

TNPA NEWS

TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION INC

Newsletter No 16 Spring-Summer 2012



From Tarkine Wilderness, photos by Chris Bell

THANK YOU

The TNPA Committee would like to thank the following people and organisations who have over the last 6 months volunteered their time to assist the TNPA, or who have helped us in other ways.

TNPA Fundraiser 'Himalayan Journeys'

Grant Dixon; Those who supplied goodies for the supper, and the University of Tasmania.

The 2012 Buttongrass Ball

The VerandahCoots & The Devils Own, David Wanless and the folk dance organising team, Phillip Bohm, the Folk Federation of Tasmania and Plants of Tasmania.

The TNPA Salamanca Stalls Rob & Toni Hill and Debbie Quarmby.

TNPA News Production (this edition)

Tasprint Pty Ltd, Bec Kurczok and Kevin Kiernan.

Secretarial Assistance to the TNPA

Simone Yemm, and Maree Healey (newly started).

Other Support & Assistance

Paul Smith, Amy Lin, Ted Mead, the Environmental Defenders Office (Tas), the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, Environment Tasmania and the National Parks Australia Council.

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

EDITORIAL

This issue of TNPA News features articles which look at recent and current events and developments which have great bearing on the future of Tasmania's and Australia's national parks and conservation areas, and indeed the whole Australian natural environment. Right now the campaign to stop the proposed changes to the Commonwealth EPBC Act is rapidly gaining momentum, in Tasmania we have

the prospect of the Forest Agreement delivering a greatly increased area to be managed by PWS, and the Wilderness Conference in Sydney looked at the future of national parks and of preservation of wilderness from a global as well as a local perspective. This issue also includes Kevin Keirnan's very interesting and thought-provoking article 'Light and Biota', a follow-up to his piece 'Starlight and Birthright' featured in TNPA News #15. Thanks to Kevin and to TNPA Committee members for their writings and photos.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PEN:

A World-Class Reserve System Deserves a World Class Management Agency

As I was writing this article in late November an email popped in my Inbox informing me that an agreement had finally been reached in the long-lasting Tasmanian Forest negotiations. The next day the enabling legislation had passed the lower house of the Tasmanian Parliament after a marathon sitting and by the time that you read this we will know whether the Legislative Council has also supported this agreement.

Passage of this legislation will have significant consequences for Tasmania's conservation reserves with indications that much of the 504,012 ha of native forests to be protected under the Agreement will be placed within existing or new national parks.

The timing of this Agreement is coincidental with the tabling in parliament earlier in the month of the report by the Legislative Council's Government Administration Committee 'B' Inquiry into The Operation and Administration of the Parks and Wildlife Service.

The genesis for this inquiry (in April 2012) was the potential for the Intergovernmental Agreement on Tasmanian Forestry (IGA) to add significant areas of land to the estate managed by Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS). Under the terms of the IGA \$7m had been allocated for the management of these additional areas, but there was concern as to the adequacy of this amount to meet the additional land management costs involved. As the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Sue Smith MLC, pointed out:

'I believe it is important that all Members have a strong understanding of any potential changes in the operations of a government agency which already appears to be struggling to meet community expectations.'

The TNPA welcomed the establishment of this inquiry and the invited opportunity to comment, as we have been concerned for a number of years about the level of funding provided to the PWS and its ability to carry out its legislated duties as well as the other special projects it has been assigned.

Based on nine written submissions received by the Committee, together with verbal representations provided by eight witnesses to the three public hearings, the report of the Inquiry makes interesting reading as outlined in the following four key identified issues.

1. *The current under-resourcing of the PWS which limits its ability to carry out the Objectives for management of reserved land as listed in Schedule 1 of the National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002.*

The Committee noted all of the submissions which addressed this issue were in agreement and noted that the inability of the PWS "to meet its obligation should be a mat-

ter of great concern to the Tasmanian community and the Tasmanian Government”.

Significantly, the Committee also noted that the current funding of the PWS, on a per hectare basis, is well below the levels of other states and territories and other land managers in Tasmania, such as Forestry Tasmania. Whilst different sets of comparisons were given in various submissions, the submission from the CPSU noted the following:

‘A 2007 Report of the Senate Environment Committee entitled “Conserving Australia: Australia’s national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas” estimated the average cost of managing terrestrial Commonwealth reserves was \$26/ha. The report also found that the equivalent costs in New South Wales was \$37/ha and in Victoria \$30/ha. Based on the 2012-13 budget for the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service of \$45.6M the cost per hectare of land managed equates to just \$18.3/ha - a long way short of the figures quoted for other jurisdictions in 2007.’

Testimony given by Peter Mooney, PWS General Manager, to the Committee also highlighted the lower per hectare expenditure in Tasmania:

“...the Parks and Wildlife Service budget is \$49 million at the moment but a majority of that is project funding. When it comes down to the basic recurrent funding, it is about \$23.5 million per year that we are provided and we manage within that at the moment. That gives an equation to approximately \$11 a hectare”

The findings of the Committee were that funding for the management of the current reserves and maintenance of the existing infrastructure to access those reserved areas is not adequate to fulfil the Management Objectives listed in Schedule 1 of the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*. It was also found that the PWS is currently underfunded in relation to its core management responsibilities with evidence suggesting that \$16 per hectare would be a more appropriate level of funding. This would mean that core funding for the PSW would need to rise by about 50 percent.

2. *The possible impacts resulting from any transfer of additional national parks and other reserves to the PWS as a result of the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA);*

Having found that the Tasmanian PWS is presently underfunded and unable to adequately manage and maintain its current reserves estate, the Inquiry noted that it would seem that increasing the size of that estate would only worsen the situation unless significant additional resources

were provided. The Committee also noted that it was very unusual that there had been no forward detailed planning whatsoever undertaken by the PWS or DPIPW into the implications of any increase of land coming under the control of the PWS as a consequence of the IGA process.

3. *The adequacy of the resources provided by the Commonwealth Government under the IGA to the PWS for the management of additional parks and reserves;*

The IGA specifies the Commonwealth Government will provide an immediate payment of \$7 million to the Tasmanian Government in 2011-12 to support management of the additional reserves then, following formal legislative protection by the Tasmanian Government of the areas of reserves, the Commonwealth will provide \$7 million per financial year, indexed to CPI, with a review of the base funding after 5 years.’

However, the evidence presented to the inquiry indicated that \$7 million would be insufficient to cover the additional costs incurred with managing the expected new reserves and national parks. In particular the Inquiry noted that the infrastructure requirements for managing Forestry Tasmania’s reserves differ substantially from reserves managed by the PWS and as such, the Inquiry concluded that the additional funding to be made available under the IGA appears to be well short of what would be required. The Inquiry concluded that additional management responsibilities associated with increased parks and reserves would require substantially increased ongoing resourcing.

4. *Resources required by the PWS for fire management in additional national parks and reserves at significant risk of wildfire.*

Other evidence presented to the Committee demonstrated that greater fire management responsibilities and costs would be imposed on the PWS if it was given responsibility for large parcels of land consisting mainly of fire-prone native forests. The Committee noted in its findings that the PWS has limited experience in managing fire in dense forest.

Based on its finding the Inquiry made the following four recommendations

1. Detailed assessment and planning be undertaken prior to any decision being made to transfer the management of additional national parks or reserves to the Parks and Wildlife Service.
2. The State Government ensures that adequate ongoing resourcing is provided to the Parks and Wildlife Service to manage its current national parks and reserves.
3. The State Government ensures that adequate ongoing resourcing is provided to the Parks and Wildlife Service if it is required to manage any additional areas.

4. *The State Government ensures adequate funding to maintain and repair infrastructure within the forest reserves for the purposes of fire fighting, tourist access and emergency egress.*

Given that a Forest Agreement has now been sent to parliament, with its inherent implications for large extensions to the existing system of conservations reserves within Tasmania, the findings of this Inquiry have important ramifications for the future management of this reserve system. It is interesting to note that in setting up this inquiry the President of the Legislative Council had already voiced a concern that the PWS “already appears to be struggling to meet community expectations”. If this is the case, and given the expectation of a significant increase in its management portfolio, one can only hope that additional and adequate funding will be provided to the PWS in future years so that it can meet its legislated responsibilities. However, calls by the TNPA and others to increase the funding of the PWS in recent years have unfortunately gone unanswered.

