

December/January 1994/5



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Environs

P14/15

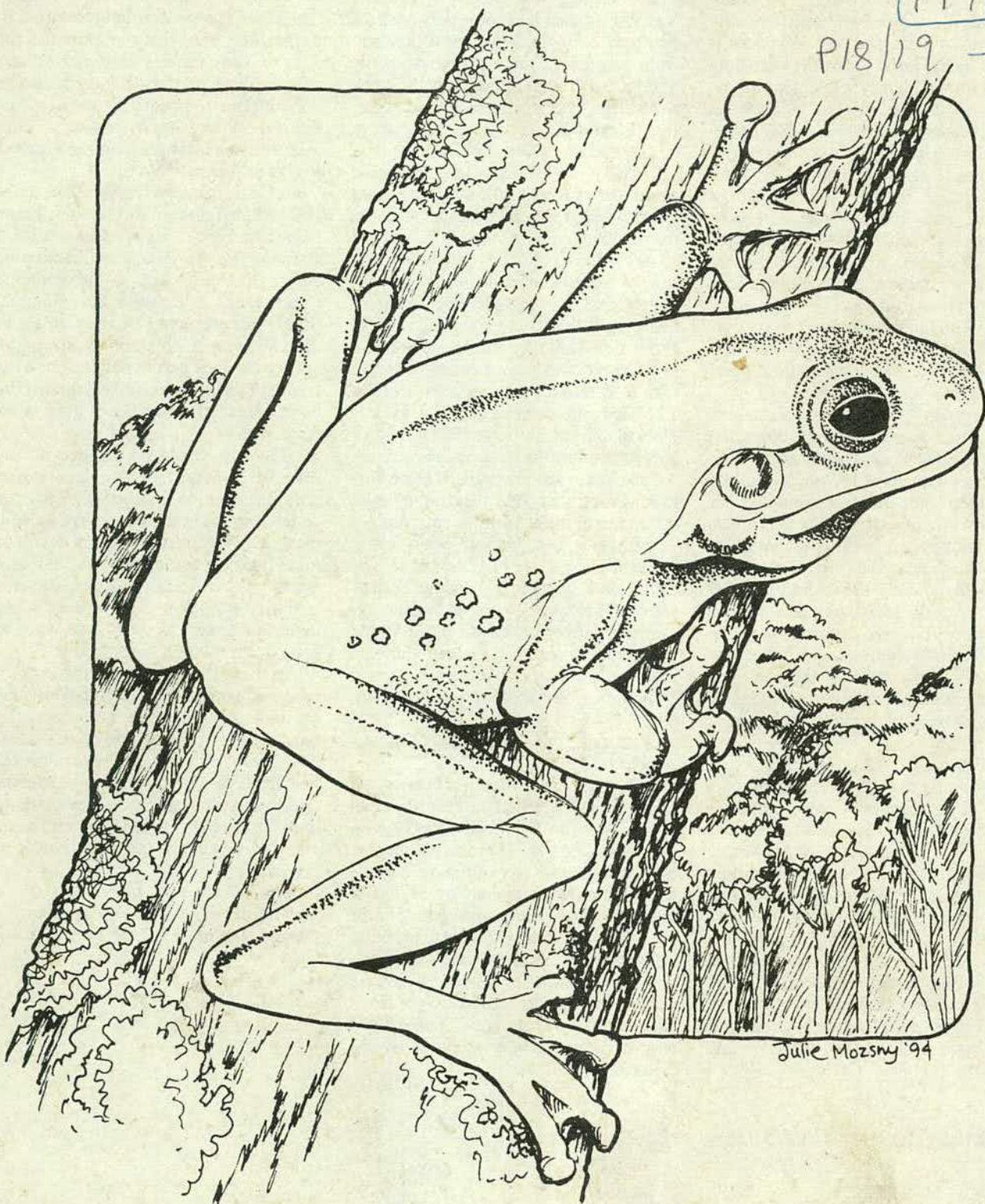
THIS ISSUE: ● Logging & Water, ● Greenhouse: Time to get Serious,
● Ralph Nader on GATT, ● Club Med Dead?, ● Chlorine Dangers

the north coast environment magazine

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P18/19 - Len S



Julie Mozsny '94

Logging operations pollute family's water

Water Rights - Case in Court

Land owners have generally considered there was nothing they could do if a piggery, for example, is given a licence to pollute upstream of them or a heavy irrigator is given a licence resulting in a depleted flow downstream. This may be about to change.

A case which is about to be decided in the Supreme Court may see the reinstatement of traditional water rights to farmers and landowners who depend on their river frontage for water for domestic or stock purposes. The Supreme Court heard the case of a landowner, Ms Bev van Son in July 1994. Ms van Son is claiming that NSW State Forests' logging operations on steep erodible slopes above her property have polluted her family's water supply with silt. She is hoping that this will be the conclusion of a long battle for her family's right to clean water.

In January 1984, Ms van Son and her husband purchased property bordering Mistake State Forest. Their property benefited from a small creek forming a boundary to their land, and they pumped water from that stream (Jaspers Creek) for domestic and rural purposes. Following logging operations in the catchment area in late 1986 and early 1987, the VanSon's and other landholders complained to the (then) Forestry Commission about pollution of their streams and in November 1987, Mr Justice Stein of the Land and Environment Court restrained logging on an interim basis in certain compartments of the forest.

In February 1988, Dr John McGarity, a soil scientist of high repute, prepared a report on the Jaspers Creek catchment area. Based upon that report, a further restraint was issued in 1989 by Mr Justice Hemmings in the Land and Environment Court, upon steep slope logging in certain forest compartments until an Environmental Impact Statement was prepared. In August 1992, the EIS was determined by the Forestry Commission and in March 1993, a draft Harvesting Plan produced.

"When I heard logging was going to begin again, I tried to tell State Forests about the problem. I went to a lot of

trouble and expense to have Dr McGarity make a report on the likely consequences if the logging went ahead," said Ms VanSon. "I sent his report to State Forests before logging began, but they still went ahead with the logging. After the next rain, yellow silt appeared in the creek and all the inconvenience started again. It's just not right for a public authority to be allowed to do this," she said.

In May 1993, Dr McGarity prepared a preliminary report following his further inspections of the area which indicated proposed logging on steep slopes would cause serious pollution of streams and risk of permanent damage to soil and aquatic environments. Despite this report being made known to the Environment Protection Authority and State Forests, a pollution control licence was issued and a final Harvesting Plan prepared. In June 1994 logging commenced and in July 1994 significant rain fell and Ms VanSon's pumping hole in the stream became silted. An injunction was granted and State Forests advised that their "intention" was not to log in the area for twenty years.

However, Ms VanSon's view is that much of the damage had been done, and the advised "intentions" of State Forests were not binding. She feared further logging and further pollution, so the Court proceedings continued as she required a permanent solution to the problem and could not accept mere statements of intent.

