



Newsletter – Winter 2021

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Edited by John Edwards

Amongst all the bad news, positive things are happening

Every month, more evidence emerges showing the tide is turning in the environmental battle against those right-wing elements within governments worldwide who support the expansion of the fossil fuel industry.

Already, corporations are factoring climate change risks into their business models. Insurance companies have long since reacted, with increased premiums, and the banking sector, awake to the threat to their industry from stranded assets, are increasingly reluctant to back new fossil fuel investment.

Reinforcing those initiatives, three significant judgments have been handed down by courts in Australia and overseas in recent weeks. Firstly, the Australian Conservation Foundation's win when the Federal Court overturned the Federal Environment Minister's approval of Adani's application to take water from a local river to service its Galilee Basin coal mine'

This judgment was based on the Minister's failure to assess the impact of the proposal on Australia's water resources which, the Environmental Defenders Office noted: "*confirms that major coal and gas projects are subject to scrutiny by the Independent Expert Scientific Committee for all water impacts*", meaning that miners can no longer avoid scrutiny of their water use.

Then the Hague District Court, handed down a finding that Royal Dutch Shell has a duty to protect the human rights of Dutch citizens from climate harm. In that case Shell was effectively ordered to reduce its global emissions by 45% by 2030, including emissions caused by the use of its products.

Essentially that judgement means Shell could, in future, be held responsible for damages, an implication that will not be lost on other fossil fuel conglomerates.

Finally, The Australian Federal Court saw eight children challenge the Environment Minister's approval of Whitehaven's Vickery Coal Mine, the Court ruling that the Minister "*owes a duty to take reasonable care not to cause climate harm to children. when deciding whether to approve a new development*", and that climate change poses a real risk of death and personal injury to Australian children, with greenhouse gas emissions from the Vickery mine increasing that risk of harm,

Clearly, the fossil fuel industry can no longer continue business as usual.



Land for Wildlife now has its own plant nursery



In October last year Anna Patterson's 10ha Nymboida property became registered as Clarence Valley's LfW #133, and that has certainly proven fortuitous for us.

When the megalithic 2019/20 Federation Trail bushfire wrought its devastation through the forested hinterland, Anna's was one of the many Nymboida properties in its path, destined to be left a smouldering ruin in its wake. But despite having lost everything, including her house, Anna's passion for raising native seedlings helped her to start repairing her own small corner of the vast charred wasteland. By the time we met, numerous young trees were already in the ground starting to heal the damage.

Anna's plans and seemingly tireless enthusiasm for this work inspired me to suggest she might look at starting up a native plant nursery, to help repair not only her own property but some of the many other Land for Wildlife properties that were destroyed in the fires. If I'd expected her to be appalled by that quite ambitious notion, I was wrong. She not only took it on board but became excited by it, and together we worked on an application for funding through the Community Environment Network for a \$6000 grant, spread over a 3-year period to help set up the nursery.



The application was successful and Anna's *Corymbia Wild Plants* is now well on its way to fruition. The first expenditure from this year's grant went on pots, plant stands, potting medium and materials to immediately start the planting, and this effort is already producing its first flush of local provenance seedlings sourced from Anna's property and the local area. These first baby steps are evident in the photograph above, set up initially in the Patterson's South Grafton yard.

The remaining part of the grant contributed to fencing materials to protect the Nymboida site from wildlife; galvanised mesh; some roofing, and structural pine to enclose the nursery, while Anna has contributed colorbond roofing, poles from her site, a water tank that survived the fire, and drainage work around the rear of the nursery, plus all the many small incidentals to put it all together.

Anna also did most of the ground work, carting and fuel expenditure to fulfil the "in kind" part of the grant agreement, and also provided a beautifully charted blueprint of the floor plan and elevations.

So far, it's a lovely job, and already proving its worth by additional young rainforest as well as dry Eucalyptus community plants now in the ground replenishing Anna's own land. Thank you, Anna, for undertaking this labour of love and commitment, and to the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust and Community Environment Network for their approval and provision of the welcome funds to set this important work on its way.

We'll keep you posted on progress

Pat (Regional coordinator)

* * *

Now, something to make you really angry

Published by "Crikey" under the heading, "***Carbon capture and storage (CCS) a dud but fossil fuel industry's cash capture working well***", this is an article guaranteed to make your blood boil, and reads as follows:



"The government wants to expand its Emissions Reduction Fund to pay fossil fuel companies to increase emissions. Who came up with that idea? Take a guess.