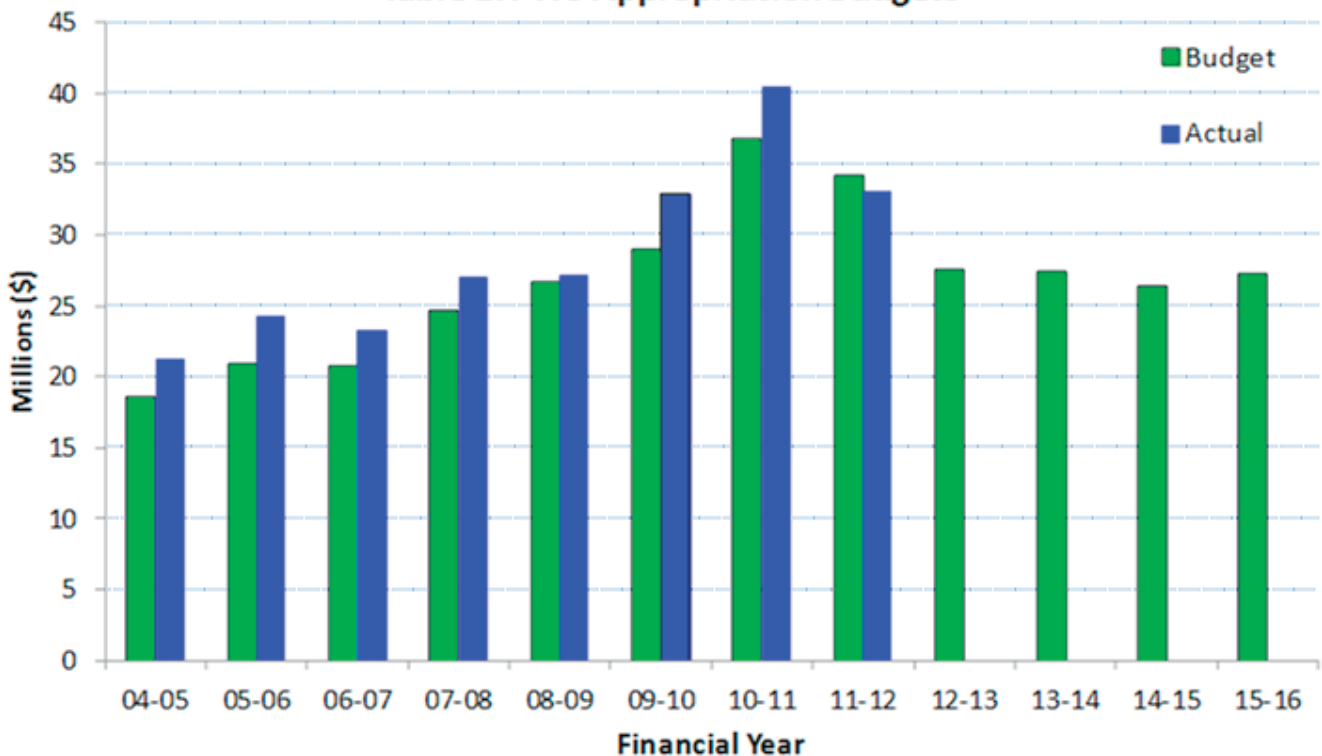
While the recommendations of this Inquiry have only recently gone to parliament, given the ongoing concern that the PWS “already appears to be struggling to meet community expectations”, it is extremely disappointing to note the projected budgets for the PWS as outlined in the most recent budget. As noted in the TNPA submission to the Inquiry, and confirmed by the comment noted previously by Peter Mooney, a particular issue with the PWS budget is the significant proportion of the budget that is one-off alloca-

tions to special projects which significantly inflates the total revenue to the PWS, but hides the influence of these funds on the size of the core budget that the PWS has to carry out core duties.

Nevertheless, when the projects that are being funded are examined, with the exception for the Three Capes Track development, it could be argued that all the funded items are part of the normal duties of the PWS and should not be funded as ‘special projects’. In addition, current issues with infrastructure management and the lack of funds for research, control and monitoring, strongly suggest that at least this additional level of funding is required on an ongoing basis.

A more detailed analysis of the PWS budget (c.f. Table 1) highlights the ongoing problem facing the agency. The appropriation revenue for the PWS displays an increase over the years between 2004-05 and 2010-11 (when it peaked at just over \$40m), but based on the forward estimates the annual revenue is anticipated to decrease to \$26.3m in 2014-15 (representing a 35% decrease) with only a small increase to \$27.2m in 2015-16. Furthermore, if one considers the appropriation allocation to the PWS as a percentage of the total State government revenue, then this percentage reached 0.85% in 2010-11, but is forecast to decline significantly to only 0.55% in 2014-15. Again, this represents a 32% decrease in the proportion of state revenue allocated to the PWS. Indeed, all allocations to the PWS over the forward estimates are substantially below those received since 2008. If past budgets were seen as inadequate for the PWS to carry

Table 1: PWS Appropriation Budgets



Note: Figures taken from Departmental Annual Reports and Tasmanian Budget Papers.



out core duties, then the projected decrease in revenue (both total and recurrent appropriation) by 2015 would appear to only exacerbate this problem.

The TNPA is aware that, in response to its poor budgetary situation in recent years, PWS has been pro-active in seeking alternative funding and labour, especially from volunteer organizations such as Wildcare. The TNPA supports the work carried out by such volunteer groups, however we believe that some of these avenues are now at their limit. For example, we do not believe that it will be possible to significantly increase the amount of volunteer labour for works in Tasmanian conservation land.

Tasmania has one of the world's most extensive and spectacularly beautiful reserve systems and a higher portion of the state reserved in parks than any other in Australia. This collection of parks and reserves also constitutes one of the Tasmania's most important assets. It is a conservation asset of unique significance and, where consistent with the values conservation, is a recreation resource. This reserved land is also a significant element in the State's tourist industry and economy, and underpins 'brand Tasmania'. Given this situation Tasmania, more than any other Australian State, has a vested interest in properly managing and protecting these areas and the values for which they were reserved. Furthermore, given the heightened importance of these reserves for environmental, social and economic benefits there is a need for adequate funding for the PWS.

In order to overcome the deficiencies identified above, there is a need to identify a core budget which the PWS requires to carry out its legislated management objectives. Furthermore, in order to improve the public transparency and accountability of the management system, a Performance Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting program needs to be fully developed. Such a program would improve on the present inadequate reporting of key performance indicators (replacing the inadequate performance criteria presently reported in the Annual Reports), provide clarification to the public on management performance, and provide factual feedback about performance to guide adaptive management to improve achievement of management objectives.

Given these goals, what the TNPA recommends the following initiatives:

1. Identify an adequate recurrent budget for the PWS that is guaranteed in the medium-to-long term so that the agency has the confidence to employ and train on-ground staff, maintain its vast amount of infrastructure, and get on with developing an essentially stalled natural and cultural values information base that is essential to the sustainable use of Tasmania's reserved land system. This doesn't need an unlimited budget – but it needs a reliable and reasonable budget. A commitment to developing a world-class system of conservation reserves deserves nothing less.
2. Undertake a review of the PWS to identify the levels of funding and staffing, together with the most appropriate management and operational structures, which would allow the agency to achieve its legislated management objectives in the most cost effective and economically efficient manner.
3. Formulate an effective and justifiable approach to prioritising tasks and spending in tight financial times such as now. In recent years it is arguable whether the PWS has demonstrated the capacity or willingness to effectively and appropriately prioritise what gets done, though as indicated by the findings of Crossley (2009) the changes in departmental structure and funding to the PWS in recent years has made the achievement of this more difficult.

In undertaking the management duties for nearly 40% of the State's land and a world-class system of conservation reserves there is no doubt that the PWS has a large and significant task. The TNPA believes that the PWS has a dedicated and competent staff who need support in fulfilling their legislated management objectives. Given the present range of government departments and agencies, the TNPA also believes that the PWS is the most appropriate for taking on the management responsibilities for any additional conservation reserves that are the outcome of the current IGA process. However, if this eventuates, a funding increase commensurate with the increase in land under management will be necessary.

Robert Campbell, President

Reference

Crossley, L. (2009) *Paradoxes of Protection Evolution of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and National Parks and Reserved Lands System*

By Kevin Kiernan

Artificial Light, Biota and Park Planning



Natural light on Earth comes from the sun, other stars, moon, auroras, lightning storms, and biota such as glow-worms, fireflies and phosphorescent algae on the sea. But some years ago I attended a conference in Rockhampton, Queensland, close by the location of Australia's longest ever conservation battle, the ultimately won fight to halt quarrying of the Mt Etna Caves for limestone. Wandering out from dinner one night someone noticed many bats feeding on insects around a streetlight. Eventually tiring of stiff necks from gazing upwards, and feeling cheerily mellow, various of us lay down on the car-park to gaze upwards at the spectacle, contemplating just how many tons of insect pests the millions of bats inhabiting the Mt Etna Caves must save local farmers in insecticide costs each night. The wonderment and discussion continued until someone mentioned snake predation on bats, at which point my kiwi mates seemed somehow to instantaneously levitate about 1 m into the air despite no perceptible movements of their arms or legs and then, their legs suddenly rotating in road-runner fashion, rapidly depart the scene. Two things have stayed with me ever since: an enduring story with which to take the piss out of my kiwi mates whenever I cross The Ditch to wonderful Aotearoa; and the fact that those bats weren't doing their natural job that night: they were being distracted by the similar distraction of their insect prey by just one of the hundreds of thousands of artificial lights around Rockhampton.

