

TNPA NEWS

TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION INC

Newsletter No 12 Autumn/Winter 2009

Photo: J Andrews

A Week to Remember

—“No Developments in Parks” policy gains support whilst government department abolished.

FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT’S PEN:

If the news in early May was anything to go by, the old adage “a week is a long time in politics” is still alive and kicking in Tasmania. In the space of a week the decisions outlined in the series of announcements are likely to have a number of flow-on effects on the future management of Tasmania’s National Parks and other conservation reserves.

The first of these announcements, reported in *The Mercury* on 5 May, was that the resort planned to be built within the Southwest National Park at East Cockle Creek by Stage Designs Pty Ltd was not to proceed. As reported in previous newsletters, the TNPA had campaigned long on having this development removed from the National Park. While the TNPA supports appropriate regional tourism, we argue strongly that large-scale developments such as that proposed at East Cockle Creek are inappropriate within national parks.

However, an unfortunate legacy of the now axed development is an ugly scar extending into the park - the result of a road bulldozed to the proposed development site. The TNPA has written to the Tasmanian government calling on it to ensure that Stage Designs fulfils its obligations to fully rehabilitate the area under the supervision of the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Indeed, the TNPA is proposing that all developments approved within conservation areas should be accompanied by a bond so that if damage is caused then the bond can be used for rehabilitation. The tax payer should not have to pay to clean up a developer’s mess. The mining industry do it, so why can’t the tourism industry?

THANK YOU

The TNPA Committee would like to thank the following people who have recently volunteered their time to assist the TNPA, or who have helped us in other ways over the last six months.

The Buttongrass Ball 2009

The Verandah Coots, David Wanless, Cathie Hutchinson & Friends, Plants of Tasmania.

My Tasmania Photographic Exploration of Tasmania’s Natural Environment

Rob Blakers, Grant Dixon, Karen Gowlett-Holmes, Melva Truchanus.

TNPA News Production (this edition)

Tasprint Pty Ltd, Mark Hovenden, Bec Kurczok, Claire Newman, David Obendorf, Jenny Scott.

Secretarial Assistance to the TNPA

Janet Henderson

Other Support & Assistance

Tom Baxter, Chris Bell, Helen Gee, Jess Feehley, Steve Johnson, Debbie Quarmby, Ray Thomas, Peter Whyte, the Henderson family, Sustainable Living Tasmania.

To identify, protect, conserve, present, and where appropriate, rehabilitate the area and to transmit that heritage to future generations in as good or better condition than at present.

Overall objectives of the World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999

The TNPA is also requesting that the government acquire the freehold land now for sale and include it within the surrounding Southwest National Park, thus removing this historical anomaly and enhancing the ongoing protection of the unique natural and heritage values of the region.

As highlighted during the debate over the logging of the North East Peninsula of Recherche Bay, the area is rich in natural and cultural heritage. The TNPA supports an imaginative and long-term vision for this region which protects and enhances the existing values instead of offering them up for short-term gain and enduring loss.

“The natural wonders of our island State are unique, valuable and admired by overseas and interstate visitors...”

Such a vision would extend the Southwest National Park and Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area to include the North East Peninsula and the adjacent Southport Lagoon Conservation Area. Such a promotional focus offers the opportunity for a visitor node to be developed at Southport in league with those at Strahan, Cradle Valley and Coles Bay. This node could include a regional visitor and interpretive centre, and walks celebrating the local history could be developed in the region.

With leadership and an enduring vision combining the unique history and the relative pristine picturesque beauty of Recherche Bay, the area has the potential to become an iconic focus for tourism in southern Tasmania; tourism which is truly environmentally sustainable.

The second “announcement” was the Editorial published in The Mercury on 7 May. Under the banner “Fight for the Fringes” this editorial stated that “the collapse of plans to build a tourism venture at Cockle Creek...is, all things considered, for the best.” In a strong endorsement of the TNPA’s position, the editorial went on to passionately articulate the need to protect areas in an over-developed world and that developments have no place within Tasmania’s National Parks, stating: “The natural wonders of our island State are unique, valuable and admired by overseas and interstate visitors...”

We must protect the integrity of these natural assets by defending their boundaries and resisting infringements on their borders. For as much as we protect them, other places of natural beauty around the world will change and develop - and our national parks will become increasingly valuable.”

The TNPA greatly appreciates the public support shown by The Mercury on this important issue.

The axing of the plans to build the resort within the Southwest National Park follows the failure of a number of other government approved commercial accommodation projects planned within national parks and shows that the present policy of opening Tasmanian National Parks to such developments needs to be changed. As such, the TNPA has also written to the Tasmanian government calling on it to show leadership in protecting the integrity and values within Tasmania’s conservation reserves by developing a policy for environmentally sustainable tourism (currently there is none), and by supporting the policy that tourist accommodation developments be located outside Tasmania’s National Parks and other conservation areas.

As the TNPA has argued simply and strongly, such projects threaten the natural and cultural values protected within national parks. The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan clearly states that accommodation facilities should be provided in nearby townships and areas adjacent to the WHA. This policy needs to be supported and adopted for all Tasmania’s conservation reserves.

Public opinion surveys show strong community support for locating developments outside the boundaries of National Parks.

The TNPA supports appropriate tourism based projects in Tasmania and supports the regional benefits that will flow from such projects. However, the TNPA argues strongly that these same benefits can be achieved by placement of such projects outside the boundaries of Tasmania’s National Parks. The development of very successful tourist nodes outside National Parks at Strahan, Cradle Valley and Coles Bay, validates this argument.

Following the demise of the Cockle Creek development, the third “announcement” (reported in The Mercury on 13 May and formally announced by Premier Bartlett the following day) related to the demise of another kind –the abolishing of the Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts.

In an effort to save costs in the next years budget, considerably less than the government will pay for the Hawthorn football club to play a few games in Tasmania in the same period, the government is to destroy the integrity of the Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts and scatter its severed parts hither and thither. Instead of offering a cohesive vision for the future of the State’s environment, parks, heritage and arts, and its international “brand” as a place of natural, wild, cultural and artistic beauty, Premier Bartlett seems to have thrown the gears of government into reverse.

When it comes to the environment, the Tasmanian Labor government seems to be displaying the level of responsibility and strategic vision that would be expected from unsupervised children in a lolly shop.

With around 37 percent of Tasmania having some form of conservation status, including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and a world renowned national park system, surely Tasmania, more than any other State, has a vested interest in properly managing and protecting these areas.

Furthermore, given the heightened importance of these reserves for environmental, social and economic benefits, Tasmanians deserve a Parks agency and an environment department that can deliver world’s best practice in the ongoing management of such a vital resource. Recent studies show that Australia’s 17 World Heritage properties generate \$12 billion annually and support over 120,000 jobs across the country, with the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA generating around \$190 million each year.

However, instead of the government outlining a vision to support Tasmania’s unique natural assets, Tasmanians have instead witnessed:

- a continuing decline in recurrent funding to the Parks and Wildlife Service;
- a continuing program of encouraging and supporting commercial development within high conservation reserves, apparently without regard for the environmental impacts and ignoring or altering management policy and plans;
- the announcement of a \$23 million Tarkine Road which very few want and which will have major environmental impacts;

- the announcement of a new Bay of Fires National Park without consultation with the agency or other stakeholders; and
- the announcement of the amalgamation of the various state 'planning' agencies, including the RPDC, and the creation of Projects of Regional Significance; changes which are likely to have major adverse consequences for environmental resource management.

Decisions such as in the 2009-10 budget to leave priority asset maintenance in Tasmanian reserves unfunded while providing \$200,000 for expressions of interest for the Three Capes development on the Tasman Peninsula (which will cost the Tasmanian taxpayer at least \$20 million), also show disregard for reserve management.

Surely Tasmania, its environment and heritage, and the "jewels in the crown" – its national parks - deserve better.

All Tasmanians should be proud of the unique natural beauty of their island State and the iconic status in which their national parks

are held both interstate and overseas. They should also be proud of the dedication of the Parks and Wildlife Service who maintain and manage, with limited resources, these wonderful and unique assets.

The Tasmanian National Parks Association therefore calls on the government to review its recent decisions—decisions which will have a significant adverse impact on Tasmania's natural and cultural values, and to work with stakeholders to develop an integrated and strategic vision which is adequately resourced, so that it can fulfil its charter of providing world class management of Tasmania's protected areas and meet its international obligations for environmental conservation.

Tasmania's National Parks are world renowned for their unique and spectacular landscapes and wilderness qualities. Let us ensure that they remain that way.