CCS is a discredited technology that even coal mining executives dismiss as "neither practical nor economic". It ranks behind nuclear power as a climate solution, given nuclear power is at least a proven technology; CCS suffers from the [same delays, budget blowouts and project cancellations](#) as nuclear power, but is yet to be proven to actually work effectively. A

large-scale CCS project at the Gorgon LNG facility off the WA coast was supposed to commence in 2016, but only began limited operation last year.

CCS also requires power companies to actually produce more emissions: CCS when used in association with power generation is a highly energy intensive technology that requires significantly greater power output to capture the relatively small amounts of carbon it is able to, thus requiring the host coal or gas-fired power plant to burn more.

But the real benefit of CCS is that it provides an excuse for climate inaction and a means for funnelling taxpayer money to fossil fuel companies; since the election Scott Morrison has repeatedly [flagged more government support](#) for, particularly, Santos and Origin, and claimed that gas is fundamental to Australia's energy production needs.

Expanding an "Emissions Reduction Fund" to enable fossil fuel companies to actually increase the production of emissions may seem contradictory or, at least, deeply ironic, but it is entirely in keeping with the purpose of the fund, which was always to serve as a fig leaf for Tony Abbott's view that climate change was "bullshit", and to funnel taxpayer money to Coalition allies and donors.

This isn't really a story about climate or energy, but about political influence being used to secure taxpayer funding in a twisted version of industry policy. The Coalition's fossil fuel donors will benefit from taxpayer handouts on the recommendation of former fossil fuel executives appointed by the Coalition. That's how power is used in this corrupt government".

The thing that I find doubly frustrating is the fact that the implementation of clean coal technology at a power station, even if it works, would require that station to generate double the amount of power just to run the CCS technology. That fact was highlighted in the Owen Report as far back in 2007.

* * *

New challenges for our bush regen team

2020-21 was a challenging year in more ways than one. Not because the workload was greater or more difficult, but the challenging circumstances we have been forced to face that seem to change at the drop of a hat.



"I don't understand it—no matter how much I drink coffee, play on my phone, refresh my e-mail, look up things online, go to the kitchen for snacks, message my friends, scroll through Twitter, and play with the cats, I still can't get any work done."

There have been two basic influences, firstly the Covid 19 pandemic, and secondly, the weather. Dealing with the bureaucracy has never been easy, and as always, a slow tedious process, but Covid 19 has raised those processes to stratospheric levels.

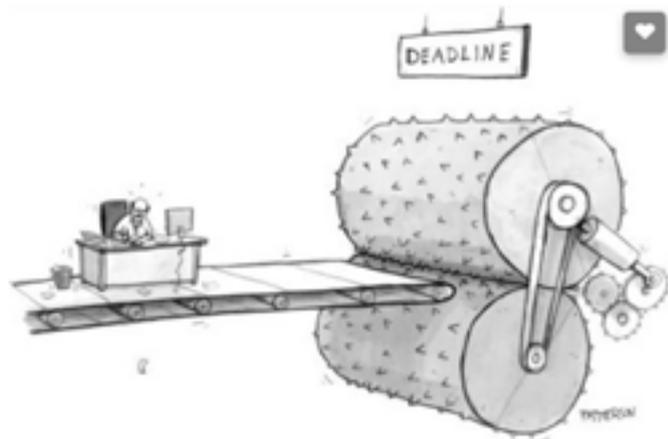
With individuals forced to work from home, and communications carried out via skype and zoom, or some other incomprehensible process that is way beyond my aging brain to comprehend. We have struggled to engage with 'mute buttons' on screens where pixilated images of speakers never seem to be

synchronised with their voices which periodically cut out altogether.

But enough of the failing technology; probably my fault anyway, but it is clear that this form of interaction is having a profound effect on the efficient running of government departments.

For example, the CEC has multiple contracts and projects, 4 of which are on-going or multi-year, so there really is no reason why each year's funding, which has already been predetermined, can't be granted soon after the start of the financial year, 1st July. After all, in this age of electronic banking, that could have been pre-set in the same way pensions are paid each fortnight. But no, of those 4 projects, the first funding only arrived at the end of November last year, meaning we were already 5 months late in starting.

The other payments dribbled in over the coming months, with the last one not arriving until April, giving us just 10 weeks to deliver what was supposed to be a 12-month project.



We need to introduce more of these!!!!!!

Naturally, protests were lodged, and subsequently some allowances were made, but that process all takes time, something that is also in short supply under these trying circumstances.

We were fortunate in obtaining a few private contracts to keep our weed team employed during those first 5 months, but then we were forced to double our workforce to meet those deadlines. This meant additional costs to equip the extra team, and insurance cover, all expenditure that means less money to spend on bush regeneration work. All very frustrating!

