

# colong bulletin

No. 268 | September 2017

## Introducing Harry Burkitt Kowmung Campaigner



Our new Kowmung Campaigner, Harry Burkitt liloing on the Colo River last summer.

**H**! My name is Harry Burkitt and I've recently taken on the position of Kowmung Campaigner with the Colong Foundation for Wilderness. I will be organising the campaign to stop the raising of Warragamba Dam wall by 14 metres. The proposal to raise the dam wall is to limit flooding in the Nepean Valley by instead flooding and permanently damaging extensive areas of the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park.

I'm a 20-year-old Sydney University student, studying Political History and Geology. My background is in speleology. I began caving when I was thirteen years old, with my first caving

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### *Don't Raise the Dam*

by Keith Muir

The enclosed 'Don't Raise the Dam' brochure outlines the impacts that will result if Warragamba Dam wall is raised by 14 metres as proposed.

Like freeways, dam proposals are decided by the NSW Government. A new environmental impact statement is in preparation for this proposal which was originally rejected in 1995. We need to start fighting to save Blue Mountains World Heritage from flood inundation, as the proposal won't be subject to public hearings and independent review processes.

Sufficient people power must be raised to convince decision-makers to ditch the dam plan. The brochure explains the steps you can take to stop the DAMage.

A bigger Warragamba dam can only offer marginal improvement

to flood mitigation provided by the existing five dams in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. It can't eliminate floods.

Raising the dam wall will only be a half measure as floods also occur in the other half of the catchment below the dam. Remember the big flood experienced by Picton only two years ago? No flood came over the existing dam wall, it came from outside the Warragamba catchment. Downstream of the dam, floodplains must be retained for agricultural purposes (and floods). It is worrying that urban expansion plans are already in place that could put more people at risk on the floodplain, and if they go ahead the dam proposal will be part of this deadly real estate deal.

It would be far better if urban expansion was to avoid flood prone areas of the Cumberland Plain to

keep people out of harms way, rather than raising the dam wall and creating a false sense of flood security reinforcing urban sprawl on the floodplain.

Practical alternatives, such as lowering the full supply level and downstream floodplain management to prevent floodplain sprawl, will avoid damage to national parks upstream. Many beautiful river banks of the Nattai, Coxs, Kowmung, Nattai, Wollondilly and Kedumba rivers must not be covered with unsightly sediment and weeds. This damage will occur if the dam wall is raised.

Please say NO to a bigger Warragamba Dam – beauty must not be replaced by blight!

A letter writing and campaign guide to save Blue Mountains rivers is on the back of the brochure.

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**Monthly General Meetings** will be held at our office at Level 2, Fortuna House, 332 Pitt Street, at 6.00pm on the second Thursday of the month on October 12th, November 9th and December 14th. Members and visitors are welcome.

## Harry Burkit

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trip to Cliefden Caves in Central West NSW. I have always had a deep passion for the natural environment – especially karst areas in and around the Blue Mountains.

My involvement in the speleological world led me to become the inaugural Secretary of the Save Cliefden

Caves Association in 2014. The group was formed to protect the internationally significant caves and fossils at Cliefden from a proposed dam on the Belubula River. We have had several important wins in the Cliefden campaign to date, most notably the recent announcement by the State Government to list the caves on the State Heritage Register.

For me, dam projects

often raise more questions than answers. Their huge environmental impacts, enormous cost to taxpayers and very ability to serve their intended purpose, are where many dam projects come unstuck. The raising of Warragamba Dam wall is no exception. It would cost taxpayers close to \$1 billion dollars to build, flood World Heritage listed environments - home to

many threatened species, and in any case not properly protect the Nepean Valley from major flood events. It just doesn't add up!

Please join me in the coming weeks and months to help give this campaign a strong and united voice. We need your help to raise awareness of the flaws in this proposal by lobbying politicians, spreading the word amongst your

networks, volunteering your time and giving the campaign much needed financial support.

