

colong bulletin

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RIVER RED GUM NATIONAL PARK

PAT THOMPSON

The announcement by the NSW Government that 42,077 hectares drawn from Gulpa Island, Millewa and Moira State Forests will be declared as National Park is welcome news. It will adjoin Bermah National Park which is on the Victorian side of the Murray River, thus making it the largest overall protected area of the majestic and habitat significant tree. In making the announcement, the then Premier, Nathan Rees said: "Already under attack from the drought and climate change, this habitat is fast approaching a tipping point where we risk losing it forever".

Environment groups have welcomed the news. It is a very important area and has been part of a campaign that has lasted decades, to end the logging of these magnificent trees, which among other things provide important nesting sites for the Barking Owl.



Shooters' mega-complex thrown out of court

IN November the Land and Environment Court has overturned former Planning Minister, Kristina Keneally's approval of the six shooting ranges and parking for 200 cars on 1000 hectares of former Bargo State Conservation reserve that adjoins the Heritage listed Nattai Wilderness.

The Minister's claim that 900 hectares of the shooter's facility will remain for conservation was rejected by Justice Peter Biscoe.

He ruled that range buffer zone around the shooting complex was not part of the environmental conservation area but an essential part of the project.

He declared the entire approval void and criticised the Government-appointed expert panel, chaired by former National Party leader Ian Armstrong.

The man-proof fence would block movement of wildlife along Bargo Fauna Linkage just as much as if the entire site was cleared.

"This is a resounding victory

for local people against the bulldozing tactics of the NSW Government and the Shooters Party," said Hilltop Residents Action Group spokeswoman, Jodie Laing.

"The plain fact is that this development is too big, too close to Hilltop and too dangerous. The shooting range would deliver thousands of tonnes of lead into Sydney's water catchment and disrupt the lives of local residents including the kids at the local primary school," Ms Laing added.

Subscription Renewal 2010

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Ian Tanner, Hon. Secretary

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General Meetings

will be held at our office on level 2, Fortuna House, 332 Pitt Street, at 2.00pm on Thursday February 11th and March 11th. Visitors welcome.



END OF SHOOTERS' PARTY PUSH

PAT THOMPSON

In an interesting speech in the NSW Parliament, which also proved to be Nathan Rees' last one as Premier, he chose to refer to the conservation achievements of the former Wran & Carr Governments "and the importance of not having them undermined". He then went on to refer to the problems the Government meets in the Legislative Council in passing its legislation, stating that: "We have made agreements and undertakings that have stretched the Labor Party's environmental beliefs to the limit. And with the proposal to allow hunting in national parks the limit of our tolerance has been reached. Accordingly, I can advise the House today, that under my leadership: THERE WILL BE NO HUNTING IN NSW NATIONAL PARKS".

We note our readers will be interested in the related story on the rejection of the Shooters' complex proposal by the Land & Environment Court and trust that the new Premier Kristina Keneally is taking note. We also welcome the new Premier and invite her to make her own positive mark for conservation during her time in office. It was Neville Wran who said that what he will be remembered for is "Saving the Rainforests"; for Bob Carr it will be the Wilderness Act and for my money Nathan Rees can look back on his last stand against the shooters as being worth the cost.

Saving The Antarctic Wilderness

REVIEW BY KEITH MUIR

DR GEOFF MOSLEY has produced a short book that takes you on an amazing journey over dangerous political seas, on the campaign that stopped mining in Antarctica. Although Geoff does not say so, he was the main strategist of this important campaign. In the introduction he outlines how he took as his inspiration those earlier successful campaigns in Australia that adopted the grand vision approach, particularly Myles Dunphy's pioneering Greater Blue Mountains National Park proposal of 1934.

Many have argued, as they do now, that stopping mining on an entire continent was mission impossible. It wasn't. Geoff explains that the lessons of vision and determination which drove that campaign are now ignored. Today, timid environmental campaigning has become bogged down in detail. Dr Mosley understands that the really big conservation gains arise from a visionary stance. He wisely side-steps an open public attack of the environment movement's leadership, instead pointing the way forward.