Her case was based upon two legal principles:

Her rights as a Riparian Owner and Common law rights in Nuisance. Riparian Owner rights are from traditional English Common Law where farmers and anyone owning land with river frontage had the right to use the water that flowed past. If an upstream owner caused pollution or caused the flow to be depleted to the point where the downstream owner's flow was no longer suitable for his needs, then the downstream owner would have a claim against the upstream one. This helped ensure fair use of the water for all and discouraged polluters.

These "Riparian Rights" were thought to be extinguished in NSW when the Water Act gave control of rivers to the State. The general interpretation of the law has been that the State has the right to issue licences to irrigate (Water Resources Department) and licences to pollute (Environmental Protection Authority) without legally having to consider or necessarily preserve the Riparian Rights of downstream users.

A clause in the Water Act 1986, states that certain rights are absolute -including "riparian type" rights. Ms vanSon's Barrister, Mr Tim Robertson, has argued before Justice Cohen in the Supreme Court, that, under NSW law, Riparian Rights are preserved by the Clause. In other words, a pollution or irrigation licence can only permit pollution and the taking of water to such an extent that the basic water rights of others are not interfered with.

The case could be decided at any time...It is important that landowners note the decision because if traditional water rights for landowners are upheld, then the government could well decide to make a simple amendment to the Water act to wipe them out! If this happens, everyone's voice will be needed to say loud and clear "No Way, we want to keep our traditional water rights".

In these drought times, the maintenance of water rights for all landowners on rivers is even more important. The reinstatement of traditional water rights will mean that operators with licences will have to be responsible to downstream users, but surely that's a fair thing to ask and certainly will help our rivers, many of which are far from healthy at present.

Compiled from the office of NVCA with thanks to Ms Bev VanSon, Lyn Orrego, David Leach, Tim Robertson.



Ti-Trees Trashed

World's worst destruction of old growth forest

The world's worst destruction of a single old growth species, *melulucea alternafoli*, Australia's unique natural Ti-Tree is almost complete according to a two month survey by the North Coast Chemical Coalition.

The survey says about 95 per cent of natural bush stands, particularly on Forestry Crown leases have been chain-sawed and hacked down or irretrievably damaged in the past three to five years.

A spokesperson for the NCCC, Mr. Bob Cummins, said the survey was conducted with assistance of traditional Ti-Tree harvesters complaining about the clearing of forests, some five hundreds years old, by contractors for major plantations.

Vertical demand had placed the native species at risk, particularly in the Bungawalbyn area near Corakai, he said. "In Ti Tree forests from Port Macquarie to Stanthorpe there is massive destruction because of the demand for oil to mix with mainly inferior plantation oils, and for seed stock," he said.

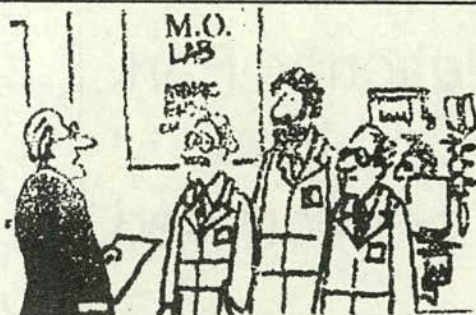
The NCCC is calling on Federal Environment Minister, Mr. John Faulkner to strip the NSW Forestry Corporation of its control of wetland forests. It claims there is no protection of old growth or recent growth *melulucea* and a complete vandalism of wetlands for vested interests.

The NCCC says it is doubtful if ever in the history of mankind that a single species has been reduced in such a short time.

Contractors using chain saws, often dipped in oil and cutting trees to stumps are ruining eco systems that have taken millions of years to develop. Forestry's abrogation of control is criminal vandalism the survey states.

North Coast Chemical Coalition press release 10.10.1994. For further information: contact Bob Cummins, 066-855218.

Wild Cattle Creek Bitterness



The public and the press is demanding the truth... I want you to come up with three versions of it

1: SOD OFF's View

The trashing of compartment 579 in Wild Cattle Creek State Forest may have been legal only because suitable laws will not be enacted or enforced in the present political climate; although in breach of the National Forest Policy statement. Morally, on the other hand, there is no way it could be condoned. Forest that was assessed as Old Growth by department of Conservation and Land Management, and of High Conservation Value by National Parks and Wildlife Service, has been trashed, and no amount of hindsight, no amount of re-creation by the future generations denied its splendour, can ever bring it back. State Forests, in their actions and inaction have betrayed the responsibility placed upon them to manage the forests in a proper and sustainable manner, for the benefit of present and future generations. *Society of Dedicated, Obstinate Forest Folk (SOD OFF)*

2: NCEC's View

Lyn Orrego, representative of NCEC, has resigned from the Forest Advisory committee as a result of Wild Cattle Creek logging. The North Coast Environment Council has written to Minister Souris withdrawing its representative on the state Government's Forest Policy Advisory Committee and censuring Mr Souris for his blatant and willful support for the breaching of the National Forest Policy statement by his endorsing the logging in compartment 579, Wild Cattle Creek. In his press releases, Mr Souris claimed: "there is absolutely no basis to any claims that this area should be reserved", even when a submission from NPWS stating categorically that the area should be reserved for its Old Growth High Conservation value was put before him prior to making that false claim.

NCEC also censure Mr Souris for misleading the public by implying that Wild Cattle Creek is not Old Growth Forest when a report from Mr K Pitman of CALM (his own department) was before him which stated the non-rainforest component of the majority of the compartment qualifies as Old Growth under the National Forest Policy statement definition.

NCEC notes that it no longer has faith in an advisory process where expert scientific facts are ignored by the Minister.

3: NVCA's View

Nambucca Valley Conservation Association are concerned that old growth forests are being logged as a result of an inept assessment of resources by State Forests and a subsequent inappropriate and unfeasible agreement with Boral to supply timber. These fears are confirmed by comments by Graham King of State Forests to Radio 2NVR regarding the operations in compartment 579, Wild Cattle Creek State Forest:

"We're just so desperate at the moment to maintain continuity of wood to industry, that we've got to pick up these small remaining pieces that are scattered throughout the forest" (referring to unlogged [or old growth] areas). When asked where the timber would be going, Mr King replied, "It will be going to a mill at South Grafton...a Boral mill."

NSW is losing 60 hectares of public old growth forest every day (or 20,000 hectares per year), especially in areas where there are no active and informed environmental groups to scrutinise the logging operations. A moratorium should be placed on logging of all public old growth forest in NSW immediately as the value of these forests far outweighs the short term economic benefits (if any) provided by logging operations.

National Park Values Compromised

Environment Minister Chris Hartcher is to allow Kempsey Shire Council to use groundwater supplies from beneath Hat Head National Park. Stage 5 water restrictions have had to be implemented across the whole of the Macleay Shire. This involves a ban on all water use outside the home with re-used bath water and washing water only, to be used on gardens. All taps on public reserves and public showers have been capped to prevent undue wastage.