Robert Campbell

Vice-President, TNPA

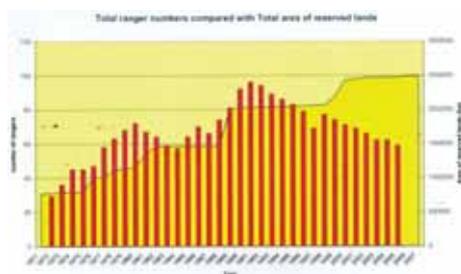
New Report on the Evolution and State of the Tasmania's Reserved Lands System and its Management

If you are interested in how well Tasmania's reserved land system is being managed, and how the system and its management has evolved historically, the recently released *Paradoxes of Protection – Evolution of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and National Park and Reserved Lands System* by Dr Louise Crossley (May 2009) is something that you will find interesting.

The report was commissioned by Greens Senator Christine Milne. This is the first independent (of government) report, and provides a current assessment of how well Tasmania's reserved land is being managed, as well as historical background leading to the current situation.



Louise Crossley summarising her findings at the launch of her report in Hobart in May 2009 (photo: A. McConnell)



Total ranger numbers over time compared with total area of reserved land (Figure 4, Crossley 2009)

It is an extremely timely report, given the changes that have been occurring in the management of Tasmania's reserved land, and particularly the financial pressures due to the global recession. The TNPA applaud the commissioning of the report and the report, which vindicates many of the concerns that the TNPA have been expressing about reserved land management in Tasmania since its formation in 2001.

To give you a feel for the findings, the following are excerpts from the report Executive Summary. Alas it is a sorry tale:

"The National Parks and Wildlife Service was created ... nearly 40 years ago. Since that time, the management philosophy of the PWS has changed substantially, from one charged primarily with the development and management of an ecologically representative system of reserved lands and for conservation of flora and fauna, to one with a major emphasis on managing of public use and recreation. Throughout this period, the dominant rationale of the reserved lands system has primarily been politically determined".

"The role and effectiveness of the Service as the managing agency of Tasmania's reserved lands system has also been affected by this shifting power play. The Service has gone through many administrative changes, most of them motivated by political considerations, which have had the effect of systematically emasculating its ability to manage the reserved estate for conservation values". Crossley notes that from 1986 the PWS has been "amalgamated with a number of other agencies and departments in a constantly changing alphabet soup in a total of nine combinations over 20 years ... , with a 'restructuring' on average every two years".

Crossley goes on to note that "This chronic administrative instability has led in a constant direction – towards an increasing emphasis on the economic value of national parks and reserved lands for tourism, and a reduction in resources of both money and staff for biodiversity conservation and habitat protection. ... Visitor facilities absorb the majority of PWS resources and there is constant pressure for more private investment in, and profit from, public lands. The number of on-ground rangers and land managers has steadily decreased from a peak in 1990 even as the reserved estate has grown [see Figure], so that the ratio is now one to 30,000 hectares, compared to Parks Victoria for example with one land manager to 5,000 hectares."

Crossley concludes – "The essential conservation responsibility of the PWS is chronically underfunded, and the emphasis on tourism is unlikely to be sustainable in the future"

And, in case you are wondering where the title came from, Crossley explains – "The paradox is that as the reputation for wilderness has grown the value that the Tasmanian government puts on wilderness has not. Utilitarian exploitation not protection has become the dominant government attitude towards the natural environment".

If you would like to read the full report – it can be downloaded from the Australian Greens website – www.greensmps.org.au

THREE CAPES DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Well readers, where is this Labour government tourist development at the present time?

Given the recent well publicised demise of the department containing the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) in the near future, it must be nevertheless assumed the approvals process for this development will move forward with the report from the RPDC being finalised and to be soon considered by the Minister, the Hon Michelle O'Byrne.

This follows a period of "public consultations" early in 2008, whereby the RPDC received 246 submissions with the overwhelming majority either opposed or with major concerns about the development. Of the 246 submissions, 209 (85%) were opposed to the development. The RPDC commenced its review of the Director PWS report and public submissions in April 2009, and recently determined there was no need to hold public hearings. Once completed, the RPDC report to the Minister will be made public.

Because the PWS management is not directly subject to the Land Use Planning and Appeals Act, the Minister alone can determine whether this development ought to be given the go-ahead. If she approves it, it will then need funding approval.

The TNPA has concerns that the Tasmanian government has applied (or will apply) for the special \$60 million Federal Jobs Fund for heritage conservation projects, part of the Federal government's economic stimulus package. In the current economic climate Federal funding may be the only way this ghastly development will go ahead.

Don't ever forget this is an unprecedented intrusion into a National Park with the development of 5 mini-villages complete with "luxury" accommodation for up to 60 people with all the associated paraphernalia for access and maintenance.

TNPA cannot find anywhere in the feasibility study proper justification for the provision of these massive huts or indeed even justification for this ridiculous 6 day/ 5 night walk in the Tasman National Park where there is nowhere apart from Cape Pillar which really does need to be an overnight stay to appreciate the wonders there. This area is presently well provided with day walks and plenty of accommodation in nearby local overnight accommodation and restaurants OUTSIDE the Tasman National Park.

Recently, Tasman Council Councillors, Mayor and Deputy Mayor along with several council staff, were taken on a helicopter flight from Lake St Clair to Windy Ridge Hut as well as to the private commercial hut in that locality. The aim was to convince the Councillors that the huts to be situated in the Tasman National Park are okay, as the Tasman Council has to give planning approval for the huts. TNPA believe that Tasman Councillors may not be fully informed in this matter given the complexities of properly managing our national parks, and the spin being put on the development by the government.

Unfortunately, now that the tourism lobby is so powerful and all encompassing in this State under the usual guise of jobs, jobs, jobs; Tasman National Park is being set up to cater for this powerful group whose short term view is one of dollar signs and self-promotion.

In fact the very nature of Tasman National Park as it is today is what will attract people there to experience it. Not with some hideous, ridiculous and contrived "3 Capes Walk".

TNPA is still arguing strongly for a 2 Capes Walk along with the existing day walks and this will require minimal intrusion into the park; and people can enjoy it for recreation. The Tasman National Park will achieve a high level of protection if and only if adequate funding is made available for rangers, maintenance and marketing which is respectful of this national park, not through high impact tourism development.

We also must be mindful of this nation's recent and biggest peacetime disaster in Victoria where many many lives were lost. Tasman National Park is dry and windswept and contains little water. There is extreme risk, given conditions, of a wild fire in this park which is obviously increased by this development where up to 300 people may be overnighing in the park at the worst possible times for fire risk, with few escape options given the precipitous cliffs along most of the proposed walk. This alone should preclude any development given the recent tragedy.

What has TNPA been doing?

We have been lobbying politicians of all persuasions including Minister O'Byrne.

We have a post card campaign where YOU, and others you may know who are similarly concerned, can sign a POSTCARD to be sent to the Minister, via the TNPA.

We are attending public places such as our recent MY TASMANIA evening at the Stanley Burbury Theatre, and Salamanca Market to promote the viewpoint of TNPA.

We have been talking with special interest groups, in particular bushwalking groups around Tasmania.

We have been in contact with the local Tasman Peninsula tourism group, PATTA, in order to explain the adverse effects this may have on local accommodation places and restaurants.

We are planning a rally in the future.

And we are thinking of other approaches.

What can you do?

- Offer to help by contacting Janet Henderson (0427854684) or Pam Fenerty (0362503351 or 0438502797) or email admin.tnpa@auswide.net.au.
- Send a postcard to the Minister.
- Write to newspapers and politicians including local Tasman Peninsula Councillors.