Saving the Antarctic Wilderness focuses on Australia's decision in 1989 to veto the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities and work instead for a measure which would keep intact the Antarctic Wilderness (the Madrid Protocol of 1991). The pivotal role played by the Australian conservation

movement delivered this outcome.

The book is about the power of the community and winning through against all obstacles when one sticks to one's ideals and refuses to compromise. While Geoff takes a forensic approach to this historic event, he recognises that 'people power' was crucial to success. His strategy is the exact opposite of those pundits who argue that the 'greens' will remain minor political players because they are uncompromising extremists.

Dr Mosley defines the art of 'the possible' in international conservation politics in. For the permanent ban on mining in an entire continent is the environmental equivalent leap for nature conservation that landing on the moon was for human ingenuity. And like the moon landing, it stands as an achievement unsurpassed, yet so strangely it has gone almost totally unrecognised.

Saving the Antarctic Wilderness promotes the ongoing campaign to establish a World Park for Antarctica, the last continental wilderness. The international political dynamics that underlie the Antarctic Treaty system has worked for conservation once, and can do so again.

The book also sees a broader impact from such strategic, visionary campaigning. In 1989 Bob Hawke saw the wider vision for Antarctica to act "as a testament to our recognition that in other corners of the world we have already gone too far."

As with the ban on Antarctic mining activity, Geoff believes that achievement of the goal of a new world order in which the environment comes first will require the same exposition of clear cut alternatives and rejection of compromises.

Nobody seems to be making such bold statements these days for Australia. For this reason the book deserves a wide audience, and close scrutiny by all 'exhausted' conservationists fed up with today's 'trench warfare' activism.

The prospective reader must be determined to grasp the detail, because the nature of political debate, conservation group wrangles, and international treaties and protocols does not to make for light reading. Sometimes I felt like I needed a mental ice breaker to get through the information but its well worth the journey through the icepack. To see how an entire continent was claimed back for nature from the despoiling forces of the minerals industry is something well worth understanding.

Saving the Antarctic Wilderness is available for \$19.95 (cheque or money order), post free in Australia from: either, Geoff Mosley jandemosley@bigpond.com, at 90 Boyds Road, Hurstbridge, 3099; Janet Copland janethcopland@hotmail.com at 98 Dominion Road, Mt Martha, 3934; or, from Envirobook pat@envirobook.com.au at 7 Close St, Canterbury, 2193. For overseas sales please email for further information.

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The Gardens of Stone campaign gathers pace

WHILE the NSW Government procrastinates, Opposition members have been showing a keen interest in the Newnes Plateau. The Member for Castle Hill, Michael Richardson, and the Shadow Minister for Climate Change and the Environmental Sustainability, Catherine Cusack have both inspected the area recently. They were struck by the need to better manage the area. If the Government does not act, it is becoming increasingly certain that the Opposition may steal the march on them, and support moves for better protection of the area.

Last month the Colong Foundation, along with members from The Wilderness Society, National Parks Association, Total Environment Centre and the Blue Mountains Conservation Society visited the Airly-Genowlan quarter of the park proposal. A grand high tops circuit around Mt Airly and a visit to Airly Turret were trip highlights.

Traveling by train and using a community bus from Katoomba to Airly Gap the visit had a low carbon footprint, being part of the cultural change we want to see.

The large Airly-Genowlan



Tara Cameron, president of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society with daughter Elata led an inspection of Dargan Creek for Ms Catherine Cusack, Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability and Joshua Crawford her eldest son.

sandstone mesa in the upper Capertee Valley covers about 3,200 hectares. The mesa is characterised by oil shale ruins, and a spectacular assemblage of spectacular pagoda rock formations and clifflines.

