

NEWSLETTER 1 - SUMMER 2010



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Wildlife corridors

In Australia, biodiversity protection and ecosystem enhancement is finally receiving the recognition it should, with biodiversity management plans and strategies at every level, from federal, state, regional to local government.

A crucial component of all those plans is the identified need for wildlife movement corridors to enable species migration in the face of climate change. Those national and regional corridors have been identified and mapped, with one of NSW stated "Key Directions" being: "Coordinated conservation management of ecological corridors".

Clarence Valley's Biodiversity Management Strategy includes such idealistic aims and actions as:

1. *No reduction in viability of priority habitat values or corridor function.*"
2. Raise funds to be "*used for rehabilitation and restoration of native vegetation within mapped corridors*".
3. The "*identification of regional and local corridors that take advantage of remnant native vegetation and attempt to expand that, and to link it up...*"
4. *Priority for revegetation would be on cleared lands within identified wildlife corridors... This is particularly the case for those areas identified as being important as climate change linkages to allow species*

migration and adaptation to changing climatic conditions.

5. *At a regional scale across the LGA, the Key Habitats and Corridors mapping (Scotts 2003) provides an appropriate corridor matrix for biodiversity protection and maintenance.*

6. And finally: "*Council's main role is to support DECCW...in the rural areas and to work with landholders on a range of incentives to build on and restore important remnants and links through priority corridor areas. The detailed maps of priority conserve and restore areas where biodiversity priorities are.*"

Unfortunately, these grand ideals are not reflected by actions. Just last month Clarence Valley Council approved a rural residential subdivision east of Coutts Crossing, in the centre of one of those regionally mapped, priority conserve, corridors, allowing the bulldozing, and permanent removal, of about 20% of vegetation from the last remaining extant area of bushland in the vicinity.

As always, Council's actions speak louder than words.

John Edwards

Mobile phones, help wildlife, not landfill

Certain programs are now in place to ensure that mined materials gold, silver, copper, cadmium, lead and coltan (Columbite-tantalite ore), and also plastics found in mobile phones are safely recovered and diverted from landfill, where these harmful

elements would eventually end up in our waterways.

Last year alone the mobile phone industry's own recycling program, MobileMuster, collected almost 103,000kg of mobile phone handsets, batteries, chargers and accessories, diverting their harmful elements back into the system instead of the environment. This program, supported locally by Clarence Valley Council and schools, ensures that for every kilo of phones received, a tree is planted through Landcare Australia, this year to help restore Queensland rainforests and the NSW Murray River red gum forests and wetlands.

Another program, "They're Calling on You" operated by Taronga and Taronga Western Plains Zoos, targets the rare mineral ore, Coltan, which is used to coat capacitors in mobile phones. This ore is mined extensively in the African Congo basin, and is currently causing unrest, war and bloodshed among the native people, while drastically accelerating the decline of the Western Lowland Gorilla, and at least 10 other African primate species.

All mobile phone users are therefore urged to please, instead of dropping your old handsets into your kitchen waste bin, either place them in the bin provided in the main Council foyer, or into the basket in the Clarence Environment Centre, behind the café in the Emporium, Skinner Street, South Grafton.

Do your good deed for the day – support a worthy cause and help reduce the pressure on our environment.

Land for Wildlife Program taking off



I'm happy to report that the Clarence Valley LGA Land for Wildlife program is up-and-running again, with four new properties now enrolled in the scheme. This means four new gate signs erected and passing on their important message, two in the Copmanhurst area, one at Waterview, and one at Pillar Valley. A number of patient souls are on a list awaiting property assessments, while two others have been completed, with the applications awaiting only a tick of approval from Head Office. By Christmas we expect to have new recruits along the Old Glen Innes Road, Glens Creek Road Nymboida, as far afield as Fine Flower via Coaldale, and a few more around Pillar Valley

The Land for Wildlife program is important for the Clarence Environment Centre as it represents a steady income through budgeted regional funding. This could be increased with additional funding from other sources, and this can be looked at in time when the business has shaken down a bit and we all know more about what we are doing.

It's exciting to see early original members, who haven't been contacted for years, gathering back into the group with reawakened interest in this important arm of the conservation movement. Some now drop in regularly at the Centre, while others are starting to swell the monthly meeting numbers, all with important information, suggestions and certain skills that we are keen to use. The most significant in these early stages is the likelihood of linking members who can form a native seed collection group, and those who are able and have the facilities to plant and propagate the seeds for distribution to program members. Of course this work doesn't need to be done only by Land for Wildlife members. An established tree planting program is a major plus for grant applications too, so if any of our CEC members reading this article are keen to help in any way, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Another interest is that Land for Wildlife also meets the criteria when applying for assistance through the work-for-the-dole scheme. This could greatly benefit some of our less able members, who are watching their properties slowly deteriorate, and those

new members with daunting revegetation programs and solitary wars to wage against Lantana.

An initial news sheet has been circulated to a few LfW members by email, to pull everyone together and let everyone know where we are at in the Valley. This sheet is expected to be released at un-timed intervals to form a record of our local progress. As these will be distributed only by email, a number of members will be missing out, so if anyone gets word of this who isn't on the email list and would like to have a copy, they can be picked up in person at the Environment Centre from the Land for Wildlife pigeon hole.