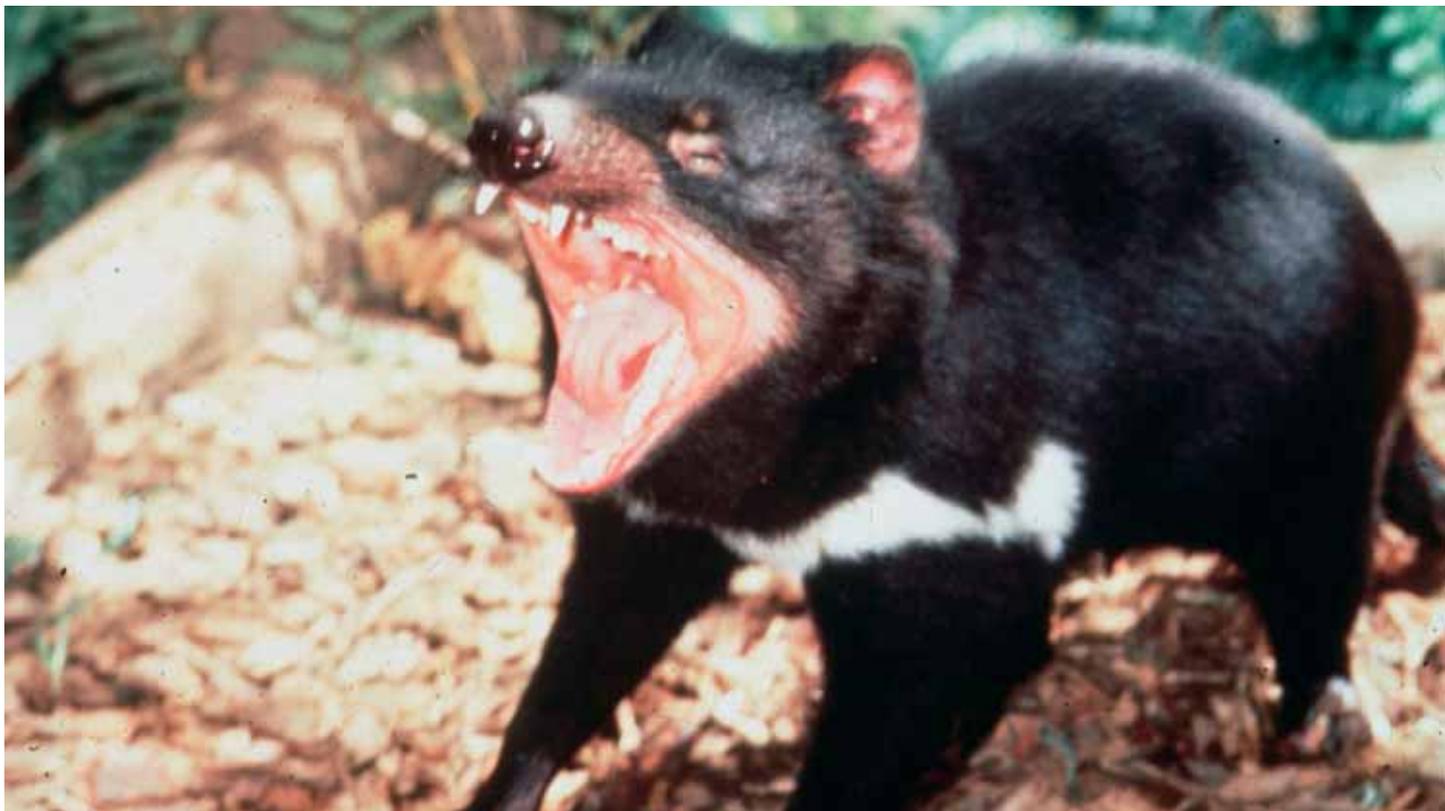


Image courtesy of D. Obendorf

A Socially-Transmissible Cancer Killing the World's Largest Marsupial Carnivore —Slow Science as Taz Spins Closer to Oblivion

Dr David Obendorf

In 1941 the Tasmanian government took the extraordinary decision to list the Tasmanian devil as a 'wholly protected species'. At that time, well before any Australian parliament had enacted any legislation to protect rare & endangered species of native fauna, the Tasmanian devil was recognised as a native animal threatened by human activities. Five years earlier, what was to be the last living thylacine had died in Hobart. It was Tasmanian field naturalists, bush-loving conservationists and a few leading zoologists at the University who spoke out about the persecution and decline in the abundance of devil, the next largest carnivorous marsupial after the thylacine. Only 70 years ago, by all accounts, devils had become a rare creature in the Tasmanian landscape. How that came to be and the likely explanations that improved the fortunes of wild devils from the mid-1950's onwards is a narrative for another time.

Now fast-forward to 1996 when grotesque tumours were first photographed on the faces of Tasmanian devils in the extreme north-east region of Tasmania. The devils at Mt William National Park were one of the more populous and well-studied population in Tasmania yet within a few years their numbers were in sharp decline. By 2003 similarly afflicted devils were found further south all along the east coast and westward into the mid-lands. Australian wildlife experts immediately recognized this condition as a new pathological process, an epidemic caused by a neoplastic disease; they listed it as amongst the top three significant diseases affecting Australian native animals.

It's now well accepted that this affliction is progressive and ultimately fatal to all devils with visible facial tumours. Over time—a matter of months—these deforming cancers grow to the extent where they affect the devil's ability to eat and in the advanced stages, the cancer can spread to other parts of the body; that's the last straw as rapid cancer growth overwhelms the devil's metabolic and homeostatic processes leading to death.

Put simply, the condition is a progressively fatal cancer but far more amazingly, this cancer is able to pass from an affected devil to other devils by social contact. Imagine if this condition was occurring amongst Tasmanians with the cancer killing roughly half of the Tasmanian population through social contact. Just like recent human pandemic scares (Bird Flu, SARS, Swine Flu, Nipah virus and Ebola) the World Health Organisation would be co-ordinating the scientific response and issuing technical updates regularly; Tasmania would become a global hotspot of cancer research and investigation. Every effort would be made to understand how a cancer came to be infectious and socially-transmissible. But back to reality, this is Tasmania and, after all's said and done, it is ONLY a cancer in the creature we named 'a devil'.

In the early years, only the Tasmanian government and UTAS scientists did the vital preliminary research in the cancer. It concentrated on the pathology of these large deforming tumours seen around the heads of affected devils and in monitoring the cancer's presence and spread within devil populations across Tasmania.



Map courtesy of D. Obendorf

The laboratory studies showed that all the facial tumours were made up of one particular type of cell that multiplied in the soft tissues of the lips, mouth and cheeks. Officially called 'devil facial tumour disease', these proliferating tumours are made up of cells with chromosomes that are dramatically altered from what is expected in normal healthy devil cells. Such chromosomal changes are seen amongst abnormal clusters of cells that have become cancerous and start dividing uncontrollably.

The large numbers of devils affected in any one population and the uniformity of the cancers developing predominantly around the head and face suggested that this cancer was highly unusual; in all likelihood it was indeed a transmissible cancer!

A significant breakthrough came when a Tasmanian cell genetic biologist, Anne-Maree Pearse discovered that all cancer cells from affected devils showed the same pattern in the alterations to the chromosomes. This suggested each cancer hadn't individually and spontaneously developed in each devil but each and every facial cancer was the derivative of the same clone of cancerous cells. Same cancer type, same cell type, same chromosomal aberration and lots of animals affected and dying.

But what does THAT mean and how could that come about?

Anne-Maree's forensic cytogenetics work showed that this cancer cell clone had plausibly originated from just one devil and then the progeny of those cells has passed themselves very effectively throughout a localised devil population. One way of thinking of this devil cancer cell is to consider it as akin to a simple unicellular microbe that reproduces itself by asexual division (direct mitosis). However in the case of devil cancer cells the 'microbe' isn't some foreign organism infecting a mammal host—like a bacteria or a virus—it is the devil's own cancerous cells that becomes the pathogen.

Interestingly there were no recorded instances where tumour-affected mothers, some with hideous ulcerated facial cancers, had infected their pouch young and orphan-rearing of these offspring to adulthood has failed to show any devil progeny have developed the disease.

By 2005 these cancer cell clones had spread into other devil communities covering nearly two-thirds of Tasmania. Official estimates acknowledge that well over half of the island's devils, estimated at 150,000 animals in the mid-1990's, have died as a direct result of this cancer; in just 10 years!

The next significant discovery in understanding the biology of this cancer came only after the Tasmanian government was encouraged to allow interstate and international molecular biologists to be involved in the research effort. That work led to the discovery of the near-identical histocompatibility genes in all Tasmanian devils affected with the cancer and in the cancer cells themselves. In addition, this gene analysis survey showed that the populations of devils across eastern Tasmania had very little genetic diversity in a gene complex that should show a very high level of diversity between individuals and across their habitat range. These genes are very important front-line warning processes that help the

body's immune system to identify foreign invaders (bacteria, viruses, parasites etc), allergens and even in recognising bodily tissues that are 'non-self'. Before the importance of this histocompatibility gene complexes were fully appreciated, haphazard transplant experiments in animals and humans lead to the rejection of tissues or whole organs from another animal of the same species.