A draft plan of management for the proposed Airly-Genowlan State Conservation Area reserve (SCA) has been prepared by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the Department of Industry and

Investment had agreed to the reservation. Reservation of the area should proceed without delay and any remaining administrative technicalities should be resolved once the reserve is in place.

Growing Opposition to development in National Parks

IN a letter to the Nature Conservation Council last month, the Shadow Minister for Climate Change and the Environmental Sustainability, Ms Catherine Cusack confirmed her, and Shadow Tourism Minister, Mr Don Page's, opposition to development of private accommodation facilities inside National Parks.

This follows the stance taken

by the Local Government Association at its Annual Conference to the opening up National Parks to recreational hunting and commercial development.

The Local Government Association expressed concern about any move to allow recreational shooting and plans by the NSW State Government to develop commercial facilities inside National Parks. The

Association is also concerned that the National Parks and Wildlife Act and the Wilderness Act may be amended to facilitate development.

The Association resolved that improved, low-key facilities for National Park visitors and better promotion to encourage more public use, off-park accommodation and other services will support local economies whilst avoiding

more impacts on National Parks.

The Blue Mountains City Council working with community conservation groups and through a network of Councillors, including those in Sydney City Council, Ashfield, Strathfield, Willoughby, Weddin and Warringah councils were successful in getting the motion passed through the conference.

Wilderness and conservation priorities

REVIEW BY KEITH MUIR

'Wilderness and future conservation priorities in Australia' a paper by Dr James Watson and others, has systematically examined the extent to which wilderness reserves serve biodiversity conservation aims. This is an important question, as many conservation bureaucrats have attacked an alleged wilderness reservation bias and most no longer consider wilderness in reserve planning at all. The 'NSW National Parks Establishment Plan 2008', for example, has no wilderness priority, except for minor consolidation of existing areas. Similarly the 'Directions for the National Reserve Systems – A Partnership Approach' by the Natural Resource Ministerial Council in 2005 does not propose wilderness reservation initiatives.

The main conclusion of the paper is that reserve network design "should not become so reactive as to ignore the role that large, intact landscapes play in conserving biodiversity, especially in a time of human-induced climate change."

The paper defines wilderness "as large areas that have experienced minimal habitat loss", a definition which does not preclude (or ignore) a human presence. The definition is consistent with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) definition of wilderness as "a large unmodified or slightly modified area, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition."

The Australia-wide landscape analysis undertaken by the authors set the bar for a large intact area being wilderness at greater than one million hectares. Large indeed, and greatly at odds with the currently used National Forest Policy Statement definition for wilderness being greater than 15,000 hectares in size, except



Eucalypt forest, Coolangubra Wilderness. Photo: Henry Gold

for on the coast where a forest wilderness needs to be greater than 8,000 hectares. Legal and operational definitions for wilderness also incorporate a capacity for areas to recover wilderness condition. Based on these current policy and practice considerations, the paper's analysis considerably understates the extent of wilderness capable land in Australia.

Many formal wilderness reserves in NSW were excluded from the identified wilderness land and the limitations of the wilderness mapping should have been discussed in more detail, for example, effect of activities such as 4WD roads on wilderness designation.

Even so, the study reveals that just over half of Australia's strict reserves are in a wilderness condition (52%), while for multiple use reserves, where resource extraction can continue, over four-fifths are in a wilderness condition (82%).

Wilderness not protected in national parks

According to Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, "in 2006 there were 71 reserves covering nearly 5.5 million hectares in the National Reserves System (NRS) with an IUCN protected area management category of 1b Wilderness Area, which is about six per cent of the NRS".

Applying the wilderness data

within the NRS in this paper, only a little more than one tenth of the wilderness areas within strict reserves are actually being managed as wilderness. The actual wilderness management situation could be as low as one twentieth of the wilderness in reserves, however, given the very conservative assumptions of the analysis.

The paper defines the mean size of Australian reserves as 10,200 hectares, while the median size is a mere 99 hectares. The median statistic implies that at least half of the Australia's conservation reserves are inadequate for ecological viability and integrity. Even with aggressive wildlife corridor programs, perhaps over half of Australia's reserves are doomed to lose key species and be extensively degraded by pest species because they are too small.