Regards and warmest wishes to all our members.

Pat

(LfW Regional coordinator)

Dune destroyers



Poisoned vegetation at Diggers Camp

The sleepy little hamlet of Diggers Camp is once again the focus of an investigation into the poisoning of dune vegetation. Any recent visitor would most likely be appalled at the unsightly vista of dead and dying Banksias and other dune vegetation, poisoned in the dead of night by some sneaky resident seeking a clearer view of the ocean.

This is not the first time this has occurred. Some five years ago the Clarence Environment Centre offered to help fund a very large sign to be erected in front of the poisoned vegetation explaining that poisoning

of native vegetation is an offence, but that never happened.

I understand that a granular weedkiller was used, meaning all vegetation has been killed, not just individual trees, putting the stability of the dune at risk.

This latest act of vandalism has been briefly investigated by an under resourced Environmental Protection and Regulation section of the Department of Environment, which has decided not to pursue the matter further as it has bigger land-clearing issues that are a priority, claiming that the Diggers incident is a Council matter.

With two of the residences in position to benefit from the improved view of the ocean named "Pacific Vista" and "Ocean View", investigators would have little trouble narrowing down the list of suspects.

Council has been informed, and as the poisoning has occurred on the Council owned Reserve, it is hoped they will show a little more backbone this time around. I suggest a sign, explaining to visitors how the trees and shrubs were destroyed, be painted on a very large, rusty old shipping container and placed in front of the dead vegetation.

John Edwards

Doubleduke State Forest Logging breaches (an update)

The Clarence Environment Centre first investigated the Doubleduke State Forest north of Maclean on 7th February 2010 in response to reports of possible breaches of the Integrated Forests Operations Agreement.

Following two more investigations, the Centre's investigators determined there had been serious breaches of Forests NSW's Threatened Species Licence, and emailed The Department of Environment, Climate Change, and Water's (DECCW) forest investigator on April 6. After failing to receive any response, the investigator was emailed again on April 22; again with no response.



C.E.C. Doubleduke film team

In frustration, the Centre wrote to the Minister of Environment, Frank Sartor, on May 15, providing a comprehensive list of alleged breaches including the logging of an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC).

On 14th June, two independent ecologists, Dave Scotts and Andy Benwell were employed by the North Coast Environment Council to assess the Doubleduke logging, and confirmed the CEC's assessment that an EEC had been logged.

The following week, a North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) investigation team of specialists also undertook a detailed 2 day audit, also confirming our initial findings, and discovering multiple, widespread logging breaches elsewhere at Doubleduke.

On June 29, the Environmental Defenders Office wrote to Forests NSW and various Ministers, listing the alleged breaches which Forests NSW now claims was the first report received.

DECCW investigators finally responded and presumably reported their findings by the end of July. However, as of November 15, DECCW claims their investigations are still not complete.

In the mean time, other forest audits at Grange and Girard State Forests by NEFA and CEC, have reported more breaches, including the alleged logging of protected rainforest,

endangered ecological communities, and old-growth forest. These too are now under investigation.

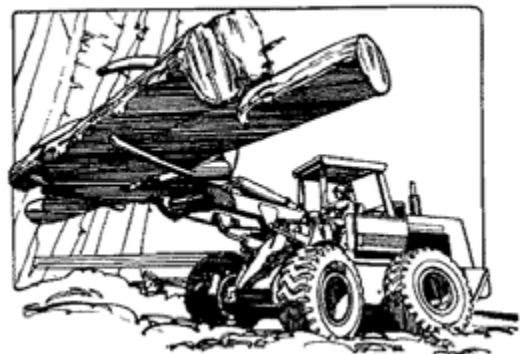
Frustrated by inaction, and aware that logging is continuing unchecked, NEFA has undertaken another investigation at Doubleduke and found yet more areas of Endangered Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest that has been logged and trashed.

A detailed report on this latest incident has been compiled by expert botanists, listing an additional 46 trees that had been logged within the EEC, and 1,387 other trees and shrubs that had been bulldozed out of the ground, trampled by machinery, or had trees dropped on them within the EEC. NEFA believes these activities in the EEC have exposed Forests NSW to a maximum fine of at least \$16,203,000 if they are ever prosecuted.

The latest scene in this ongoing drama was enacted on Friday 12th November, when protesters finally lost patience and blockaded a new compartment in Doubleduke where Forests NSW proposed to start logging in significant areas of previously mapped old-growth forest which has mysteriously been removed from its harvest plans and made available for logging.

The historic forests agreements, signed just a decade ago, are now at risk of collapse, and Forests NSW and the other regulatory authorities that have regularly turned a blind eye to these systemic breaches, must shoulder the blame.

John Edwards



More shocking logging at Clouds Creek



Logging devastation at Clouds Creek

The logging atrocities appear to be never-ending. Simon and I visited Clouds Creek after receiving a copy of the latest Harvest Plan for the Clouds Creek State Forest, and found the usual logging far in excess of the 40% maximum volume allowable.