The work on the devil histocompatibility genes suggested the normal immune system of devils wasn't able to recognise these cancer cells as any different from their own cells; the immune gatekeepers saw them as their own. Like the metaphorical 'Trojan Horse', these particular cancer cells if they entered into another devil would not be recognised as alien invaders and they'd simply begin to multiply in their new host!

Another group of researchers (pathologists) tried to discover what tissue-type these cells came from and whether any triggering pathogen—such as a virus—had been responsible for altering a normal devil cell and changing it into the cancerous cell clone. Current research shows that these cancer cells are likely to have originated from a neuro-endocrine stem cell type and to date no visible or identifiable virus has been associated with this unique devil cancer.

In summary the 'case definition' of devil facial tumour disease included the following components: (1) a cancer originating from a neuro-endocrine stem cell, (2) a cancer cell which evades immune recognition and acts as a unique self-generated parasite, (3) a cancer that invariably progresses to kill all the host species it was derived from and (4) a cancer that successfully transfers into other animals of the same species. That scenario has become the Tasmanian devil's new reality.

Current research suggests that this aneuploid devil cell is able to act as the actual agent of disease amongst other genetically-related devils with all



Above images courtesy of D. Obendorf

the pathology observed in affected devils attributable to direct animal-to-animal transmission of this neoplastic cell clone.

But how do the cells actually transfer from one devil to another?

As extraordinary as it may seem, a cancerous devil becomes 'infectious' to other devils when cancer cells from open tumour masses passively attach onto the surface of one or more of a devil's long canine teeth. Through biting mainly to the face—a social behaviour seen amongst devils in high density populations—these microscopic tumour cells actually use the wound created by these teeth to enter another devil's body. Once through the skin of a bitten devil and into the soft tissues, the transferred cancer cells begin to multiply and grow rapidly into new facial tumours.

In a paper recently published in the *European Journal of Oncology* a colleague, Dr Neil McGlashan and I proposed that one research priority for this cancer would be to determine whether any wild devils can naturally resist the entry and establishment of the cancer cells resulting from differences in their histocompatibility immuno-genes.

Right now these transmissible cancer cells are spreading with affected devils westward and entering a geographically separate devil population in northwestern and western Tasmania. These are the populations offering the greatest prospect of having devils with innate immunogenic resistance to this cancer. Determining whether some of these western devils could naturally resist the establishment of these cells because of their different genetics is rated the highest priority. If the facial tumour case definition as outlined is correct, any devils that can recognise these cancer cells as alien organisms and successfully eliminate them are very important animals indeed. In the long term these devils would be the survivors passing on their immunogenes to future generations of devils; if they could be successfully identified they could be the progenitors of cancer-resilient or naturally resistant offspring.

With the knowledge of the father of evolutionary theory, Charles Darwin, even the interaction of this mammal with its own transmissible parasitic cell is likely to follow the laws of natural selection. The survival of the Tasmanian devil in the face of this explosive transmissible cancer may still come down to a few basics—social contact, intra-specific behaviour and population genetics—irrespective of the human endeavour.

Could such a basic understanding save the devil from extinction in the wild? Time will tell!

Concern for the long-term survival of the Tasmanian devil in the wild means the species is now listed as "endangered" under the Tasmanian threatened species legislation. By mid-2008 devil numbers had dropped

by about 70% of their previous numbers. The senior scientist responsible for the "Save the Tasmanian Devil" Program, Professor McCallum stated that the cancer is likely to cause local extinctions within 15 years of its arrival and, based on current rates of spread, the disease will cover the geographic range of the devil within the next five years. He warned that devils could become extinct in the wild within 20-30 years through the agency of this single highly lethal disease.

A second research area that has been neglected is an open and truthful investigation of the local environmental conditions that preceded the index outbreak within the high density devil population in north-east Tasmania. Based on current knowledge of this unusual new neoplasm, it is becoming more likely that progressive narrowing of the devil's genetic diversity and perhaps also changes in its social behaviours have been important preconditions for the establishment of this transmissible cancer. Devil facial tumour is likely to have arisen as the fateful culmination in a cascade of human activities since European colonisation and more specifically can be linked to our broadscale use of some non-specific and target specific poisons.

By the 1990s this predominantly carrion-feeding marsupial had reached unprecedented numbers. The sudden emergence of a transmissible cell clone commenced in a high-density devil population that already had considerable loss of genetic diversity deserves far greater attention than it has received to date.

Did this unique cancer have a toxigenic trigger amongst the first cancer case or cases in north-east Tasmania?

Substantial amounts of money have been invested in setting up the so called 'insurance' populations of disease-free devils for later release into the wild. The failure to investigate the environmental triggers that initiated this cancer cell clone to appear so suddenly is a serious failing in the Save the Tasmanian Devil program. Whilst we remain blissfully ignorant of how the cancer began, it is very likely that another transmissible cancer amongst devils or perhaps another Tasmanian mammal will occur.

Tasmanian natural conservation managers have a duty to ensure that this unique transmissible neoplasm is properly investigated to ensure that all plausible aetiologies are thoroughly assessed. We owe it to the devil and the wellbeing of ourselves to put effort into discovering the root cause of this transmissible cancer.

Dr David Obendorf, BVSc(Hons), B(An)Sc, PhD – Veterinary pathologist

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An update on Macquarie Island, including a report on a field visit this summer



Background information:

Subantarctic Macquarie Island is a Tasmanian Nature Reserve and has been World Heritage listed as an outstanding example of major stages of the earth's evolutionary history, and a place of exceptional natural beauty. The island is a critical nesting site for four species of albatross and is characterised by huge seal and penguin colonies. A number of species found on the island are listed as vulnerable to extinction including the four species of albatross, five species of burrow-nesting seabirds and the southern elephant seal and subantarctic fur seal. The eradication of cats from the island, reduced effectiveness (and now unavailability) of the myxoma virus and climate change have caused an explosion in the numbers of feral rabbits, rats and mice on the island. Extensive damage to the native vegetation caused by the rabbits, and subsequent erosion is impacting the protection needed for burrow-nesting seabirds. Several important breeding sites on the island have been badly degraded. The loss of native vegetation caused by the rabbit plague has also caused severe landslips on the island, including a slide in mid-2006 which killed a number of king penguins. Rats are also preying directly on the eggs, chicks and adults of some of the seabird species. Macquarie Island is located 1500 km SSE of Tasmania in the Southern Ocean, covers 13,000 hectares, and has been part of Tasmania since 1825.

Image by J Scott: Wrecked slope at Bauer Bay, west coast of Macquarie Island, showing recently grazed tussock, now dead stumps on an eroding bare-peat slope with many rabbit burrows.

Dr Jenny Scott

School of Geography & Environmental Studies

Two years ago in the Autumn 2007 issue of this magazine there was an article on the deplorable degraded state of Macquarie Island, and the deplorable politics surrounding the non-funding of the proposed Plan to Eradicate Rabbits and Rodents from Subantarctic Macquarie Island. So what happened after that, and what is happening now?

In June 2007, after years of delays and political obfuscations, the Tasmanian Government finally agreed to pay for half of the eradication program - \$12.3 million. The Commonwealth Government had already agreed to pay the other half. Everyone who had been lobbying so hard for the past year breathed a collective sigh of relief - TNPA, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and all those concerned individuals, both out there in the public arena and behind the scenes in both the public service and in politics. The Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) could finally go ahead and employ people to start the logistics planning, the dog-training, the permit applications, e.g. for poisoned bait use on the island, and all the other pieces of bureaucracy required to undertake such a huge program on this Tasmanian Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area, a small remote island in the middle of the Southern Ocean.

The eradication of rabbits, rats and mice on Macquarie Island is an exciting landmark project for Australia, and will be a world first in island eradications of multiple pest species. As a result of the international publicity generated by the campaign to get the program funded, the world will be watching.



Image by J Scott: Severely grazed slopes at Sandy Bay, east coast – these slopes had tussock and Macquarie Island Cabbage vegetation destroyed during early 2008. New landslipping has occurred on the bare peat face. King penguins on the beach for scale.

After funding was finally committed in June 2007, the most urgent and time-consuming task was to organise the hunting dogs and their training. An essential part of the eradication plan (available on-line at <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=6186>) is to send in teams of hunters and trained hunting dogs immediately after the aerial baiting program, which will be undertaken on the island during winter (this is to minimise harm to other wildlife, much of which migrates away from the island in winter, and to increase the likelihood of bait uptake when minimum food is available for the rabbits, rats and mice). The hunters and their dogs need to start work straight after the helicopter baiting, to start mopping up any remaining rabbits before they start breeding again in the spring.

