

colong bulletin

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A Dad's Army of unionists seek dialogue to protect Lithgow's Gardens of Stone

BY JANINE KITSON

IN June 2018, representatives of the Gardens of Stone Alliance - Janine Kitson, Peter Drinkall, Lyndal Sullivan, Peter Green and Keith Muir - hosted a delegation of over twenty members of the Combined Retired Union Members Association (CRUMA) who travelled to see Lithgow's spectacular pagodas in the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal, at Dobbs Drift Lookout, just north of the town. This was followed by a visit to the State Mine Heritage Park where CRUMA members saw an outstanding display of union banners and a sobering history of coal mining, with its litany of accidents and deaths arising from appalling and dangerous work conditions.

CRUMA concluded their visit at Lithgow Workmen's (Workies) Club where other unionists joined them for speeches and refreshments and where they were welcomed by the Club's General Manager, Geoff Wheeler. Jim Angel, former Blue Mountains Mayor, spoke and eloquently shared the union history behind the campaign to save Lithgow's Gardens of Stone. He reminded the gathering that it was local mining unionists Verne and Joyce Moffett who first expressed the need to protect Lithgow's spectacular pagoda landscape. Their contributions are memorialised in the Moffett Pagodas, named after them.

Following the speeches, CRUMA put forward a motion that was unanimously carried to invite leaders of Unions NSW, CFMEU (Mining & Energy Division), Gardens of Stone Alliance representatives and Lithgow Mayor Stephen Lesslie on a site visit where they could begin "discussions for a State Conservation Area".

CRUMA supports underground mining but opposes open-cut mining in



Peter Drinkall, Bed and Breakfast small business owner and poet sings his Gardens of Stone song to retired unionists delegation at Dobbs Drift lookout. Photo: J. Kitson

the Gardens of Stone region, including the Manildra-owned Invincible Mine extension that was re-opened last year.

Significantly, CRUMA resolved to support the reservation of a 39,000 hectare Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area over unprotected publicly-owned forests. The retired union members, many of whom were involved in Sydney's Green Bans, are keen to establish a positive dialogue between local unionists and conservationists.

CRUMA member John Koch said the sandstone pagodas made Lithgow "one of the most special places on earth". John participated in a "Spring Day in the Gardens" in November 2017.

CRUMA members subsequently attended a meeting of Retired Unionists at Sydney Trades Hall, where they gave enthusiastic and positive feedback on their visit to Lithgow's Gardens of Stone, acknowledging strong community support for their trip. This was made evident when the Lithgow Community Choir came out on a cold

and dark winter's evening, to farewell them by singing union songs on the platform of Lithgow Railway Station, just as CRUMA members boarded their train back to Central.

Many of the retired unionists have promised to follow-up the urgent need to 'save' the Gardens of Stone with their individual unions and Labor Party branches. Unions NSW have placed photos of CRUMA's visit to the Gardens of Stone on the Sydney Trades Hall facebook page with an invitation for a future visit later in the year.

The Gardens of Stone Alliance now awaits Lithgow's response to the union delegation. It is hoped that CRUMA will break through the propaganda that has in the past attacked the Gardens of Stone National Park for loss of corporate profits. The pro-industry lobby is also promoting misleading and confusing views about the State Conservation Area proposal, which has tragically entrenched Lithgow's long-standing opposition to it.

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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 third Wednesday of the month on July 18th, August 15th Sept. 19th and Oct. 17th. Members and visitors are welcome.

Snowy-hydro 2 risks significant damage to Kosciuszko National Park

BY KEITH MUIR

THE SNOWY-HYDRO SCHEME, the largest engineering project ever undertaken in Australia, covers Kosciuszko, the largest national park in NSW, with 16 dams, hundreds of kilometres of roads, 80km of aqueducts, many pipelines, power plants, tunnels, associated large rock waste heaps, and vast numbers of high tension electricity transmission lines cleared through sensitive subalpine woodlands.

Snowy 2, will again mistreat the environment and ignore national park protection. The proposal is sold as being critical to ensuring the security of Australia's electricity distribution system as the National Electricity Market (NEM) becomes decarbonised. As reported in *Colong Bulletin* 270, the proposed pumped-hydro scheme will also increase coal consumption by using off-peak electricity to pump vast amounts of water uphill. Pump storage does not generate green energy.