This major thinning of forest canopies that is allowing weed infestations to run riot, Bell Miner Associated Dieback to take hold, and potentially change the forest structure forever, is now common practice. One such over-logging event that was reported to DECCW for investigation resulted in an explanation from that Department, excusing those responsible, stating that while logging percentages had been exceeded in places, the average across the entire “tract” was less than 40%. What constitutes a “tract” we have no idea, and no explanation was forthcoming.

John Edwards

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Shannon Creek 2009 Threatened Species monitoring comments (Part 1)

Over the past three years, I have undertaken a review of the threatened species and pests monitoring reports undertaken as part of the Shannon Creek dam project. About the middle of last year, and knowing I was undertaking these reviews, I was specifically asked to undertake this task by an officer of Department of Environment (DECCW).

This year the Department accepted my offer to review the 2009 monitoring reports, and readers might find it odd that I am only now reporting on monitoring that took place in May and November 2009. The fact is the May/June 2009 monitoring report wasn't finalised until 8 months later in February 2010, and the November/December report was similarly held up until mid July, 2010. The main reason it seems is that a preliminary report is sent to the Department of Services, Technology & Administration, a department that 'morphed' from the old Public Works Department via the Department of Commerce, and then presumably held there for editing.

Frankly I question the right of any Authority to 'edit' a professional report in the first place, and wonder what has been included or excluded as a result, but what other reason would there be to hold on to the report for 3 months?

One reason why I'm concerned about the delay, is the May 2009 report identified that - *“Wild Dog/Dingo records have increased substantially overall, whilst the combined occurrence of fox records from within the Shannon Creek catchment and Compensatory Habitat Area has increased slightly...”*. This observation is followed by: *“The number of Wild Dog/ Dingo records obtained during the Autumn/Winter 2009 surveys represents the largest number of records from a single survey to date, and the largest increase in records in consecutive survey sessions with a 233% increase from the Spring/Summer 2008 survey.”*

As far back as 2007 it was reported that foxes were encroaching on known Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby habitat, but no action to address the problem has ever been undertaken. Therefore, I suppose it was not altogether surprising to read in the May 2009 report that *“Of particular concern was a confirmed Red Fox scat record collected from a known Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby shelter site, the partial remains of a rock-wallaby at the same site and multiple fox scats collected from the new storage facility picnic area.”*

Knowing that foxes have been responsible for the extinction of these Wallabies in Victoria and southern NSW, I'm appalled that we have not learned about this threat until now, over 12 months later, and still no control program has been put in place.

I have conveyed our serious concern to DECCW and asked for **action to be taken immediately**. Whether this will happen I cannot say, but I will keep on the case. John.

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Shannon Creek **2009 Threatened Species** **monitoring comments (Part 2)**



Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby

To date, a common denominator in most reports resulting from the threatened species monitoring, has been a failure to complete the program, with the blame invariably placed on weather conditions. The Autumn 2009 survey is no different, explaining that: "*An intense weather system formed over the far north coast during the second week of the programmeConsequently, a number of survey sites were unable to be accessed*".

While acknowledging that 2009 was an exceptionally wet year, I point out that this is a million dollar plus program, and a motor vehicle is not an essential accessory, with all the monitoring accessible by foot. The uncompleted works included:

- * *Melichrus hirsutus* reference sites (Chambigne west);
- * *Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby* reference site RA1 (Chambigne west); and
- * *Black Bittern* monitoring site M3.

So what is actually being monitored?

About 43 threatened species and 5 Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC) have been identified at the site, all of which are impacted by the project. However, not all of them were initially placed on the list of species to be monitored, and since that time more and more species have been dropped off that list.

By May 2009, there were still 23 threatened species on the monitoring list, including the 10 microbat species which are all surveyed automatically by Anabat ultrasonic detection. This is just half of all threatened species known to occur so, excluding the Microbats, there are just 13 species.

However, only 4 of those 13 were actually monitored in Autumn 2009, flora species *Lindernia alsinoides*, and *Melichrus hirsutus*, and fauna species Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby; and Black Bittern. It has been accepted that the Black Bittern is now locally extinct, with most of its previous habitat now under water, so they are now monitoring the little bit of "habitat" that remains instead.

Excluding microbats; of the 4 species that were monitored, we are told that **the surveys of three of those species, *Melichrus hirsutus*, Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby; and Black Bittern were unable to be completed because of bad weather.**

Moving on to Microbats, and as already mentioned there were 10 threatened bat species known to occur before work commenced in 2006. Subsequent to work commencing, the most threatened bat species recorded during any one session is 5, a real concern to us, so when we read the Summary which stated that "*the Z-caim sampling program was successful in detecting 17 of the 19 species recorded over the monitoring*

program to date, **including seven of the ten target threatened species**", we were encouraged.

It isn't until some 50 pages later in the report that we find a new term introduced, one that hasn't appeared in previous survey reports, "tentative records", and a revelation that "*microbat numbers were low overall*", and once again **only 4 threatened microbat species were actually confirmed, and the other 3 were tentative records**. Those 3 "tentative" recordings were, Eastern Falsistrelle, Large-footed Myotis, and Greater Broad-nosed Bat, none of which have been recorded since construction began.