The bats of Mt Etna are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the impact of light pollution on animals. Dur-

ing the 1987 Commission of Inquiry into the World Heritage values of the Lemnathyme and Southern Forests, a QC for the forest industry cross-examining an expert entomologist memorably commented "I put it to you that when the average person thinks about these flies, spiders and bugs, they think not of World Heritage, they think of Mortein". But the biomass of insects accounts for 2/3 of all the animal protein on Earth, and insects occur towards the base of the food chain. Pollination is one obvious service they provide for all the residents of Earth who eat vegetable matter or breathe oxygen. And pollination is not just about buzzing European bees on sunny days – for example, the preponderance of white flowers in NZ attests to the majority of pollinators there being night flyers for whom colour is no attractant. Various studies have shown that insects can fail to find mates due to artificial "light barriers". And it is not just insects we need to think about, because overall faunal activity on Earth is greatest at night, and light can have significant impacts. For example, studies of pumas in southern California have shown that artificial lights displaced them from their old paths through easy topography as they navigated towards the darkest horizon.

Plants too have evolved in the context of a 24 hour cycle that contains day and night, and excessive artificial light also impacts upon them. The length of day and night influence such things as flowering and the onset of dormancy. Disruption of flowering and development has been demonstrated if a plant that has evolved in the context of short day length is denied a long night. Excessive artificial light can also cause

deciduous trees not to lose their leaves when winter arrives – and, given that avoiding physiological damage caused by cold winter temperatures underlies the adoption of a deciduous habit, physiological consequences can be anticipated.

More than half all the faunal species on Earth are nocturnal, and they don't stop at night just because we humans do. The artificial lights with which we seek to turn off our human nights have repercussions for individual animals, habitats, ecosystems and environments. Foraging areas, breeding cycles and possibly physiology are affected. Ecosystems have become adapted to the moon and stars over millions of years, and since the industrial revolution we have been progressively extinguishing these critical signals. These changes are more starkly visible to the human eye than are the climate changes that have been occurring in parallel, but somehow we seem not to be seeing them despite the fact that they are literally up in lights. Light pollution adversely affects birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals, causing creatures to become disorientated, extending diurnal activity at the expense of nocturnal, interfering with predator-prey relationships like those bats at Rockhampton, and impacting on reproductive behaviour.

Migrating birds that are apparently reliant on stars become distracted and misdirected, and others follow lights to terminal impacts against windows – around 100 million birds are estimated to die in the USA each year due to exhaustion by misdirection, or trauma caused by collision with artificial structures. Birds particularly fall victim to lighthouses, offshore oil and gas platforms, and light beams. One study from British Columbia recorded 6000 bird deaths at 45 lighthouses; elsewhere in Canada a "Fatal Light Awareness Program" was initiated in Toronto where fatalities from head trauma, broken necks and feather damage due to impacts with human structures was found to have affected 160 different species. It is not only artificial structures that cause problems, but also illumination of natural sites – studies of storm petrels breeding in sea caves in Spain revealed more were killed by gulls in caves that faced city lights than in those that faced seawards.

Although little is known of nocturnal activity in the oceans, it seems reasonable to presume that brightly lit foreshores may also have implications for marine fauna, particularly when one considers how effectively fisherman can employ artificial lights to increase their catch. Various marine organisms receive their cues from natural light. Salmon fry migrate at night to the cue of darkness; the spectacular spawning of corals along the Great Barrier Reef always follows the full moon, possibly due to reduced risk of predation. Onshore, female turtles have been shown to select sub-optimal nesting sites in order to avoid artificial lights, and there is an apparent alteration of the usual male/female balance at intrusively lit nesting sites. There is also higher mortality of hatchlings at lit sites - under natural conditions they navigate towards the sea by following the brighter ho-

zizon that is indicative of water rather than land, a strategy that collapses under artificial lighting.

Various manipulative experiments have provided ample additional food for thought: many frogs and salamanders are nocturnal, and not only does light affect their mating, but experiments have shown lowered melatonin in salamanders that were kept illuminated, and that more light caused delayed or failed metamorphosis of tadpoles. Hence, there is growing evidence for even physiological changes being caused by this breakdown of the fundamental cycle of darkness and light. And what of our own species, *Homo sapiens*? Muscles controlling the human iris become less efficient with age, hence glare particularly affects the elderly – so perhaps the progressive closing of the curtains that I observed in the homes of my grandmother and mother as their years advanced was not just about shutting out despair after seeing nine decades of unending political blindness, but instead a response to unheeded progressive failure of their own eyes in parallel with the bigger-is-better so brighter-must-be better-too ethos of most civic authorities. And that annoying street-light that trespasses into your "natural" garden and even shines into your bedroom? If its trespass and nuisance involved noise instead of light you would at least have recourse to legal avenues, but not when it is light waves rather than sound waves that are responsible for this pollution and unwelcome home invasion. Trespassing light has demonstrable impacts on sleep disorders, human immune system function, and disease. We humans have also evolved under a natural 24 hour cycle, and night-time illumination has been shown to influence irritability, psychological factors, psychiatric disorders and social behaviour. There is further food for thought in one apparently esoteric experiment in which melatonin-depleted blood from pre-menopausal women who were exposed to light at night was injected into nude rats – the result, reported in a 2005 issue of the journal *Cancer Research*, was stimulation of human breast cancer xenografts. So perhaps even we humans should start paying more attention to possible adverse consequences of our exposure to excessive artificial light – despite our perhaps being among the least adversely affected of the many species with whom we share the Earth, and since we actually choose to do these things to ourselves.

Finally, it is worth recording that not only may biodiversity be affected by our interference with light and dark, but also geodiversity. Mention has already been made of the significance of the moon for spawning of the organisms responsible for constructing coral reefs, and such a link between bioheritage and geoheritage is by no means unique. For example, the mouths of some limestone caves bear phototropic speleothems, that is stalactites and related formations that grow towards the light, because their slow rate of formation allows colonisation of the lit side by simple plants that are in

turn buried as new layers of mineral are laid down. Deeper inside caves that have been developed for commercial tourism, excessive artificial light and the heat also generated by it commonly causes the growth of lampenflora – simple plants that not only disfigure lit cave formations but can also elevate carbon dioxide levels such as to cause the formations on which they are growing to be dissolved. But despite all the beauty to be found underground, for most people heaven is up where the stars are, and it is hell that is down where the stars are not – and if they do venture hell-wards into a limestone cave and there should chance upon glow-worms, they marvel at their likeness to a starry night, not vice versa.

It is well past time that light pollution was accorded greater significance in management of parks and reserves, not only for the impacts of irresponsible lighting on natural values but also for its impact upon sense of place and the human experience of natural areas. For such reasons measures are increasingly being taken world-wide to address the loss of night-time darkness. For example, Canada's legislative moves to safeguard the night in its conservation estate have included establishment of the Torrane Barrens Dark Sky Reserve, north of Toronto, in 1998, and the Lake Hudson State Park Dark Sky Reserve established in 1972. Globally there is increasing interest in the concept of Starlight Reserves, which flowed from a *Declaration in Defence of the Night Sky and the Right to Starlight* adopted at a conference in La Palma in April 2007, and received added impetus from a Thematic Initiative "Astronomy and World Heritage" developed by the World Heritage Centre in Paris, and the adoption of an action plan, and a workshop organised by UNESCO-World Heritage Centre, the International Astronomical Union and Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias, with support from the government of Fuerteventura Island.

The La Palma Declaration recognised that "The Skies, which have been, and are, an inspiration to all humanity, are becoming obscured and even unknown to the younger generation. An essential element of our civilisation and culture is rapidly becoming lost, and this loss will affect all countries on Earth". It holds "that humankind has always observed the sky either to interpret it or to understand the physical laws that govern the universe, and that this interest in astronomy has had profound implications for science, philosophy, culture and our general conception of the universe".

The 1994 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Future Generations* provides that "persons belonging to future generations have the right to an uncontaminated and undamaged Earth, with untainted skies, and are entitled to enjoy these as the basis of human culture and social bonds making each generation and individual a member of one human family". Given the role of the skies in different cosmologies, international conventions on religious freedom may also be relevant.

Irresponsible lighting not only affects biota and our sky-view heritage, it also causes public nuisance in the same way

as can noise. Under current legal arrangements in the Canary Islands, light pollution is treated as a form of air pollution. Effective light controls involve minimising the area that is lit, the duration of lighting, the degree of lighting, and minimising ultraviolet and blue emissions. In addition to such basic concerns as ensuring lights are correctly directed and shielded, it is also necessary to consider reflection from the ground – especially wet roadways – and from the faces of buildings. Avoiding light pollution requires broadly-based approaches that include engineering, design, education and regulations to ensure more responsible lighting and more efficient use of energy. Given the environmental harm and public nuisance caused by irresponsible lighting, the sky-glow that results from unwarranted upwards and lateral illumination of the atmosphere where the light is scattered by dust and aerosols, it is well past time that environmental impact statements were extended to include street and other lighting. The law has already started to catch up with such problems in some other parts of the world. Changes are being made to laws related to lighting in Chile, for instance, where Regulations for Controlling Light Pollution set out in *Supreme Decree N686* of the Ministry of Economics were enacted in 1998 and came into effect in October 1999.

