderness. To modify natural vegetation by fire is not to 'create' it, only to influence it. The rocks and gorges were not made by humans, nor did we evolve the native species. We influenced com-

munity composition to some extent. This is very different from 'creating' something.

*Wilderness is a 'flight from history', a Romantic, escapist retreat (Cronon 1996)*

HW: Wilderness can be a retreat from the pressures of modern society – this is a positive not a negative thing. If we consider the environmental history of the last 215 years to be the clearing of half of the native vegetation and the fragmenting of the rest, then perhaps we *need* to confront history and change this trend?

*Wilderness does not recognise that such areas were 'home' to native peoples (Langton 1996, Adams and Mulligan 2002, Cronon 1996)*

HW: This goes back in part to the American Wilderness Act, which states that wilderness 'is an area where the earth and its community of life is untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain'. The question here is what 'untrammelled' really means. I would argue that it doesn't mean that native peoples never lived there, but the ambiguity has understandably offended many native peoples. Most recent international and Australian definitions are at some pains to avoid such ambiguity, and do recognise that wilderness in most parts of the continent was home to native peoples. Rather than wilderness ignoring native peoples, I see wilderness as a tribute to their land management.

*Wilderness is a colonialist term (Cronon 1996, Adams and Mulligan 2002)*

HW: Wilderness derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'wil-deor-ness' – the place of wild animals. There is noth-

ing *inherently* colonialist in the word itself. If it is a colonialist term, why did mainly the colonies of England develop such a term, and not the colonies of (for example) Spain? It seems more likely to me that wilderness gained popularity as a term precisely because England and America led the industrialization of the first world. Wilderness became an important concept there as it was seen as the opposite of this rampant destruction of the natural world.

*Wilderness is the same as Terra Nullius (Flannery 1994, Langton 1996) and is a 'mystification of genocide' (Langton 1996)*

HW: Terra Nullius under the Mabo High Court judgment did not in fact mean that nobody lived here, it meant that *nobody owned the land*. The objectionable doctrine of Terra Nullius argued that Aborigines did not have a real civilisation and hence ownership. The essence of the concept of wilderness is large natural areas – Terra Nullius and wilderness have nothing to do with each other. Similarly, wilderness has nothing as such to do with genocide.

*Wilderness is an icon of the frontier and a monument to the American past (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Cronon 1996)*

HW: This claims that wilderness is a product of machismo. Do only macho, tough men love wilderness or go there? Anybody can enjoy a short or long day walk in wilderness.

*Wilderness are human-exclusion zones (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Adams and Mulligan 2002, Cronon 1996), and variants of this which claim that wilderness victim-*

*continued on page 5*

## Criticisms of Wilderness

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*izes the disabled (as vehicles and roads are excluded from wilderness)*

*HW:* Wilderness management does exclude *permanent* habitation. Note the emphasis on the word 'permanent'. Wilderness has the same access today that it had up until 1788 – by foot or canoe. It does **not** exclude human visitation (for weeks at a time). Surely the key point to consider is that the alleged access 'restrictions' are a consequence of natural conditions, not an action of humans, and that greater access requires damaging modification. Permanent habitation today means (almost universally) roads, power-lines, garbage, water supply, all of which add up to substantial human impact. Wilderness management will mean that some people with disabilities can not visit some parts of wilderness. However, 95% of NSW is extensively roaded – so ethically does any particular group have the right to demand that **all** natural areas be roaded for them to visit them? There are thousands of kilometres of public access roads provided within national parks outside wilderness areas, providing endless scope for outings, including outings to the edges of all wilderness areas. Roads cause substantial environmental impact (see Aust. Heritage Commission study on 'The role of wilderness in nature conservation'). The more they are used (e.g. fire-trails) the greater the impact.

*Wilderness is the enemy of the poor, as it prevents the use of land for productive agriculture (Cronon 1996)*

*HW:* Wilderness management does maintain that not all natural areas are going to be a resource for humans. Poverty has to do with the equity of sharing what we *have* already developed for human use, not clearing our last remaining wilderness areas. Exploiting the last wild areas in Australia will not impact on poverty.