Then there was the weather, and this may seem just a distant memory now, but up until the end of November last year, we were experiencing quite a serious drought. Those dry conditions coming out of winter and spring, meant the weeds we were dealing with, mostly Lantana, were under stress, so spraying with herbicide is ineffective. As a result, the team was forced to employ the much slower process of “cut and paint”. However, when the rains did come, it was a flood, resulting in many of our work sites being inaccessible (we don’t like to chew up people’s tracks or get vehicles bogged), and some sites, two of which are swamps, became unworkable for a significant period.

Of course, the late payment of funding not only shortened the time available to complete the work, but it removed a lot of the flexibility that a full 12 months would have given us. In that respect, we are fortunate, with as many as 20 work sites to choose from, some of which had all-weather accesses. Nevertheless, flexibility is important. The swamps I mentioned earlier cannot be efficiently worked when water levels are high, and the funding for that project, just happened to be that which arrived in April when most of the east coast was experiencing record flooding. It would have been great if we had been able to work those sites in the drought conditions back in September and October, instead of wading about all day in gum boots later in the year.

I think everyone will agree, this year’s weather has been great for the Clarence Valley. Spared the worst of the flooding, the summer rains kept temperatures down and the bush was finally able to start recovering from the extremities of drought and fire experienced in 2019.

It has also been a fantastically good growing season for weeds, particularly in areas where canopy trees have been killed by the bushfires. Normally, our teams don’t deal with annual and perennial weeds, most of those are best controlled by allowing trees and shrubs to grow, to develop a canopy to shade them out. These short-lived weeds mainly come in after disturbance which has allowed more sunlight to penetrate to ground level.

One exception to this has been Tropical Soda Apple (TSA) at “Rockview”, Clarence Valley Council’s property that was acquired for the Shannon Creek dam, and where two of our main projects are being carried out.



Rob, pulling fruits off the noxious Tropical Soda Apple, which are bagged and burned.

The TSA was introduced by agisted cattle several years ago, and are now being spread by those cattle which eat the fruit. The wet conditions have prevented Council’s weed teams from properly dealing with the weed this year, and this has seen a worrying increase of the weed which has spread across several thousand hectares of sometimes inaccessible land, which is now going to be impossible to eradicate.



One of the washouts filled in order to access worksites

Our team has been actively dealing with the weed in and around their work sites in the dry rainforest gullies at Endless Creek, a process that, because the weed has been allowed to mature, requires the pulling up of the very thorny plants, the fruits to be picked off the plant and burned.

Dealing with annual weeds is not the only new experience for our team this year, with many of the racks washed out in the heavy flash flooding that occurred earlier this year, they have had to become road-builders as well (see left).

The above image is of just one of several washed-out gullies along what is essentially a public road. Shown on the map as Endless Creek Road, this road was once the access to several properties along the creek, but over the years, residents have moved away and Council has long since ceased to maintain the track.

Trying to get Council to do some necessary maintenance after the flooding has been very frustrating, particularly as it is now the only safe way to access our Endless Creek work sites on Council's land. This procrastination has led to the team having to undertake the work by hand, armed only with mattocks and shovels.

* * *

Another case of water quality considerations being ignored

A number of reports have recently appeared in the media relating to water quality. Firstly, Coffs Harbour and Grafton newspapers reported on announcements by their respective Councils that, for the first time since December 2019, Level 1 water restrictions will no longer apply.

The reason for all the excitement was that the source of the region's water, the Nymboida River, is finally clean enough to use for filling their main storage at Shannon Creek So, despite higher-than-average rainfall, the entire region has been on water restrictions for 18 months because of muddy water.

Two days later "The Conversation" reported that three Victorian suburbs had been warned against drinking tap water because severe weather had led to an equipment failure, allowing potentially unsafe water to enter the drinking water system.



Figure 1 While venting some concern over the quality of water entering the Shannon Creek dam, Council does not show the same degree of concern over the quality of water they release from the dam

However, unlike the above reports, it stated the obvious, explaining that: *"To maintain optimal water quality, we must protect the integrity of water catchments. For example, damaging logging operations along steep slopes in Melbourne's biggest water catchment threatens to pollute the city's drinking water because it increases the risk of erosion during storms."*

This obvious need for catchment care is clearly not high on the list of priorities of those authorities who have responsibilities to provide safe drinking water to Coffs - Clarence residents, as highlighted by another media report that same week. That story was about the protest action which saw logging operations blockaded in Wild Cattle Creek State Forest west of Coffs Harbour. In that case, despite being the responsible agency for protecting waterways from pollution, and having placed a stop work order on that same logging operation 6-months earlier, because of illegal activity, the Environmental Protection Agency has allowed logging to recommence.