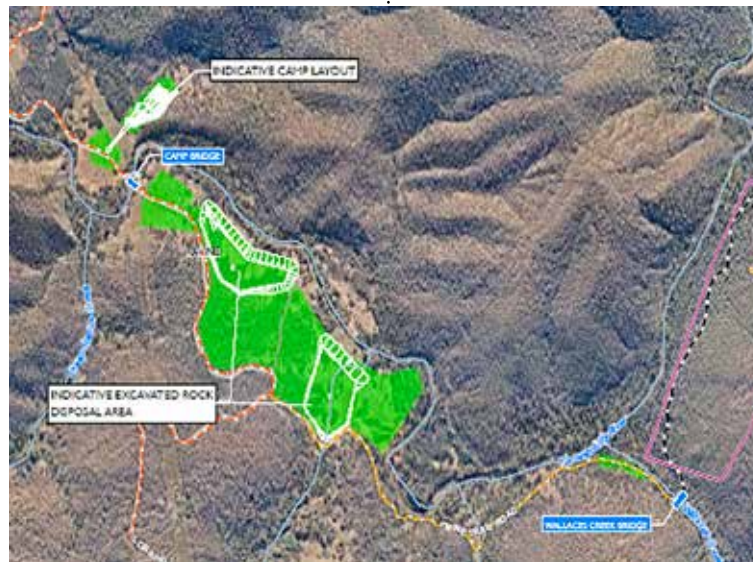
When exploration becomes development

The Snowy Hydro company has proposed exploratory works in the Ravine region of Kosciuszko National Park and if approved, public access to thousands of hectares of the park will be denied. The proposed "exploration" includes the 4.4 kilometre main access tunnel to the proposed Machine Hall cavern. This concrete lined,

D-shaped tunnel will be 8 by 8 metres wide. The 750,000 m³ of rock waste produced from it will be spread over 10 hectares of national park beside Yarrangobilly River, potentially on flood prone land. A construction pad requires another 20 hectares of national park to be cleared, and the access portal and accommodation site a further 3 hectares. In total 114 hectares of national park will be disturbed and park visitors will be prohibited from visiting Ravine Valley and campground for about a decade. A new road will be constructed along a pristine reach of the Yarrangobilly River for about a kilometre and other major road works are required to make narrow 4WD access roads into the valley suitable for truck haulage.

On this large and remote works site several nationally threatened fauna species have been identified including the Smoky Mouse (*Pseudomys fumeus*), Eastern Pygmy-possum (*Cercartetus nanus*), Broad-toothed Rat (*Mastacomys fuscus*), Boorolong Frog (*Litoria booroolongensis*) and Alpine She-oak Skink (*Cyclodomorphus praealtus*). Despite this, the consultants for Snowy Hydro reported in a preliminary environmental assessment that approvals under Federal law would not be required.

This is demonstrably wrong as the national park is listed as National Heritage and shall be significantly impacted by a huge amount of disturbance



750,000 tonnes of waste rock are proposed to cover 10 of 114 hectares of national park 'disturbed' in Ravine Valley by the initial Snowy 2 development. The Yarrangobilly River will also be subjected to a new bulldozed road. These are not significant impacts according to Snowy Hydro!

and exclusive occupation of thousands more hectares in Ravine Valley, perhaps with no compensation to the NPWS. Snowy Hydro may fear that a new Federal administration after the election some time in 2019 will less enthusiastically support Snowy 2.0 which comes with a \$4.5 to 8 billion price range, depending on the extent of powerline transmission networks built in association with it.

Snowy Hydro has officially informed the Federal Government it does not have impacts on National Heritage. Their expert opinion is that 114 hectares of disturbance and exclusive occupation of thousands of hectares of national park, and closure of a camping ground is not a significant environmental impact. This opinion is out of kilter with past precedents

where disturbing even a few square metres of National Heritage was enough to trigger Federal environmental assessment processes. If this so-called exploration proposal is approved, construction of major works will commence before the Snowy 2.0 pump-storage project is assessed under Federal or NSW law, locking in Government expenditure without adequate consideration of the project.

National Parks don't count

The NSW Minister for Planning, Anthony Roberts, declared Snowy 2.0, and all its associated works, a Critical State Significant Infrastructure project (media release, 8/3/2018). Before his decision, 40 drill sites had been approved in the national park as part of the 2017 'feasibility study', which is not part of the

exploration currently being assessed. This decision has made the proposed Snowy 2.0, its contingent earthworks and clearing for transmission lines more important, in a legal sense, than the National Heritage listed national park where the works are situated. It should not be surprising then, that Snowy Hydro is seeking to sweep aside the park's National Heritage listing as matter to be considered in the Minister's determination process for this proposal.

The Critical State Significant Infrastructure planning approval pathway has replaced the long-standing practice of avoiding infrastructure and new utility easements in national parks with a development friendly system which permits removal of national park bushland and installation of rock waste heaps without any recourse to independent review of the Minister's decision.

There is an ever-growing collection of damaging NSW Government decisions that have alienated voters in several electorates, who care about the environment.

If Snowy 2.0 is approved, subsequent park damage will occur behind the closed doors of Snowy Hydro's exclusive possession of Ravine Valley, and this again reflects poorly on the NSW Government's infrastructure and planning record. The inflexible nature of infrastructure approvals increases the chance for administrative errors and is likely to result in greater environmental impacts.

THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS LTD
2/332 Pitt Street Sydney NSW 2000 (ABN 84 001 112 143)

TELEPHONE: (02) 9261 2400 FAX: (02) 9261 2144 EMAIL: foundation@colongwilderness.org.au
WEBSITE: www.colongwilderness.org.au

PATRON: The Hon. Bob Carr, BA (Hons), Hon. LittD. • DIRECTORS: John Robens (Chair); Ian Tanner (Hon. Secretary); Janine Kitson (Vice-Chair); Henry Gold, O.A.M. (Hon. Photographer); Dr. Stephen Allen (Hon. Treasurer); Alex Allchin; Sierra Classen, BA (Hons); Alan Dixon; Valerie Atkinson; Pat Thompson, L.C.P.; Haydn Washington, B.A., M.Sc., PhD.

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WILD RIVERS CAMPAIGNER: Harry Burkitt

HON. FIRE OFFICER: Ian Brown, O.A.M., BSc. • HON. BULLETIN DESIGN & TYPESETTING: Jenni Gormley

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Wild Light exhibition – A celebration of Henry Gold's photography

BY KEITH MUIR

Henry Gold's 'Wild Light' exhibition of 45 framed photographs at Bondi Pavilion in June was a great success with most images sold, some several times over.

HENRY WAS HONOURED by the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, among others. "Today, with the Colong Foundation, he can celebrate fifty years of achievement as the honorary landscape photographer for the environment movement in NSW. His work, and that of the Foundation, must continue as there are still many precious wilderness areas that are not protected; Macleay gorges, Pilliga and the Main Range of Kosciuszko National Park among them," said Mayor Moore's message of support at the exhibition launch.

Many know the late Tasmanian landscape photographer Peter Dombrowskis whose stunning Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend image was pivotal in saving Tasmania's Franklin River in the 1980s, but Henry Gold's classic shot of Mt. Colong played a similar role and predates that iconic image by sixteen years. The great dramatic impact of Henry's black and white photographs contributed to saving the Colong Caves from limestone mining in 1968 – the campaign that led to the creation of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

Henry's Mt. Colong

photograph became the Foundation's letterhead, and this recognisable image has eloquently introduced many decision-makers to the subject of wilderness protection.

As a teenager, Henry was fascinated by a book his father owned called 'Wonders of the World'. It had a chapter on Australia, featuring views of the Blue Mountains that were so different to the Austrian Alps he knew, with their valleys populated with chateaus and villages. Australia's 'pristine' mountain ranges motivated Henry to join the Sydney Bushwalkers after he arrived from Europe in 1955.

He then began using his skills as a photographer to open Australian eyes to their unique wilderness heritage.

He learned a great deal about wilderness photography during a three-year sojourn in the USA, where he kept in touch with the Sierra Club and studied the technique of well-known wilderness photographer, Ansell Adams.

Our bush has a reputation for sameness, and we take it for granted, but Henry Gold saw it with the unprejudiced eyes of an artist, new to the country, and recognised its real beauty. From 1958 to 1971 Henry worked with writer Frank Rigby to compile a portfolio of



Henry Gold and Yuri Bolotin at the launch of the Wild Light exhibition at Bondi Pavilion, June 6, 2018. Photo: Dave Noble

photographs for the landmark book "The MacDonnell Ranges" published in 1973. The book was the first report to document the case for a MacDonnell Ranges National Park in the Northern Territory.

In 1967, a year before the Colong Committee began, he worked with other bushwalkers to prepare a submission to Tom Lewis, then Minister for Lands, against the mining of Colong Caves. When Alan Rigby died, literally on the job, Henry was persuaded to take over his role of principal photographer for the project. He then produced the classic Mt. Colong image, and Milo Dunphy the text, for the influential brochure "Quarrying Valuable Scenery", which helped save the Colong Caves area in the southern Blue Mountains.

Throughout the campaigns

to save the southern Blue Mountains he provided a multitude of photographs for pamphlets, press articles and newsletters. Henry spent a fortnight alone on Boyd Plateau, camping through a blizzard, and the best of these photographs were used for a professionally mounted display book. Three days after one was left with him, the then Minister for Lands, Milton Morris, announced that there would be no pines on Boyd Plateau!

Later Henry was despatched to targeted areas, such as the Border Ranges and Kakadu. His photos have been used in Journals, Australian Conservation Foundation books, government publications and on stamps.

The sale of thousands of his posters and his awe-inspiring NSW Wilderness Calendar provided ongoing and regular funding for the Colong Foundation. He also co-authored and supplied photos for the notable publications: Colo Wilderness, Wild Places and Blue Mountains World Heritage.