*Wilderness is a state of mind, a concept, not a place (Lowenthal 1964, Nash 1979, Cronon 1996, Johnston 2003)*

*HW:* Wilderness *is* a concept, so is Sydney, so is Canberra, so is this seminar – but wilderness is also a place. One can argue about the definition and boundaries, but large natural areas do exist, they are real places with real problems that need real protection to continue to survive.

*Idealizing wilderness means not idealizing the environment in which we live (i.e. non-wilderness) (Cronon 1996)*

*HW:* Perceiving and loving the wilderness does not mean you can't love your local park. Should we idealise either? Possibly not – but we should *love both*. We should accept the more-than-human otherness of both places. For me, wilderness catalyses the love of the land – and that spills over to all areas, urban bushland too.

*Wilderness stops other uses (i.e. multiple use) which might attain a 'balanced, sustainable relationship' (Cronon 1996).*

*HW:* 95% of NSW has been altered so much that it is not wilderness any more – so where is the balance? To degrade the remaining 5% by using it as a resource for humans is hardly going to help us reach a balanced, sustainable relationship. Rather, to reach such a relationship we need to protect *all* of our remaining wilderness, and link these areas together through a Wild Country vision (as proposed by the Wilderness Society) so as to 'rewild' the state to some extent. For me, wilderness lets us learn about wild nature, and gives us the perspective that we need to reach a sustainable relationship in the future.

### Other criticisms

*Wilderness is the recreational preserve of yuppie bushwalkers (Recher 2003)*

*HW:* Wilderness is for nature, the alleged benefit to walkers is a by-product of travelling there without building damaging roads. Walkers cause less impact than horses, and much less than 4WD vehicles or roads. It is possible to have too many walkers in some areas, and then numbers need to be regulated (as at

the Grand Canyon). 95% of the state is roaded for non-walkers, leaving only 5% as wilderness is hardly 'unbalanced'.

*Wilderness is not essential for nature conservation (Recher 2003)*

*HW:* This would seem to fly in the face of biogeography, and of experts on biodiversity such as Wilson, Raven and Soule. The opposite was the conclusion of the AHC report by scientists called 'The role of wilderness in nature conservation' (Mackay et al 1998).

*Wilderness is an idea based on outdated equilibrium ecology (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Adams and Mulligan 2002)*

*HW:* Wilderness does not rely on equilibrium ecology to justify its existence. In any case, punctuated equilibria theory does not legitimize the major stresses humans are putting on natural areas (else why are half the world's species in danger of going extinct?)

*Wilderness is overrun by feral animals and weeds (Peter Cochrane, 2004)*

*HW:* These pests occur state-wide. They are much less prevalent in well-preserved wilderness areas (especially where there are no roads). Under park management, control measures occur where particularly needed (e.g. 'Willows out of Wollemi').

*Wilderness is degraded (Peter Cochrane, 2004).*

*HW:* While no absolutely 'pristine' wilderness remains on the Australian mainland, wilderness is the best that is left, and is managed to recover (or rewild) its natural condition.

*Wilderness is in conflict with the protection of endangered species (as these must be intensively managed) (Cronon 1996).*

*HW:* Wilderness by its large size protects rare and threatened species. This is due to minimum 'edge effects', large biogeographical size, less pressure from weeds and ferals, etc. When there is a threat in wilderness to endangered species, action is

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## Criticisms of Wilderness

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taken. There is no conflict.