Wild Cattle Creek lies in mountainous country, and is the main tributary of the Little Nymboida River which provides most of the region's drinking water. Everyone knows that soil disturbance in mountainous country leads to erosion and dirtier water, and should be avoided, but once again councils remain silent, and residents suffer the consequences.

* * *

A much-needed review of the Plantations and Reafforestation Act but will it result in and improvements

The NSW Government is currently undertaking a review of the Plantations and Reafforestation Act (P&R Act) that has been in place since 2001. Set up supposedly “*to streamline the plantation development approval processes without compromising environmental standards*”, the Act has been an environmental disaster from the start.

Around the time that the Act came into force, the Federal Government introduced a scheme which allowed a 100% tax deduction for tree planting, ostensibly to store carbon to combat climate change. The lure of easy money saw an explosion of tree-planting across the country, mostly undertaken by managed investment schemes using investors' money which, being tax deductible, means the schemes were subsidised by all tax-payers.

By growing trees for woodchip or biofuel, rather than timber, allowed the schemes to promise a rapid financial return as an added inducement to invest.



This image from 2002 shows the preparation of the land for a plantation on Pringles Way. The subsequent plantation was bulldozed a decade later for Macadamia nut trees.

Under the Act, “regrowth” native forests, specifically forests that had grown since 1990, could be bulldozed to establish a plantation. That meant, when the act was introduced in 2001, eleven-year-old trees could be bulldozed to plant others that would be cut down in fifteen years. However, that 1990 baseline still exists, and today 30-year-old forest can be bulldozed for plantation development.

That’s only the start of the allowable destruction. Despite the Act stating that plantations must be established on “predominantly” cleared land, any mature forest less than 1 hectare in size, along with irregular projections of adjoining forest, can also be obliterated presumably to create a neat appearance. Solitary old-growth paddock trees with hollows that take hundreds of years to develop and provide habitat for wildlife, can likewise be bulldozed if they’re in the way or dangerous.

And all this destruction can occur with no requirement to check the site for threatened species. 2008 global financial crisis saw most investment schemes collapse, and thousands of hectares of worthless plantations subsequently bulldozed and burned on site, or sent to generate electricity at local sugar mills. A sad end to a farcical chapter.

There is much to be considered by this review; hopefully some sanity will emerge.

* * *

Mining in the Clarence Valley would be high risk

If anyone still has lingering doubts about whether mining should be allowed in the Clarence Valley, I suggest they consider the news emerging from western Tasmania.

That story involves a copper, zinc and lead mine that has been operating for 80 years, producing toxic waste in the process which is currently stored in two very large tailings dams on the edge of the world renowned Tarkine forest.



Those existing dams will reach capacity within three years, and the owner, MMG, wants to construct a third dam inside the Tarkine, with a massive 285-hectare footprint.

Naturally, this has drawn condemnation from concerned citizens and protests have already erupted leading to more than 40 arrests to date. MMG argues that without the third dam, the mine would be forced to close, which appears to be a clear admission that cleaning up these toxic waste storage dams isn’t possible. After all, to a layman at least, the obvious solution would be to clean out one of the existing dams, dispose of the waste safely, so it could be refilled, thus avoiding the environmentally destructive consequences of building the third dam.

Mining companies are supposedly obligated to eventually rehabilitate the site when a mine is closed down. How will this occur in the Tasmanian case? If history is any indication, it probably won’t!

The well-respected Australia Institute, in its report “The dark side of the Boom” (2017) reported that **over 60,000 mines had been abandoned across Australia, and found evidence of barely more than 20 that had been closed and relinquished**. In fact, their researchers could only find evidence of a handful of mines that had been successfully rehabilitated.

The report points out that “*rehabilitating a single mine can cost millions or even billions of*



dollars”, which probably explains why, in more recent times, so many mines are “moth-balled”, rather than closed permanently, thus avoiding the required rehabilitation.

If copper mining gets the go ahead in the Clarence, a similar toxic

timebomb could be the legacy facing the valley’s residents in the future.

* * *

The RMS’s wilful destruction continues

The recent discovery of a hitherto unknown species of tree in the Coffs Harbour hinterland has generated a degree of interest in certain quarters, mainly because they are about to be dug up to make way for the city’s Pacific Highway bypass.

Appeals for the highway route to be diverted in order to avoid the destruction of the rare forest remnant have been rejected by the RMS, which in turn has led to the trees being nominated for listing as critically endangered in an attempt to save them.