President of the Three Valleys Branch of the National Parks Association, Mr Terry Parkhouse, said the bores were a belated attempt to address the water shortage.

"Water restrictions should have been in place long before the Macleay started to stop flowing. Then emergency measures, such as sinking bores in the National Park, would not have been required.

"It would be more cost effective to treat saline bores than sink new ones. Memtec, an Australian company selling filtration equipment all over the world, have told me using reverse osmosis to filter water from a saline bore would keep the supply up to standard.

The National Parks Association objected to bores in the Hat Head National Park because the park is there for the conservation of flora and fauna.

"A development in a National Park is anathema - the bores are the thin end of the wedge. Any lowering of the water table could deplete the resources for the park's vegetation."

Mr Parkhouse said if it could be proved the bores did not affect the park, and if they were to be on the road reserve, the branch might not object - but it opposed on principle the exploitation of National Parks.

"One good thing out of this drought is that we are going to use water much more wisely - as a precious resource and not something to be wasted," concluded Mr Parkhouse.

from: *Macleay Argus* 4/11/94

Unwanted Development of Natural Creeks

A new group has been formed by concerned residents of the Valla area to try to curb uncontrolled development in their region. The Valla Environment Group, have put submissions to Nambucca Council on its proposed development and rezoning of two natural areas:

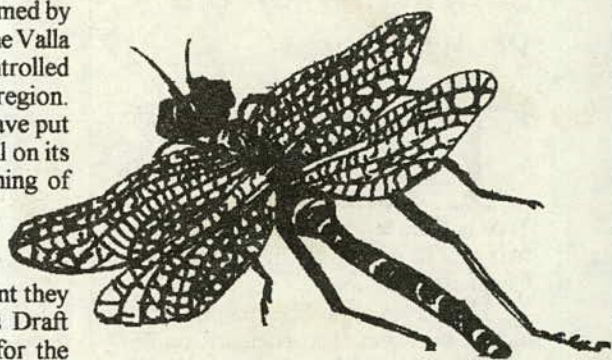
1. South Valla (Deep Creek)
2. Oyster Creek (North Valla)

In the South Valla development they are seeking to change Council's Draft Local Environment Plan (LEP) for the area and implement:

- More environmental protection areas including broadened wildlife corridors, vegetation buffers between Deep Creek Estuary and wetlands, and setting aside Nature Blocks within the urban area.
- Proper drainage and stormwater diversion away from Deep Creek estuary and wetlands.
- Proper planning for future sewerage and water problems, (with increased population)
- Larger residential blocks to encourage tree cover.
- A greener development, so as to protect flora and fauna and the Deep Creek estuary.

In the Oyster Creek Development (Western side of Oyster Creek to Highway) Council wants to change the zoning to Rural Residential which would allow small rural blocks and possible urban development in the future. Valla Environment Group are seeking a change to the zoning from Rural Residential to (7F) Coastal Foreshore Environmental Protection. The reason for this is:

- This area has been identified as an area of very high conservation value with many endangered fauna including Koala, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Spotted-tailed Quoll, Red Goshawk, Square-tailed Kite, Troughton's Eptesicus (Little Bat) and the Queensland Blossom Bat. Also many vegetation communities have been identified as worth saving in this area.
- Any development at all will impact severely on the unique landlocked Oyster Creek with the inevitable stormwater and



residential run-off as well as on-site effluent discharge into this pristine waterway. This would mean the destruction and pollution of one of the last remaining clean waterways in the Nambucca Valley.

- As development proceeds in the Valla village area and urbanisation of the South Valla area occurs, it is important to set aside a Coastal Reserve on both sides of Oyster Creek (eastern and western areas). This would provide not only protection for flora and fauna, but also a natural area for local people and visitors for recreational and eco-tourism possibilities into the future.

You can support the submissions made by Valla Environment Group or make your own. Write a letter to Council and let them know your views on this.

*Contact: Valla Environment Group
Sue Francis, Valla Beach Road, Valla,
NSW 2448.*

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The Rainforest Seed Collective Workshop



Experience

by Grace Bartram

Recently I did a workshop with the Rainforest Seed Collective, established seven years ago by Johanna Treweeke and Mark Baird. It is run on a non-profit, voluntary basis, assisted by one grant from Greening Australia in 1991 and a second this year from Save the Bush, an agency of the Conservation and Land Management Department. Johanna and Mark have planted over 20,000 trees and established three community nurseries.

In the workshop we first learnt how to collect rainforest seeds - but not from National Parks or State Forests where you require a licence to do so. Surprisingly, seeds can be collected in ordinary council parks, hospital grounds and from surviving trees growing along roads.

Most people involved came from the newer suburbs of Coffs Harbour, keen on doing something to plant and re-establish trees that once grew prolifically in their areas and also to learn how they could play a part in regreening other areas. The seeds we prepared for planting were Lilly Pilly, Scrub Cherry, Red Apple, White Cedar, Rough Fruited Pittosporum, Vieny Wilkeas, Jackwood, Black Apple, Kurrajong and Flame Trees, studying the leaves of each so we could begin learning to identify trees. We rubbed pulp away with our fingers, peeled off tougher husks to the detriment of our finger nails, and used pliers to crack open the real toughies. We learned to prepare the potting mix, to

spread and place the seeds in small pots, remember to label each with type of seed, date planted, where collected. I found the day absorbingly interesting and worthwhile doing.

As the sun vanished behind the mountain (we were in the chilly Bellinger Valley) we were planting tiny seedlings into larger pots. Each of us was allowed to take home and nurture one of the pots we'd prepared. I chose Davidsons Plum. I have persuaded one to flourish in my garden and have a special interest in this species, which birds just love for the juicy fruit from which great jam can be made - although I don't advise eating them raw, unless you want a puckered-up mouth for several hours.

The Rainforest Seed Collective Newsletter comes out regularly and puts seed collectors and distributors in touch with each other. You can, if you wish, sell your collected seeds to others for five dollars a packet, or you can give them back to Johanna and Mark to grow. Over 150 species are presently available and by subscribing to the newsletter you can learn a whole lot more about this project and what others are doing.

The Australian Nature Conservation Agency has just released figures that are disturbing - Australia may lose another 4 billion trees by the end of this decade, with about 500,000 hectares of bush being cleared each year. NSW is among the States with the highest level of clearing. Estimates suggest that, since a planting program began five years ago, two billion trees have been harvested or removed for agricultural land usage and just half a billion trees have been replanted.

All of us left full of admiration for what Johanna Treweeke and Mark Baird are doing and their dedication to this service.

For information on the next RSC course phone 066 552 233.

Increased danger from ultraviolet radiation

Leaked research from a top laboratory of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the USA indicates that sun-screens may not provide protection from excessive ultraviolet radiation (UV-B) resulting from the thinning ozone layer.