Dr Watson's paper expresses concern for the bias in recent reservation practice toward small, more fragmented and degraded reserves that are less viable in the long term and more expensive to manage than a smaller number of larger, more intact reserves. Generally speaking, the bias arises from the priority need to protect threatened natural remnants in the heavily cleared and more developed regions. Naturally these remnants are smaller and contain more vulnerable species.

The authors argue that

reservation priorities should seek large intact natural areas that have greater resilience to environmental change, lower land values and are less expensive to manage. This they believe can be achieved by using current or future threats rather than past threats to prioritize areas, and by incorporating key ecological processes and costs of acquisition and management within the planning framework.

Australia is globally significant for its large intact natural landscapes, yet the paper fails to examine whether a wilderness once reserved in a national park is safe. If wilderness areas are important for the long-term persistence of biodiversity, as this paper suggests, then it is prudent to create wilderness reserves that prevent fragmentation by inappropriate fire management, and the construction of tourist roads and visitor facilities. Otherwise wilderness may continue to be Australia's fastest disappearing natural resource, even if large intact reserves are given greater priority is future reserve selection.

Several other important subjects in the wilderness debate should also have been mentioned. These include the IUCN wilderness definition and the capacity of wilderness values to be restored.

While the aim of the paper is to assess the value of wilderness to biodiversity conservation it would not have been unreasonable for the authors to have acknowledged in the introduction, the important other contributions of wilderness reserves to society, including the protection of catchments and provision for wilderness recreation.

This is an important paper and deserves a wide readership. It is particularly pleasing to see wilderness being presented by scientists as an important measure for building resilience to climate change into the National Reserve System.

The State Plan review, a blueprint for more blunders

BY KEITH MUIR

LAUNCHED in 2006, the NSW State Plan outlines the Rees Government's reform program. Last September a consultation draft of the Plan was released. The Plan is supposed to reflect the changing needs and priorities of the NSW community, and not surprisingly this new draft is primarily interested in economic development.

The consultation draft has dropped any commitment to progress toward a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative reserve system, deleted any mention of marine reserves, or a Biodiversity Strategy. According to Carmel Flint of the National Parks Association, no new marine parks have been announced in NSW since 2005, while South Australia has created 19 new marine parks since then.

The need to keep building the reserve system is recognised by following state and national strategies and agreements:

- ❑ DECCW Adaptation Strategy for Climate Change Impacts on Biodiversity;
- ❑ NSW Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation Framework,
- ❑ DECCW National Parks Establishment Plan 2008;
- ❑ The International Convention on Biological Diversity;
- ❑ Intergovernmental Agreement on the

Priorities

◀ Continued from page 4

Watson, J., Fuller, R. Watson, A., Mackey, B., Wilson, K., Grantham, H., Turner, M., Klien, C., Carwardine, J., Joseph, L., and Possingham, H., (2009) *Wilderness and future conservation priorities in Australia*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, *Diversity and Distributions*, 1-9.



The cutting of red tape proposed by the State Plan review could make park development much easier, such as that this recent development at Thredbo in Kosciuszko National Park.

Environment;

- ❑ National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity;
- ❑ National Forest Policy Statement;
- ❑ National Reserve System Directions Statement.

Yet the State Plan has given up this agenda.

More red tape cut to be cut for developers

A key priority is to cut 'red tape' from government decision-making, particularly in relation to business interests, which are said to be frustrated by having to obtain planning approvals. To expedite matters, departmental bosses have a performance condition for cutting 'red tape' in their employment contracts.

Also planned is a \$70 million slush fund which will be used to attract major project developments. And an additional \$40 million handed to Tourism NSW over three and a half years to encourage tourism development.