However, if we look back to similar calls to protect rare or endangered species in the path of the ‘upgrade’, and the intractability of the Roads and Maritime Services when facing such barriers, it would appear highly unlikely that any adjustment of the route will be considered. As a result, with calls for DNA testing likewise being rejected, these trees will likely disappear almost before they are officially discovered.

Looking back, readers will recall similar cases on the North Coast. For example, where the highway was built right through the middle of the endangered Coastal Emus' habitat, a decision which if not directly causing the inevitable extinction of the population, has certainly provided a pretty solid nail for the coffin.

Then there was the discovery of three breeding populations of the endangered Coastal Petaltail Dragonfly within the proposed highway corridor north of Tucabia. The RMS had previously declared that the species was most likely locally extinct in the Valley, and continued to procrastinate over the issue while their bulldozers were set to work destroying all three sites.

Then of course, there was the infamous rejection of evidence that the proposed route north of Wardell would have a serious impact on Koalas, a species now predicted to become extinct in NSW within 30 years.

There are, no doubt, more cases we could quote but the RMS's attitude, which Jodi Mitchell so aptly summed up with her classic song, "Big Yellow Taxi", has remained stubbornly unyielding throughout. This latest proposal to 'relocate' the inconvenient trees from the Coffs Harbour bypass is a classic case of "take all the trees and put them in a tree museum", and they have already paved a huge chunk of paradise to allow for more emissions-intensive road transport.

So, when it comes to the inevitable local extinction of our iconic wildlife, we should erect a plaque on the highway acknowledging "RIP, courtesy of RMS".

* * *

PLANT POTS NEEDED, please
We are proud to have been able to add a good contribution to the Koala feed tree drive across the Clarence Valley this last year by distributing over 3,000 native trees to our members. It is surprising to find on a final count how those regular small deliveries mounted up, and we are grateful to the many of you who put up your hands to take and plant the trees.



With many of these trees being freely donated, we now need to help our nurseries in turn by returning their pots, and also, if possible, by donating others not being used.

Please help continue the good cause by checking your sheds, and putting any empty plant pots in a box or bag ready for your next trip to South Grafton. To arrange delivery/pick-up text me on 0456 689 134 to make arrangements.

Warm wishes. Pat

* * *



The Draft National Recovery Plan for the Koala is now released and on exhibition for public comment. The CEC will be sending in a submission; however, all members are also urged to lodge individual suggestions and comments before the closing date, 24th September. The Draft Plan and information to help with your submission can be found on

<https://haveyoursay.awe.gov.au/koala-recovery-plan>

Pat



Feral pig baiting, a successful program at Stockyard Creek

Land for Wildlife members on Stockyard Creek Rd have been actively working to control feral pigs on their property while monitoring results on motion sensor cameras. It has been interesting hearing their accounts of how this work is carried out, and the results they have achieved. The bait they are using is a well-tested product, HOG-GONE[®], based on a common food additive that is toxic to pigs and well-proven to act quickly and humanely. Another humane requirement is the way the bait is delivered, ensuring no small piglet is left behind with the potential to starve to death without its mother, which is likely to happen with hunting and shooting. So this seems an ideal way to deal with these pests for those who don't want strangers with guns and dogs on their land, or, like most of us I suspect, prefer not to have to meet the unwitting victims. We all know the pigs aren't to blame for being around, but they do need to go. As with all feral animals that do so much harm to our wildlife and bushland, the blame for them being here lies firmly on those who initially haven't controlled their animals, or who actually deliberately set them free to roam.

Terry & Ian provide the latest update on their recent work - the 2nd part of their program to date:-

We would have to say we have had another successful feral pig baiting program. Funnily enough this is the exact same time as last year that we were baiting feral pigs! Exact area as well. This year we were better prepared, thanks to the support from you and LLS, and the animals baited were younger and smaller. Although the destruction these animals have caused to the land here is horrifying, we can now look forward to some form of recovery. We will maintain our vigilance of these and other invasive species.

All up we believe as many as 13 feral pigs have now been removed, 2 sows with litters of 4 and 6 piglets, and, thanks to Bob who hunts with dogs, last night he removed a large boar who had not yet learnt about the baiting station. We think the sows had been keeping that animal away. Bob will be here again tonight as a follow up exercise.

We understand that the feral pigs here will not be eradicated, but hopefully their numbers can be managed.

As we did not have a camera on the second baiting station, it was not possible to determine which pigs were actually feeding from it. It is now believed the same pigs were feeding from the two bait stations. Hence, we wasted some toxin baits. Next time, big sigh, we will have the two stations together. It's always a learning curve.