According to Ozone Action, a non-profit organisation concerned with UV radiation and the destruction of the ozone layer, the research also states that UV-B appears to suppress the immune system of animals and humans despite the use of sun-screens. According to this research, the use of sun-screens may even damage DNA.

Already documented is evidence that increased UV-B from ozone loss causes eye damage and skin cancer, and significant increases in both have been predicted. Researchers from Oregon recently showed that UV-B is killing off the eggs of frogs and toads, known to be in decline in the Cascade Mountains of that state. If UV-B can suppress the human immune system, this would have consequences for infectious diseases and vaccination programs.

NASA and NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) both measured record levels of ozone depletion worldwide in the northern spring and summer of 1993.

According to documents obtained by Ozone Action through the Freedom of Information Act, NASA scientists were so concerned about the potential for UV-B exposure that they urged the EPA to issue a public health warning before the summer of 1993 - but were unsuccessful.

EPA in December persuaded the DuPont Company to create chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs - one of the most powerful ozone-depleting chemicals) for a full year beyond DuPont's promised US phase-out. The Clinton administration was concerned about a possible consumer backlash from expensive automobile air conditioner repairs if the CFCs needed to recharge them became rare and expensive.
from greenleft news via pegasus computer network

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Environment... ...Government

*Some thoughts from North Coast
Environment Council's esteemed President
Mr Terry Parkhouse*

At the Global Level:

The Rio conference showed governments for what they are: short term thinkers, economically biased and pragmatic opportunists.

At the Australian government level:- The environment was taken off the agenda. There was an admission that we cannot meet our international obligation to reduce CO2 levels by the year 2000.

The one billion trees programme will not come close to compensating for the four billion trees that will be cleared for agriculture, urban development and forestry by the year 2000.

At the NSW State Government level:- The environment was never on the agenda of the Coalition and indeed they have tried to legislate against it with the TIIP Act, Resource Security for the big players in the timber industry via wood supply agreements, and a "Claytons" Wilderness declaration.

At the Local Government level:- Despite the heroic efforts of the few Green councillors the environment is ignored in the "growth is good" philosophy and the race to attract the biggest development or accommodate the most people. Generally their State of the Environment Reports are pathetic.

Public Participation

Public participation is enshrined in the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, however, what the public expects and what the public gets are poles apart.

Whilst it has brought some successes and the NSW Act is better than other State's, public participation at all government levels is tokenism. We in the environment movement know it as we are the ones who participate and respond to the surveys, the enquiries, the committees and the forums and suffer the disappointments of being ignored.

Just one example among hundreds was the Wilderness public participation process which over a protracted period attracted an enormous response. Approximately 70% of the respondents were in favour of the NPWS recommended areas of Wilderness. The State Government's greatly reduced version of the recommended areas announced in December has now been further reduced following National Party and 4 Wheel Drive Clubs influence.

I can't resist adding another example. Look-At-Me-Now Headland Ocean Outfall has had referendums, demonstrations and a commission of enquiry all

adequately revealing the public's attitude, but is being ignored by the Coffs Harbour City Council.

So where do we go from here? From the EDO's workshop on Environmental Law I will use a note I recorded that: Laws reflect community attitudes or if they do not, change the laws or the people who make them.

The Letter W

Have you ever stopped to think of the many issues that start with the letter W. Water, Waste, Wetlands, Woodchips and Wilderness.

Your Favourite Charity!

The NCEC has been awarded tax deductibility status and is now deemed to have charity status. This is a great boost to our credibility as an important community organisation and allows us to be more attractive as a fundraiser. It is now up to member groups to impress upon their members and friends to start donating any of their excess funds to the NCEC and to use our tax deductibility advantage. Send to: The Treasurer, P McEntee, North Coast Environment Council Inc in NSW, PO Box 400, Wauchope. 2446.

The Dunggir Conservation Proposal

What does 'Dunggir' mean in the Gumbaynggr language?

Why was Mistake State Forest so named?

Who are the rightful owners of this land?

Is the soil remaining in place?

Is there any Old Growth remaining?

Are State Forests really logging rainforest and Old Growth?

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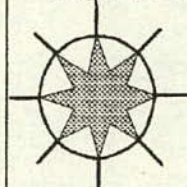
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CLUB MED DEAD ?



A long, hard-fought battle against the proposed Club Med resort at Byron Bay has finally been won. Justice Mahla Pearlman, Chief Judge of the Land and environment court, ruled that Byron Council had failed in its duty in granting development consent to Holiday Villages (Byron Bay) Pty Ltd to build the 416-room Club Med resort.

The decision, handed down on September 30, has been greeted with elation by members of Byron Shire Businesses of the Future (BSBF)

the group that spearheaded the court challenge against the resort.

BSBF president, Phil Oliver, said "our victory has been to show that the environment has to be protected and legislation needs to be followed, no matter how much money you've got or how much political influence you wield."

BSBF successfully argued that the 91 hectare Club Med development should not be approved without an EIS and a Fauna Impact Statement. The Court accepted that environ-

mental damage to the habitat of six endangered species had not been addressed, and that Council had failed in its duty to ensure that all due processes were followed.

BSBF also argued that the development should not have been approved because it encroached on a Coastal Lands Zone (where tourist developments are prohibited), and because drainage works on the site would result in sulphuric acid from the acid sulphate soil.

In the wake of the Land and Environment's finding

against Holiday Villages, the Tweed Heads chamber of commerce now wants to bring Club Med to the Tweed coast instead. Its president, Jade Hurley, wants the developers to consider the Sahben site, north of Bogangar, as an alternative. This site, owned by Lenon Pty Ltd, was approved by Tweed Council for a major development in 1992. The development application has since expired.... So expect to hear more about a resurrected Club Med in the future!

from : *TREE* Vol 5 October 1994

Nambucca: New Water Plan

The Nambucca Valley Conservation Association has written to Nambucca Council asking for an extension for submissions to its recently released Draft Local Environment Plan. This plan sets out development of, as yet untouched, land until the next century and has ideas for two new townships in Nambucca shire!

NVCA wish the date to be extended until early 1995, when the findings of Sinclair, Knight and Partners' "Future

Water Supply Study" are due to be released, and say that by doing this, Council would be able to integrate a knowledge of the available water with the amount of available land.

"Unless you ensure that sufficient water is available to a larger population, there is no point making land available for development. If water supplies cannot keep up with demand, we are likely to face water shortages even in times of normal rainfall," stated NVCA's Acting Secretary, Ms Pope.

"The decision regarding the rezoning of extra land must be made in conjunction with the findings of the water report, and not before it is considered and approved by the community and by Council", concluded Ms Pope.

Residents of the Nambucca Valley are asked to make submissions as soon as possible to let the Council know their views on future development in their shire. A copy of the draft LEP is available in the NVCA office; phone 647808.