*Wilderness ignores the perspectives/knowledge of rural populations (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus)*

HW: Presumably this means that wilderness activists ignore local people. Having worked as an activist for some decades, and for the last 9 years been a 'local' on the edge of Wollemi, I would have to say that some locals have little knowledge about Wollemi. Where there is real knowledge my experience is that activists are very keen to find it. Where there are biased stories, there is a need for skepticism. I am reminded of a claim made by a 'local expert' about an Aboriginal cave on the edge of Wollemi. He said it was a burial cave, but talking to local Wiradjuri people, we found that in fact it was a birth cave. In regard to the Alps, up to half a million sheep and tens of thousands of cattle once grazed on Kosciuszko's mountain pastures. Graziers burnt the slopes remorselessly to encourage new grass. This and the pounding of hard hooves caused serious soil erosion. Where grazing by ungulates has been removed, the alpine flora has returned. The perspectives of the 'horse culture' in the Alps were in fact damaging to the natural environment. The 'Man from Snowy River' is a romantic cultural myth that in reality ignores the damage caused to the land by horses and stock-grazing.

\* \* \*

When considering the conserva-

### **Meeting Dates**

**Meetings will be held  
in our Kent St office  
at 2pm on  
September 16th  
and 30th, October  
14th and 28th and  
November 11th  
and 25th.**

tionist values of wilderness, and the criticisms made of wilderness, we can see just how different are some of the views on wilderness. It can be seen from the above, that I don't believe that many of the criticisms of wilderness are in fact valid or useful. The word wilderness has got caught up in political ideology, and in philosophical theory. Who speaks for the wild land itself?

Would it help if we changed the word from wilderness to 'wildland' or some other word? I don't believe so. Many of the above criticisms are in fact criticisms of the *idea* that large, natural, wild areas have a right to exist. For some of the authors of the criticisms, they seem to be arguing that we should protect large natural areas, but not draw a boundary around them and call them 'wilderness'. I find this both poorly reasoned and highly impractical in the real human world of politics and bureaucracy. A wilderness *needs* to be managed as such, so that roads or power-lines are not built through it, etc. To manage it, there needs to be lines on maps - boundaries need to be set, so wilderness management can take place.

In regard to the criticisms above, a 'wildland' could similarly be called a cultural creation, could be seen as a dualism, could be seen as a flight from history, etc. A change in name is not in my view going to solve the wilderness knot. Some people don't want to keep large natural areas. If we want to keep them, then sadly we need to fight for them. We have a perfectly good word for large, natural areas, and that is **wilderness**. It is time for us to reverse the 'code of silence' that seems to exist in academia and bureaucracy, where the word wilderness is not mentioned. Ignore it and it will go away - not just the concept *but the wild place as well*. Those of us who believe wilderness *has* a right to continued existence into the next century (let alone the next millennial!) need to stand up and defend the use of the term. Hence the need for wilderness resurgence.

## Threats to wilderness

I won't talk much about wilderness campaigns, as Keith Muir and Geoff Mosley will cover much of this. I would like to point out that there is an idea that we have got most of the wilderness, that the pressure is off, that it is just a mopping up exercise. This is not the case. Only around half of the wilderness found by the NSW Wilderness Working Group in 1986 is formally declared as wilderness. So there is the real task of campaigning to get these areas. Then there is keeping the wilderness that is declared. Already, the wilderness area in Kakadu has been rezoned to 'zone 4' due to criticisms of 'wilderness'. How will this be managed? In the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage (formally Environment Australia), in my recent experience (Inspirational Landscapes workshop), there is a culture which seeks to ignore wilderness, and pretend the term does not exist (in fact staff get warned off using the word).

Let us not kid ourselves that the attempts to exploit wilderness have gone away! Sydney continues to expand, pressures to allow access by 4WDs and horse riders continue, miners still eye the coal under the parks in the mountains. The price of gaining a declared wilderness area is in fact eternal vigilance to keep it into the future. The proposal for the mega-quarry to mine friable sandstone at Newnes Junction on the edge of the Wollemi Wilderness illustrates the threats, as does the proposal to mine coal nearby in identified (but not declared) wilderness in State Forest at Gooche's Crater.