With the depressing report from the spring 2009 survey that: "*No individual Koalas or Koala pellets were observed during the survey...*", it is now 2 years since there has been any sign of the animals. Their apparent disappearance has been met with a decision to reduce the twice-yearly Koala monitoring, as recommended in the Plan of Management, to once every two years. Koala populations went into free-fall from an estimated population of between 140 and 240 in 2005, when monitoring found "high use" habitat in all 4 study areas. However much of it was destroyed to build the access road.

Further to that we now have reports that dog numbers have escalated significantly, suggesting the depressing possibility that Koalas might now be extinct in the Shannon Creek vicinity.

The monitoring report does mention the possibility that dog predation may be a factor in their disappearance, but conclude: "*There is no evidence however, based on current information, to support the supposition that such factors may have affected the local Koala population*".

We therefore ask two questions: Given that as of November 2010, 12 months after dog numbers had been reported to have escalated, and 18 months after foxes had been reported killing Rock-wallabies, no control actions have been taken, what benefits are ratepayers

getting from this million dollar plus program, and why is the DECCW not sharing our concerns?
John Edwards

Ecological logging

The Private Native Forestry (PNF) section of the Department of NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) has been busy once again reducing what little protection remains for our native forests.

Under the leadership of an ex forester, and rabid anti-greenie, PNF legislation has now been introduced to allow operators to log in Endangered Ecological Communities (EECs), which includes rainforests and swamp forests, but supposedly only when that logging will have beneficial results for that community.

However, as anyone who has seen a forest after loggers have finished will attest, the likelihood of such an outcome being achieved are slim indeed. The first of such logging approvals apparently took place in a Coastal Swamp Sclerophyll EEC, a Paperbark swamp, undertaken to supply a plywood producer who wanted the Melaleuca timber for one of his products. How anyone could log a Paperbark swamp and improve its condition in the process is a mystery, and one which the North Coast Environment Council is investigating.

The Clarence Environment Centre has presented a submission to the Minister on the matter (posted on our website), pointing out that EECs have been so declared following a thorough analysis of scientific evidence, by the NSW Scientific Committee, showing that unless current trends are reversed these communities will become extinct.

It must be clearly understood that an EEC does not consist of tree species alone, but contains a complex mix of plant species, from large and mid-storey trees, shrubs, ground covers, grasses, ferns and herbs, to seed banks and fungal spores.

An ecological community also provides habitat for all manner of fauna - birds,

animals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates, through hollow-bearing trees, dead standing trees, logs and leaf litter. All plants provide food and shelter for these species. They provide habitat for thousands of insects that make up nature's food chain. There are bacterial forces at work; predators and prey, all combining to provide nature's balance.

In nature, no one species is any more important than the other, yet the PNF Code of Practice (CoP) infers that somehow up to 80% of an EEC can be logged in a way that “*improves or maintains environmental outcomes for the EEC*”.

To put it simply, albeit crudely, any suggestion that logging can occur without diminishing biodiversity values is complete hogwash!

Trees themselves support other plants, epiphytes, tree orchids, mistletoes and fungi. There are vines that depend on trees for support. Log one tree and hundreds of other species are directly impacted. Peripheral damage is unavoidable during logging, not only to other trees, but also trampling of plants and small animals, and soil compaction by machinery during the extraction process.

Six dot points are provided in the “Draft Ecological Harvesting Plan Guideline for Endangered Ecological Communities” to try to persuade us that the guidelines protect diversity while EECs are being exploited. These cannot be taken seriously.

Firstly there is no requirement under the PNF CoP to undertake a flora and fauna survey prior to logging. So how can the supposed “*improve or maintain environmental outcomes*” be measured?

Secondly, we must consider the disasters occurring in public forests under the Integrated Forests Operations Agreement (IFOA) which is also administered by DECCW. That administration, in the decade since the IFOA came into force, has been a disgrace with virtually no on ground auditing of logging operations taking place. Of the numerous breaches identified, mostly by

members of the public, only a handful of infringement notices have been issued, accompanied by pitifully inadequate fines, and not a single prosecution has resulted.

In our submission we tried to impress on the Minister that, given the NSW Scientific Committee has identified logging as a primary threat facing most EECs, and to the dozens of threatened species they support, and that they risk becoming extinct if these threats are not addressed, that there should be absolutely no logging operations allowed in those communities.

John Edwards

A Sad Victory.

Great news from the Department of Environment (DECCW). A consultant ecologist fined for giving bad advice to a developer. Most of us can point to a case where a development approval has been granted despite it having major environmental impacts. Behind each of these decisions has been a consultant who has assessed that the impacts will “not be significant”.

Under the current system, a developer engages the services of a consultant to identify ecological threats that the proposed development is likely to have, and put forward recommendations to minimise those impacts in order to allow the development to proceed as planned. Should a consultant determine that the impacts are too great, and the project gets rejected, there is a good chance he/she will never be employed by any other developer.

Because the developer is paying for the service, there is an understandable perception that the consultant ecologist's task is to find ways around any environmental impediment to help the employer, not the environment.

Those of us who are concerned that the environment is being unfairly treated as a result will be buoyed by the NSW Land and Environment Court decision to convict a consultancy and one of its directors in August, for giving bad advice to their client.