This open door strategy is

expected to boost tourism in NSW by 25.5 million visitor nights and increase tourist expenditure to \$19.2 billion by 2015-16. This is up from a previously projected increase of 10 million visitor nights.

There has already been a tremendous weakening of planning laws, reducing public participation and environmental protection in relation to development.

The State Plan appears to be literally designing a tourism bonanza. This so-called strategy will encourage vicious boom/bust cycles in the industry due to over-enthusiastic investment with undue haste, particularly as overseas tourism is totally dependent upon a vibrant global economy.

Tourism developments, being in attractive locations by definition, need to be adequately considered by regulatory agencies through open, transparent public processes that ensure proper review. It is ludicrous for the State Plan to propose rushing development in popular, high conservation

value or controversial areas. Development approvals from such an approach will be at a high cost to the community and the environment.

With environmental protection zones and national parks set to become the next tourism development opportunity in NSW and the State Plan bent on further cutting of 'red tape' and adopting strategies strongly favouring commercialisation, coastal communities will be 'up in arms' against the government for a long time to come.

The words 'ecologically sustainable development' (ESD) need to be put into the State Plan. Growth cannot be sustained forever, especially without consideration of the environment. It seems that the ESD definition of the 1987 Brundtland report needs to be relearnt:

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Climate Change, Biodiversity conservation, and the role of protected areas

An Australian perspective in *Biodiversity 9* (3 & 4) 2008

SUMMARISED BY DAVE LOCKWOOD

AUSTRALIA is responsible for almost half of the mammal extinctions which have occurred globally over the last 200 years. Many native species have also declined in range and abundance since European settlement. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of terrestrial bird and mammal species listed as endangered or vulnerable rose by 41%. Overall 45% of Australia's vertebrate species are in decline in one or more parts of their range.

The nature of climate change we are now faced with is human induced and may impose new climate and environmental regimes that many species cannot adapt to. This climate change co-insides with 200 years of habitat loss and ecosystem degradation since European settlement. This includes 54% of all land being sequestered to farming and 50% of all woodlands and forests being cleared. In some regions 95% of the original native vegetation has been modified or lost.

Grazing pressure by domestic and feral livestock has changed under storey plant species composition, increased run-off and erosion and trampled the tunnels and nests of ground dwelling animals. The invasion of weeds and feral animals have contributed to the decline of many native plants and animals. The introduction of cats and foxes have made major contributions to all mammal and bird extinctions since European settlement and the introduction of the cane toad has decimated amphibian and reptile populations in northern Australia. There are now 2,500 non-native plant species established in Australia. Many

of these species are altering the ecology of the ecosystems they have invaded.

The National Reserve System currently protects 11.6% of Australia in IUCN category 1 – 6 reserves. Many of these reserves were established for their aesthetic or recreational value and were lands considered surplus to the needs of farming and forestry. They were not designed to maximise the conservation of biodiversity. State and Federal governments have attempted to address this problem in recent years by promoting a more systematic approach to creating new reserves based on the criteria of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness. The most likely outcome is that these measures will only be partly successful. Only 67% of ecosystems are protected in the NRS and many of these are small and isolated from other reserves.

The thresholds identified for meeting Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve criteria are too minimal to meet bold conservation outcomes such as protecting ecosystems from climate change. The National Reserve System (NRS) doesn't guarantee the survival of species which move across many locations and land tenures. It also doesn't provide for large scale ecological processes important for biodiversity conservation on a continental scale.

The NRS will also not be large enough to meet the challenge posed by climate change. It will require significant expansion.

Large intact landscapes are not currently recognised for new reserves because resources are being directed towards threatened species on land that has already been degraded.

For example, the Kimberley is one of the few bio-regions in Australia that has retained most of its native mammal fauna but is not a high priority under the NRS. The region will only become a priority after it becomes degraded and its species threatened. It would be more cost effective to protect the region before this happens.