Together, let's get this proposal knocked off the political agenda and let's protect what should already be protected – the Blue Mountains World Heritage area. There are far more sustainable ways to mitigate against flooding in the Nepean Valley than by raising Warragamba dam wall. ■

## A SPRING DAY IN THE GARDENS

*Banner event, Sunday November 26th 11am to 2.30pm*

*State Mine Gully Road, Newnes State Forest*

Join us to raise awareness for the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal. Put this date in your diary, and organise your friends and family to attend this important event. Like the 2011 event, you will discover another spectacular pagoda-studded location.

Your presence will support a 39,000 hectare Gardens of Stone reserve proposal that seeks to facilitate a transition for the Lithgow region.

Now is the time to make a change, as the 100 significant heritage values of Gardens of Stone region can't wait for further degradation. Existing coal mining needs to make way for a sustainable, lower impact, local economy based on tourism.

The banner event site can be accessed from Lithgow by conventional car and there is adequate parking.

An interurban train from Central Station departs at 8.18am and arrives in Lithgow at 11.10am where you will be picked up and

transported to the event. These times were correct when printed and no track work was planned, however we encourage you to check details prior to travel: ph: 131500 or <http://www.sydneytrains.info/timetables>

There are NO facilities on-site, so please bring everything you need – a litre

of drinking water, food, sun protection, hat, rain jacket, sturdy shoes and camera. There is mobile phone coverage.

### Call for volunteers

Volunteers are needed for parking and event marshalls on the day, raffle ticket sales, painting small

banners, climbers, placard makers and more.

We particularly need people and cars to volunteer for the vehicle shuttle service from Lithgow Station to the site and back – a distance of about six kilometres, mostly on sealed roads.

Contact Keith by email on [keith@colongwilderness.org.au](mailto:keith@colongwilderness.org.au)

[colongwilderness.org.au](http://colongwilderness.org.au) or phone 9261 2400 and mobile 0412 791 404 if you can help.

### Map of the Gardens of Stone region

The Gardens of Stone Visitors Map can be purchased from the Colong on-line shop <https://www.colongwilderness.org.au/store/books/gardens-stone-visitors-map-second-edition> for \$10.

This is your chance to be part of a simple but effective demonstration to highlight the importance of this reserve proposal.

Please note all are welcome to attend. You are responsible for your own travel arrangements and all other needs. Participation in all activities is at the participants own risk.



*Left: It is proposed to unfurl a large 'Protect Gardens of Stone' banner below the mighty Sphinx pagoda. Photo: K. Muir*

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# Building a strong and sustainable NPWS

ANTHONY LEAN, CEO, OEH

THIS YEAR MARKS the 50th anniversary of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) proudly protecting and preserving our state's natural landscapes, wildlife, culture and heritage.

Since 1967 NPWS has strived to ensure our land management and conservation programs are world class. This is something worth celebrating.

At the same time as we reflect on our proud history, it's important to look to the future to ensure the organisation is strong enough to deliver these vital services for the next 50 years and beyond. NPWS has been working toward this for some time now.

Throughout 2016, an extensive review was conducted to put the organisation under the microscope and determine what's working well and what can be improved.

As a result, in December last year, a leaner and more effective senior executive structure was created. The next step is redesigning the non-executive layers to reinvest the savings from those changes

into areas where they're needed most.

A draft proposal for this redesign was released for consultation with employees, unions and other stakeholders in July. This has been an important step in making sure we've got it right. NPWS is working through the feedback and expects to announce the final plan this month.

The changes we're making aren't about saving money – they're about doing the most we can, in the most effective way, with our existing staff budget. By redirecting the funds that were previously spent on top heavy management layers, we're able to increase our total number of employees rather than reducing it.

Our role as conservationists is at the very centre of this. It's an opportunity to build an organisational structure that ensures NPWS can deliver on its critical conservation and land management responsibilities in the most effective way possible.

A large part of the approach is to put more employees on the front line. Our new structure has 87 additional full-time-equivalent roles

when compared to our current budgeted roles. This increase includes approximately 70 field-based roles.

This will increase the capacity to carry out the core work of conservation in pest and weed management, firefighting and hazard reduction, by raising the number of field officers in the service.

We're also changing the mix of entry-level, mid-tier and senior roles to make sure we're as effective as we can be. This provides better career-progression pathways for existing employees and creates opportunities for young people to join the organisation. It also enables our experienced senior staff to mentor junior staff, allowing their years of accumulated knowledge and skills to propagate through the organisation.