In this case the DECCW prosecuted Orogen Pty Ltd over its 2007 advice which allowed vegetation in koala habitat to be cleared in preparation for a development at Taylor's Beach, near Port Stephens.

Orogen's failure to advise the developer on the need to retain vegetation for the threatened animals was devastating. The deaths of 30 breeding female koalas have been directly attributed to the resultant clearing activity. It also proved very expensive for Orogen which was fined \$120,000, and ordered to pay prosecutor's costs and investigation expenses. The court has also ordered Orogen to provide \$160,000 worth of environment services for Port Stephens Council. To add further to the consultant's discomfort, the Court has also ordered them to take out media advertisements detailing their offence.

We can only hope the Court's message is heard loud and clear by all consultants who feel their obligations to an employer overrides the law.

A Pulp Mill?

In mid September there was a well-attended meeting of plantation interests in Woodenbong to discuss the future of the local plantation industry. Following that meeting the Northern Star reported that Kyogle councilor and vice-president of the National Timber Councils Taskforce, Lindsay Passfield, had called on the Federal Government to either establish a pulp mill on the Northern Rivers or develop a port locally so woodchips can be exported. His call was, *"because I don't see a lot of value in the majority of the plantations otherwise."*

I believe taxpayers across the country should be outraged at such a suggestion. Firstly, they have seen their taxes handed to shonky operators through managed investment schemes to plant the trees. Secondly, investors in those schemes lost everything when companies like Great Southern and Forests Enterprises Australia went bankrupt, and now taxpayers are being asked to fund an export port facility or, God forbid, a pulp mill, to enable these useless plantations to be utilised.

We have timber millers across the state crying out for saw logs, a forestry manager illegally logging

old growth forests, rainforest, and endangered ecological communities to meet those demands, and tens of thousands of hectares of plantations containing tree species suitable only for woodchip.

Mr Passfield's assessment that there is little value in the plantations is a damning assessment of the organisations responsible for setting them up. They must have known their operations were valueless but happily took investors' money anyway.

Governments, both State and Federal need to shoulder much of the blame for this debacle, particularly the late unlamented State Minister involved, Ian Macdonald, who was repeatedly warned of what was happening, but preferred to ignore the problem. However, any suggestion that taxpayers should fork out once again to perpetuate a useless, highly environmentally destructive woodchip industry, should be swiftly knocked on the head.

John Edwards

Um. What Do We Do Now?

Read it and weep.

Table 1 Peaking year, annual reduction rates and associated warming

Peaking year	Annual reduction rate for all emissions	Annual reduction rate for energy and industrial emissions	Resulting concentration (ppm CO ₂ -e)	Likely associated warming
2015	4%	6.5%	450 ppm	2°C
2020	6%	9%	550 ppm	3°C
2020	3%	3.5%	650 ppm	4°C

Source: Anderson and Bows (2008), p. 17

This table assumes

1. A complete halt to deforestation.
2. Halving emissions from food production

Neither of the assumptions is possible.



It's on again!

The clarion call once again rings out across inland NSW - we must dam all that water going to waste down the Clarence River and pump it over the range so that irrigators can waste it all on growing cotton and rice, two of the thirstiest crops there are, and growing citrus, a crop that has never been able to compete with overseas' imports.



Some of the many kilometres of river valleys that would be inundated by a dam on the Mann River

In response to the outcry that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan has caused in regional Australia, the Gillard Government has turned to the usual 'do nothing' solution, set up a committee to spend a year looking at the problem.

The Murray Darling basin has been the subject of endless such inquiries, so why there need to be more delays is a mystery. Nevertheless that is what we are faced with, and we have sent a submission accordingly

We pointed out that moves by the previous Coalition Government and the present Labor Government to protect environmental flows in the highly stressed Murray Darling Basin must be applauded. Everyone accepts that water from the system has been over-allocated, and that, unless steps are taken to provide environmental flows, the region's ecology is threatened with collapse. However, as soon as moves to make the

necessary cuts to water allocations, it seems that nobody is prepared to shoulder the responsibility personally, and everyone points to where they perceive the problems are created. We believe the recent deplorable behaviour of some extreme elements in the debate, who have hurled abuse at officials, and publicly burned copies of the Plan, is an exhibition of greedy self-interest.

It is with this background that the Murray Darling Association has raised the perennial call for the supposedly limitless waters of the Clarence River to be pumped over/through or around the Great Dividing Range to rejuvenate the Murray Darling system and allow the water exploitation to continue unabated.

Science, common sense, and even engineering theory are rarities when this emotive issue is raised. When Malcolm Turnbull announced a feasibility study for the transfer of water from the Clarence to South East Queensland in early 2007, the Bourke Cobar, and South Australian Alexandrina Councils immediately launched their individual bids for a million megalitres per year, and 1.3 million megalitres respectively, to be diverted from the Clarence River.