The La Palma Declaration affirms that "An unpolluted night sky that allows the enjoyment of the contemplation of the firmament should be considered an inalienable right of humankind equivalent to all other environmental, social and cultural rights, due to its impact on the development of all peoples and on the conservation of biodiversity". Though for my own part I am no astronomer and have only the most meagre knowledge of the stars, my life has been immensely enriched by their majesty. My very being seems to know that I am the product of an evolutionary process that has unfolded beneath the night skies, which have become inextricably linked with some of my most tender moments, whether being summoned home by the thought that the Southern Cross upon which I was gazing from distant New Zealand was perhaps also being gazed upon by my love at home at that very same moment; or enjoying magic imaginings with my children as to what we might encounter were we able to walk upon the moon-path that shimmered upon the waters of Lime Bay; or standing spell-bound upon the sands of Lake Pedder beach before a moon-bow suspended above reflective Maria Creek; or sleeping out atop Mt Tyn-dall beneath the Milky Way with the love of my life; or even first encountering the concept of light pollution decades ago with a close friend who is no longer with us, in response to a complaint from a resident persecuted by new lights at the Wrest Point casino car-park. The night skies are as deeply-rooted in all of us as they are in all the other species with which we share this Earth, and it is past time that we turned the stars back on.

TNPA EVENTS

Buttongrass Ball 2012

The Buttongrass Ball, an annual event started in 1998 and hosted by the Folk Federation of Tasmania, was enjoyed by a slightly smaller number than usual at the 2012 Ball, held at the end of November. The dancers however more than made up for their smaller numbers by their enthusiasm, with few people being seen sitting down when the dancing was happening.

Who could sit down and watch, when such great dance music was being provided – by the *VerandahCoots* for the first half of the Ball, then by *The Devil's Own* in the second half. As usual, the dances were taught by David Wanless, the MC and dance caller for the evening. David also selects the dances and provided the dancers at the 2012 Ball with a lovely and varied set of dances, from traditional Huon dances to old favourites, with even a couple of American contra style dances included.

Highlights of the evening were having Edie Dawson from the Huon (who is one of the main sources of the traditional music and dances recently collected from the Huon region) play with the *VerandahCoots*; and David Wanless' leading off the traditional, complex, and annually lengthening Grand March.

The hall was wonderfully decorated (as usual) by images of Tasmania's fabulous natural places. There was less buttongrass to be seen this year, but the lesser number of pots of buttongrass was made up for by one extremely large tub of buttongrass, kindly lent for the evening by Plants of Tasmania.

In keeping with the tradition of theming the Buttongrass Balls, the 2012 Ball was dedicated to the Tasmanian Devil (the theme suggested by the name of the *The Devil's Own* band), although the Ball also celebrates all of Tasmania's wild places, plants and creatures. Given the 'Devil' theme, half the proceedings from the night were donated to the Tarkine Devil Project, which is linked to the *Save the Tasmanian Devil Program*. A few interesting 'Devil Facts' are included below for interest (you may be surprised by what you learn – as I was!). Interestingly no one came to the Ball dressed as a Tasmanian devil.

This is a great evening of Tasmanian folk dancing which also raises money for the TNPA, with the Ball organisers and the bands generously donating the proceedings of the night to the TNPA. The TNPA would like to warmly thank the *VerandahCoots* & Edie Dawson, *The Devils Own*, David Wanless and the other dancers from Folk Federation of Tasmania who organise this event, Phillip Bohm for the photos in this article, and Plants of Tasmania for providing the buttongrass.

DEVIL FACTS – *About the Devil* –

- > The Tasmanian devil is the world's largest surviving carnivorous marsupial.
- > Their Latin name is *Sarcophilus harrisii* – meaning 'meat lover named after Harris'.
- > Juvenile devils are called 'imps'.
- > Tasmanian devils are most closely related to quolls (their next closest relationship is with smaller marsupials and a more distant relationship with the thylacine (the Tasmanian tiger)).



Photos by Phillip Bohm

- > Tasmanian devils historically were widespread in Australia (and may have been in Papua New Guinea), but have become extinct on the mainland.
- > The Tasmanian devil population in Tasmania is thought to be somewhere in the range of 10,000 – 100,000.
- > Tasmanian devils seem to eat any meat that is available, but they are particularly fond of wombat meat.
- > If they are not interrupted, Tasmanian devils can eat up to 40% of their body weight in 30 minutes (Wow!)
- > Devils have a biting power as strong as a dog about four times their weight.
- > Tasmanian devils give birth to between 20 and 40 young each year (many of the young do not survive as the parent is unable to feed them all) and breed only for about 3 years.
- > Very few wild devils live longer than 5 years.



About the Devil Facial Tumour Disease–

- > The first signs of Devil Facial Tumour Disease, a fatal and infectious cancer, were observed in 1991.
- > Sightings of the Tasmanian devil have since declined by more than 70%.
- > As at late 2009, the facial tumour disease was found at 64 locations across more than 60% of Tasmania (with the west coast being apparently disease free at that time).
- > Because of the impact of the facial tumour disease and its widespread nature, the Tasmanian devil has been listed as 'endangered' by both the Tasmanian and Federal governments. Its endangered status is also recognised at the international level through its listing as 'endangered' on the IUCN Red List.

These 'facts' have been taken from the Save the Tasmanian Devil website, where you can also donate money to support the programs that are helping to understand the Devil facial tumour disease and to combat it, to help ensure that the Tasmanian Devil does not become another entry in the list of extinctions.]

TNPA REPORT

Report: 6th National Wilderness Conference

Context

I (Nick Sawyer) represented the TNPA at the 6th National Wilderness Conference, *Wilderness, Tourism and National Parks* in Sydney in September. These are my notes (I don't necessarily agree 100% with every point) of the most important and interesting matters raised both inside and outside the formal sessions. Paul Smith also attended. He reviewed the first draft of this document and I have made some changes in response – thanks Paul.

TNPA Resources

The conference was jointly organised by the NSW NPA, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness. All appeared to be very well resourced (several full time, paid staff) compared to TNPA.

Politics

The conservative hegemony (as speakers referred to it) overshadows everything. Governments with an overt anti-conservation agenda are in power in several states, and likely soon in Canberra. With exception of SA, the remaining Labour governments are not much better.

This is reflected in resourcing of park management agencies around the country. It is not good and getting worse.

The situation in NSW is a disaster with Shooters and Fishers Party holding the balance of power and the state government drip feeding them concessions every time they need their support in parliament. NSW PWS have been required to immediately implement plans for mountain biking, horse-riding and 4WD access to parks. The intention is that adaptive management will follow but there has been no opportunity for "before" monitoring and it is not apparent that the resources are available for any monitoring or any effective response if negative impacts are identified. A recent Colong Bulletin available at the conference contained an excellent article on the difference between using recreational hunters in a targeted feral animal control program and current NSW proposals for hunting in national parks.

Anti-conservation views of state governments correspond with local opinion in many regional areas.

Dominant view in Australian society is of nature as a resource/commodity.

Wilderness

In recent decades the main focus of conservation has moved on from preserving wilderness to preserving biodiversity. Paul and I were disappointed not to hear more intellectual

justification for wilderness preservation. Some speakers attempted to justify wilderness preservation as a mechanism for preserving biodiversity but we did not find these arguments convincing because biodiversity can easily be preserved without preserving wilderness. It is unlikely that a few isolated human-made intrusions in an otherwise natural area will have any significant effect on biodiversity but they can totally destroy the user's sense of being remote from civilisation (the anthropocentric "wilderness experience"). This was articulated by Les Molloy (New Zealand) who was clear that wilderness is a recreational and cultural concept but that the preservation of wilderness is also an effective strategy for the protection of biodiversity. I would like to see more research on how individuals perceive nature to justify the importance of the "wilderness experience" and wilderness preservation.

A few comments that were made regarding the definition of wilderness:

- The 21st century definition: "Wilderness is anywhere without phone/internet access". This is clearly somewhat flippant and would not work as a strict definition of wilderness, yet it is an important consideration for an increasing proportion of the population.
- Wilderness is an area that we visit on nature's terms – an unmediated experience of a wild place.
- Wilderness quality is usually defined according to some combination of remoteness and naturalness. One speaker suggested that a wilderness area should be defined as a place where wilderness quality is recognised and valued, not just an area with high wilderness quality (this was put forward to acknowledge that many areas of, for example, central Australia have high wilderness quality but are rarely, if ever, visited by anyone seeking a "wilderness experience"). I consider that this is a valid point but it is also symptomatic of the lack of wilderness theory at the conference, especially the shortcomings of the current wilderness terminology and the shortage of research to justify the values of wilderness.