A guaranteed success of a baiting program depends on 'winning the pigs over' and following the procedure instructions. Patience is a requirement, as is hygiene, wear gloves, the stations get dirty from pig slobber! And have your wits about you as these animals are very dangerous creatures.

We intend to write a blog describing our experience on the baiting management of feral pigs to share with neighbours and the general public. We shall continue to keep you and your organisation updated.

Regards,

Terry and Ian - ISTARI - Website: www.australianbushlife.com

Note: Ian & Terry have also been working hard at controlling a bad infestation of Cat's Claw creeper. They have now successfully applied for a grant that will go some way to helping deal with this invasive weed. Our weed team are booked in to do this work, so can expect to enjoy a brief change of scenery from their usual sites at Rockview and Pillar Valley. While the assistance our team will be able to provide won't be enormous, it is a privilege to have this opportunity to support such dedicated members. We hope it will make some immediate and pleasing difference.

Pat

The two minds of Christopher Gulaptis

The Clarence Catchment Alliance (CCA) has campaigned strongly for the past 3 years, educating the community about the potential threats posed to our Clarence Valley environment by mining, particularly the threat to water quality.

During that campaign, CCA volunteers have diligently collected between 10,000 and 11,000 signatures on a petition calling for a ban on mining in the Clarence River catchment. That petition has been tabled in State Parliament and is scheduled for debate on 5th August.

That campaign, and the community support it generated, would have been partially responsible for Clarence Valley Council's motion calling on the State Government to impose a moratorium on mining within the LGA.

The CCA committee took their concerns to Mr Gulaptis on 23rd April via Zoom, where he clearly lost patience and very aggressively asserted the view that mining should go ahead if a viable resource was found, and that any risks could be managed by the stringent conditions that would be imposed. At the same time, he indicated he would be speaking to the Parliamentary debate, and would not support any call for a ban on mining in the Clarence River Catchment.



A typical copper mine site. The last thing we need in the valley

So, when waking up on Saturday, 24th April, to read the Northern Star's article on the subject of the Dunoon Dam, quoting comments made by Mr Gulaptis, the Clarence Catchment Alliance team could be excused for being more than a little perplexed. The reason being, that on the very same day that he belittled the CCA's campaign, and dismissed its 10,000-signature petition as NIMBYism, Mr Gulaptis is quoted as stating the following:

"... it is vital our communities have a clean and reliable water source.", and then finished with: ***"It is often said that local government is the government closest to the people. Clearly that is not the case of the five elected councillors (that voted against the Dunoon Dam proposal) in this instance, who are ignoring the will of more than 10,000 constituents"***.

Mr Gulaptis was also strongly critical of Clarence Valley Council when it took notice of the more than 10,000 people who signed the CCA's petition, and called for a local moratorium on mining.

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Mr Gulaptis was also strongly critical of Clarence Valley Council when it took notice of the more than 10,000 people who signed the CCA's petition, and called for the moratorium. It seems that for some politicians, they only need to consider the will of their constituents if it happens to agree with their own philosophy.

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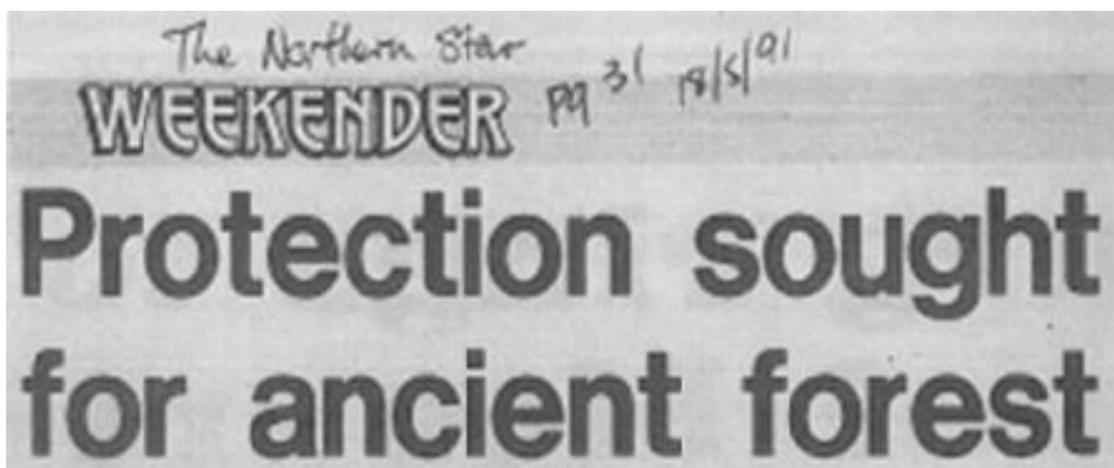
At rest – Terry Elby

The natural world lost a true champion with the recent passing of Terry Elby after a relatively short illness. Terry has been at the forefront of numerous environmental and social campaigns in recent years, and his energy and commitment to the causes he championed, will be missed. Rest easy Terry, you have truly earned it.