On top of this, NPWS has taken a close look at which functions are best delivered locally and which benefit from being centralised. Getting this balance right is key to making sure we're getting the most out of the resources we have.

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I wrote to the Hon. Gabrielle Upton, Minister for the Environment and the Hon. Penny Sharpe, Shadow Environment Minister in August requesting articles that outline their vision for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The contributions provided could not be more different.

Keith Muir, Director, Colong Foundation

## Our National Parks need protection not cuts

BY PENNY SHARPE MLC

THE 50 YEAR anniversary of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) should be a year of celebration, reflection and commitment to continuing to build a reserve system that is the envy of the world, but instead we are now witnessing the single biggest attack on the NPWS since it was established in 1967.

NSW has some of the most beautiful, diverse, and environmentally significant natural areas in the world. Wisely, we have protected many of these places in more than 870 parks and reserves covering more than 7 million hectares (9%) of the state, including four World Heritage sites, many National Heritage sites, and 17 Ramsar-listed wetlands.

Never has so much been at stake for our national parks and the dedicated staff who manage them every day.

Despite government obfuscation and a commitment to withholding information, analysis of government budget papers and answers to questions put to the Minister for the Environment have revealed that NPWS staff cuts, budget cuts, and budget underspending by the State Government will slash \$121 million out of the NPWS over just two years.

This represents 27% of this year's entire NPWS budget.

Driven by these cuts, the current restructure underway in the NPWS has seen the axe taken to the jobs of many experienced and dedicated staff, with decades

of experience lost. Not only is this an appalling cut to regional jobs, but the negative impact on day-to-day parks operations will be significant.

At least 246 full-time staff have already been sacked or made redundant from the NPWS, and at least 20% of national parks ranger positions have been erased. In addition, a number of NPWS employees are facing modified job classifications that will reduce their take-home pay by thousands of dollars each year and again see experience and corporate knowledge walk out the door.

And there is more to come; the restructure is not over.

Staff cuts mean fewer conservation programs, reduced maintenance of facilities and fire hazard reduction, less work on dealing with pests and weeds, and an emerging problem of wild dogs and deer.

Compounding these cuts, just days ago the Minister for the Environment admitted that the Government's plan for the establishment of new national parks is still incomplete, despite a promise made in 2014 to progress this. There is no plan. There is no strategy for the acquisition and expansion of national parks – and it shows.

Under the previous Labor Government the parks and reserves estate was supported and expanded to become a world class public asset, dedicating an additional 2.7 million hectares of land for conservation, representing

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NPWS staff undertaking annual helicopter winch training at Pool Flat Audley in Royal National Park.

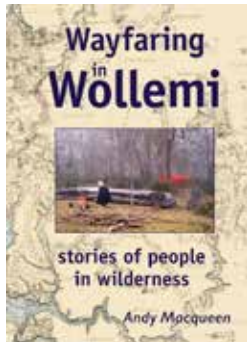
Photo: D. Croft/OEH



BOOK LAUNCH, , Sunday October 22nd, 10.30am

# Wayfaring in Wollemi

NON-FICTION, HARD COVER, 352 pages, with 140 maps and images, RRP \$40



JOIN THE COLONG Foundation to launch Andy Macqueen's latest book, *Wayfaring in Wollemi: stories of people in wilderness*.

■ **When:** 10.30am 22 October, 2017

■ **Where:** Waratah Education Centre, Blue Mountains Botanic Gardens at Mt Tomah

Free event, but bookings are essential as light refreshments will be served. Register on the Colong Foundation website [www.colongwilderness.org.au](http://www.colongwilderness.org.au) and just follow the links.

Launching *Wayfaring in Wollemi* will be by Alex Allchin, President of Bushwalking NSW. A book signing by Andy will follow.

Other speakers include inspiring Blue Mountains conservationist Wyn Jones and Dr Haydn Washington of the Colo Committee, the driving force behind saving the Wollemi.

Andy Macqueen is an engineer, hydrologist, conservationist, bushwalker and an accomplished writer of Blue Mountains history. This is his fifth book.