Specialised training of hunting dogs has always been part of the eradication plan – but this takes time. It takes two years - from the time pups can be selected, to the time when they have passed several rigorous training tests and become certified as rabbit detectors able to operate in a sensitive wildlife environment. That is, to detect rabbits only - definitely no side-tracking to penguins or seals or other enticing-smelling seabirds. During the campaign to achieve funding, with all its delays and frustrations, part of the desperation of those who knew and loved Macquarie Island lay in this fact – that even after funding for the eradication plan was achieved, it would take at least two years before anything could be done to solve the problem on the ground.

And so it lies at the moment. Dogs are being trained in New South Wales and New Zealand, the various pieces of necessary bureaucracy are being organised, and logistics planning is well underway. But the island is still undergoing severe damage. The on-ground eradication – the helicopter baiting operation – is not due to commence until winter 2010. At least we can now say that it will be Next Winter.

I spent two and a half months on the island during summer 2008-09, from January to late March. I was there as a university scientist, courtesy of the Australian Antarctic Division, and I was re-measuring an island-wide series of vegetation monitoring plots and photo-points on the steep tussock-covered coastal slopes.

I've been doing this work with Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick from the School of Geography and Environmental Studies, and I first set up the plots and photo-points nearly thirty years ago, in 1980. Since then we have been able to measure changes in vegetation and erosion under several different levels of rabbit grazing.

From 1980 until the mid 1990s we measured a spectacular vegetation recovery, resulting from a huge reduction in rabbits from the introduction of myxomatosis in 1979, a year before our study started. Then in the late 1990's disturbing reports started coming in from Parks rangers, scientists and other expeditioners telling of the resurgence of rabbits and the severe damage occurring on steep slopes, especially in the south of the island, where there had been very little grazing previously. It appears that an unfortunate combination of factors – the unexpected end of myxomatosis availability plus probable lessening of its effectiveness, the successful eradication of feral cats, and climate change – was resulting in an escalation of rabbit numbers towards pre-myxo levels.

I next visited the island in 2003 to re-measure our study sites. Like others familiar with the vegetation over a long period, I was shaken by the damage which I witnessed. I could clearly see that it would get much worse. And it did – and it is still worsening. This summer, 2008-09, was a shocker. I thought that I was mentally prepared, but I found it a profoundly depressing experience, much more devastating than I had imagined. Above the level of the beaches, which of course are still filled with spectacular wildlife, the island looked horrible. The slopes above the Sandy Bay tourist site had been heavily grazed only during the past twelve months. Huge expanses of bare eroding peat was riddled with burrows and dotted with the introduced weed *Poa annua*. Rabbits were everywhere. The tourists who I spoke to couldn't get over the large size of the rabbits, and asked, "How on earth could it GET like this?!!!"

Despite this, there were definitely signs of hope for the future once rabbits have gone. Where the slopes had been stripped of vegetation over the past year, amongst the brown stumps of tussocks and chewed roots of dead Macquarie Island cabbage plants, there were tiny seedlings of both tussock and cabbage, striving to survive amongst the flushes of *Poa annua*. Once the tiny seedlings got to about half a centimetre in height, WHAM, they were eaten. But they were there, and trying. And there are hopefully enough scattered pockets of inaccessible plants remaining on rock outcrops across the slopes to continue providing a seed source. Based on Jamie's and my studies over the years, I really do believe that the vegetation will substantially recover with time once the rabbits have gone, and although it will take a few years, the recovery will start almost immediately. Whether the island will fully recover to a 'pre-rabbit state', no-one knows. And we still have this winter and next summer to go before the on-ground eradication begins. A substantial proportion of the small amount of remaining tussock and cabbage vegetation will probably disappear during this time, and more landslipping will occur. Meanwhile, the dogs are learning to detect rabbits and avoid penguins and preparing for their tests; and the PWS eradication team are arranging bait, helicopters, permits and a thousand other things. Winter 2010 can't come quickly enough.



“In the face of the changing climate, it could mean the demise of very many species, because they are simply unable to access appropriate habitat.”



Management of Terrestrial Reserves in a Changing World

Dr Mark Hovenden

School of Plant Science, University of Tasmania

Our world is changing, there is no doubt. The climate is warming, rainfall is becoming differently distributed both in time and space, and changes are happening in the atmosphere, such as the increasing concentration of carbon dioxide. Living things are very responsive to their environment and therefore the current changes in climate are having an immediate effect on the way organisms operate regarding their interactions with each other and with their environment. This means that ecosystems are changing in composition and in function. Areas of land that have been set aside as reserves are also subject to the changes that are happening across the globe and these changes are bound to affect the manner in which reserves function. The roles of reserves are many and manifold, but importantly reserves function as regions of intact, operating ecosystems that provide a great many services to individual species, communities and the wider environment. Any area that has been set aside as a reserve, by the very fact that it has been designated a reserve has been managed. The concept of “preservation” of ecosystems in a state that is perhaps perceived to be equal to some ideal state that excludes human intervention, cannot apply as the world changes, if it could be argued that it ever applied.

Changes are not new, and the Earth has undergone many dramatic changes in the past. However, during past changes in climate organisms were able to move to new habitat, some slowly and some quickly, but nonetheless, mostly at a rate that could cope with the changing

climate. Thus, if the species needed to escape from a warming or drying climate, it was able to disperse to cooler or moister areas. The issue is now that many organisms that occur only or predominantly in reserves may have a very great distance to travel to a new reserve, with the intervening space being unsuitable habitat because it has been extensively modified by human activities. This fragmentation of the landscape is known to currently have dramatic consequences for many species. In the face of the changing climate, it could mean the demise of very many species, because they are simply unable to access appropriate habitat.

Organisms vary greatly, both across kingdoms and even within species. It is this variation that has led to the wealth of species that we see now, and the great variety of nature. This fact, termed “the infinite variety” by Sir David Attenborough many years ago in the series “Life on Earth” is central to the success of living organisms on this planet. However, it is this very fact of infinite variation that presents the greatest problems to those attempting to manage terrestrial reserves in the face of the changing world. Put simply, species that currently occur together, and that operate in a certain fashion so as to provide a particular set of ecosystem functions and services will respond in a variety of ways to the changing climate. Any sets of species that currently occur together are unlikely to move in step in response to the warming Earth, and therefore new communities will emerge with changes in dominant plant species, perhaps even changes in structure. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that an area fenced and left alone or managed in a “business as usual” fashion for a century will still provide appropriate habitat for species that occupy it currently.