Henry's work helped influence the World Heritage Committee that in 2000 was undecided up to the last moment about whether to list the Greater Blue Mountains. One wonders if a book of Henry's photographs ultimately

helped persuade the Committee to unanimously support their World Heritage Listing.

He has served for fifty years as honorary photographer to the NSW environment movement. Henry is a true 'Man of the Mountains' and knows the NSW wilderness way beyond the reach of the motor vehicle. His work has been essential in bringing threatened wilderness to the attention of decision-makers who lack time to discover these areas for themselves. There can be no doubt that Henry has won many politicians to the cause of nature conservation.

We are very fortunate that we can glimpse the spellbinding magnificence of our wilderness through his images that reflect the very essence of wild Australia.

In 2006 Henry Gold was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for service to wilderness preservation through the use of photographic documentation. This recognised not only Henry's work, but the national significance of wilderness.

Everyone who buys a Henry Gold photograph takes home a small piece of wilderness to enjoy for years to come, and helps save our ever-threatened wild places, which remain one of the best antidotes to our modern, often frantic world.

All proceeds from Wild Light will support the Colong Foundation's continuing wilderness campaigns to help stop the raising of Warragamba Dam wall and protect the wonderful Gardens of Stone region.

The Colong Foundation is extremely proud of and grateful to Henry for his lifetime commitment to photographing nature in the wild and for sharing his immense talents so generously with the NSW environment movement.

If you unfortunately missed Wild Light you can still view and purchase Henry Gold's stunning photos via our website's Wilderness Gallery, just follow the link on the homepage.

Dad's Army of unionists seek dialogue to protect Lithgow's Gardens of Stone

cont'd from p.1

The Gardens of Stone Alliance argues that the State Conservation Area will have a positive impact on the future of tourism for Lithgow. A protected pagodas landscape will attract more visitors to the town.

Reservation of the 39,000 hectare Gardens of Stone Stage 2 Proposal will

permit the continuation of appropriately-regulated, underground coal mining that is already approved. Such more sensitively managed mining would protect Lithgow's internationally significant pagodas and nationally threatened upland swamps.

CRUMA's proposed discussions with union leaders,

the Mayor of Lithgow and the Gardens of Stone Alliance is an exciting first step in bringing the Lithgow community together to develop a vibrant tourist economy. It is about time the dust was cleared away so that the Lithgow community has the opportunity to develop a win-win outcome for their local economy.

Kosciuszko National Park in peril

BY KEITH MUIR

COALITION DISCIPLINE TRADITIONALLY ensured that the Environment portfolio, especially the National Parks portfolio, was given to a sympathetic Liberal Minister, while the National Party managed regional affairs and natural resources. NSW Deputy Premier, John Barilaro has now upset this convention with legislation protecting 'heritage horses'. The idea of heritage horses has compromised setting aside national parks for nature and led to an uproar of protest.

Sober-minded organisations like the Australian Academy of Science and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature wrote to the NSW Government to oppose the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018*. Don Driscoll, a professor of ecology from Deakin University described the abandonment of culling horses in national parks as "madness" and a "disaster".

Opposition Leader Luke Foley said that the Act throws away the conservation consensus on national parks. The NPA even placed a half page advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to embarrass the Government into dropping or at least water down the legislation, but it

Horse disturbance beside the Goobragandra River, KNP. Photo: K. Muir



Flower gardens like this one in the Snowy River headwaters are being eaten out of existence by feral horses. Photo: Brian Slee, NPA (ACT)

was to no avail. For a while even the Greens NSW toyed with abandoning humane and effective culling of feral horses but thought better of it, opposing the legislation and supporting NSW Labor in its commitment to repeal it.

The legislation is dumb politics. It backs a vocal pro-horse minority on the assumption that people who care about national parks do not vote for the Coalition parties. This is dead wrong. Nearly everyone loves and enjoys national parks. They are the public's most cherished asset. Farmers know horse populations require effective control to prevent environmental damage.

Environment policies from the Nationals are vote losers in middle class, suburban Australia, which is why traditional Coalition Ministerial portfolio allocations and discipline evolved.

Heritage horse abuse

When the Snowy Hydro scheme devastated Kosciuszko with 16 dams, one environmental plus was

Committee signalled plans to list feral horses as a 'key threatening process' under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act*."

The Scientific Committee stated that feral horses negatively impact native species and ecological communities in a variety of ways. Habitat damage in streams, wetlands and adjacent riparian systems occurs through selective grazing, trampling, track creation, pugging (soil compaction), wallowing and dust bathing, leading to stream bank slumping and destruction, stream course disturbance and incision, and sphagnum bog and wetland destruction.

The Committee found that feral horses in the Snowy are endangering more than 20 plant species, including the iconic Alpine Daisy and Alpine She-oak, and seven animal species, including three frog species (Alpine Tree, Northern Corroboree, Southern Corroboree), the Alpine Water Skink, the Alpine Stoney Crayfish, the Broad-toothed Rat, and Latham's Snipe (a bird).