### Book outline

*Wayfaring in Wollemi* celebrates the human side of wilderness. It presents the stories of 28 people: colonial explorers and surveyors, wanderers, cattlemen, would-be developers, adventurers and conservationists. For one reason or another they each spent part of their

lives in the Wollemi, the largest declared Wilderness in New South Wales. What took them there and what did they get up to? Did the experience change their lives? In telling their stories, the author follows their footsteps through the gorges, over the mountains and into the hideaways. Along the way he weaves some of his personal story, revealing how he, like many of his subjects, has been touched by a landscape largely unaffected by transient modern society.

## *A leaf, a tree, a forest ... Wild Gardens of the Blue Mountains*

An exhibition of photographs by Ian Brown

If you attend the launch you can also visit the exhibition by well-known Blue Mountains photographer Ian Brown in the neighbouring rooms. His exhibition, entitled *A leaf, a tree, a forest ... Wild Gardens of the Blue Mountains*, opened on September 2nd, and closes on the afternoon of Andy's book launch.

### Our National Parks need protection not cuts

*cont'd from p.3*

more than 3% of the entire state. However, at the snail's pace of growth under the Berejiklian Government, it will take the Coalition 250 years to match Labor's 16-year record of enhancing our state's protected areas.

In addition to cuts and a lack of commitment to establishing new parks there are ongoing attacks on the national parks that currently exist.

There is a proposal to put the F6 toll road through the Royal National Park.

There is a National Party Branch that has been established to revert the Murray Valley National Park back to state forest for commercial timber harvesting.

This is the state of affairs that we face.

But I want to be clear that these revelations need not lead us to a state of doom and gloom – together we can fight the cuts, fight the neglect and together in the future, we can fix them.

There are so many people committed to the environment and to our parks systems in New South Wales, from volunteers to land carers to science, advocacy and wildlife organisations, not to mention the millions of people who visit our national parks each year.

It is to these people that I want to speak between now and the next State Election in 2019 – to reach out and discuss your future priorities for national parks and reserves, and how the next Labor Government can rebuild what has been lost, enhance what we have, and build our system for the future.

If you are as concerned as I am, I encourage you to take action to protest against the Government's cuts and make your voice heard, whether it be contacting your local member of parliament or writing to the Minister and the Premier, sending a letter to the newspaper, telling your friends on social media about what is happening, and above all: visiting our national parks and spreading the word about these magnificent places and why we must protect them.

Labor is committed to expanding and enhancing our national parks estate. I hope you'll join me to set a course for the next 50 years of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. ■

*Right: The Hon. Penny Sharpe looking up at Old Blotchy, a Spotted Gum in Murrumarang National Park. Photo: Supplied*

## Lest we forget

*'Kill a Police Officer and the laws are strengthened. Kill an Environmental Compliance Officer ... and the laws are weakened. A sad reflection of the times.'* John Benson, *The ESA Bulletin*, Vol 47, Issue 2, July 2017



# Gardens of Stone campaign on track

BY KEITH MUIR

THE PROPOSED 39,000 hectare state conservation area over the public forests in the Gardens of Stone region would protect 100 heritage values, each one rated at being either of national or international significance. This protection would stimulate tourism, but the reserve proposal is misunderstood by many, including conservationists.

For over a decade this reserve proposal has been treated by political parties and the CFMEU as if it were a national park. It has often been described as a national park proposal, perhaps so its critics may maintain their rage and project themselves as pro-coal saviours in the state electorate of Bathurst. The proposal should not be divisive, as its reserve category permits underground coal mining.

The stumbling block is that the NSW Office of Resources and Energy, the coal industry, and particularly Centennial Coal, are not prepared to relinquish coal resources for heritage protection. So the outstanding heritage of the Gardens of Stone region is being progressively ruined by high impact mining. The accompanying maze of 4WD mine access roads through



Lithgow, a tourist town, why not? Image: Lithgow Council

these beautiful forests have become race tracks for off-road vehicle enthusiasts.

Regulatory agencies have attempted more effective regulation, but the coal industry is powerful. Time and again the destructive elements of mining proposals sneak through approval processes, often after being misleadingly described as having negligible environmental impacts.