Age

The majority of conference participants were grey haired. I would guess an average age around 60.

There was informal discussion of this under-representation of younger people. It was noted that this is not confined to conservation groups – Gen Y is under-represented in any organisation with traditional meetings and committees including political parties, trade unions and service clubs.

They only join FaceBook! There is a need to find ways to engage this generation in the political process. The engagement that they do have appears shallow – does “mouse-click activism” equal involvement?

Schoolchildren and university students are getting less exposure to nature resulting in alienation or even a fear of nature (Nature Deficit Disorder). This was seen to be partly caused by onerous requirements for risk assessment for excursions. This compounds the temptation for teachers to replace real experiences with virtual experiences. An interactive session on a park service website has merit but is a poor substitute for a real visit to a national park. It is important to note that this is not the same issue as replacing paper interpretative material or plant/bird guide books with electronic documents in your iThing to provide a more convenient access to the same or more information (e.g. recorded bird calls) while in the bush.

In comparison to walkers in the 1970s and 1980s, those members of the younger generation who do participate in outdoor activities appear to spend much less time undertaking unstructured wilderness bushwalking and much more time on “adventure” activities like mountain biking, kayaking and organised competitive events. And when they do go bushwalking it is usually on managed walks like the Overland Track. I am not aware of any formal studies to support this hypothesis of a significant change in behaviour but there was widespread agreement whenever it was mentioned, so it probably has some substance, and it does not appear to be confined to Australia. If this trend is real it does not bode well for the future of wilderness preservation.

Emerging Management Issues

There has been a shift in emphasis from reserving new areas to managing areas already reserved.

There is increasing demand for mountain bike access to wild areas but it is important to understand that mountain bikers include a broad spectrum of users with very different requirements and impacts. The following categories were suggested:

- Family group – easy ride
- Touring
- Single track – adventurers
- Downhill – thrill seekers.

Large scale competitive events (e.g. “adventure racing”) in remote areas are becoming more common. Their impact is usually very concentrated in time and place. This is the opposite of most recreational impacts and provides different options for their management. For example, the time between events may allow for recovery (the example was provided of an orienteering championship in NSW – substantial vegetation trampling was apparent on the day following the event but a year later it was hard to detect where it had been held).

Commercial tourism

Tourism globally is a huge industry. It contributes 6% to global economy (5% of global greenhouse gas emissions from travel).

85% of *bona fide* eco-tourism businesses are small businesses which have a vested interest in protecting the environment on which they depend – most of the pressure for development within reserves comes from the big end of town. The recent push to open parks for development appears to have come from the Tourism and Transport Forum with few, if any, specific projects in mind (at least in Tasmania). TTF is the peak industry group for the tourism, transport and infrastructure sectors. In the current political climate many state park management agencies are being panicked into a “race to the bottom”.

Small tourism operators can be allies for conservation. In South Africa some small tourist operators have a better environmental record than the parks service.

In some (many?) parks (e.g. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park) most interpretation is presented by commercial tour operators – not the parks service.

Tourism developments within parks are a far greater problem than tourist operations that do not require additional infrastructure.

Commercial access to parks is not necessarily eco-tourism. Constructing tourist lodges within parks to the best sustainable architectural standards does not mean that they are automatically acceptable eco-tourism developments.

Tourism developments within parks are often touted as a financial benefit for the park but the reverse is usually the case. Successful enterprises within parks grow and change hands – they can become a problem even if they were not initially.

Visitors to parks

There is some evidence of declining visitor numbers worldwide.

In some countries there are massive disparities in visitor numbers between different ethnic groups (e.g. black South Africans, non-white citizens of USA). Some sections of Australian society are probably similarly under-represented among park visitors but there do not appear to have been any formal studies to confirm this.

Planning

In NSW there is a move away from statutory management plans to non-statutory regional plans. These involve cross-tenure planning and include areas beyond reserve boundaries so theoretically they should allow the best location for all facilities and allow management of protected areas to focus on protection. However, this can also be viewed as the sidelining of a robust process (statutory management plans) in favour of a process which does not “impede” the implementation of political decisions.

The National Landscapes Program is a “tourism and conservation partnership managed by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia”. It was seen as potentially a double-edged sword. The partnership will generate high level planning documents that contain a lot of good intentions, but most of these will probably happen anyway. The concern is that they will also provide a Trojan Horse for tourism developments/operations within parks.

Public image of national parks

There is a perception that the general public regards national parks as places with many unnecessary restrictions on allowable activities, yet surveys generally suggest that most

park visitors are well satisfied with their experience. This suggests a need to improve “the brand” because majority public support is needed if park values are to continue to be protected. i.e. there is a need to better explain the rationale behind the restrictions on allowable activities.

Issues across the country

The southern states have broadly similar issues in relation to tourism and park management generally. In Cape York and the Kimberly tourism is not the main issue – proposed resource developments are huge! As is the Arckaringa Basin (coal) in South Australia north of Coober Pedy.

TNPA UPDATES

Editor's Note: Since this article was written there has been an announcement that the Federal Government is putting on hold planned changes that would devolve to the States power to deal with environmental approvals for major projects. However it is still crucially important that we let the Prime Minister and Government know how strongly we oppose the proposed changes.

CUTTING GREEN TAPE OR GUTTING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION?

PROPOSED COAG¹ LED CHANGES TO THE FEDERAL EPBC ACT

The next four months will be critical months for the long term health of Australia’s environment! It’s not climate change – its big business wanting to pursue ‘least practice’ standards.

In response to pressure from business, in particular the Business Council of Australia and various mining interests, the Gillard government has promised to hand over Federal decision making powers and responsibilities in relation to the Federal environmental legislation, the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act* (EPBC Act).

This legislation was created out of the realisation that State governments were not interested in protecting environmental values of national significance and were frequently compromised by self interest or by the allure of more income for the State. In Tasmania examples of the State’s inability to make good environmental decisions include, most famously, the damming of Lake Pedder and the attempt to dam the Franklin River (stopped by Federal Government intervention). Other more recent examples include the Gunns Pulp Mill, proposed logging at Recherche Bay (now on the National Heritage list), a Tarkine Tourist Road (only stopped thought Federal intervention), and of course the Three Capes Track development proposal. In the last 10 years the TNPA has also seen a number of examples of the

government changing national park management plans to enable in-Park development. If the proposed changes occur, we may see a lot more and be powerless to stop them.

We can be polite about this proposed change to the EPBC Act, but it amounts to no less than putting the fox in charge of the hen house. It is difficult to be convinced when the Federal government reassures us that there will be no deterioration in environmental protection under the EPBC Act. This is enough in itself to make the intelligent and informed deeply concerned and lead them to oppose the proposed changes.

But what are the actual issues? Why are environmentalists really opposing the handing of decision making power to the States?

- The legislation was created to protect national environmental values (natural and cultural) – but the States are unlikely to be interested in these values.
- This legislation was created to provide checks and balances, between States’ interest and national interests in the environmental management arena. Although Australian history has repeatedly demonstrated that State – national checks and balances are critical, handing the EPBC decision making powers to the States effectively removes this function.

¹ The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia.

- The Federal government argues that the Agreement that will be put in place will ensure States make environmentally responsible decisions. Can they do this and who will police their compliance (and this would need a whole new layer of compliance monitoring and regulation)?
- If the States do the wrong thing, is the Federal government likely to be able to countermand this (and penalise them sufficiently to stop them doing it again)? To do so would require duplication of the present system as the Federal government would have to assess the environmental impacts, so any efficiencies that might be gained would be removed
- If environmental interest is at the heart of the matter, then why has this change been set up as a separate process for reform? How is it that it has been agreed by COAG without consultation and with no accompanying process for consultation or review? Why is it that this process has overridden the EPBC Act review (that has been in train for some years now and which is also looking at issues such as duplication and issues for business) rather than occurring within that broader, more consultative and evidence based analytical approach?
- Is this the best way to streamline environmental assessment to legitimately help business? The EPBC Act review findings suggest that there are other, simpler and more acceptable ways of dealing with this problem than a hand over of power to State government.
- And what exactly are the issues related to environmental regulation that are crippling business? This is hard to determine as business has not come forward with an analysis of this, nor has the Federal government. While there will be some cases where business has suffered unfairly because of environmental regulations, the EPBC Act review findings suggest that the issues are relatively minor and do not require such far reaching changes.

Before seeing such far reaching changes made to the EPBC Act, it would be appropriate to have some of the above issues explored and answered, perhaps starting with a reasoned, informed justification from the Australian business community for this change.