So-called facts and figures, and various methods to achieve the desired ends, were bandied about by everyone who had an opinion, regardless of their qualifications. Sydney Shock Jock, Alan Jones, led the charge for three days (that's as long as any one issue catches his attention), using the usual scientific measure of water in terms of 'Sydney Harbours' going to waste out through the heads each day. One engineering firm claimed the entire transfer could be achieved by damming the river, and simply running the water downhill through a 20km tunnel with no pumping required.

An elderly, totally unqualified, resident of the Clarence Valley, who firmly believes that all rivers should be dammed and the water shared equally (the environment excepted of course) recently wrote to Grafton's Daily Examiner, claiming that each time he crossed

the Grafton Bridge, it breaks his heart to see all that wonderful water flowing to waste into the ocean. The fact that the river at that point is a tidal estuary, and there would be no visible change even if the Clarence River ceased to flow altogether, never enters his head, nor the heads of thousands of casual visitors to the region who jump to the same conclusion.

In 2005, the Clarence Environment Centre put together a comprehensive submission, which spells out the realities, and was presented to Mr Turnbull, the then Environment Minister, who was good enough to grant us an audience (we attached a copy of that document with our submission, and it is also on our web site).

Mr Turnbull employed the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation to do a desktop study for the South East Queensland proposal. They did the same as many other previous studies, referencing vital facts and figures, such as average annual flows, to earlier studies. As a result there is now a widespread acceptance that there is an average flow through the Clarence Heads of 5 million megalitres annually.

In reality it is not possible to measure all the water that runs off the massive Clarence River floodplain into the Tidal Pool which extends inland for over 90km. The Orara River, which drains the Coffs Harbour hinterland south of Grafton, also discharges considerable amounts of water annually, directly into the tidal pool. Together it is possible that the total average annual flow could be as high as 5 million megalitres. However, the gauge at Lilydale on the Clarence River, which has been in place for 40 years, immediately above the tidal pool, measures an annual average flow of just 3,072,884ML.

A lot of water, one might say. However, this brings us to the second widespread myth, that dams will somehow stop flooding. Again, the reality is that the dams must be partially or completely empty at the time of the flood to have any impact at all. If the dam is full, there will be little or no lessening of the flood problem.

The largest dam ever contemplated for the Clarence system was a monstrous 5 million megalitres on the Mann River down stream of Jackadgery. It was investigated in 1975 by the Inter-departmental Committee on Water Resources, and would have seen four major tributaries affected, with some 86kms of the Nymboida River; 33kms of the Boyd; 23kms of Cunglegung Creek, and 70kms of the Mann River inundated. This would mean that a total of 181 kms of wilderness river valleys would be destroyed. Add the loss of other waterways such as Chandlers, Dinner, Doboy and Boundary Creeks, and the total riparian loss would be well over 250kms, and there are literally hundreds of minor creeks and waterways that haven't been considered.

We estimated that evaporation alone from this dam, had it been built, would have been greater than the inflows during 5 of the past 30 years.

The Mann River, which carries water from the Nymboida, Guy Fawkes, and Boyd Rivers, has an average annual flow of less than 1.5 million ML. As demonstrated, flood waters which occur perhaps once a decade, can only be captured if the dam is empty (what an awful site that would be), if the dam is full flood waters will still flow out to sea. This leaves the 'median' flow which is all that is available for transfer inland. That median flow (available water), is a mere 870,600ML annually. And the proposal is to pump more than one million megalitres out of the river? A second year primary school student should be able to work out that that equation doesn't add up.

Then there is the downhill tunnel proposal. The mega dam described above had a surface level of 220 metres above sea level. To run water downhill to an inland river with an altitude of less than 220m, would require a tunnel more than 200km long, and big enough to accommodate massive pipes and machinery for maintenance work. And that would only take water from the surface of the dam, the lowest point would be 150m lower, only 70m above sea level.

Another reality is that, should a million megalitres be pumped over the Great Dividing Range, during drought when the water would be most needed, that water will have evaporated long before it reaches Broken Hill, much less the mouth of the Murray River. In the mean time, the Clarence River's ecosystems will suffer massive degradation as a result.

At the same time it should be emphasized that the Clarence River district also suffers from frequent droughts. At the time of the Turnbull proposal to divert water from the upper Clarence, water flow at the proposed dam site near the junction with Duck Creek had all but stopped, a mere trickle less than 30cm wide was all there was. In the 2002/3 drought, the Orara River dried up, and the flow entering the tidal pool at Lilydale dropped to 35ML/day.

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Koala Protection



Blind Koala with young at Lismore Animal Hospital

The Koala is listed as vulnerable in NSW and southern Queensland, it is even listed as an endangered species under the IUCN international convention. However, successive Federal Governments have thus far refused to grant the Koala threatened species status under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act). Under pressure from the Australian Koala Foundation, which has estimated that Australia's Koala numbers (excluding South

Australia) have dropped to 43,000, the Federal Government finally requested the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to assess the eligibility of Koala for listing as a threatened species under the Act.

However, it appears the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and the Community, Senator Conroy, has floated the idea of listing the Koala as Conservation Dependent, a lower level of protection than Threatened Species listing.

Senator Bob Brown questioned the Minister, asking why he was considering this lesser protection before the Scientific Committee had made its determination.