De-escalation of political

polarisation through a reserve proposal that allows coal mining, and protection of national and internationally significant heritage is fine in theory, but in practice it requires engagement with and support from those who oppose it.

Time is running out. How many more cliffs, swamps, streams and waterfalls must be ruined before the damage stops? How do conservationists

provide leadership from this point so that the politicians respond? We continue to seek answers.

## Lithgow - a tourist magnet, why not?

Lithgow is a pretty town, and like Katoomba surrounded by nature, but Sydney residents don't visit Lithgow, like they do Leura, Katoomba or Blackheath. The range of cafes and restaurants are limited,

and unless you really know the place, the town offers visitors almost nothing but McDonalds.

Lithgow is potentially a major tourist destination with fascinating cultural stories, and the awe-inspiring Gardens of Stone on its doorstep. In terms of heritage diversity, it's more attractive than the Bungle Bungle Range and Katoomba combined, not that anyone knows.

In twenty years Lithgow's coal will be gone and so a transition policy is needed now. The days when coal was 'king' have passed. A Gardens of Stone reserve is part of the change needed, a local response to forestall climate Armageddon. We should protect the region's outstanding heritage values from damage by not mining all available coal resources.

A 39,000 hectare Gardens of Stone reserve will not throw coal industry employees onto the scrap heap, but will facilitate gradual change towards a healthy, more diverse community. On its own it will not replace hundreds of mining jobs, but a diversified service economy will. Lithgow doesn't need to die when the coal is gone. ■

## Building a strong and sustainable NPWS

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Some of the work that has been based in head office will now move back into the branches, closer to the parks themselves. These roles, such as managing spatial data and GIS, visitor experiences and asset management, are more effective when delivered locally, allowing tailored local solutions to be developed for the unique challenges of our diverse parks.

Each operational branch will soon have a standardised structure of four roles that focus on delivery of biodiversity, conservation initiatives, threatened species and pest management. We are committed to strengthening

the conservation focus of our work.

Other functions like park management planning will continue as state-wide roles in this case allowing for a small specialist team to focus on priority Plans of Management across the state. Our goal is to keep roles centrally-based only where a centralised and standardised approach is most effective.

As well as improving NPWS's ability to respond to conservation priorities, boosting resources to frontline services will improve experiences for those visiting national parks across the state.

Australian visits to national

parks have grown significantly in recent years and our visitors have reported a remarkable 94% satisfaction rate. This growth reflects NPWS visitor improvements including a more prominent online presence and a wider range of visitor experiences.

As visitation grows, so too do opportunities to educate visitors about conservation and cultural heritage.

Increasing the proportion of our workforce who are in the field will also ensure we're able to continue to meet this demand, and to deliver on our vision: inspiring everyone to love their national parks.

These changes aren't about starting from scratch. They're all about building on the good

work the organisation already does and adapting in areas where better ways of doing things can be found.

I do acknowledge that change on this scale is disruptive, particularly for the staff affected by it. NPWS is mindful of this and has designed a transition that provides as much stability as possible, and will continue to support employees throughout the process.

Change is often challenging as well as necessary. With the environment under continuing pressure and society changing rapidly around us, this is a challenge we must rise to. It's a once in a generation chance to make NPWS as strong and effective as it can be. ■

*'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. A thing is wrong when it does otherwise.'*  
Aldo Leopold, 1949, *The Land Ethic, in Sand Country Almanac.*

# Royal National Park disrespected

BY KEITH MUIR

Call me old-fashioned, but any group of park users who over a period of years systematically clear fifty kilometres of tracks (50km) in Royal National Park without permission, deserve prosecution under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*, not encouragement.

In 2010 mountain trail bike (MTB) riders argued that professional construction of single track bike trails in national parks was necessary as otherwise riders would clear bushland to establish tracks illegally, causing conflict between park visitors and greater environmental damage. Well now the apparent strategy is for riders to seek approval and upgrading of illegally cleared trails, and to obtain offers from the NPWS to investigate additional link tracks under proposed changes to the park's plan of management.