* * *

Chaelundi remembered

2021 is the 20th anniversary of the Chaelundi Forest blockade, an event that ultimately saw the formation of the Chaelundi National Park. A lot of our Clarence Environment Centre members participated in that historic blockade, and we should honour their commitment and ultimate achievements with the following 1991 excerpt from the Northern Star's Weekender.



By the NORTH COAST FOREST ALLIANCE 18/5/1991

The Chaelundi State Forest is located 50km north-west of Dorrigo and contains over 7,000 hectares of unlogged tall old growth forest adjacent to the Guy Fawkes River National Park, including the three compartments 180, 196 and 200, now proposed for logging

The three compartments have an area of 561 hectares and contain the highest known density of arboreal mammals in Australia, and are thus of national significance.

Those extraordinary densities support a correspondingly large population of predators that are under threat of extinction, including the Powerful Owl, Masked Owl, Sooty Owl and Spotted-tailed Quoll.

ANCIENT EUCALYPTS: The area consists of high productivity tall old growth, a forest type that is not adequately represented in National Parks and Nature Reserves.

The forest is comprised of dense stands of ancient eucalypts, including New England Blackbutt, Silvertop Stringybark, Diehard Stringybark, Tallowwood and Sydney Blue Gum, with a dense understorey ranging from rainforest to grassland interspersed with stands of subtropical rainforest.

The timber industry claim they need to log these compartments to obtain prime quality Tallowwood, primarily to cut it up into bits for cross-arms on power poles.

The Tallowwood is being logged on an unsustainable basis, at bargain business prices, with all the high-quality stands remaining being cut out within a few years.

One third of the timber from the three compartments is intended to be turned into woodchips for Japan.

As part of an investigation into old-growth forests in north-east NSW in 1989, NEFA commissioned flora and fauna studies into a number of areas in north-east NSW, which revealed Chaelundi State Forest to be of outstanding importance because of its unique conservation values.

This survey recorded a density of 12,5 arboreal mammals per hectare within the three compartments at Chaelundi.

At the time it was the highest density ever recorded in Australia, although surveys by the Forestry Commission and the National Parks and Wildlife Service have recently recorded higher densities in the three compartments.

WILDERNESS NOMINATION

In March 1990, the Wilderness Society nominated the Guy Fawkes Wilderness Area, including the adjacent unlogged forests of Chaelundi State Forest, for assessment under the NSW Wilderness Act.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is currently investigating wilderness values of the area and are due to report to NSE Cabinet by March 1992.

It is unacceptable that the NSW Forestry Commission are to log the compartments before the required wilderness assessment has been completed, because logging will destroy those wilderness values.

1990 Blockade

In March 1990, an investigation Chaelundi SF found that a major road had been constructed into the unlogged adjacent to the Guy Fawkes River National Park without any impact assessment.

The NEFA immediately established a blockade of the new road as it was illegal to build a road without preparing an Environmental Impact Assessment under the EP&A Act 1979.

At the Blockade, 13 people were arrested trying to stop the logging, and the accusations against the protesters were later quashed as the court later ruled that the Forestry Commission's activities were illegal, and the NEFA subsequently began legal action in the Land and Environment Court and succeeded in obtaining an injunction restraining the Forestry Commission from commencing work.

In June 1990, the Forestry Commission withdrew its request to be able to log the 3 compartments while an EIS was prepared for the adjacent 7,000 hectares of old growth forest.

The Commission then prepared a very hasty EIS in six weeks, that contained errors and inconsistencies, and also manipulated survey data as well as failing to survey all types of fauna.

The EIS was strongly criticised by NEFA, scientists and the NPWS, but as the EP&A Act allows the Commission to prepare and assess its own EIS the approval to allow logging was nothing more than a formality.

The Forestry Commission released a report on the EIS in February 1991, giving approval to the logging with minor changes in the harvesting plans.

The report failed to acknowledge the unique fauna values of the 3 compartments which, under the Commission's own wildlife policy, should have been protected from logging.