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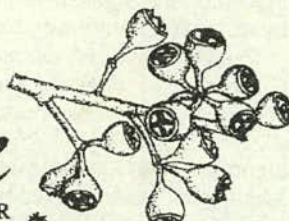
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Reanimating the Dead Heart

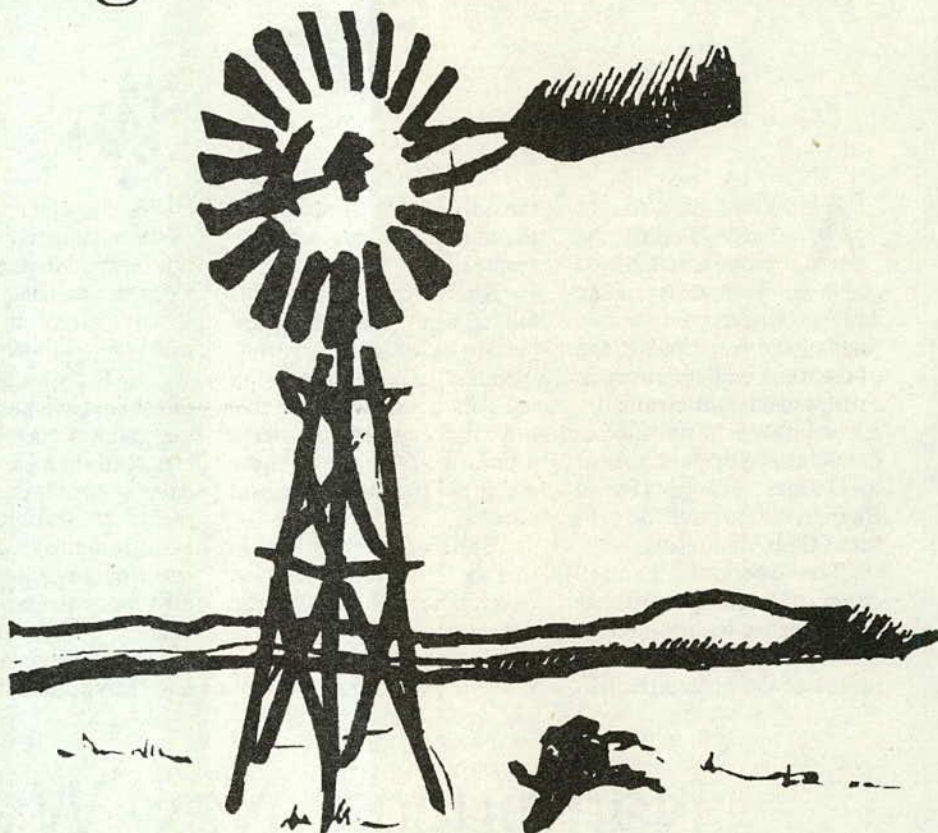
The future of Australia's rangelands is ecotourism and retirement towns, not a dying livestock industry, John Auty writes.

A radical and ingenious plan to destock Australia's rangelands can help restore a sensitive but degraded environment, solve an intractable feral animal problem and create a tourism boom, if only some imaginative thinking can permeate federal government inertia.

In March 1993 Prime Minister Paul Keating committed the Australian Government to 'work cooperatively with... governments, traditional owners, industry, the farming community and conservation groups to develop a national strategy, including an action plan, for the ecologically sustainable use and conservation of Australia's rangelands'. For these purposes 'rangelands' has been classified as those areas where crop farming is not widely practised, covering approximately 70 per cent of Australia.

In November 1993 the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation organised a workshop on sustainable use and management of Australia's rangelands. Several valuable papers were submitted but, as might be expected when scientists and producers who rely for a livelihood on the sheep and cattle industries consider the future, there were few serious calls for the semi-arid and arid zones to be destocked. However, there was no evidence that the sheep industry could be sustained throughout, or in any section of, the zone or that cattle grazing could be other than marginal. All would continue to degrade the zone through loss of soil and native flora and fauna.

The committee established in response to the Keating initiative released an issues paper for comment in February 1994, which was followed by a series of one-day rangelands consultations around Australia. At each workshop those attending posed questions for discussion that will be collated for presentation to government. An attempt was made to attract a wide spectrum of participants; in bush venues



pastoralists and other residents of the rangelands were in the majority, whilst in the cities most of attendees were scientists.

Meanwhile, Keating set up a committee to call for submissions from groups and individuals to celebrate the year 2001, the centenary of federation. Joan Kirner chaired the committee, and we have now the outcome of its first deliberations. The banality of the recommendations on celebration dates and a national photo archive do not deserve comment. The proposals to duplicate with rail the excellent road that already runs from Alice Springs to Darwin when most of western Queensland and northern South Australia lack a reliable tourist road, and to clean up the Murray-Darling -- which must be cleaned up anyway -- are neither innovative nor inspiring in their scope. It is little wonder that the committee's recommendations were made by Joan Kirner, and not by Paul Keating, because they were a nine-second wonder.

But buried in the pending tray of the committee in Canberra is at least one positive proposal on 'Reanimating the Dead Heart'. It calls for the total removal of introduced animals -- both domestic

and feral -- from the degraded semi-arid zone and the arid zone it surrounds. The semi-arid zone is defined by a line commencing on the Western Australian coast south of Broome, passing through Halls Creek to Camooweal on the Northern Territory-Queensland border, south to Wilcannia in NSW, west to Kalgoorlie and north west to Carnarvon on the WA coast. The area is 3.4 million square km, or 43 per cent of Australia.

Included within these boundaries are the Simpson, Great Sandy, Gibson and Victoria deserts, unoccupied today even by Aboriginals and constituting 20 per cent of Australia and the second-largest desert area in the world. These deserts have never been occupied by pastoralists and never will be. The semi-arid zone is occupied by about 1000 individual grazing enterprises based on extensive cattle and sheep grazing. The area carries about three per cent of Australia's sheep flocks and four per cent of cattle herds in average seasons. However, the region is subject to long periods of drought, when stock numbers may fall by as much as 50 to 80 per cent.

Recent analyses and local discussions with resident graziers suggest that prob-

“The area carries about three per cent of Australia's sheep flocks and four per cent of cattle herds”

ably half of properties are now unviable. Many properties have virtually ceased to maintain improvements developed in years of good rainfall and terms of trade. Most properties receive government inputs of administration and research, which cost taxpayers between \$8000 and \$52,000 per property per annum.

The hopeless financial position of these sheep and cattle industries can be expected to be resolved over time as pastures, property improvements and terms of trade deteriorate and graziers are forced to leave their properties. However, these woes are only part of the sorry story. Throughout the semi-arid zone and to a lesser extent in the deserts are found large populations of other herbivores (rabbits, goats, feral horses, feral donkeys, feral camels), carnivores (feral dogs, feral cats, foxes), and omnivores (feral pigs). Each of these species contributes to steady deterioration of terrain and native fauna and flora and will continue to do so.