"These species occur nowhere else and if the damage caused by feral horses does not stop we may lose them forever," Ms Smolski said.

Andrew Cox of the Invasive Species Council (ISC) "warned that feral horse numbers in Kosciuszko National Park are increasing and that the current control measures of lure trapping and rehoming and off-site euthanasia are not keeping the numbers down. The ISC believes park managers need to have available the full range of effective and humane control options, including ground and air shooting, and that vet supervised aerial shooting addresses RSPCA concerns."

The *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* undermines the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974* because it places non-threatened, non-native horses before the collective plight of native animal and plant species, including those that are threatened with extinction and found nowhere else.

The proposed fertility

controls are costly and can't work on feral horse populations located in inaccessible, rugged wilderness. Attempts to move horses to horse free parts of the park will expand the area impacted, while moving horses to occupied areas creates conflict with existing horse populations. Attempts at rehoming have failed over 15 years.

The horse legislation will increase the risks of serious and lethal accidents between horses and motor vehicle passengers. Pushing rehoming, which will follow the legislation, will increase nonsensical sympathy in the community for horse protection in national parks. Surplus horses from the rehoming program will be dumped in areas like Newnes Plateau as horse lovers won't send them to the abattoir.

The struggle continues

It's obvious that horses in NSW national parks have an adverse impact on the environment, and are a pest and a biosecurity risk pursuant to the *NSW Biosecurity Act 2015* that provides a framework for the prevention, elimination and minimisation of such environmental risks. Persons that control feral horses have a "biosecurity dealing" and consequently a "biosecurity duty" to "prevent, eliminate or minimise" a biosecurity risk, and a person who "fails to discharge the person's biosecurity duty is guilty of an offence" under this Act.

The Biosecurity Act and the Horse Heritage Act are clearly antagonistic and compel park rangers to "protect" a "pest" in "sustainable wild horse populations" in a national park, while doing their "biosecurity duty" and maintaining other environmental values of the park. Minimising environmental harm, however, can't be done by undertaking ineffective, inhumane and costly control measures, such as rehoming horses, which will only result in increased horse numbers and more national park damage. Rangers can't manage a pest as heritage – it's legal, scientific and management nonsense!

Saving the Great Barrier Reef

BY JANINE KITSON

OUR GREAT BARRIER Reef is a global icon. It is arguably one of Earth's most important natural treasures. It is a place of immeasurable beauty and biodiversity, as well as being the largest living structure on Earth. It can be seen from space. Since 1981, when the Great Barrier Reef was World Heritage listed, it has formed the basis of a vibrant tourist economy supporting 69,000 jobs and contributing billions of dollars to the Queensland economy.

The Reef is now in crisis as a result of climate change. During the summers of 2016-2017, unprecedented coral bleaching occurred. It has been estimated by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority that these mass bleaching events caused the death of two thirds of the coral in the northern end of the Great Barrier Reef.

Warm ocean waters kill coral. They cannot survive when the water becomes too warm, for too long. When the coral polyps become stressed they spit out the algae that live within them. Without their colourful algae, corals reveal their stark white skeletons.



For most of the Great Barrier Reef diversity like this is only a memory.

Without the algae, the coral begins to starve. The algae provides up to 90% of the coral's energy. Unless ocean temperatures return quickly to normal, the coral dies.

Once this happens it can take up to a decade for a coral reef to recover. This recovery depends on a healthy and resilient marine ecosystem.

Currently the reef is experiencing further stress and degradation from the accumulated impacts of poor water quality caused by decades of land clearing, pollution,

dredging, coastal development, illegal fishing and the invasive crown of thorns starfish.

Our Great Barrier Reef is at a tipping point. Although governments acknowledge the Reef is in danger they continue to pursue policies, subsidies and approval mechanisms that promote harmful projects, including mega coal mining proposals.

If approved, the Adani Carmichael coal mine in central Queensland could be the death knell for the Great Barrier Reef. Adani plans to

The Great Barrier Reef is an extremely ancient, living structure composed of living coral growing on dead coral dating back perhaps as much as twenty million years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have fished and hunted the Great Barrier Reef's waters and navigated between its islands for millennia.

■ **1770** James Cook on the 'Endeavour' struck the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and was forced to spend six weeks repairing his ship where Cooktown is today.

■ **1801** Matthew Flinders charted the GBR's inner route (1801-1803).

■ **1892** Coconut plantations were established on some GBR islands (1892-1900).

■ **1920s** Basic tourist resorts start to appear.

■ **1928-29** English marine zoologist Sir Maurice Yonge spends a year-long research on GBR, off Port Douglas, and generates enormous

scientific interest in the Reef.