Mountain bike tracks are built for sport, not the appreciation of heritage values. Mountain bike tracks are no more appropriate than ovals and golf courses in national parks. The Colong Foundation supports the use of bikes on roads, including fire trails, that are approved for such purposes through a reserve plan of management. Careful consideration of cycling in national parks assures public safety, the protection of park assets, the enjoyment of other park visitors, and conservation of the heritage values of the reserve.

A bike trail audit was produced for Royal National Park by a company with



*The NPWS used Bulka bags to chopper in sandstone blocks and materials for mountain bike track construction in Garigal National Park and to remove huge amounts of native vegetation after due process. For Royal National Park, due process may reward the builders of illegal MTB tracks. Photo: H. Gold*

a potential conflict of interest in mountain bike track construction, track maintenance and operation of MTB events. Their recommendations were translated into NPWS proposals for Royal National Park. Nothing negative was reported on three extensive bike track networks of over fifty kilometres illegally cleared in the park. This is the second time a management review appears to have been influenced by a consultant with links to MTB user groups and track construction. Such actions may damage public perception of the NPWS – it certainly damages my perception of them.

A 2009 survey by Roy

Morgan Research regarding park visitation reveals that only 4 per cent of visitors are cyclists, compared to 54 per cent as walkers. Yet walkers may have their opportunities for enjoyment reduced with the North Era camp site proposed for removal, while mountain bike riders may be allowed use of 50 kilometres of tracks they illegally built. So a traditional camp site on a cleared site on exotic grass has to go, while illegal tracks cleared through rare bushland can stay.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed a proposed F6 (freeway) Extension that would clear 60 hectares of Royal National Park (14 June 2017). The National Parks Association of NSW believes it could well alienate a further 200 hectares. Do we really care about national parks, or are they glorified playgrounds and land banks for the next infrastructure project?

“Our national park estate is not open space to be set aside until we can find another use for it. It is an important heritage asset, a vital component in protecting our biodiversity, an important set of lungs for our crowded city and a haven of peace to which more and more residents go to seek solace”, said NPA’s Southern Sydney Secretary, Gary Schoer.

There will be an international review of Royal National Park before any recommendation for inscription onto the World Heritage list of properties. We need to lift our game to have any hope of success. I’m sure local residents of Sutherland Shire and Wollongong are up to this challenge, but are user groups and governments? ■

## EARTH’S SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION UNDER WAY

EARLIER THIS YEAR Paul Ehrlich contributed a paper to the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA with a title warning of ‘Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction’. Ehrlich and collaborating scientists sampled 27,600 terrestrial vertebrate species, and undertook a more detailed analysis of 177 mammal species, and found an extremely high degree of population decay in vertebrates, even in common ‘species of low concern’.

The authors blame human overpopulation and overconsumption for this vertebrate extinction crisis, warning that it threatens the survival of human civilisation. The peer-reviewed study abandoned the usual neutral tones of scientific papers to write of a ‘frightening assault on the foundations of human civilisation’ taking a broader view than previously identified specific risks to threatened species. Many common species all over the world were assessed and found to be losing populations as their ranges shrank, while remaining present elsewhere.

Extinction rates are underestimating the risk to wildlife from broad-scale population decline. For land mammals, almost half have lost 80% of their range in the last century. Countless populations of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians have disappeared all over the planet. The diversity of life is in rapid decline.

Wildlife is dying out due to habitat destruction, overhunting, toxic pollution, invasion by alien species and climate change. The ultimate cause of all of these factors is ‘human overpopulation

and continued population growth, and overconsumption, especially by the rich’. This is bleedingly obvious, yet we remain blind and insensitive to it!

Corroborating the US study, the number of species in NSW listed as threatened with extinction now exceeds 1000, a list that includes the koala and about 60% of our remaining native mammals. Springvale’s water pollution and the defunct Berrima coal mines have devastated aquatic ecosystems and put at risk the health of Sydney’s drinking water – the highest court in NSW has upheld our pollution laws to stop this damage, but this pollution continues, so when will we act?

When will society wake up to the constant damage it’s causing to the fabric of life on Earth? That day can’t come soon enough as state land clearing laws are wound back.