The population of the Earth is now 6 billion people. We believe it will reach eight or ten billion, before hopefully it declines to a sustainable lower level (i.e. lower than we have today!). With ten billion people on the world, the pressures on wild places will be extreme. This is what Professor Wilson (1988) has called the 'bottleneck' - we have to get the Earth and its species through this time of extreme pressure on natural systems. Wilderness will clearly be under intense pres-

*continued on page 7*

# Changes to Government Policy and Legislation on Threatened Species

by Samantha Newton, Natural Resources Coordinator, Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC)

REVIEWS of the *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995* (TSC Act) and its implementation have been conducted recently by the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) (for NCC) and the North Coast Environment Council (NCEC).

The reviews by the NGOs found that the main problems were not in the legislation itself, but in the implementation of this legislation. The Department of Environment and Conservation and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) continue to be under-resourced for the task of recovering the health and viability of threatened species and communities.

The results of the internal review of the legislation by DEC went further and proposed radical changes to both the legislation and to government policy. A briefing paper was

released in April 2004 that vaguely outlined the government's intentions. **The government is expected to table a bill in the Spring Parliamentary session to amend the TSC Act.**

Although the proposed changes indicate a move to a more strategic approach to threatened species management and biodiversity conservation, environment groups are concerned about the lack of transparency, accountability and detail on the new process. For example, the Government is proposing to introduce a certification process for Environmental Planning Instruments (such as Local Environment Plans) but it is not clear how compliance with certification will be ensured. The new approach relies on the cooperation of local government, key government agencies, the Catchment Management Authorities and the community, but devolves and fragments responsibility and accountability. It also risks increasing the burden on local government and asking them to take on

responsibilities outside their traditional areas of expertise.

Environment groups are calling for the Government to ensure:

- A transparent and accountable process for certification of environment planning instruments (including local environment plans and catchment action plans)
- The retention of the current Scientific Committee, its terms of reference, and in particular its independence
- The retention of the Biological Diversity Advisory Council as a statutory body
- Tighter controls on the certification process to ensure that activities which negatively impact on threatened species and communities, and their habitat, are not allowable.

*More information on the proposed changes see the NCC brochure enclosed, visit the NCC website [www.nccnsw.org.au/threatenedspecies](http://www.nccnsw.org.au/threatenedspecies) or contact NCC on 9279 2466. ■*

## Criticisms of Wilderness

from page 6

sure during this time, pressure to provide more food and resources to the huge human population. We will not escape this pressure in Australia. If we are to keep our large natural areas (and the diversity of native species they maintain) past the bottleneck period, then a resurgence of wilderness activism is *essential*. We need to formally declare all of the wilderness in the state, and connect these core areas up to each other through green corridors. This is the vision of the US Wildlands Project in America

([www.wildearth.org](http://www.wildearth.org)), and is also the vision of the Wild Country project of the Australian Wilderness Society. I point out that we need *both* – we need the wilderness areas, and we need the **connectivity** from wilderness to wilderness (especially with global climate change). At the moment there is a trend to focus on the need for connectivity. As an ecologist, I agree wholeheartedly with this (who could not?). However, we need the core wilderness areas as well. We need both.

Wilderness still remains under threat, it still needs our love and activism to keep it into the future. ■

Look around. The signs are growing every day: the water shortage in Sydney, the parched landscape in western NSW, the permanent water restrictions in Melbourne, the emerging water crisis in Perth, the precarious state of Adelaide's water supply. Credible alarms about Australia's degrading landscape are growing in number and urgency. To say we are in drought is to seriously understate the situation. We are not experiencing drought, we are experiencing climate change.

**Paul Sheehan The issue that reigns over them all. SMH 5/7/04**

# *With Every Step*

## *Reflections on the Place and Meaning of Tasmania's National Parks and Reserves*

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Proceedings of a public seminar convened by the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council, 66pp, October 2002.

Review by Keith Muir

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*IT IS* often said that those who do not learn from the past are bound to repeat it, and the message contained within these seminar papers sound a note of warning on park management. These seminar papers provide a contemporary understanding of the history of national parks in Tasmania, which offer a unique insight into some current trends in park management.