■ **1947** Catalina flying boat started flying direct from Brisbane to Heron Island, which establishes GBR's modern tourist industry.

■ **1950** William Dakin publishes first popular scientific study of the Reef—with the message that it be conserved properly.

■ **1963** Poet Judith Wright and others form the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland which begins campaign to 'Save the Great Barrier Reef' from oil and limestone mining.

■ **1972** Australian Institute of Marine Science established.

■ **1975** Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act gazetted.

■ **1981** Great Barrier Reef inscribed on World Heritage List.

■ **2016** GBR experiences catastrophic mass coral bleaching events (2016-2017).

build the largest coal mine in Australia. It requires a railway to be built to from the mine to Abbot Point port where the coal will be shipped for export. The port requires significant dredging through the reef to provide access for large bulk carrier ships.

This industrialisation of the Great Barrier Reef and increased risks of serious shipping accidents threaten its pristine waters. At this stage, both major political parties prioritise economic growth and jobs, including growth of the coal industry. Supporting the coal industry is seen as more important than protecting the Reef's ancient, complex, priceless and irreplaceable ecosystems.

Government favouritism to the coal industry denies the importance of the reef's large tourist industry. Governments are also in denial of the science of climate change and the overwhelming evidence that coal and fossil fuels drive climate change.

If approved, the Adani mine will unlock the vast coal reserves of the Galilee Basin.

This mega mine, rail and port project will produce 7.7 billion tonnes of carbon pollution over its lifetime, which is almost ten times Australia's current annual CO₂ pollution. This massive increase in greenhouse gases will accelerate catastrophic climate change, and flies in the face of Australia's commitments to carbon emission reduction under the Paris Climate Agreement.

Adani's colossal coal mine also threatens the Great Artesian Basin due to land clearing, dewatering of groundwater aquifers, stream diversion and production of toxic leachate.

The Adani group has a poor environmental record. It is under investigation for money laundering, tax evasion, corruption and fraud. Many of its subsidiary companies are registered in the Cayman Islands tax haven.

Strong action is needed to protect the Great Barrier Reef and ensure a safe climate for posterity. This requires Australia to abandon coal and vigorously transition to clean renewable energy.

Tourism on the Great Barrier Reef is a major part of the Queensland economy.
Photo: G. Luscombe



Saving NSW Forests – an on-going process

BY KEITH MUIR

THE BATTLE TO save our state's biodiverse, hardwood forests really began in response to the 1969 commencement of woodchipping at Eden on the NSW far south coast. The clearfelling of 40 hectare forest compartments led to protests, scientific research and park proposals that prompted the first escarpment parks – the Deua-Wadbilliga National Park in 1979 being the most significant. The struggle was reignited in 1986, when an increase in woodchip exports triggered a Federal Environmental Impact Statement. Media attention and community concern were drawn to the majestic, tall, old growth trees being felled despite interim listings on the National Estate. How could the beautiful Coolangubra and Tantawangalo forests be saved?

A thousand protestors were arrested defending Coolangubra wilderness from being slaughtered for woodchips. Bob Carr, then Minister for Planning and Environment, promised new national parks but was swept from office in March 1988. The woodchip export licence was approved in 1989, then deferred while NSW and Federal Governments tried to reach an agreement.

In the lead up to the 1995 state election, forests continued to be politically prominent and the Fahey Government reserved some 40,000 ha in the south east forests, including a 10,000 hectare Coolangubra National Park mostly over the steepest areas. The incoming Carr Government ultimately brought into being a 134,000 hectare South East Forest National Park, exceeding its election promise by over 40,000 hectares and saving what was left of the wilderness.

It was, however, the North East Forest Alliance that triggered progress for forest conservation. A series of strategic logging blockades and legal actions brought about the political environment where conservationists could have a



Musicians opposing logging in Mumbulla State Forests. Photo: L. Bower

say in the fate of the forests. The Chaelundi forest was a focal point, where in 1990 many arrests and forest litigation secured a logging moratorium over some old growth forests. This pressure obliged the Greiner Government to prepare Environmental Impact Statements before logging the old growth.

Further court action to protect Chaelundi wildlife resulted in the Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Act in 1991. The NSW Government then experienced a crisis as industry wanted to log endangered fauna habitat. Its solution, a Timber Industry (Interim Protection) Act, 1992, enabled logging to continue while environmental impact and wilderness assessments were undertaken. This process fell into a shambles by 1994, as logging old growth forests and wilderness continued.

These protests and legal actions were repeated in many forests around Australia and the Federal Government then moved to rid itself of licensing woodchip exports.