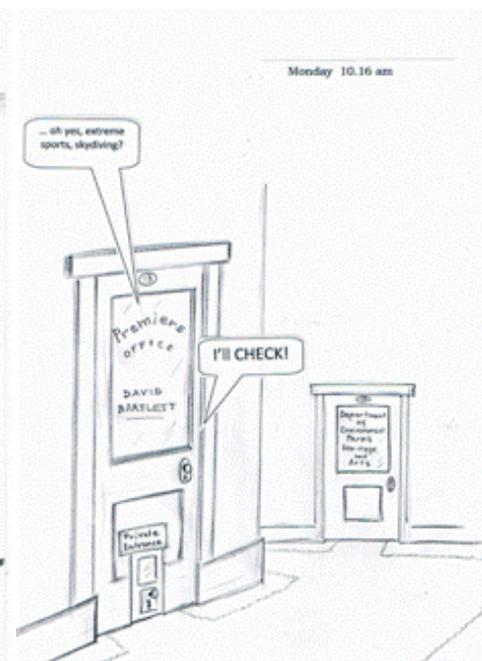
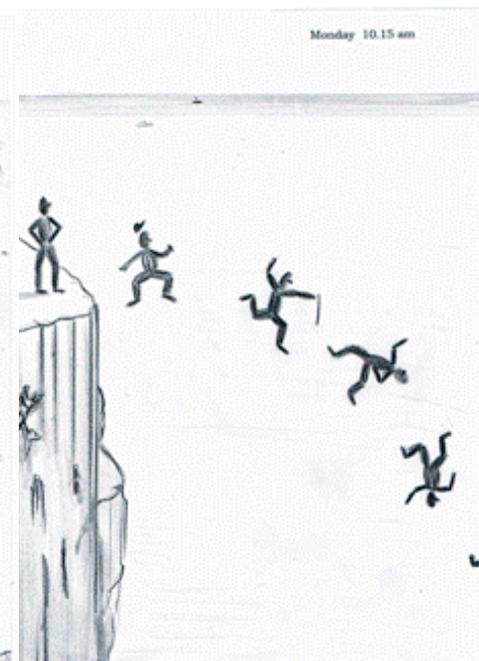
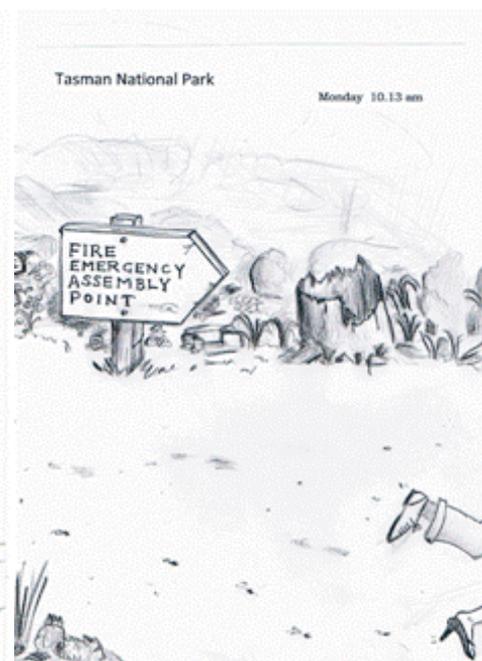
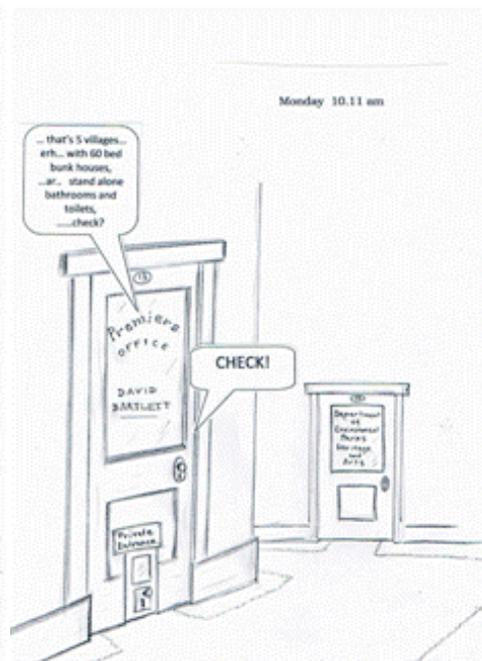
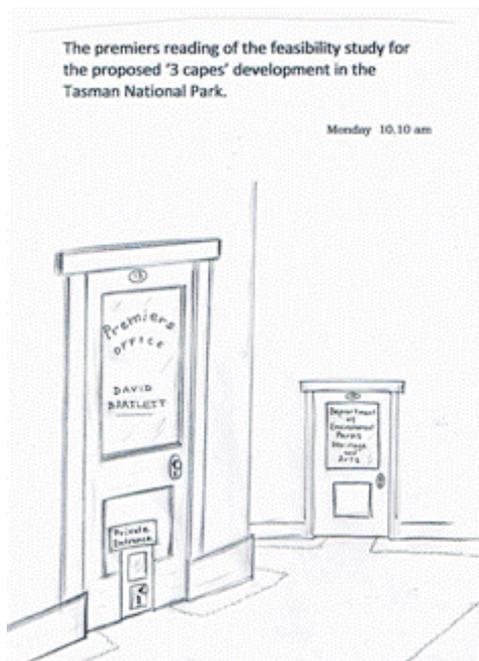
These issues present land managers with a complex and difficult set of management options. We need to decide as a community just what we want from our reserves. Do we want functioning ecosystems that provide suitable habitats for as many species as possible or do we wish to preserve the appearance of the landscape prior to human or European settlement? I would contend that these two aims are mutually exclusive. The reason for this is that the ecosystem composition will change, plant function will change and animal behaviour will change. Therefore, a landscape that appears superficially identical to one that existed 200 years ago will not be functioning the same way as it did 200 years ago. Therefore, I believe such a “preserved” ecosystem will not provide appropriate habitat for many organisms, condemning them to either an impossible relocation or eventual extinction.

Our land managers are tackling these issues in a proactive way, but there are some very uncomfortable truths that have to be faced and some extremely difficult questions that need to be answered. The wider community needs to engage with land managers on these issues and help them to decide just what it is we want our terrestrial reserves to deliver into the future.

Fees Up, Staff Down

—PWS and Park
Visitors on the Edge

By Peter Henderson





The Tarkine...

ancient and breathtakingly beautiful;
another Tasmanian political
battleground; a muddled mess of issues,
interests....even intrigue.

Janet Henderson

This article is an attempt to highlight the issues at play in the North West corner of Tasmania and the difficulties in defining a position.

'The Tarkine' has no official boundary and the area will not be found on any official map—although with its elevation to a hot political topic and the government's determination to exploit it, doubtless the maps are being re-printed. It is now generally accepted that discussions of 'the Tarkine' refer to an area bounded by the Arthur River to the north, the Murchison Highway to the east, the Pieman River in the south and the west coast of Tasmania.

The name 'Tarkine' was coined by conservationist groups in the 1980s. It was derived from the name of a coastal Aboriginal tribe, the 'Tarkiner' people, who had inhabited the area for 30,000 years prior to being 'rounded up' in the early 19th century by the government of the day. The campaign to protect the area had its beginnings in the 1960s. A formal conservation proposal was put forward by the then Circular Head Mayor, Horace (Jim) Lane, who proposed a Norfolk Range National Park.¹

The simmering conflict around the Tarkine has been re-ignited by the Bartlett government's determination to spend \$23m on a road through the northern part of the Tarkine—purportedly to stimulate the tourist industry of North West Tasmania. There is plenty of opposition—predictably, conservationists and the Greens are opposed to the road, as are existing tourism operators whose businesses would be destroyed. Far less predictably the peak body for the tourism industry—the Tasmanian Tourism Industry Council—is opposed, as are the Waratah-Wynyard and West Coast councils, the Cradle Coast Authority, the Tasmanian Liberals

and scientists (both national and international) who are concerned about the fate of the Tasmanian Devil and other threatened species.

Most of the Tarkine is managed by Forestry Tasmania (FT) and the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) under a confusion of State and Commonwealth Acts and inter-governmental agreements. Parts also fall under the statutory authorities of the Circular Head, Waratah-Wynyard and West Coast councils and some are listed on the register of the National Estate.

The area is presently a hotch-potch of reserves:

- much of the land adjoining the coast is included in the Arthur-Pieman Conservation Area—a reserve status which prioritises conservation but which allows mining;
- the only existing national park in the area is the Savage River National Park which is effectively inaccessible;
- the Savage River National Park is surrounded by regional reserves and a nature recreation reserve—these statuses effectively allow for mineral exploration first and conservation later; and
- much of the remaining area is state forest peppered with forest reserves.

Following the 2004 federal election the Howard/Lennon Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement declared that 73 000ha of the Tarkine would be protected from logging and the imaginatively named Savage River Pipeline Forest Reserve was created—to be managed by Forestry Tasmania. Neither conservationists nor Aboriginal groups were consulted in the creation of the reserves. The decisions were based on a report that had advised that logging of old growth myrtle beech was uneconomical and that the buttongrass plains were unsuitable for plantations.²

Conservation, mining, recreation, forestry, tourism (and cattle grazing) all have conflicting claims within the Tarkine.

Conservation:

The Tarkine has outstanding natural, indigenous and historical values, untouched rainforest, buttongrass plains, mountains, spectacular coastline, sand-dunes, extensive Aboriginal middens and history.

The largest tract of undisturbed, cool temperate rainforest in the world is in the Tarkine,

The list of natural and conservation values is extensive and impressive.

A sample includes:

- a number of Gondwana relict species;
- extraordinary biodiversity;
- more than 60 threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna—including the giant freshwater crayfish;
- this is one of the last remaining disease-free habitats of the endangered Tasmanian Devil: and
- Aboriginal middens

The Tarkine area has been listed as National Heritage and calls have been made for it to be listed as World Heritage. An extensive description of the Tarkine's values can be found on the Greens submission² for National Heritage listing and on the website of the Tarkine National Coalition.³

PWS have responsibility for managing the reserved areas. With minimal resourcing and recreational vehicles and cattle-grazing out of control, this is an impossible task.