Peter Bosworth and Geoff Mosley presented papers on the history of parks and reserves, which now cover 35 per cent of Tasmania. But in contrast to this reservation progress, park management has gone forwards into the past. Mr Bosworth, a key manager in Tasmanian's Department of Primary Industry, Water and Environment believes his newly created department, looks "very similar to the old Animals and Birds Protection and Scenery Preservation arrangements of the early-mid 1900s." Subsequent papers explain that the Scenery Preservation Board was comprised of loggers, miners and hydro-electricity generators who saw parks as a way to create a tourist resource from former "wastelands". We see such 'wise use' management structures and concepts and development re-emerging in park management in NSW, notably in Kosciuszko National Park. As Peter Thompson [the ABC Radio National presenter]

warns in his concluding paper, using a term made famous by Paul Keating in another context, culture is 'recidivist'.

Dr Mosley presented two papers, the first explains the consequences of there being two initial national park types: "one a modified landscape on private land and the other natural landscapes on public land". Mosley believes that national park systems are a triumph of community action that can inspire communitarian solutions to the planet's wider problems. In particular, he points to the period from 1967 to 2002 when the national park estate expanded six fold and believes what happened in Tasmania during that time was influential around the world. His second paper focuses on two watershed campaigns during that time: the Lake Pedder campaigns; and the battle to Save the Franklin River. Lake Pedder was initially protected in a national park in 1955, but the utilitarian paradigm of the 1960s meant that the Lake was revoked from the park in 1960s and flooded. The struggle to save Pedder resulted a large new park extensions made by politicians in an attempt to compensate for the loss. Peter Thompson believes that "a real marker of whether my life-on-earth has been worthwhile would be whether the real Lake Pedder had been restored. I still believe it will be." This stand, echoed my many Tasmanian conservationists, challenges the new Bass Link powerline, which links the Mainland electricity grid with Tassie hydropower. It is feared that operation of this link is likely to increase the damage caused by hydropower and frustrate Pedder restoration opportunities.

Debbie Quarmby of Murdoch University further examined the shift from utilitarianism to environmentalism in the evolution of the way people viewed national parks from 1940s to the 1970s. Utilitarianism seeks to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people, while environmentalism focuses on the requirements of the natural environment, including healthy humans.

The movement to reserve national parks had its origins in the days when wise use of resources was in ascendancy and in that time conservationists made polite submissions to politicians, which were ignored when opposed by natural resource interests. This meant that only unwanted lands were reserved in Tasmania up until the 1960s when national park advocates adopted confrontational tactics. The task for environmentalists then became one of "opposing development wherever it would take place at nature's expense." In Tasmania, as with the rest of Australia and the world, the reasons for reservation moved from tourism and public recreation arguments toward conservation of biological diversity and maintenance of wilderness.

Dr Louise Mendel of the University of Adelaide reiterated how the utilitarian role of parks was important up to the 1950s, with many wilderness parks being heavily roaded because the dominant perception of National Parks as being areas for tourists. The classic example being the Hartz Mountains where a deal was struck with the Forestry Commission to provide a

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road and log the area before reserving it as a national park. Similarly areas like Frenchmans Cap was only reserved when vehicle access and a hut was provided by bushwalkers. The result of this early approach, as elsewhere in Australia, is that only scenic lands considered of no use but for tourism were reserved, and tall forests were poorly represented in the park system. Park managers meanwhile are providing facilities for tourism and enthusiastically destroying precious Wilderness.

Mosley concludes that "the people's wishes counted for something" with two thirds of Tasmania's natural heritage protected but much of great value has been lost. Governments are innately conservative and are still orientated towards commodification of the environment. Very few big conservation advances have been achieved outside a dramatic clash over development versus conservation. That clash is between Western Tasmanian's heritage, which is of international conservation significance, and the competing uses are not.