The National Forest Policy Statement

The solution was the National Forest Policy Statement signed in 1992 by the Prime Minister and all states except Tasmania. The statement declared that "until the assessments [of native forests for conservation values] are completed, forest management agencies will avoid activities that may significantly affect those areas of old-growth and wilderness that are likely to have high conservation value." World

Heritage and old growth forest values were to be assessed and where identified, protected – in the case of wilderness 90 per cent was to be protected.

The states then made bilateral agreements, known as Regional Forest Agreements, and enshrined them in legislation. Two contingent outcomes were that the Federal Government would no longer involve itself in forest management and the native forest logging industry would be granted extensive resource security for decades without further assessment.

For NSW this process started in earnest when Labor came to power in March 1995 with specific forest and wilderness protection policies. Soon after, the Carr Government stopped logging in wilderness areas and old growth forests and set up the Resource and Conservation Assessment Council to oversee many specialist studies.

In NSW the statement was implemented through rational decision-making, where interest groups used computers and large amounts of data to negotiate land management agreements using science-based rules. It was a process light years in advance of today's 'Captain's Call' where billions of tax dollars are committed on the recommendations of self-interested corporates (e.g. Westconnex and Snowy 2.0).

The Forestry and National Parks Estate Act, 1998, preceded the signing of the RFA documents that saw 380,000 hectares of national parks created in north east NSW, followed by 325,000

hectares of new national parks in the southern region. These decisions were augmented by additional reservations before and after the agreement, including in the Eden Region.

Through these reservations, the wilderness estate was tripled, from 650,000 hectares in March 1995 to over 2 million hectares by February 2011. These reservation processes can theoretically continue for 40,000 hectares of wilderness on Crown leasehold land, except that the NPWS has virtually no funds for such strategic acquisitions.

Regional Forest Agreements were not a final solution

The forest agreements did not resolve conflict. It's unsurprising that the data on sawlog yields, old growth, rainforests and threatened wildlife distribution were inadequate for millions of hectares, and that few targets for a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system were achieved. These tasks are worthy of generations of scientific research.

The vision of a series of World Heritage listed, eucalypt-forest national parks stretching the length of the NSW Great Escarpment remains outstanding business under the forest agreements. We should be proud of our forest national parks, celebrate them, and seek the international recognition and federal funding they deserve.

The forest agreements are twenty years old and have outlived their usefulness. The comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system essentially requires the protection of all remaining public forests, because most forest types have been heavily cleared. With some exceptions, like Waratah Gully in the Coolangubra, much of the reserved, remnant forests clinging to the backcountry are not highly nutritious for forest wildlife, so populations of threatened species, including koalas, decline.

The Regional Forest Agreements have also

failed the logging industry because of the paucity of logs to meet legislated quotas. Under these agreements Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management, like single-tree selection, has become a clearfelling operation. For example, alternative coupe clearfelling is being extended into 140,000 hectares of public forests from Taree to Grafton. The former Chief Executive of the EPA, Barry Buffier, described this logging as a conversion of native forests to "quasi plantations" (pers. comm.). Our forest wildlife will not survive if natural forests become tree farms.

Renewing Regional Forest Agreements will ensure the destruction of hardwood forest diversity and produce second-rate plantations prone to erosion, dieback and weed infestation.

The Federal Labor opposition and the Coalition government are determined to renew them however, to avoid a return to environmental impact assessment. This is a mistake, as continued heavy logging will see a drastic decline in sawlog yields and wildlife diversity.

According to Dailan Pugh of the North East Forest Alliance, NSW taxpayers have paid at least \$12.9 million to buy back timber committed in Wood Supply Agreements to North Coast sawmillers for trees that never existed. As time goes on Governments will become unwilling to continue compensation for legislated timber quota allocations in 'phantom forests'.

The solution has to be a policy of transition for the hardwood forest industry into plantations established on cleared, productive private land, where trees will build carbon stores and timber can be intensively farmed. The politically poisonous alternative, the industry campaign to push back environmental protection, making the forest agreements permanent and allowing logging in national parks (the so-called 'nil-tenure' solution) must be stopped.

The Federal Government's Tasmanian Wilderness abuse subsidy

Wilderness once awe inspiring, now a tourism market niche!

BY KEITH MUIR

AFTER TAKING POWER in 2014, the Liberal Government in Tasmania vowed to develop 'appropriate' tourism projects in the state's Wilderness World Heritage Area.

The Federal Government has assisted by providing regional development subsidies to private, commercial schemes to exploit Tasmania's wilderness for well-healed visitors, who will enjoy serviced walks and accommodation. It will be adventure with a branded style and for a fat price, with the least effort – adventure experienced with a much smaller 'a'.

Senator Eric Abetz recently gave \$2.95 million to Maria Island Walk Pty Ltd, to help develop the South Coast Track with cabin accommodation as a commercial proposition. This Federally-funded wilderness degradation inside a World Heritage listed national park

was blandly reported by the ABC as 'local conservationists being divided on the matter'. Surely what Aunty really meant to say was that 'conservationists are beside themselves with rage'?