Mining:

The area is rich in iron ore and other minerals and mineral exploration licences exist over most of the Tarkine area⁴. The extensive mining interests, and potential for royalties payments, are probably enough to prevent a government agreeing to a Tarkine National Park. The Savage River iron ore mine is operated by Grange Resources and is a major operation. A pelletising plant and facilities are at Port Latta 70km north west of Burnie; there is a pipe line which runs from the concentrator at the mine to Port Latta, along the boundary of the Savage River National Park and through state forest – effectively bisecting the Tarkine area. Much of the forest reserve declared in 2005 under the Howard/Lennon Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement is on either side of this pipeline.

Recreation:

Fishing, boating and walking are relatively low impact recreational activities. However, there is also extensive recreational use of quad bikes—particularly over the dunes of the coastal areas. These are causing untold damage to the fragile ecosystems and to the extensive Aboriginal middens which are scattered down the coast. Off-road vehicles also cause extensive and irreversible damage—not to mention last year's devastating fire lit by a driver who got lost 'off-road'. There are three official 4WD tracks which require permits from PWS. But PWS is too under-resourced to enforce off-road vehicles or quad bikes and the damage continues unabated.

Forestry:

Much of the Tarkine area which is not in PWS-managed reserves is state forest. Small, disconnected patches of state forest are protected in forest reserves. The largest forest reserve is the 2005 Savage River Pipeline Forest Reserve. FT is responsible for the protection of forest reserves within the Tarkine from logging—while continuing logging of unprotected old-growth forest in the area. Forest reserves may be protected from logging but not from roading—the proposed tourist road would pass through the Savage River Pipeline Forest Reserve.

The Tarkine loop road which the Bartlett government is pursuing with such vigour is a FT plan. If the road is built it would include a bridge over the Arthur River—which would give FT access to old-growth and red myrtle forest which is unprotected and has not been accessible because the existing bridge cannot take heavy vehicles.

An existing forestry road travels alongside the Savage River Mine's slurry pipe for about 5km and the mining company has demanded a commitment of over \$70m to cover the possibility of the slurry pipe being damaged and the loss to the company that would result. The sum

was prohibitive and FT was unable to access unprotected forest across the line. The proposed tourist road also travels alongside the pipe line and the problem will be re-visited.

FT has also been branching out into tourist ventures. FT's Dismal Swamp attraction has recently been renamed "Tarkine Forest Adventures" in anticipation of increased numbers of tourists travelling the loop road.

Tourism and the proposed tourist road:

There seems to be no doubt that there is untapped tourist potential in the Tarkine. The message from all but the government and FT is that the tourist potential is in the wilderness and remoteness of the area—qualities which are rapidly diminishing in our over-exploited world. The proponents of the road do not seem able to grasp the subtlety of this vision.

For a long time, the Tarkine National Coalition has been putting out tourist brochures for drives and walks, encouraging people to see the wonders of the area in the hope that visitors would want to protect it. Tourism ventures are operating—the best known is probably the Tarkine Trails. Existing ventures are slowly building and recognise the need to protect what makes their businesses unique. The road would destroy some existing tourist operations and the threat of it has already deterred investment.

The pro-development Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) is opposed to this road on the grounds that existing operators should be respected and their businesses encouraged and developed. The TICT spokesman has said that a road alone cannot drive visitation. Three proposals were mooted for tourist roads within the Tarkine—the Tasmanian government chose the most contentious and the most destructive. The proposal is to build a new road to link the Phantom Valley with the South Arthur Forest Drive to deliver a 330 km loop road—from Burnie, taking in the far North West of the state and the northern parts of the Tarkine and back to Burnie.⁵

Of the three local councils with jurisdiction over the area—Circular Head, Waratah-Wynyard and West Coast—only the Circular Head Council is in favour of the road. The other two councils point out that the financial commitment is all in the north of the Tarkine and any benefit would only be for the Circular Head area: Waratah, Corinna and West Coast would miss out.

The much touted benefits from the tourist road supposedly predicted in the report produced by Moore's Consulting have, apparently, been misrepresented. The report suggests that the road "...and all associated developments" could deliver 1600 jobs and \$70m annually. The 'associated developments' refer to tourist accommodation, attractions and services which would require a further \$80m+ government and private investment. This additional investment has neither been made nor promised.⁶

For the most part the road would be using existing Forestry tracks—although it would seem that some of these have all but been reclaimed by the forests. The most contentious part is a 5-6 km section through pristine rainforest to close the loop. The road would cross the Arthur River upgrading the bridge to take heavy traffic and allowing access to previously unavailable, unprotected old-growth forest.

The new road would also pass through the 'Howard-declared' forest reserve. So the area may have been protected from logging, but not from anything else.

David Llewellyn—the Minister for Primary Industry—with supreme cynicism said that conservationists should be pleased because unprotected forest scheduled for logging would be protected—as a

buffer zone—if the road went ahead.

He is also dismissive of scientists' concerns that the Tarkine is one of the last habitats for healthy Tasmanian devils. He says that threats to devils would be 'mitigated'.

The road would introduce weeds, present a fire danger and would greatly increase road kill as well as giving FT access to unprotected old-growth forest. There would be problems in relation to sealing the road, speeding and travelling at night

The proposed road presents a threat to several endangered species—the Tasmanian Devil having the highest profile—so approval would need to be gained from the federal environment minister under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Policy considerations:

- Calling for a Tarkine National Park. This is simple and politically direct. However, mining and forestry interests are powerful opponents to a national park. Mines and plantations exist within the generally recognised boundaries of 'the Tarkine' and it would make no sense to include these in a national park, so it would not be possible to avoid a piecemeal approach.
- Calling for an upgrade of the status of the many reserves with particular emphasis on the proper management of the Arthur Pieman Conservation Area. Attempts have been made previously to 'upgrade' this area to national park—and each time they have been thwarted by a determined and influential group of graziers and recreational users.
- Pushing for listing as a World Heritage Area. A WHA does not have to be a national park; preliminary work has already been done by the Australian Greens in seeking listing as National Heritage as a preliminary to World Heritage.

- Calling for the forest reserves to be managed by PWS rather than FT. PWS is chronically under-funded and unable to manage the existing reserves properly.
- At the very least there should be an over-arching management plan for the Tarkine area.

To summarise:

'The Tarkine' is a complex tangle of legislation, reserve status and identity. There are powerful mining and forestry interests in the area, competing with conservation, tourism and recreational claims.

The government's proposal to spend \$23m building a tourist road through the northern part of the Tarkine is supported only by FT (whose plan it is anyway) and by the Circular Head Council.

The government's claims of predicted benefits from the road are, apparently, misrepresented.

Pursuing the creation of a Tarkine National Park is fraught with problems. This corner of Tasmania is breathtakingly beautiful and varied—long may it last.

¹ Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarkine>

² http://bob-brown.greensmps.org.au/webfm_send/33—The Greens submission for National Heritage listing for the Tarkine.

³ The Tarkine National Coalition: <http://www.tarkine.org/>

⁴ There has been prospecting and mining in the area since the 1870s, and the Savage River Mine was established in the mid-1960s [TNPA note].

⁵ Refer map—this is from <http://www.tarkinedrive.com.au> a promotional site sponsored by Forestry Tasmania

⁶ "The new green front", *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, April 4-5, 2009, p14-19, Matthew Denholm.

THE NEW WINDY RIDGE HUT – *Early reactions*

The general public could be forgiven for being seduced by the rhetoric over the new Windy Ridge Hut (now renamed the Bert Nichols Hut) recently released by the Minister Michelle O'Byrne, however it seems those experiencing the new building hut are not seduced at all.

Following the original story on the 'hut' in the last TNPA Newsletter, we are publishing some comments by Overland Track walkers to illustrate how outraged many are over this ill-conceived monstrosity. The following comments were extracted from the hut log book in spring 2008 (author names have been kept confidential – but none to our knowledge are TNPA members):

The hut is huge, the character of the old Windy Ridge Hut is lost forever. Just wondering who designed the hut?

This is the coldest hut on the planet.

... hut was freezing – all slept in kitchen – what a ridiculously high ceiling.

Can't imagine anyone using the bedrooms to sleep in so far away from the heater. Can't help thinking the hut was designed for an African safari than cold alpine walkers.

What have they done to the old wonderful Windy Ridge Hut? Progress sucks.

This hut is way too big and impersonal. We like the old school huts.

Too big, too cold to stay. Running away to the nice cosy Narcissus; bummer staying in the Giant's Bungalow. Good work in building it; but it's just the wrong place and bad feel that keeps us moving.

Shame about the new hut – \$1.2 million for a thermodynamically crap design with no character and heaps of wasted space... Please don't build any more huts like this one.

Leaving this cold, ill-designed hut for Narcissus... maybe the designer of this hut thought the Overland Track was in far north Queensland.