One of the more important principles underpinning the EPBC Act is the Precautionary Principle, which deems that *a lack of scientific certainty about the potential impacts of an action will not itself justify a decision that the action is not likely to have a significant impact.*

When reading his extraordinary response to Senator Brown's question, one can but wonder if the Minister has ever read the EPBC Act, or has had the Precautionary Principle explained to him.

That response from Senator Conroy uses a clear case of scientific uncertainty to justify not providing Koalas with the protection they so urgently need, stating that: *The Threatened Species Scientific Committee has previously noted that there is currently no published, scientifically peer reviewed estimate of the total number of Koalas in Australia and no definitive past estimate within an appropriate timeframe to enable comparison. The report on 1986 - 7 national survey of Koala distribution noted that the total population size was impossible to estimate as survey techniques varied greatly from area to area*

The Clarence Environment Centre has voiced concerns for Koalas in the past and repeats those concerns once again. Quoting from the recently compiled Clarence Valley Council's Koala Plan of Management we point out that the Iluka and Woombah populations, reliably surveyed in the 1990s, are now considered to be extinct, while another Lower Clarence Population at Ashby is under severe threat from development.

Also a population at Shannon Creek, estimated in 2005 to number between 140 and 240, has been the subject of a scientific monitoring program since that time, and no signs of Koalas have been found there since 2007.

We have called on the Minister to immediately order the listing of Koalas as endangered to ensure the species and its habitat are provided with all the protection possible.

John Edwards

A Voice for the Koala

There was a sense of urgency amongst the dedicated volunteers at Lismore's Koala Hospital when we arrived there last week. A mother koala and her Joey had just been brought in, having been savaged by a domestic dog. A brief assessment of their wounds, followed by an immediate decision to rush the pair to the local vet for emergency surgery.

Our latest casualty was an adult female koala found in a clump of bamboo by an alert landowner on Woodford Island. She was clearly sick and blind in at least one eye, and in need of urgent treatment. However, formalities had to be completed, checking sex and body condition, calculating age, weighing, and recording details of the rescue; before being transferred from the carry cage into more comfortable surroundings to await her turn for a vet check.

She was the third Koala we had delivered to the hospital in as many weeks, as a spate of sick, injured and orphaned koalas hit the Clarence Valley, evidence that the animals are in real trouble. Regrettably many of those taken to Lismore have proved to be too sick to save and had to be put down. It is important therefore that anyone sighting a koala that appears to be sick, report it immediately to WIRES or some other wildlife care group. Early intervention is often their only hope.

Many diseases that affect koalas are brought about by stress, sudden changes in their local

habitat, land clearing, removal of understorey vegetation, and logging of high use feed trees, all contribute to the problem.

Habitat protection, including conservation of movement corridors to allow koalas to travel across the landscape without having to move across open ground, is critically important.

The Review of New South Wales Forest Agreements and Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals

One of the more onerous tasks faced by conservation groups such as ourselves, is the need to assess proposed new legislation, reviews of current regulations and possible changes, and then take the opportunity to write submissions on the proposals, in the hope that someone will actually pick up on our ideas and actually implement them.

One of the many reviews that are currently under way is one for the Regional Forest Agreements which, for our region, were signed into law in 2000. The review should have been undertaken after 5 years but better late than never.

Of course, as many of you would have heard, we have uncovered widespread non-compliance with the Agreements in recent years, culminating in a series of forest audits by ourselves, NEFA and the North Coast Environment Council, which has found incidents of rainforest logging, logging in Endangered Communities, and also old-growth forests.

Underpinning the Agreements is something called Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM), so with the release of the Review, we were keen to see if any assessment had been made about its effectiveness.

At the very outset of the Review we are told that:

“The New South Wales Forest Agreements were a landmark in social, economic and

environmental assessment for the State of NSW. The NSW Forest Agreement process delivered:

? region-by-region assessments of forest resources and forest values

? over 1.2 million hectares of new national parks and reserves, and more than 460,000 hectares of informal reserves created in NSW since 1995

? 20 year security of timber supply to industry, and creation of new jobs

? funding for industry development assistance and restructure

? ecologically sustainable forest management enshrined in legislation.

Also enshrined in legislation is the Integrated Forests Operations Agreement (IFOA) which is also examined in the Review. However, as already stated, we have determined that logging operations are not complying with the IFOA, or the Threatened Species Licence granted by the Department of Environment.

We note that the review claims to be a “combined 5 and 10 yearly review. i.e. the promised five yearly review never happened. Our search through the document to determine exactly how well the “enshrined” ESFM was performing found that: “... *consideration of the ESFM criteria and indicators is reported. The NSW Forest Agreements require the criteria and indicators to be trailed and assessed during the first five-year period to ensure they are practical, measurable, cost-effective and capable of being implemented at the regional level.*”

Our expectation that after a decade some progress reporting on the effectiveness of the 'enshrined' ESFM would be forthcoming in this review, were clearly over-optimistic. All we get is a review of the ESFM criteria and indicators, with a further explanation that: **“The review will not assess sustainability. Sustainability issues are to be addressed over time by the ESFM criteria and indicators contained in the NSW Forest Agreements.”**

The Agreements cover 20 years to 2020, so with half that time already gone, and no plans to release any details on whether or not Forests NSW is honouring its side of the bargain to deliver the promised ecologically sustainable outcome, for at least 5 more years, we are expected to take the timber industry's claim that they are delivering a “world class” system. For those of us that have been involved in the forest audits, it is clear that 'world class' has been achieved by comparing us to countries like Borneo, Indonesia, and Brazil.