Grievous harm

Another proposal is a commercial walking track from Farmhouse Creek to Lake Geeves below Federation Peak to ensure walkers don't get wet feet. This development received \$70,000 in 'seed money' from the Federal Government's regional development fund. If ever there was a development that justified the need for state wilderness legislation, then it is this proposal.

The promotional website, *Geeves Effect*, claims 'such an iconic walk will allow investors to leverage from the trends currently experiencing strong growth: accommodation,

outdoor experiences, eco-experiences and food, cider and wine experiences.' The track's developers even have the temerity to call for public donations on their website, having won Federal Government support. The developers plan to charge a fortune for the privilege of using this track, just like the Three Capes Track, but in pristine wilderness.

The proposal is completely at odds with the park's management plan and the area's World Heritage values. It is disgraceful that taxpayers' money is being used to push such a misguided tourism proposal into the spiritual heart of Tasmania's wilderness. Every adventurer in the future will look down from the summit of Federation Peak with their heart in the mouth and see ... a resort! What a deeply spiritual experience! This proposal reaches the



A hut on the Three Capes Track. Similar huts are planned along the South Coast Track, below Federation Peak and at the Walls of Jerusalem.

pinnacle of wilderness antipathy.

Walls of Jerusalem and Frenchmans Cap also targeted

At the very top-end of the market is a helicopter-accessed private tourism proposal at the Walls of Jerusalem. This development also doesn't conform with the park's Management Plan. It has apparently been approved as a 'standing camp' under the Tasmanian Government's discredited Expressions of Interest process. The Halls Island proposal has three accommodation buildings of timber and steel – some standing camp!

No doubt the tourism industry is delighted to receive approvals through shadowy commercial in-confidence proposals funded and subsidised by the taxpayer. Responding to the Halls Island proposal, Vica Bayley, from The Wilderness Society said "There is nothing 'self-reliant' about a helicopter-accessed, luxury private tourism development in a high value wilderness area."

Next is Frenchmans Cap, where several private accommodation developments are planned with the national park to be rezoned to allow it.

My head reels at the recent announcement by Senator Richard Colbeck that the Federal Government has put \$1 million into an investigation of a cable car, hotel, new visitor centre and enlarged carpark

developments at Cradle Mountain.

Bob Brown believes that "Premier Hodgman is privatising the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area by stealth." The World Heritage Committee has expressed concern. It has called for the 'establishment of strict criteria for new tourism development within the property which would be in line with the primary goal of protecting the property's Outstanding Universal Value, including its wilderness character and cultural attributes' (2015 decision 39 COM 7B.35).

The Federal and the Tasmanian Governments seem to think they can act regardless of the World Heritage convention, and the sanctity of national parks and wilderness. As Dr Bob Brown has politely suggested, governments should invest in tourism outside national park boundaries.

Pristine wilderness inside national parks must be sacrosanct or as Alex Colley would say, "what is the point in protecting these areas in the first place?" It is long overdue for wilderness to be recognised as a World Heritage value. Many think wilderness is a listing value, but despite being proposed as such by the Colong Foundation some years ago, it remains a just one of a number of factors assessed when the 'integrity' or 'scenic value' of a natural area is nominated World Heritage for listing.

Gardens of Stone

by Pete Drinkall, 21 January 2017©

Lyrebird's song is drifting through the forest,
Copying sounds of others he has known;
He runs so fast, tail trailing behind him,
Through his domain in the Gardens of Stone.

Wedge-tailed eagle soars high above the
valley,
Where ancient pines, have forever grown,
Wombat sleeps in his den among the tree roots
Hidden away in the Gardens of Stone.

Pagoda Daisy - bright as morning sunshine,
Growing where other flowers are unknown,
One of Nature's treasured small surprises,
Surviving here in the Gardens of Stone.

Highland swamps, if mining hasn't drained
them,

Giant dragonfly clinging to a stone,
Mountain skinks chase each other in
the swamp grass,
Mid-morning mist in the Gardens of Stone.

Rainforest grows in gullies and in canyons,
Cascading ferns where wind has seldom
blown,
Eucalypts stretch up to meet the sunshine,
Sentries on guard in the Gardens of Stone.

Silent places - where spirits seem to linger,
Sometimes you feel you may not be alone,
Cliffs and caves where others would have
sheltered

Mystical memories in the Gardens of Stone
.....Mystical memoriesin the Gardens
.....of Stone.

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.)

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(NB Membership application covers Bulletin subscription)

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Please include your full name to help identify your payment. So we can mail you an official tax deductible receipt, and for our accounting purposes, please also inform us when you have made a payment by emailing your name, address and donation details to foundation@colongwilderness.org.au

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 guarantee \$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."



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.

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

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