The main thrust of the seminar is that the onus for extending and protecting heritage will continue to rest with organised citizenry standing against development interests. Peter Thompson concluded by arguing that the conservation cause is best advanced by community politics, not party politics. "Turning towards elected politics has helped confuse means and ends." I believe this is only partly true, as campaign strategies must be sync with the phases of political cycle to get the best results. While the seminar proceedings are notably incomplete, as it does not present the development viewpoint, it is a good analysis of Tasmania's conservation history in today's context. The proceedings also remind us that park management does not always evolve toward better nature conservation, it can also adopt practices that exploits wilderness to chase the tourist dollar. ■

BOOK REVIEW

# Conservation on Private Lands: The Australian Experience

by Penelope Figgis, AM, 2004, IUCN, Sydney. 31pp.  
Review by Keith Muir

PENELOPE FIGGIS has produced an excellent summary paper for IUCN of the ways in which conservation is being achieved on private lands in Australia. The paper lists seven conservation mechanisms, as well as explaining the ecological and social drivers for these initiatives.

The paper states that productive environments make up only a small proportion of the land conserved in national parks. Past reservation strategies have focussed on areas unwanted for development; the so-called wastelands. Initiatives for conservation on private land can protect the vestiges of productive environments that remain in a natural condition and also build bushland links between existing reserved areas to make a web of remnant bushland. The case for building a network of protected landscapes is supported by island biogeography theory that argues that if the isolation of national parks increases, native species within them become vulnerable to extinction through inbreeding and accidents such as bushfire.

To stop increased environmental fragmentation through land clearing the public is being encouraged to become bushland stewards by various mechanisms. In a sense, the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* started this trend in 1979, with local development control plans that limited damage to environmental values, such as coasts, rainforests, wetlands and steams.

Figgis states the received wisdom 'that parks "islands" will not survive in either "seas" of ruined ecology or

"seas" of social hostility'. Penelope points out that focussing this stewardship debate off-park, on private lands, ensures real progress can be made. I would go further and also state that when the rural sector and resource groups are encouraged by governments to apply stewardship to on-park conservation management, ecological absurdities like managing sustainable levels of feral horses, over burning national parks and eradicating endangered dingoes and quolls by aerial baiting can develop. Kosciuszko National Park is the supreme example of mismanagement masquerading as stewardship, as regional development, increased visitor use and appeasing hostile rural lobbyists have replaced conservation as the management priority.

## Conservation tools for private land

The Wilderness Society and many other environment groups are keen to adopt new tools to expand protection across the Australian landscape. The proposal to establish *WildCountry*, a web of protected areas, particularly in areas like Cape York are being promoted. This is an approach where national parks and other conservation initiatives can be developed on a regional basis. Another a form of multiple land use conservation is the Indigenous Protected Areas initiative, also set up to protect natural and cultural values outside formal reserves. Over the last year, this scheme has been applied to 13.8 million hectares.

The above strategies are essentially visionary initiatives into which the detail of nature-based land management and administration can be developed over time.

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## *Additions to Blue Mountains Parks*

In a recent address to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society Bob Debus said "Great conservation takes commitment and vision from both the community and governments. The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area took 80 years to become the magnificent reserve that it is today." He announced additions of 120 ha to the southern Blue Mountains, 70 ha to the Gardens of Stone National Park, 1900 ha to Yengo, 746 ha to Wollemi, 1800 ha to Blue Mountains and Nattai National Parks and the inclusion of the Three Sisters in the parks system – 4500 ha in all.



*The Three Sisters are at last part of the Blue Mountains National Park.  
[PHOTO: H. Gold]*

### **Conservation on Private Lands**

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Another land conservation driver is the National Reserve Program into which Federal funds have been poured to assist private bushland protection outside the formal reserve system.

These government funds, like the National Heritage Trust, are being used by organisations, like the Australian Bush Heritage Fund founded by Bob Brown in 1990, to assist them to buy and manage private lands. The private sanctuary is another land management model that also benefits from the National Heritage Trust. Earth Sanctuaries and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy are two examples of these outfits.