The COAG agreement (April 2012) commits the government to the following timetable to progress the changes –

1. *fast-track the development of bilateral arrangements for accreditation of State assessment and approval processes, with the frameworks to be agreed by December 2012 and agreements finalised by March 2013;*
2. *develop environmental risk- and outcomes- based standards with States and Territories by December 2012; and*
3. *examine and facilitate removal of unnecessary duplication and reduce business costs for significant projects.*²

At the time of writing, the December 2012 COAG meeting will be in a week's time, and the Federal government will

present their *Draft Framework of Standards for Accreditation of Environmental Approvals for approval by COAG.*

But a large number of people are not happy with these proposed changes, and various individuals and organisations, and groups of these, are starting to seriously question and oppose the proposed changes. Major actions so far in the lead up to the December COAG meeting include the following –

- Delivery to the Federal government last week of a 10,000 signature petition asking that the changes not go ahead by the Places You Love campaign (the national collective of environmental organisations opposed to the changes).
- The introduction of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012* to Federal parliament last week by Greens Senator Larissa Waters. This would make it illegal for the Federal government to hand over its decision making powers (but sadly the Bill is unlikely to be supported by a majority).³
- Australian scientists have sent the government an open letter protesting about the changes.
- Major environmental organisations (eg, ACF, TWS, the Environmental Defender's Office, the Australian Greens) have been lobbying government in recent weeks to not go ahead with the handing over of Federal powers.⁴

If you are also concerned about the proposed changes, the TNPA would encourage you, as an individual, to let the Federal government know – every voice counts in these matters.

There are a few options for voicing your concerns:

- you can write your own letter to the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and to the Minister for the Environment, Tony Burke telling them it's not okay to gut our environmental laws;
- you can print out (or cut out) and post the *Places You Love* postcard next page; and/or
- you can sign the Places You Love petition on their website - <http://placesyoulove.org/take-action/>; and
- you can let others know about this issue.

THIS IS A REAL AND SIGNIFICANT ISSUE. IF THESE CHANGES ARE MADE, IT WILL TAKE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN AUSTRALIA BACK 35-40 YEARS.⁵

IF THESE CHANGES ARE MADE IT WILL HAVE AN INCALCULABLE IMPACT ON AUSTRALIA'S ENVIRONMENT AND SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISH IT.

By Anne McConnell

³If you are interested, you can make a submission on this Bill to the Federal Environment and Communications Legislation Committee for Inquiry (the deadline for submissions is 18th Jan 2013).

⁴According to the Sydney Morning Herald (5/12/12) a Galaxy poll of 1074 voters commissioned by the Greens found 59 per cent were opposed to the federal government handing over powers to make decisions about world heritage areas, with only 19 per cent supporting the idea and 22 per cent uncommitted.

⁵The first national environmental legislation was the 1975 *Australian Heritage Commission Act*, which also established the Register of the National Estate.



If you are concerned with the winding back of our environmental laws please sign and mail this postcard today!

Dear Prime Minister,

I am deeply concerned that Australian governments are weakening our environment protection laws. Environmental laws safeguard our way of life. They protect our land and wildlife, and ensure that our air and water are not polluted by destructive development. I call on you to reject the proposals to transfer federal approval powers to state governments; to weaken the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and to allow states and territories to fast-track major development projects.

Sincerely,

Name:
Address:

Postcode:

Signature:

Please Affix
Stamp Here

The Hon Julia Gillard
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Photo: The Mallee Emu-wren is listed as endangered under the EPBC Act © Dean Ingwersen

TNPA FIELD REPORT - TASMANIA

By Nick Sawyer

Report to 6th National Wilderness Conference

Nick Sawyer represented the TNPA at the 6th National Wilderness Conference, Wilderness, Tourism and National Parks, in Sydney in September. Each local representative was requested to provide a summary report on the “state of play” in their state. This is Nick’s “field report” on the situation in Tasmania.

Introduction – History of Wilderness Loss since 1950s

Hydro-electric development was responsible for the majority of wilderness lost in Tasmania from the 1950s to the late 1980s. The controversy over the inundation of Lake Pedder in the early 1970s was a milestone in the development of environmental awareness in Tasmania and Australia as a whole. It set the scene for the successful campaign against the Franklin Dam a decade later. The halting of the Franklin Dam in 1983 and the related (1982) World Heritage listing of much of the highest wilderness quality parts of western Tasmania marked the highpoint for wilderness conservation in Tasmania, although further gains have been made since (particularly the 1989 expansion of the World Heritage Area to its present boundaries). Despite the high profile of “wilderness” and the overuse of the word in tourism industry advertising, no state government has ever seen fit to actively protect wilderness values and a major legacy of these successes is the antagonism towards “Greenies” that still divides the Tasmania community and polarises public debate on any environmental issue.

The threat to wilderness from hydro-electric development ceased with the completion of the Henty-Anthony scheme in the late 1980s. By this time most of the remaining high quality wilderness areas were reserved in national parks and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA). The early days of the TWWHA saw some limited wilderness restoration in the form of some closures of 4WD tracks, mostly in the more remote parts of the Central Plateau.

Other industries have also had major impacts on wilderness values:

- **Forestry** has been ongoing since colonisation but was transformed into a modern industry by the introduction of export wood-chipping in 1970. Forestry activities have continued to erode wilderness quality ever since. Talks to resolve the future of the industry are ongoing but until a resolution is reached, forestry remains the major threat to wilderness quality in parts of Tasmania.
- **Mining** too has been ongoing since colonisation. Many areas of Tasmania are littered with remains of abandoned mines. Some are being reclaimed by nature and have only minor impact on wilderness quality but others are major scars responsible for acid drainage which will last for centuries. Areas of known mineral potential have been largely excluded from categories of reservation which would pre-

clude mining (i.e. national parks), so the potential remains for new mines which will impact significantly on wilderness quality. The biggest single post-war impact on wilderness quality from mining was the development in the late 1960s of the Savage River Mine and associated iron ore slurry pipeline to Port Latta which bisected the extensive wilderness area within in the area now known as the Tarkine.

- **Road construction:** Two roads stand out for their impact of wilderness values:
 - o The Cradle Mountain Link Road was constructed in the early 1980s to facilitate tourism. It made Cradle Mountain far more accessible but isolated the Vale of Belvoir and Black Bluff Range from the Cradle Mountain area.
 - o The Western Explorer was constructed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its role was ostensibly to facilitate tourism in north-west Tasmania but the main rationale appeared to be to bisect the largest remaining area of wilderness in the Tarkine.

A comparison of the map of wilderness quality with a map showing national parks identifies the major wilderness areas in Tasmania that do not have the protection of national park status (i.e. are vulnerable to further loss of wilderness quality from industrial development – most likely mining):

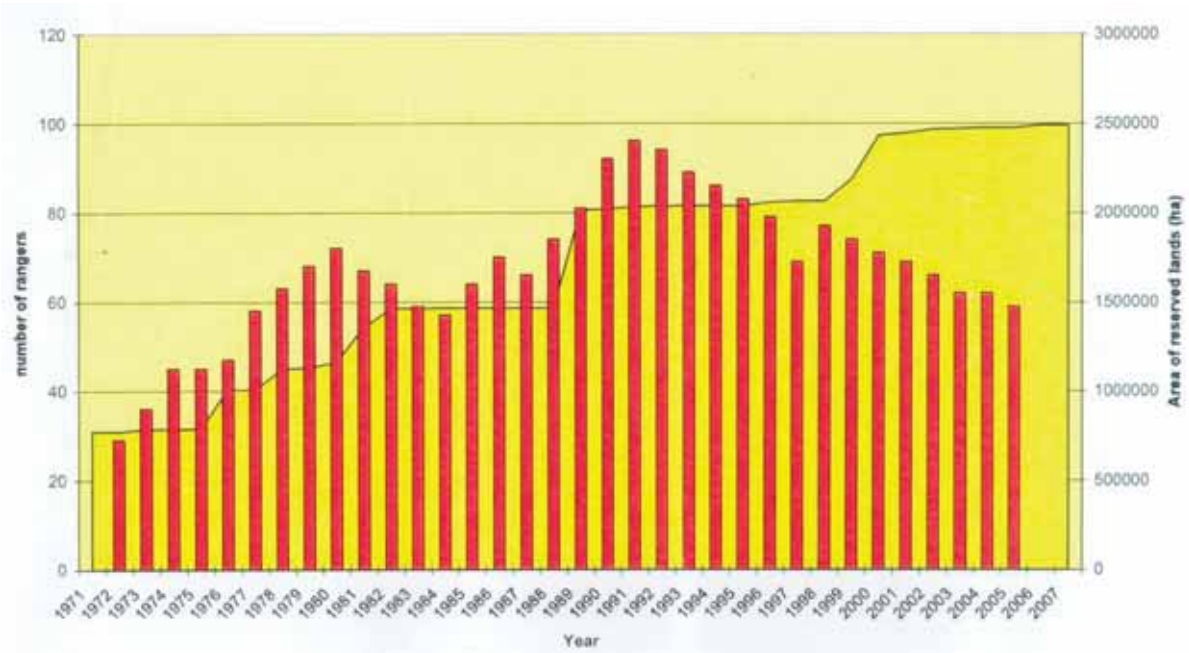
- The portion of the Southwest Conservation Area along the coast south of Macquarie Harbour; and
- The surviving areas of high wilderness quality within the Tarkine (apart from one which is largely protected within the Savage River National Park). Note that the Tarkine includes several areas that still have high wilderness quality but is not one large contiguous tract of wilderness (and not all the wilderness is rainforest – most of the wilderness west of the Western Explorer is coastal heathland).