The authors conclude: ‘... population extinctions today are orders of magnitude more frequent than species extinctions. Population extinctions, however, are a prelude to species extinctions, so Earth’s sixth mass extinction episode has proceeded further than most assume. The massive loss of populations is already damaging the services ecosystems provide to civilization. When considering this frightening assault on the foundations of human civilization, one must never forget that Earth’s capacity to support life, including human life, has been shaped by life itself.’

Reference: Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, and Rodolfo Dirz, 2017 Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signalled by vertebrate population losses and declines, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA*, vol. 114 no. 30 <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2017/07/05/1704949114.full>

## Royal National Park – A Birthing Place for the National Parks Movement

The setting up of national parks systems has been a global conservation phenomenon. It is therefore very important that international recognition is given to how the movement began. Probably the best world example of this birthing in a largely natural area is the establishment of Royal National Park that had a major influence on the development of national parks not only in New South Wales but also in the other colonies. In NSW Royal’s legacy includes the development of larger national parks in the Blue Mountains and in the Snowy Mountains and the evolution and spread of the wilderness movement. The establishment of Royal also inspired the establishment of national parks at Belair in South Australia and Wilsons Promontory in Victoria. Each of these helped spread the national parks movement in their respective States. In July 2017 the World Heritage Committee placed the English Lake District on the World Heritage List, a first for the recognition of a different type of national park protecting rural man made landscapes. The obvious next candidate for World Heritage listing is Royal National Park, a natural.

**Geoff Mosley**

# Implementing the Murray Darling Basin Plan

BY BEV SMILES, PRESIDENT,  
INLAND RIVERS NETWORK

THE MURRAY DARLING Basin Plan was gazetted in November 2012 after an extensive period of data collection and community consultation. The Plan is a new direction for water management and sharing in one of the world's largest river basins.

It is a statutory instrument under the *Commonwealth Water Act 2007* (passed by the Howard Government led by Water Minister, Malcolm Turnbull).

In its objects the Plan gives effect to international agreements. These include the Ramsar Convention for wetlands of international importance, the Biodiversity Convention, the Bonn Convention for migratory species, and the agreements between Japan, China and Korea to protect migratory birds and their environment.

The Plan aims to address the over-allocation of water used for irrigated agriculture. The millennium drought saw a drastic reduction in wetlands, River Red Gums, waterbirds and native fish populations. The Murray mouth was closed for a prolonged period of time, salinity levels rose across the Basin and water dependent ecosystems, weakened by lost natural flows, had less resilience.

Analysis by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) concluded that ecosystems and species needed a volume of 7,600 GL (gigalitres or billion litres) to be returned for a healthier Basin.

The Inland Rivers Network and other interest groups, after strong opposition from the irrigation industry and considering the social and economic impacts of alternatives to extraction, advocated that a fair compromise would be a return of 4,000 GL.

The final outcome of the political process, with strong positions from the four state jurisdictions (NSW, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland), arrived at a



*Aerial of Mannum on the Murray River, South Australia. Photo: S. Strudwick*

volume of 2,750 GL back to the riverine environment, with some adjustments during the implementation phase.

The adopted Plan includes an adjustment mechanism lowering this volume by a further 650 GL through supply measures that demonstrate the same environmental outcomes with less water. The adjustment also allows for an increase of 450 GL through funding on- and off-farm water use efficiencies.

The other possible change to the Plan is through the Northern Basin Review due to limited knowledge of the Barwon Darling catchment. The outcome of this process, a political decision influenced by the irrigation industry, is a proposal to reduce flows back to the Darling River system by 70 GL (390 GL down to 320 GL in the proposed amended plan).

Even worse, the MDBA is proposing to take up to 28 GL of existing environmental water from the Macquarie River and up to 22 GL from the Gwydir. This decision will seriously impact the Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes and Gwydir Wetlands.

We are now at a critical stage of decision-making on

the final volume of water for environmental improvement. The adjustment mechanism and Northern Basin amendment are to be adopted in Parliament by the end of this year.

The influence of the irrigation industry both on the MDBA and State Governments, and particularly the NSW Government, has been significant. This was recently exposed by the ABC Four Corners program, *'Pumped: who is benefitting from the billions spent on the Murray-Darling?'*

The program exposed water theft, tampering with water meters and the winding back of compliance monitoring. Changes to water sharing plans in NSW have benefited large agribusiness irrigation at the expense of downstream communities, other water users and the health of river systems.