In most regions, particularly along watercourses, there is a wide variety of weed species including grasses, forbs and shrubs. Even the introduced pasture plants may be classified as weeds if they do not provide suitable habitat for native fauna or compete successfully with native flora. Vast areas of terrain are subject to erosion. South Australians and Victorians will recall the dust cloud 500 km long and 200 km wide and estimated to contain 30 million tonnes of topsoil that blotted out the sun in June 1994. The total of plant species at risk of extinction may only be estimated. A recent estimate for the NSW section under discussion suggests that 40 species of mammals, 78 of birds, 23 of reptiles and 15 of frogs are on the verge of extinction.

It has long been clear to most in the scientific community that the fragile lands of the semi-arid zone cannot sustain grazing by sheep and cattle. These industries have been able to survive only because tapping underground water has brought more and more fragile ecosystems into exploitation. From time to time new developments in infrastructure and farm improvements have given graziers a

breathing space. Station properties have been amalgamated under single management, staff numbers have been reduced to bare bones. There are no new developments in the pipeline and this has triggered the Keating initiative.

Desperate problems create desperate answers. In recent years there have been calls for a reduction in introduced grazing numbers and replacement of sheep and cattle by a kangaroo industry. Eminent scientists are calling for destocking and the creation of large national parks. All of these solutions beg the question of feral and introduced wild animals.

A rational new approach is required and this is set out in 'Reanimating the Dead Heart'. The semi-arid lands without exception must be destocked by complete removal of domestic cattle and sheep. Following this, all artificial waters, except those shown to be required by mining, tourist and retirement town developments, must be permanently closed by pulling or otherwise destroying wells and bores and by bulldozing earth tanks. During this process feral animals, driven onto remaining natural waters, must be humanely eradicated.

We wait to be told that such a program carried out in close collaboration with the grazing and scientific communities is utopian. Any student of Australian history knows that, examined in abstract terms, all development has been utopian. In the semi-arid zone utopians set out to establish a sheep and cattle grazing indus-

try that would live for ever. We know now that such visions are illusory. Either as a nation we carry out a destocking of the semi-arid zone or nature and terms of trade will do it for us, and when it is achieved we will have another series of deserts to name.

The Kirner committee, or its successor, is prepared to spend large sums on circuses such as a photo archive or a north-south railway. These many millions of dollars, spent wisely, could stop the present process of total environmental destruction in the semi-arid zone and bring about its rehabilitation. The future is ecotourism and retirement towns, not a dying livestock industry.

John Auty, author of 'Reanimating the Dead Heart', is a former assistant director of the Department of Primary Industries and Chief Commissioner for Land Conservation in the Northern Territory.

from FRONTLINE newspaper (September 1994), published monthly in Melbourne, by a number of trade unions, with support from community organisations, and is distributed free of charge throughout the labour movement and through community groups.

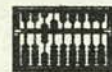
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GREENHOUSE ALERT:

Global Warming is a Global Warning

Scientists, politicians and economists recently gathered in New Zealand for the Greenhouse 94 conference from October 10 to 14. Discussions at the conference confirmed that the heat is on: sea levels are rising, climate patterns are shifting, and the atmosphere is heating up. **Zanny Begg** reports on the implications of global warming.

Ben Elton, in his best-selling novel *Stark*, was able to describe the earth as a stinking trash can of multinational companies - with an ozone layer in tatters, sea temperatures rising and pollution transforming the air into a toxic soup - and keep it funny. But when straight-faced scientists begin to talk about the threat global warming poses to the planet there isn't much to laugh about.

Two thousand five hundred scientists working for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a statement on September 14 that told the world what we didn't want to know: carbon dioxide levels are on the rise and the world's climate is at a serious risk from human activity. This was confirmed by discussions at the Greenhouse 94 conference, convened by CSIRO, which concluded that sea levels and temperatures in the Oceania region have been rising steadily since the beginning of the century.

Elwin Jackson attended the Greenhouse 94 conference for Greenpeace. His prediction for the future, if no reduction of greenhouse gases occurs, is as stark as Ben Elton's. "In the year 2040", he explained to *Green Left Weekly*, "we could see famine stalking through South-East Asia. We could see more droughts, increased flooding, rapidly changing weather conditions and more pests. The conditions we see in many parts of Africa could come to this part of the world. The human cost of this would be horrific."

"In ecological terms we could see entire life forms like coral die out if the sea temperatures rise by just a few degrees. These are just some snapshots of the crisis we are facing."

A report published in August by the Washington-based Climate Institute estimated that global warming over the next 80 years could lead to the destruction of fisheries, increase storm damage and displace millions of people.

The report noted that 5700 square kilometres of India's coastal regions are at risk of inundation, which would leave 7.1 million people homeless. In Vietnam 10% of the population could be displaced by rising sea levels. A sea level rise of one metre could deplete Malaysia's mangrove cover and severely erode its coast. 3.3 million people living in Indonesia's coastal regions could be displaced by sea level rises and billions of dollars' worth of damage could be inflicted on houses, ports, offices, roads and railways. A one metre rise would threaten 21% of the agricultural land and 14% of the population in Bangladesh.

These unnerving figures are brought home to Australia by some of the research carried out by Dingle Smith, a senior fellow at the Australian National University Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies who attended Greenhouse 94 to give a paper on flooding.

Smith closely studied the Hawkesbury Nepean and Queanbeyan areas of NSW to assess damage caused by flooding under an enhanced greenhouse effect. He worked from a scenario from the CSIRO which looked at rainfall patterns when CO₂ in the atmosphere doubles (called the 2 x CO₂ time scale).

"When we had CSIRO produce for the first time estimates of what greenhouse change would mean for rainfall intensities, we learned that intense rainfall bursts would wincrease fairly dramatically in the time scale of 2 x CO₂, which is roughly over the next 50 years. These changes in rainfall would be matched by increases in the flood intensity", Smith explained.

"The worst case scenario during the 2 x CO₂ time scale would mean that flood intensity would go up by a factor of about four. Because we have a large database on all the houses in the Hawkesbury

Nepean and Queanbeyan regions, we were able to assess the implications of the new scenario.

"The base line for assessing flooding in the Hawkesbury Nepean region is the one in 100 years flood, a rare flood. If a one in 100 years flood happened tomorrow, around 1700 residences would have water over the floor. In the 2 x CO₂ time scale, this would rise to close to 8500. Because of the overall geography of the region we estimate that a one in 100 years flood tomorrow would destroy completely around 70 houses. In the 2 x CO₂ time scale, that figures climbs to 2500", Smith continued.

Smith points out the social implications of flooding: "If the building actually fails, the stress to the occupants can be very severe. In Ipswich in Queensland during the 1974 floods, people lost their entire houses. The owners were left in the terrible position where they were paying a mortgage on a house that had been swept away, they had nowhere to live and the only tangible thing they owned was a flood-prone block. The worse flooding gets, the worse the social effects are."