Threats to Wilderness Values from Tourism

A major threat to wilderness values is now tourist operations and resort/accommodation developments. These often occur in or adjacent to reserved areas. In comparison to the impacts listed above, the impact of these on wilderness values is usually both minor and potentially reversible but they do have great potential to impact on the wilderness experience of visitors to reserved areas. The management of such activities is the responsibility of the Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Management Authority

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) was created by legislation in 1970 (somewhat later than in many other states) as an independent government agency with responsibility for the development and management of an ecologically representative system of reserved lands, and for conservation of flora, fauna and cultural heritage, with education, recreation and visitation



PWS staff numbers and area managed by the agency (Crossley 2009)

being conditional on not significantly impacting on these values.

Over the intervening years it has suffered more cutbacks than most other agencies while its responsibilities have increased (see graph above).

It has been subsumed into larger agencies and undergone multiple internal restructures including the removal of the natural scientists to a separate branch within the overarching department (which appears to have led to a reduction of scientific influence on PWS management decisions). Some of this experience was shared by other Tasmanian government agencies as multiple small agencies were consolidated into a few “super departments” but underlying many of the changes appeared to be a systematic attempt to change the role of the PWS. The consequences of a decade of restructure and reorganisation on the PWS can be summarised as “mission creep”: from a focus on environmental values and habitat conservation, to embracing more anthropocentric values, promoting commercial opportunities, and being the basis of the tourism industry (Crossley 2009). Visitor facilities now absorb the majority of PWS resources.

Management of Reserved Areas

Thanks largely to many years of relatively generous federal government funding (now mostly ceased) management of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), which includes Tasmania’s three largest national parks and many of its key natural attractions, was much better resourced than the non-World Heritage reserves for which there is still a much larger backlog of management planning and on-ground works. So the management plan for the TWWHA provides a good example of how PWS priorities changed in response to the pressures described above.

- The 1992 Management Plan for the TWWHA represented the pinnacle of conservation management planning in Tasmania. It essentially assumed that tourism operations would not expand beyond those already in existence; only a very limited range of new proposals could be considered

and little guidance was provided on the approval process.

- In contrast, the 1999 Management Plan included a “New Proposals and Impact Assessment Process” with relatively few constraints on the type of proposals that could be considered.

Proposals considered under this process included:

- commercial helicopter/floatplane landings (rejected following an overwhelming number of public submissions opposing the proposals – this provided the impetus for the formation of the TNPA);
- a “wilderness lodge” at Cockle Creek (approved but unlikely to ever be constructed);
- the conversion to tourist accommodation of existing buildings at Pumphouse Point on Lake StClair (approved but not yet constructed); and
- a significant expansion of accommodation at Cynthia Bay on Lake StClair (approved but not yet constructed).

Key Challenges for Protected Area Management in Tasmania

Big Picture

- There is increasing pressure from the State Government for parks to provide facilities for tourism and to earn money from tourism. In conjunction with the under-resourcing of the PWS this leads to compromise on protection of natural and cultural values and weakening of management control (e.g. new Wellington Park Management Plan includes a change to make a cable car discretionary – previously it was not allowed).
- This also leads to even more pressure from the industry for relaxation of perceived restrictions on development within parks. e.g. *The Mercury*, 30-08-2012: Tasmania risks losing its grip on the wilderness tourism sector if it doesn't make it easier to develop in national parks, says the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania. This is apparently based on the

need to “provide continually updated and new experiences in our national parks” and the examples of Victoria and Queensland in opening their parks to private tourism development.

- This has also led to State government proposals to give areas of land (e.g. Bay of Fires) national park status largely to enhance their tourism potential.
- The COAG proposal to delegate many of the Federal government’s responsibilities under the EPBC Act to state governments. Tasmania has a history of major issues where conservation has only been achieved through the application of federal powers. e.g. saving the Franklin River, saving Recherche Bay from logging.
- A consequence of the pressures described above is that the PWS no longer provides “frank and fearless advice” to government on the management of reserved areas, especially where tourist developments within parks are concerned. The National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council includes conservation representatives but it is an advisory council, not a decision making body. Groups such as the TNPA lobby the PWS and government and use the media to “keep the bastards honest” but there are limits to what can be achieved without a strong pro-conservation voice inside government.

Specific Issues

One success story which shows what can be achieved by principled management by PWS, supported by strong advice from the World Heritage Area Consultative Committee and ENGO advocacy, is the control of development at Cradle Mountain. Despite tourism industry pressure for greater access to the park, the substantial amount of new accommodation has all been discretely located outside the park boundary and the provision of a shuttle bus service has allowed the amount of car parking in sensitive areas within the park to be reduced. In contrast, at Lake StClair, the restaurant and visitor centre has been constructed within the park and within sight of the lake, with a substantial amount of new visitor accommodation nearby, also within the park.

Poorly considered (government initiated) schemes for development. e.g. The Three Capes Track on the Tasman Peninsula. There has been opportunity for public comment on aspects of the proposal but much legitimate criticism of the concept has never been acknowledged.

Poorly considered (privately initiated) schemes for development. e.g. Mount Wellington Cable Car. This gets raised very few years in varying degrees of seriousness, unsupported by any rigorous analy-

sis of impacts or costs. It is hard to understand how it can possibly be viable without substantial government support.

The major concern with both the commercial huts on the Overland Track (Cradle Huts) and “temporary standing camps” (tourist accommodation which is supposedly removable) within parks is the “foot in the door” argument. They have not caused major problems to date, thanks in part to vigilance and lobbying by TNPA, but the longer they are established, the harder it is to constrain them from evolving into much more intrusive/permanent facilities.

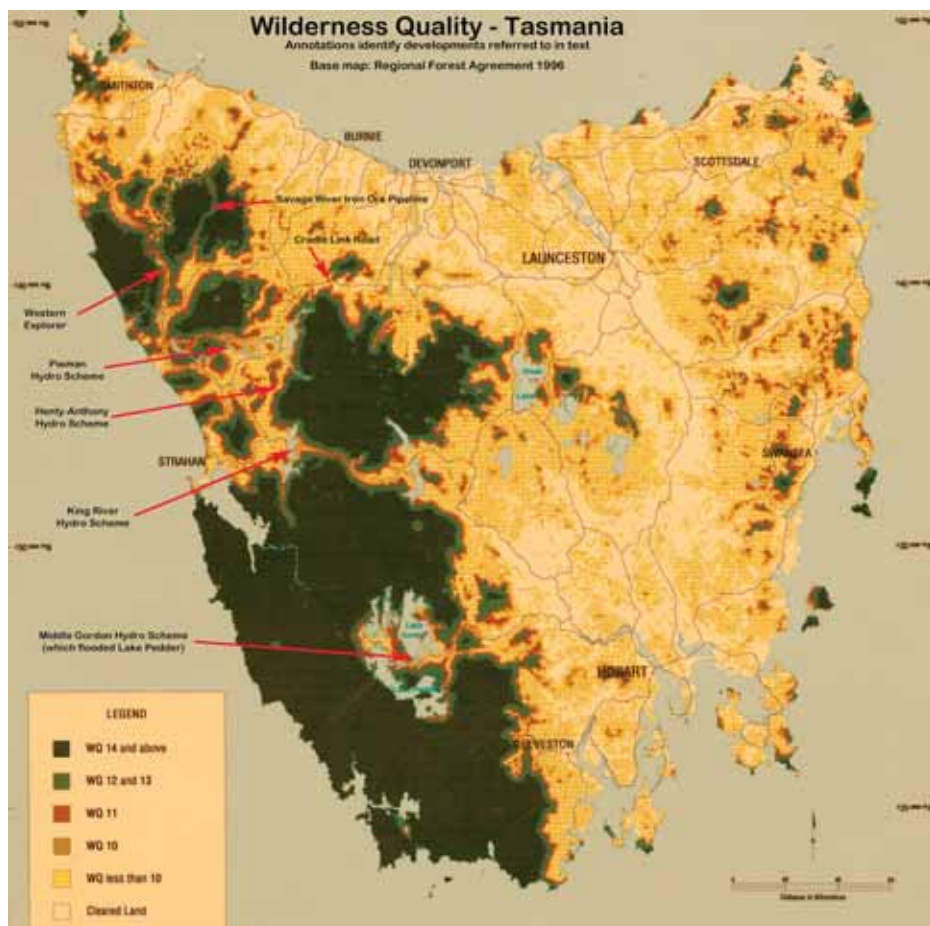
Walking track hardening is a double-edged sword. It protects the environment from additional impact at the cost of introducing structures into remote areas. Track work in remote areas has essentially ceased in recent years due to funding cuts but overdevelopment (e.g. unnecessarily high standard of the new Cape Hauy Track and excessively large and intrusive public huts on the Overland Track) remains a concern.