Big F... cold clinical hut; all I can say is it's completely unnecessary. Spent six days on the Overland Track from Dove Lake; it's been awesome. Don't think this hut really fits in though. It seems out-of-place for the Overland Track... I loved the old hut.

Typical architect-designed building – he obviously hasn't spent a night out from behind his desk.

Ghastly monstrosity.

Don't know what to comment about the new hut. The use of space is just appalling and the entire place is ice cold. I won't stay here next time.

Windy Ridge Hut Log Book Entry October 2008

Apart from prior comments, it's strange to put cooking bays in the darkest recesses of this building. Presumably the architect is male, doesn't frequent kitchens and has not ventured south of Brisbane. At least extend the eating tables so everyone gets a seat. No verandah to trap the rain and dry wet gear or to enable people to lounge outside a la Pelion Hut. No expansive vistas from this hut. I can only look up and out of the dining room windows – sky and tops of eucalypts – just like being at home only not as interesting. Anyway there is lots of vacant space left: is it too much to ask? [to] apply the word/concept function to it. I can't even reach the clothes line. Its not too late for a verandah along the dining room wall. What about bunks with all the space you've got? (eg, Windermere/Pelion). I never met Bert Nichols but I reckon he'd have a comment or two about this joint and they'd be pretty short ones. Can someone tell me why there's a need for locking window winders on insect screen windows? If you're hard of hearing abandon hope when you enter here. This building should be a compulsory field study for year 1 Architecture students: in how many ways is this design fundamentally flawed? PS: The coal burner's good. PS the architect has obviously never heard of solar passive design and insulation & the whole building bounces as someone walks on the floors let alone jumps out of one of the sleeping platforms.

I am absolutely disgusted by this monstrosity of a hut. I thought people would have had more sense.

...this building should be compulsory field study for year 1 Architecture students: in how many ways is this design fundamentally flawed (for full entry by this person see text box).

And on the hut subject again...and not only that; none of the corners are child proof.

This new hut does nothing for the reputation of its architect. Very poorly designed.

Clearly the Overland Track walkers are not impressed. Regular walkers in the area have been astonished by the structure's enormity and energy inefficiency. It lacks empathy with the natural environment and is without consideration of the social needs of walkers. Tables and benches are immovable – making the space cold climatically and socially.

Folk in the tour guiding industry with experience overseas have also commented to the TNPA:

Why has whoever gave the go-ahead to the gross waste of over a million dollars of public money which is Windy Ridge, still got a job?

By comparison the NZ Department of Conservation (the equivalent to Tasmanian PWS) did a far better job of maintaining their parks and providing huts far more economically. The huts that NZ Department of Conservation



Image of Windy Ridge Hut, July 2009

have managed to build for about NZ\$200,000 each are very impressive.

In fact, the TNPA has not heard a single positive comment about the new hut. We find this concerning, as although there are issues in our view with the new Pelion Hut, we have heard a lot of positive comment about this structure.

It is clear from the above remarks that there are serious issues, recognised by a range of users, with the design of the new Windy Ridge Hut - in particular its large size, coldness, the nature and placement of fixtures, and lack of effective verandah. It is obviously not appropriate at many levels for the environment – physical and environmental – that it is in. There are also issues relating to the hut's location and high visibility that have been brought to the TNPA's attention. It is also clear that a large number of users are extremely concerned, and in some cases outraged, by how much money was spent to build this hut. And, the designer art work on the ceiling appears to add insult to injury, with this being mentioned a number of times as a ludicrous waste of money and unnecessary in a bushwalking hut.

The TNPA believes that this hut could have been much better designed, more economically constructed and with far less impact, for example sections could have been prefabricated and helicoptered in, saving money, waste and other impacts of having the building constructed on site. Keeping it smaller and using some of the space saving features found in New Zealand huts would have also reduced the cost. Attention also needs to be given to making this and other new huts more user friendly. Perhaps a little more consultation with users and highly experienced walkers might have helped here. Let us hope that the Parks and Wildlife Service will not repeat this debacle.

How the new Windy Ridge Hut got approved in the first place is a question that the TNPA has asked. The TNPA will be making enquires and will report back in the next issue of TNPA News.

RECENT TNPA EVENTS

Since the publication of the last newsletter, TNPA has held a couple of fundraising evenings, and also supported the Buttongrass Ball, an annual Folk Federation of Tasmania event. The fundraising evenings have been successful on several levels—they bring in funds for the TNPA, they provide an opportunity for members and the wider community to enjoy a social evening together, they raise awareness of the organisation and they bring in new members.

Committee members were very active in organizing these events, promoting the activities to their friends and to the community. Big thanks are due to them for their hard work, as well as to all those who came along and brought friends.

QUIZ NIGHT

The Quiz Night (November 2008) was held in at the CCAMLR building in Macquarie Street, and this turned out to be a very satisfactory venue. Overall profit was over \$1,000, through entry costs, sale of drinks and a raffle. Our MC was Mark Nicholson, who asked the questions and provided witty commentary during the evening.

The Committee has decided to hold another Quiz Night this year at the same venue—9 October, so please put the date in your diaries. We received feedback that the questions were too narrowly oriented to national parks knowledge, so this year we will have new questions—if you have suggestions, please email them to us.

Thanks go for the success of this evening to the Committee for their hard work, and also to those businesses and individuals who sponsored the evening through raffle prizes, wine label production and photocopying. And special thanks to the Committee family members who marked each table's answers, and identified the winners!

SLIDE NIGHT

The recent slide night, My Tasmania, at the Stanley Burbury Theatre (15 May) was even more successful financially with a profit of over \$2,000! Most of this came from entry costs, but considerable donations were made by those people who enjoyed the supper which was provided by the Committee (and, again, their family members). It seems that people still love home-made cakes and biscuits with their cup of tea or coffee!

Slides were shown by Karen Gowlett-Holmes, Rob Blakers and Grant Dixon. As a marine biologist/diver/photographer Karen introduced the audience to vertebrate and invertebrate marine life through her stunning images. Rob presented Tasmania's magnificent but endangered forests, and Grant showed us the island through his geoscientist and conservationist eyes.

And Melva Truchanas showed some of Olegas Truchanas' slides in her introduction to the evening, and introduced each of the presenters.

Thanks to all the presenters for a wonderful evening.

BUTTONGRASS BALL

The annual Buttongrass Ball was held in March, with the Verandah Coots providing their usual "Lively traditional music and heritage dances for everyone"—and it really is everyone who comes to this event. It is so exciting to see children, from toddlers to teens, swinging alongside their parents and grandparents, learning these old dances.

This year the theme was the Tarkine which, with the threatened new 'tourist' road in the offing, really needs support. So our thanks to the Verandah Coots who donated the proceeds to TNPA; to David Wanless, master dance caller; to Cathie, Fiona, Jennifer and others who helped with decorations and organisation on the night; and to Plants of Tasmania for their sponsorship.

Tasmanian National Parks Association Inc

Patron: Peter Cundall

TNPA Management Committee (from October 2008)

Vice President 1: Anne McConnell

Vice President 2: Robert Campbell

Treasurer: Patsy Jones

Secretary: Pam Fenerty

Public Officer: Greg Wood

Other committee members: Jean Elder & Liz Thomas

Contact Details

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Meetings

Management Committee meetings are held one Monday each month at 6:30 pm at Sustainable Living Tasmania (note new address – 1st Floor 71 Murray Street (above Ecohaven), Hobart). Members and supporters are welcome. Meeting dates will be advertised in each TNPA Communique or please check with the Secretariat.

Have your say...

ABC National—Tim Cox

tasmornings@your.abc.net.au or 1300 36 1700

Letters to the Editor at The Mercury

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hsletters@hwt.newsltd.com.au

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TNPA News

TNPA News is published twice a year. It aims to provide informative articles on issues related to national parks and other reserves, as well as updates on TNPA activities and campaigns. The views expressed in TNPA News are not necessarily those of the TNPA Inc. In this issue, many thanks to David Obendorf, Jenny Scott, Mark Hovenden, Robert Campbell, Anne McConnell, Pam Fenerty, Patsy Jones, Janet Henderson, Peter Henderson and Chris Bell. Original articles in TNPA News may be reproduced, but please acknowledge the author and the source. Contributions for TNPA News No. 13 are welcomed (deadline mid October 2009). Please send contributions to admin@tnpa.asn.au (attention: TNPA News editor).

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Editor TNPA News 12 - Claire Newman

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