John Edwards

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Proposed Pacific Highway Alternative Route Option, Tyndale to Maclean

The Clarence Environment Centre has had close involvement reviewing various components of the RTA's proposed new motorway across the Clarence Valley from Wells Crossing to Iluka Road, since the plan's announcement more than 5 years ago.

Of the entire Sydney to Brisbane Pacific Highway Route, the section of highway between Woolgoolga and Ballina, has by far the lowest traffic numbers. Why there needs to be a motorway in addition the current highway along this section, has never been satisfactorily explained.

Throughout the process we have been adamant that the environmental impacts of the preferred route are unacceptably high, and that an upgrade of the current highway to dual carriageway is not only the least impactful option, but would be by far the cheapest, and therefore should be adopted.

The currently proposed changes, if adopted, will see the new motorway moved eastward by an average distance of some 700 metres. This we are told will satisfy a handful of cane-growers who were concerned at the loss of prime agricultural land closer to the Clarence River.

The RTA has reported that following the construction of the motorway, only 30% of through traffic will utilise it, with the remaining 70% still using the current route. With the NSW

Planning Department forecasting a population rise of 20, 000 over the next 2 decades, local traffic will increase accordingly, and within the next 20 years will greatly exceed the current numbers.

The Clarence Environment Centre has always asserted that the motorway proposal should be abandoned in favour of adding an extra 2 lanes to the current highway. That way less cane land would be affected, and safety concerns would be addressed.

No environmental impact assessment has been made for this new 10 km section with the claim that the ecological assessment made for the initial proposal is relevant for this change. In reality, even without any details being provided by the RTA, there will be a number of obvious impacts:

1 Endangered Coastal Emu

There will be a further 500 to 800 hectare reduction of habitat for the endangered coastal emu population.

2 Large Water Birds

The placing of the motorway in close proximity to the Shark Creek wetlands will place large bird species such as the Black-necked Stork and Brolga at serious risk. Because of their size, these birds have very low take-off trajectories, and as a result will risk flying into the path of trucks and other vehicles travelling at high speed.

3 Clearing of Native Vegetation

The clearing of native vegetation is listed under the Threatened Species Conservation Act as a Key Threatening Process. The main cause of the declining numbers of every one of the dozens of threatened species identified as occurring along the proposed route, is habitat loss. The RTA's discussion paper identifies 40 hectares of native vegetation, 8 hectares of an Endangered Ecological Community, and 9 hectares of high value fauna habitat, a significant loss that will contribute to further declines.

4 Destruction of wildlife corridor

Contained within federal, state and local government biodiversity management plans and strategies, there is a mapped north-south wildlife corridor where the proposed new alignment will run. The RTA's drawing of a

line on the map to delineate the boundary of the corridor so as to make it appear that the proposed motorway is avoiding it is completely unacceptable.

5 Open ground, even cropped farmland, is wildlife habitat.

Large predator owl species frequently forage across open grasslands from roosts on forest edges. The proposed changes sees the motorway encroaching on native forests along much of its length, which will force these birds to fly through the traffic to reach their prey, an additional threat to species known to occur there.

John Edwards

"Clarence Plague"

A new disease has been discovered in the Clarence Valley, which is believed to be associated with bats. It is thought to be a virus, and rednecks, halfwits, and National Party Politicians are especially vulnerable to the virus. It is particularly virulent in the Cowper Electorate.

Symptoms include ranting, raving, frothing at the mouth, chest beating, and a type of flatulence that results in copious amounts of hot air issuing from the mouth. Other symptoms include a morbid desire to seek media attention, and those afflicted will be seen standing near High Schools, Hospitals or roads trying to get their pictures taken.

Another manifestation of the condition is the writing of irrational letters to the local papers advocating all sorts of strange anti-social behaviour, including discharge of fireworks in public places.

Those afflicted who are also "gun nuts", become obsessed with the idea

of putting on their camouflage fatigues, and roaming around discharging firearms.

Medical authorities think that the condition is incurable, and the most humane option would be to euthanase the sufferers. Bio-ethicists are concerned that this might be construed as a form of "eugenics", which is against the Geneva Convention, and The Hague Protocols.

Of more concern is the worry that if the local authorities don't get the outbreak under control soon, it will attract the attention of the Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta, and the Americans will fly a B52 over and drop a 10-megaton warhead on the Cowper

Electorate, to stop the spread of the contagion.

The bats say however, that they are the victims of a vicious smear campaign, and the virus got into Australia via racehorses from Abu Dhabi, or banana imports from Ecuador."



M Casey

We would like contributions from as many sources as possible for the newsletter, so please feel free to email, or send in something, to the Clarence Environment Centre. There is also a pigeonhole in the Office where you can leave your contribution. Poems, cartoons, articles, etc, would be appreciated. Thanks. The Editor.