Off road vehicles are a major problem on the Tarkine coast despite some commendable recent attempts at control, and on the coast between Cape Sorell and Low Rocky Point.

Conclusion

Underlying all of these concerns is the failure of the state government (unchallenged by PWS) to recognise the importance of preserving the intrinsic wildness of Tasmania’s unique reserved lands.

Reference: Crossley, Dr Louise; May 2009. Paradoxes of Protection, Evolution of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and National Parks and Reserved Lands System. A Report for Senator Christine Milne.



TNPA UPDATES

Keep the Capes Wild Campaign



A detailed update of this campaign, now in its sixth (!) year, was provided in TNPA News 15. So far no new construction for the track or associated facilities has occurred. No doubt the government is keen to get started on building the Three Capes Track proper (& huts, jetties, lookouts, entry points, etc), before it gets even more expensive!

As noted in TNPA News 15, the development now has all the key approvals that it requires for the development proper to start¹. These include the Federal government's decision not to make the project a controlled action under the EBPC Act (although a number of conditions were stipulated), the PWS' own approval under their Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA) process, and local government approval.

Because of concerns with all three approvals processes, the TNPA and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT) joined forces in late 2011 to continue the campaign against the proposed development. Joint and separate actions by these two organisations have included submissions to relevant reviews, meetings with politicians, and some media publicity to try and highlight the issues and concerns. The submissions and meetings have also been aimed at highlighting the issues associated with the proposal, as well as to promote the need to consider less costly and high impact options and to get the project independently reviewed.

In February 2012 the TCT and TNPA wrote to the Premier, Lara Giddings, to have the development declared a 'Project of State Significance' under the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993*. This move was precipitated by deep concern over the state government approvals process, which was an internal PWS process - effectively one where the developer approved their own development - with no opportunity for independent review. In addition, the PWS had failed to respond to (or publically release) the public submissions on the 2011 (Nov) *Draft Three Capes Track Development Proposal & Environmental Management Plan* (DPEMP) and approved the development (in its RAA process) on the basis of the November 2011 draft DPEMP (as did the Tasman Council) thereby ignoring the public comment they had sought. The TNPA and TCT also met with the Premier to discuss our concerns and the need for an independent review. The TNPA received a response from the Premier in late November stat-

ing that she did not believe that the project was a Project of State Significance, and defending the approvals processes and the project. This is disappointing at a number of levels, and highlights the lack of transparency and the prevalence of poor process within government at present in relation to environmental matters.

Although the key approvals have been secured, there is still one last hurdle for the development. This is the review of the project by the Joint Parliamentary *Public Works Committee*. This occurred in October 2012, and the TNPA and TCT both made submissions to the review, and both spoke to Committee hearing on the matter. The TNPA's submission focused on the flawed premises and economics of the Three Capes Track proposal, highlighted the economic flaws and promoted the idea that there were real financial risks, as well as environmental risks, from the current proposal. It also, again, noted the lack of independence in the approvals process.

The focus of the Public Works Committee at the hearing appeared to be on the on walker numbers and the high level, hence cost, of the track due to its, in the TNPA's view, over-the-top stonework and imported gravelling - all helicopter supported (see photos). In relation to walker numbers, it appears that the PWS are still basing their business case on 10,000 walkers a year in the permit period, although the PWS noted that the Overland Track has fewer than 8,000 walkers annually (with the Three Capes Track being unlikely to be able to attract anything like the Overland Track walker numbers).

The TNPA has also been pursuing the economics of the Three Capes Development proposal, having argued since the release of the feasibility study that the development will be considerably more costly than the government estimates and will not have the economic benefits being touted by government and the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania. To this end we have been seeking an assessment of the economic case by an independent economist. Also, Ted Mead, who has been a long term critic of the government's development, and who has expertise in the area, is currently developing a costing for an alternative to the Three Capes Track (similar to the TNPA's alternative Great Coastal Experience) which should demonstrate the overly ambitious nature and financial irresponsibility of the current Three Capes Track proposal.

¹ The Fortescue Bay to Cape Hauy track rebuilding was an 'upgrade' of the existing track and not technically part of the Three Capes Track development (although it used the Federal government's Three Capes Track project funding) as construction of any new track would not have been legal given that the PWS did not at the time have the approvals for the development.



Recently upgraded Fortescue Bay – Cape Hauy Track (Jul 2012, photo – A. McConnell)

The government, it appears, has also come to the conclusion that the costs for the Three Capes Track development (now costed at approximately \$40 million - almost four times as much as when originally proposed) may be too much for the public purse to bear. Rather than review the scale of the project, however, the response has been to 'stage' the project, with the current proposal being to build the eastern half of the 'Track' first (with a completion date of late 2015), and build the western half at some unspecified later date. This decision appears to have been made on the run, with no revision of the costings or consideration as to how this 'half walk' might impact on user interest, hence numbers.

There also appears to have been no modification of the actual proposal to accommodate this change to a two stage build. A boat leg across long Bay to Denmans Cove, dubious enough for the full walk, is still proposed, although one can

walk in from the head of Long Bay. And, an accommodation node is still proposed for this access point, although walkers arriving in the morning are unlikely to want to spend a day hanging around, and will want to move on to the next hut which may end up being overfull.

Surely this is a classic case of "*there are none so blind as those who will not see*". The state government's handling of the approvals for the Three Capes Track development also raises serious questions about the outcome for the environment should the Federal government be successful in transferring their decision making powers under the EPBC Act to the states (see elsewhere this issue).

Key TNPA letters and submissions regarding the proposed Three Capes Track development and the Keep the Capes Wild campaign can be found on the TNPA website at www.tnpa.asn.au and at www.keepthecapeswild.org.au.



TNPA PROFILE

Nick Sawyer

Most of Nick's childhood was spent in London. This did not provide much exposure to the natural world but family outings at weekends often involved a trip to the surrounding countryside and annual holidays were spent on the coast and mountains of Wales. At the age of ten his father was offered a job in South Australia so the family emigrated. During his teenage years several family holidays were spent in Tasmania, partly to avoid the heat of the mainland summer. These evolved into bushwalking trips to Tasmania while he attended the University of Adelaide and led to him moving permanently to Tasmania in 1978, shortly after the completion of his university studies. Despite some walking in the nearby Flinders Ranges while he lived in S.A. his main interest is in temperate wilderness areas, particularly western Tasmania.

He had only peripheral involvement in the campaign to save the Franklin River but it did trigger an interest in conservation issues which led to him undertaking a Master of Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania (thesis: Management of Bushwalking in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area [TWWHA]) and involvement with the Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT), initially as a Board member, later (for two years) as an employee (Executive Officer). His role was primarily administrative but it included representing the TCT on the Australian National Parks Council (the umbrella group for national park associations [this predates the formation of TNPA]). He was also heavily involved in campaigning against the 1993 Mount Wellington Cable Car proposal.

In 1995 he started work with the planning section of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service where he remained for seven years. He worked mainly on the review of the management plan for the TWWHA, the assessment of the proposals for commercial helicopter/floatplane landing sites within the TWWHA and the assessment of the proposed Cockle Creek "Wilderness Lodge". He was also involved in the research on walker numbers and usage patterns which provided the basis for the current management of the Overland Track. He then worked for a decade in the assessments section of the Environment Protection Authority on proposals including wind farms, a mine, the pulp mill and the Ralphs Bay Canal Estate.

He has recently retired from the public service but remains a keen bushwalker and photographer with a strong interest in the management of natural areas.

Nick is the new secretary of TNPA.

Tasmanian National Parks Association Inc

Patron: Peter Cundall

TNPA Management Committee

President: Robert Campbell

Vice President: Anne McConnell & Chris Bell

Treasurer: Patsy Jones

Secretary: Nick Sawyer

Public Officer: Catharine Errey

Other Committee Members: Catharine Errey

TNPA wishes to thank outgoing Committee members, and in particular Liz Thomas

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Meetings

Management Committee meetings are usually held one Monday each month at 5:30 pm. Members and supporters are welcome. Meeting dates and venue will be advertised in each TNPA Communicate or please check with the Secretariat.

Have your say...

ABC Local Radio: Mornings - Leon Compton
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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. For this issue many thanks to Robert Campbell, Anne McConnell, Kevin Keirnan, and Nick Sawyer. Original articles in TNPA News may be reproduced, but please acknowledge the author and the source. Contributions for TNPA News No. 17 are welcomed (deadline mid June 2013). Please send contributions to admin@tnpa.asn.au (attention: TNPA News editor).

This newsletter was correct as at 8 December 2012.

Editor TNPA News 16 – Catharine Errey

Newsletter production by: Ricoh Business Centre Hobart