In addition to the above private reserves and sanctuaries there are voluntary arrangements between Government and landowner, such as the Wildlife Refuges that cover 1.65 million hectares in NSW and its equivalents in other states. In this approach the Government provides varying levels of advice and information and the landowner voluntarily protects their land. A more targeted approach is to focus protection based upon scientific advice as to what is poorly conserved, with government funding of conservation efforts but with voluntary farmer participation in the scheme (e.g. Landcare, although whether the money is well targeted is debatable).

Covenants on the land title provide a legally binding approach, for example in South Australia *Heritage Agreements* enable farmers to access financial assistance, relief from local government rates and expert advice on management bushland.

The NSW Property Vegetation Plans are essentially a contract system that falls somewhere between voluntary agreements and covenants on the title of the land. These Plans are binding for 15 years and define the lands to be conserved on the farm, with provision for Government funding where existing use of the farm is affected.

Many of these approaches have benefited from changes made to taxation law to encourage philanthropy. Gifts of land and goods over \$5000, as well as loss of land values due to placing conservation covenants over land, are now tax deductible. In addition, State Governments are providing rate relief for private lands set aside for conservation.

Market-based mechanisms are another approach that can enable land to be purchased, to have its relevant portions protected under binding covenant and then resold to sympathetic buyers that can then access tax and rate relief.

Essentially these mechanisms enable the broader community to pay farmers to manage land for nature conservation. This may be cost effective but the risks arise when there is a change in Govern-

ment policy or the money supply declines. It also assumes, as Alex Colley points out, that the farmer should be compensated for doing what is essentially in their long term interest. On private land, short term economic changes can mean the loss of voluntarily protected bushlands essential for the survival of endangered plants and animals. The private land trusts and sanctuaries, however, are less vulnerable to changes in economic and government policy because of their proven ability to tap into philanthropic funds.

Figgis describes the fears conservationists have in regard to private land mechanisms as including the substitution of private conservation for additional national parks, lack of security for the bushland protected and lower levels of accountability for taxpayers dollars. This is a bigger problem in the temperate parts of Australia where it is doubtful existing private bushland remnants can protect native plants and animals without major revegetation efforts.

Society may be deceiving itself by managing small isolated elements of rare but degraded bushland. Incur-sions by fire, ferals and weeds make it almost impossible to maintain archipelagos of many small fragments no matter how irreplaceable. The tremendous effort required to maintain them would be better placed in maintaining the more ecologically intact wilderness areas. ■

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan (National Parks and Wildlife Service, New South Wales, 2009) is an outstanding example of the coordination of planning and management of an area of 1,032,649 hectares in 8 protected areas. It is also a good example of local (12 Local Government Areas), State, and federal cooperation.

The Greater Blue Mountains Area consists of 1.03 million ha of sandstone plateaux, escarpments and gorges dominated by temperate eucalypt forest. The site, comprised of eight protected areas, is noted for its representation of the evolutionary adaptation and diversification of the eucalypts in post-Gondwana isolation on the Australian continent. All World Heritage properties in Australia are matters of national environmental significance protected and managed under national legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This Act is the statutory instrument for implementing Australia's obligations under a number of multilateral environmental agreements including the World Heritage Convention. The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is a million hectares of awe-inspiring wilderness, recognised globally for its sandstone cliffs, canyons, waterfalls, eucalypt forests and Indigenous rock art. The ecosystems of the Blue Mountains provide clean air and water to the Greater Sydney region while supporting an exceptional measure of biodiversity, including a number of endangered species and rare plants like the ancient Wollemi pine that exists nowhere else on earth. In late 2019, after a long period of drought, Australia was beset by catastrophic wildfires, including several megafires. The Greater Blue Mountains Area was inscribed on the World Heritage list on 29 November 2000 and is one of Australia's 19 World Heritage properties. What does it mean to be World Heritage Listed? World Heritage is the designation for places on earth that are of outstanding universal value to humanity and as such, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List to be protected for future generations to appreciate and enjoy. Places as diverse and unique as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, the Taj Mahal in India, the Grand Canyon in th