Smith's findings, combined with the Climate Institutes report and the warnings coming from the IPCC, present a pretty disturbing picture. The amount of information on global warming, like the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, is increasing rapidly. And all of it is bad news.

The basic science behind global warming has been pretty clearly established. Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases like methane and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere have a natural greenhouse effect; radiation from the sun passes through the atmosphere and warms the earth's surface. Much of the heat is radiated back into space, but greenhouse gases trap some of it.

Without the natural greenhouse effect, the earth would be too cold for human life. Since the start of the industrial revolution, however, human society has burned around 60 thousand million tonnes

of carbon-based fuel, greatly increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This creates what has been called the "enhanced greenhouse effect", which accelerates the heating of the earth.

In scientific circles there is very broad agreement that the earth's atmosphere is warming up. Study after study has confirmed this fact.

For example, Dr Neville Nicholls, leader of the climate research group for the Bureau of Meteorology in Melbourne, has been involved in a study of observed climate change in the south-west Pacific. His studies show that there has been a definite warming throughout the region.

"Ours was the first study", he explained, "to look at all the elements. We looked at precipitation, cloudiness, sea surface temperature and even the temperature below the ocean surface to see whether there is a consistent pattern of change."

"We had to be so thorough because all of the data is somehow suspect on its own. We hoped that by looking at all the different types of data together we could see whether they would confirm each other. And that is just what we found. This century, particularly since 1951, there is clear evidence of a 0.4 C to 0.8 C warming throughout the south-west Pacific."

While a 0.4 C increase in temperature may not sound great, it is only a 0.5 C increase in the ocean temperature which has been linked to the current drought in Australia.

What there is not broad agreement on in scientific circles, however, is whether the present warming is the start of the enhanced greenhouse effect.

Nicholls is cautious on this score. "We can't tell for sure whether the warming of the south-west Pacific is just a fluke or whether it is due to human activities. We can say for sure that the changes we are seeing are not inconsistent with the patterns of change you would expect from the enhanced greenhouse effect."

Smith looks at the question in another way. "Very slight changes in the temperature of oceans can have enormous



effects on the distribution of fish. The same kind of distribution effects apply to forests and agricultural crops.

"What you also have to consider is that we are already changing the environment through a multitude of other effects. Global fisheries are already overwhelmed by ocean pollution, over-fishing and so on. Coral is already dying because of other causes. How will we be able to measure the effects of global warming in an environment seriously degraded? Sometimes you get the feeling we are arguing about finer scientific points while the crisis goes on around us."

Greens (WA) Senator Dee Margetts believes that there has never been so much scientific agreement in modern times as there has been on climate change. "Climate change is not the sort of thing you can put in a test tube and say we have done this experiment 50 or 100 times and this is the outcome. What we can say quite clearly is that the greenhouse scenarios that have been put forward are consistent with what is happening now."

Rather than fiddling with finer scientific points while the planet burns, many scientists, environmentalists and social justice activists are arguing for change now. Peter Kinrade, Australian Conservation Foundation member on the National Greenhouse Advisory Panel, believes, "Governments have used scientific uncertainty to try to get let off the hook".

The magnitude of the problem means that waiting for absolute scientific certainty may well jeopardise society's potential for action, as Margetts argues: "By the time global warming becomes so bloody obvious that governments have to take action, it might just be too late".

Action from governments on greenhouse emissions has been very slow. The IPCC has released a report which says that even the most ambitious targets on the negotiating table for reducing greenhouse gases will not prevent global warming.

In Berlin in March, the next major international meeting on global warming will be held, but environmentalists are not very optimistic that strong action will be taken on emission levels. Currently no agreements on greenhouse gases are binding. Most of the targets allow concentrations in the atmosphere to increase.

If Japan, the United States and the European Union achieve their target of stabilising CO₂ emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000, greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere will still go up for at least a century. If the British government meets its target of CO₂ reductions by the year 2000, it has said it expects to increase emissions after that date. Australian environment minister Senator John Faulkner opened the Greenhouse 94 conference by saying Australia would not reach its greenhouse gas reduction target by the year 2000.

Australia is one of the five worst greenhouse gas emitters in the world. In 1990 alone Australia produced 572 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. A greenhouse inventory of Australia revealed that forest destruction was contributed 25% of 1990 greenhouse gas emissions and that the energy sector 53%. Despite these figures, forest clearing continues, no strict controls have been placed on industry, and renewable energy options are largely ignored.

“We have a very skewed idea of value in our society”

Dingle Smith describes the inability of governments to act on global warming: “I don’t think the industrialised world, or the Third World for that matter, can really get a grip on cutting down the emissions in the way that needs to happen. And of course the longer they put it off, the more greenhouse gases that are emitted, and the harder it becomes. I think it is just too difficult for governments to respond.”

“Is the First World, which is already industrialised, going to turn to the Third World and say, ‘You can’t do that, you are going to be penalised’? Will the Australian coal industry hurt its profits and reduce emissions if it can’t be guaranteed action on a world scale? Senator Faulkner at the opening of the conference basically said that action in Australia is impossible. I think this is true of almost anywhere you can name in the world.”

“There is a lot of discussion about ‘no regret’ solutions, which are options that don’t cost anybody anything. Now there are limits to the free lunch. There isn’t much slack in the system, and I have a terrible suspicion that it will take too long for governments to act. Then of course we will have to deal with the impacts of a warmer world.”

A problem the size of global warming obviously deserves an equally massive response. But where will this response come from? At the Greenhouse 94 conference, pollution emission quotas and carbon taxes were put forward as a solution. Dr Brian Fisher, from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics, argued for tradeable pollution quotas to encourage industry to reduce pollution. Some environmental groups have called for a “green tax” to factor the cost of environmental destruction into industry.

But pollution quotas do not reduce overall pollution; they just parcel it out between different industries which have bought the “right” to pollute. The only way quotas can reduce overall pollution is if the government, or some other institution, actively buys up the quotas and does

not use them - not a likely scenario in a competitive world.

A carbon tax is intended as a disincentive for companies to pollute, but like most taxes would end up being paid by ordinary people who have no real control or choice about what fuels are used. Moreover, a study at the Australian National University estimated that a carbon tax would cause a 2% drop in GDP. Would the government stand aside and let the economy wear such a loss?

Dee Margetts feels that the market alone cannot stop pollution. “By themselves, industry won’t go green. The market signals, even with carbon taxes, are not enough unless you build in some regulation, some standards that demand energy efficiency. State or federal intervention is required to implement higher standards.”

This view is supported by Peter Kinrade, who feels that “the market itself is not going to be an appropriate mechanism to solve global warming”.

The market is driven by profit. There are obviously very few companies that will voluntarily limit their profits by reducing carbon emissions and greening their technology. That puts the ball in the government’s court to introduce legislation that will force industry to change. “The fact that damage to our environment gets counted as a plus to our GDP is a fault with the system”, says Margetts. “We have a very skewed idea of value in our society, and we need to change that.”