Australia's large intact landscapes will be important for protecting natural biodiversity. They have retained a cover of continuous native vegetation and lack the habitat loss and fragmentation which occur in many parts of Australia. This would support a range of habitats and provide options for species as they migrate in response to climate change. Connectivity will be an additional requirement for continental scale conservation.

The current network of reserves is often isolated. Even some large reserves are islands surrounded by land tenures that don't facilitate the movement of plants and animals. This can be solved by the restoration of large scale migration corridors on regional and continental scales. Other responses should include reducing current threats to biodiversity:

1. Halt and reverse land cleaning to prevent further habitat loss and fragmentation;
2. Remove unsustainable extractive land uses such as grazing and logging;
3. Halt further large scale diversion of water;
4. Control invasive pest species; and
5. Implement suitable fire regimes.

Other opportunities to extend the reserve system can come through private, indigenous and freehold land being given conservation

covenants. The owners can be offered incentives to facilitate this. A value also needs to be placed on ecosystem services provided by protected areas. The emerging carbon market will also probably provide opportunities to fund the further expansion of reserves and protect native vegetation.

The current conservation strategy in Australia is based upon protecting relatively small parcels of land based upon arbitrary criteria and the development of recovery plans for a few threatened species. This strategy won't effectively mitigate the impacts of climate change on Australian biodiversity. What will be needed is a continental scale conservation plan.

The protected area network will be the central element. These areas need to be significantly expanded to include all ecosystem types. Reserves also need to be better buffered and linked. Broader landscape remnants need to be protected and restored. Lands that are currently intact should receive special consideration.

NEW REPORT ON ARCTIC WARMING

According to a new report by World Wide Fund for Nature, the Arctic has warmed twice as fast as the rest of the globe in the last few decades. This warming is destabilising Arctic systems including sea ice, the Greenland ice sheet, mountain glaciers and permafrost soils. Some critical Arctic climate feedbacks are now being altered and accelerated beyond the range that policymakers are considering.

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Yes, I wish to become a member of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. I subscribe to the Foundation's aim of preserving Australia's wilderness remnants. I accept the liability provided in the Colong Foundation's Articles of Association to guarantee \$20 should it be needed in the event of the winding up of the Foundation. Signed

Bulletin back page, 12/09



A BEQUEST

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ABOUT THE COLONG FOUNDATION

The Colong Foundation, the successor to Myles Dunphy's National Parks and Primitive Areas Council, is Australia's longest-serving community advocate for wilderness. Its proposal for a *Wilderness Act* was accepted in 1987. To supplement this legislation, our Red Index, audits NSW wilderness areas, identifies threats and formulates site specific protection remedies. There are now 1,836,000 ha of protected wilderness in NSW. However, many beautiful and environmentally highly significant wilderness areas are not protected, such as the 13,000 ha Green Gully in the Macleay Gorges, Pilliga and Goonoo on the north west slopes, Yengo in the Blue Mountains, the Deua Valley on the South Coast and the Tabletop and Main Range in the Snowy Mountains.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness has had a long and successful history. From its foundation in 1968 until 1975 it was the fighting force that prevented limestone mining and the destruction of native forest for pine plantations in the southern Blue Mountains. The Foundation not only played a leading role in realising Myles Dunphy's plan for a Greater Blue Mountains National Park, it pushed for its World Heritage listing, as well as the reservation of a Border Ranges National Park and Kakadu National Park. It has initiated successful campaigns for the protection of over a million hectares of wilderness in NSW.

The realisation of Myles Dunphy's vision of a comprehensive system of national parks with protected wilderness areas remains the primary objective of the Colong Foundation.

Now, more than ever, the Foundation needs your support. Well financed and powerful rural interests, miners, loggers, resort developers, as well as four wheel drive enthusiasts, horse riders and others, have greatly increased the threats facing Australia's wild places.

Only with your help, through continued membership and donations, can the Foundation continue its campaigns for the preservation of the natural environment and effective nature-based national park management, and by concentrating on wilderness, these rare areas can be kept safe from development and misuse.

THE COLONG FOUNDATION

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