1991 Blockade.

As a result of the approval the NEFA was forced to establish a blockade across the road to prevent logging from occurring before legal action was considered by the NSW Government.

The blockad commenced on April 2 and has successfully kept the Forestry Commission from roading, logging and burning the 3 compartments.

Chelundi is a national treasure, plundering it is sheer vandalism.

NEFA launches court action over north-east Regional Forest Agreement.

In what could be a landmark case for north-east NSW forests, the Environmental Defenders Office solicitors acting for the North East Forest Alliance have today served papers on the Commonwealth and NSW Governments challenging the re-issued Regional Forest Agreement for north-east NSW.

“NEFA will argue that when the Prime Minister executed the varied RFA, he did not have regard to assessments of key environmental matters as required by law,” said NEFA President Dailan Pugh.

“We say there was no assessment of the impact of climate change on the forests. This despite the Commonwealth having access to and publishing its own materials about the current science – science that warns about the effects climate change has already had on the Australian natural environment and what climate change might mean for our forest ecosystems in the future,” said NEFA spokesperson Susie Russell.

“Extreme weather events can have catastrophic impacts on forests. We saw this in the drought that preceded the 2019/20 bushfires, the bushfires themselves, and the floods that have followed. Untold number of animals, including some that the Commonwealth Government has listed as threatened with extinction have died.

“Similarly, we say the Commonwealth undertook no assessment of endangered species or oldgrowth forests before it rubber stamped ongoing intensive logging for another 20+ years. “We contend this is a breach of federal law. We say these are matters that should have been assessed and that failure to do so means the Regional Forest Agreement for north-east NSW does not exempt forestry operations in north east NSW from Commonwealth assessment and approval. “We are asking the Federal Court to make a declaration to that effect for north-east NSW,” Ms Russell said.

“In late 2018 the Prime Minister and the NSW Premier rolled over the RFA for north-east NSW for a further 20 years, with provision for the agreement to automatically extend every 5 years, so that it could go on indefinitely,” Mr Pugh said.

“The Commonwealth and NSW rely on the RFA to exempt forestry operations in north east NSW from the usual Commonwealth environmental assessment and approval requirements. “We say that where logging is occurring that is likely to significantly affect a matter of national environmental significance – like a listed threatened species – it will need to be referred to the Federal Minister for the Environment and be assessed under the provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act,” he said.

“Both governments have effectively rubber-stamped ongoing destruction of our forest ecosystems. It is appalling that in the face of the twin global crises of rapidly changing climatic conditions and biodiversity decline, that all they could do is agree to more of the same without considering the science,” Ms Russell said.

* * *

Roads and Maritime Services as predictable as ever

The recent discovery of a hitherto unknown species of tree in the Coffs Harbour hinterland has generated a degree of interest in certain quarters, mainly because they are about to be dug up to make way for the city’s Pacific Highway bypass.



Appeals for the highway route to be diverted in order to avoid the destruction of the rare forest remnant have been rejected by the RMS, which in turn has led to the trees being nominated for listing as critically endangered in an attempt to save them.

However, if we look back to similar calls to protect rare or endangered species in the path of the ‘upgrade’, and the intractability of the Roads and Maritime Services when facing such barriers, it would appear highly unlikely that any adjustment of the route will be considered. As a result, with calls for DNA testing likewise being rejected, these trees will likely disappear almost before they were discovered.

Looking back, readers will recall similar cases on the North Coast. For example, where the highway was built right through the middle of the endangered Coastal Emu’s habitat, a decision which if not directly causing the inevitable extinction of the population, has certainly provided a pretty solid nail for the coffin.

Then there was the discovery of 3 breeding populations of the endangered Coastal Petaltail Dragonfly within the proposed highway corridor north of Tucabia. The RMS had previously declared that the species was most likely locally extinct in the Valley, and continued to procrastinate over the issue while their bulldozers were set to work destroying all three sites.

Then of course, there was the infamous rejection of evidence that the proposed route north of Wardell would have a serious impact on Koalas, a species now predicted to become extinct in the wild within 30 years.

There are, no doubt, more cases we could quote but the RMS’s attitude, which Jodi Mitchell so aptly summed up with her classic song, “Big Yellow Taxi”, has remained stubbornly unyielding throughout. This latest proposal to ‘relocate’ the inconvenient trees from the Coffs Harbour bypass is a classic case of “*take all the trees and put them in a tree museum*”, and they have already paved a huge chunk of paradise to allow more emissions-intensive road transport.

So, when it comes to the inevitable local extinction of our iconic wildlife, we should erect a plaque in their memory on the highway stating: “RIP, courtesy of RMS”.

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