This is particularly the case for the Darling River which is the connection between the Northern Basin system and the Southern Basin catchment to the Murray mouth.

The implementation of the Basin Plan has a \$13 billion budget making it the most expensive natural resource management project in the

nation. The most efficient use of this funding to achieve an increase in river flows, is to buy back water from willing sellers.

Lobbying by the irrigation industry with the strong support of the National Party capped water buy back at 1500 GL. The rest of the environmental water now must be recovered through very expensive infrastructure projects and on-farm subsidies to improve efficient water use.

The current volume reclaimed for environmental use is approximately 1753 GL.

Water purchased with public money or saved through expensive infrastructure projects must stay as additional river flows to improve the environmental health of the system and to support downstream communities and Aboriginal cultural values.

The NSW Government has failed to protect purchased environmental water from being pumped for irrigation. The entire process under the watch of National Party Ministers at the state and federal level has been a windfall gain for the irrigation industry.

The Inland Rivers Network is a member of the Lifblood Alliance made up of

environment groups, farming and grazing groups, Aboriginal representative bodies, tourism and fishing industry representatives. We see river systems as the lifeblood of the driest continent on earth that must be nurtured and respected for the health of our country and its people.

The Alliance has been advocating that the Basin Plan be implemented in full and on time. This means that 3,200 GL must be returned to rivers under current agreements. We also advocate that the MDBA be a properly functioning, well-resourced and truly independent body with a balanced Board.

While there are now several different reviews, inquiries and matters sent to ICAC on NSW water management, nothing short of a judicial review will have the power to thoroughly examine the political influence that has corrupted good, transparent water management and decision-making.

We need to continue to demand a full judicial review. Only in this way can Malcolm Turnbull protect his legacy and achieve the outcome of a healthy, well-managed Murray Darling Basin. ■

## SUPPORT THE COLONG FOUNDATION!

To: The Treasurer, Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd., Level 2, 332 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000  
The enclosed remittance or advice covers the item(s) indicated by a tick. (One cheque payable to the Colong Foundation is sufficient to cover subscription and donation.)

- Membership application for individuals or households (\$30) to 31 December 2017  
(NB Membership application covers *Bulletin subscription*)
- Colong Bulletin Subscription (\$15) to 31 December 2017 (non members only)
- Membership renewal to 31 December 2017 (\$30)       Life Membership (\$550)
- Tax deductible donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the Colong Wilderness Fund
- PLUS \$\_\_\_\_\_ being for publications as indicated on the reverse side of this form.

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Please add your full name in the Reference Field so that we may trace your contribution and also inform the Colong Foundation by email immediately after you have made a payment. Email [foundation@colongwilderness.org.au](mailto:foundation@colongwilderness.org.au) with your name and address details, so we can mail to you an official tax deductible receipt. We also need notification so as to track all contributions to those who have provided them for our accounting purposes.

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION Why not join or invite a friend to join?

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 guaranteee \$20 should it be needed in the event of the winding up of the Foundation. Signed .....

### A BEQUEST

**Please remember us in your Will.**

The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording... "I bequeath the sum of \$... to the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd.

for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the treasurer for the time being of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd."



### 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 2,100,000 ha of protected wilderness in NSW. However, many beautiful and environmentally highly significant wilderness areas are not protected, such as the Pilliga and Goonoo on the north west slopes, 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

SENDER: THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR  
WILDERNESS  
Level 2, 332 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000



### PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE COLONG FOUNDATION

**CELEBRATING WILDERNESS** 60.00

*Edited by Ian Brown, this spectacularly illustrated book with 46 full-page colour wilderness photographs by Rob Jung, David Neilson, Rob Bakers and Ian Brown is essential reading for wilderness supporters (120pp)*

**WILD PLACES** 27.50

*The meticulously researched, beautifully written book on wilderness by Peter Pirneas with photographs by Henry Gold (285pp)*

**BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE** 50.00

*Alex Colley and Henry Gold's description of the 67 year campaign culminating in World Heritage listing. (136pp)*

**SUSTAINABILITY** 20.00

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