Karen Fletcher, the Democratic Socialist Party candidate for the seat of Marrickville in the NSW elections next March, agrees with Margetts on this point. “In our society, the most valuable thing is private profit. This is considered more valuable than even the future of the planet itself. Industry will continue to avoid paying the price for a degraded environment. We have to turn this around. We have to say that people and the environment come first.”

Fletcher believes that global warming can be solved only “when people have a democratic say in how the economy is run. The free market is a prison. It puts control over the environment behind the bars of profit. At the moment only those with a fat cheque book can make decisions.”

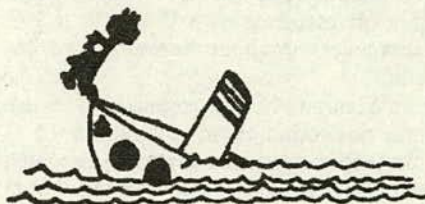
“We will stop global warming only when we have an integrated approach to it. We need to stop industry polluting, but we also need to increase public transport, we need to build energy efficient houses, we need to plant more trees. We will

achieve these changes only if people get involved on a massive scale and fight for them. The system as it is can provide no solution.”

In a final scene in the novel *Stark*, a capitalist, with a belated conscience, explains the end of the world: “Ever since the industrial revolution when James Watt boiled a kettle and invented acid rain, the natural life-forming parameters of our world have been like an hour glass, getting thinner and thinner. The question being would we squeeze past the middle and break through to the other side. Now if we had acted earlier, when it first got obvious that we were screwing up home sweet home then it might have been OK ... but we didn’t do it. We opted for constant profit and comfort, beer and skittles at the expense of the whole of future history. Anyway now the gap in the glass is plugged ... there isn’t a way through any more.”

In real life Elwin Jackson from Greenpeace presents us with a similar choice. “It is already too late to act on global warming in many ways. What we have to do now is make sure that warming does not get to the point where we can’t do anything about it. We have opportunities now, we have the warnings of the world’s best scientists saying what the implications of global warming will be. What we have to do now is to look at the potential for changes open to us and run with them. We have to act now to avoid the horror scenarios of the future.”

from: *Green Left Weekly* No 164,
October 26, 1994
via Pegasus computer network



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sub-arctic forest destruction

World's *Taiga* vanishing: Greenpeace

Vast forests of conifers - spruce, pine and fir sweep across the chilled northern reaches of Alaska and Canada, of Norway, Sweden and Finland. These boreal forests, or Taiga, also stretch from Russia to China, Mongolia, Korea and on to northern Japan, covering 15 million square kilometres of the planet.

Boreal forests are one of the three great forest types of the world. The others are tropical and temperate forests. But now the taiga are vanishing, claims a report by Greenpeace International. "Between 50% and 90% of the world's taiga will disappear as atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases rise. The rate of decline is still uncertain, but is likely to be rapid in many regions, and driven by massive fires, insect outbreaks and storms."

The exact mechanism by which carbon dioxide damages boreal forests is also unclear, but the report suggests that trouble in the taiga began back in 1976 with an "abrupt shift" in the global climate. Higher temperatures after 1976 sparked larger and more frequent fires throughout the boreal forests, followed by an increase in storms and damaging insect outbreaks. Gradually, the forests are weakening and declining.

The forest devastation triggered by carbon dioxide also adds to the carbon dioxide load in the atmosphere. The shrinking forests will also effect their plant and animal inhabitants. Endangered animals

such as the Peregrine Falcon and the Siberian Tiger will be particularly at risk, as will migratory birds which rely on the boggy wetlands of the taiga during the short boreal summer.

The report calls on policy-and-decision makers to "radically rethink" approaches to logging in order to "preserve the climate and biodiversity".

From: Sydney Morning Herald 10 Sept 1994

Greenpeace finds 'barbaric forestry' in Russia

On May 23, Greenpeace called for an end to destruction of the unique forests of the Russian far east by Russian and multinational logging companies. A three-week expedition based on the organisation's flagship, the MV Greenpeace, revealed barbaric forestry practices by a Russian-Hyundai joint venture company.

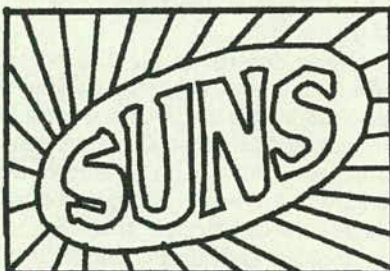
The expedition also uncovered logging by a Russian company in former nature reserve territory, the home of the endangered Siberian tiger.

"Russia's forests are being razed and shipped abroad", said Mary Blake of Greenpeace International. "Hyundai have the resources to back environmentally and socially responsible forestry which will ensure a future for both forests and the Russian economy."

Greenpeace's inspection of Hyundai's joint venture with a Russian logging enterprise at the village of Svetlaya, 800 kilometres north of Vladivostok, found widespread damage. Among the violations of environmental laws and the contract signed with the local authority in 1990, Greenpeace found:

- extensive clear-cutting, mostly of healthy trees (the contract requires preferential cutting of dead and dying trees);
- thousands of cubic metres of logs left in piles on the ground to rot, because the company cut more trees than it can transport;
- no successful replanting;
- logging in water protection zones;
- pollution by oil used in logging machinery.

The Greenpeace expedition also found extensive forest damage by the Russian-owned company Melnichnoye. This company operates in territory lifted from the internationally renowned Sikhote-Alin nature reserve in the 1950s and forming part of the Siberian tiger's range. The company is breaking quotas for logging of cedar, a protected species in Russia, and logging in water protection zones.



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Ralph Nader on GATT

by Frank Noakes

Ralph Nader, the world's best-known consumer rights advocate, visited Australia as the guest of the Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations earlier this month. The talented lawyer, who successfully pushed for the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Occupational Health and Safety Agency and the Freedom of Information Act in the US, represents Public Citizen, a powerful Washington-based consumer action group. While here, Nader highlighted the new General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) as possibly the greatest threat to democracy today.

"GATT is an international form of governance", an outspoken Nader told journalists in the plush Vice-Regal Room at the Randwick Racecourse on October 10. "[GATT] subordinates non-trade living standards, like health and safety, consumer, environmental and workplace to the dictates of international commerce."

In January, a new organisation, the World Trade Organisation, based in Switzerland, will be born under the auspices of the GATT agreement. The WTO has legislative, judicial and executive powers and can impose penalties and other sanctions, through its tribunals, on its 123 member nations.

"One country can take another country's laws to the tribunals in Geneva and if they [the complainants] prevail the losing country - the burden of proof is on the defendant - has to repeal the laws or pay perpetual trade fines and sanctions to the winning country." In fact, the WTO will not require countries to actually repeal offending laws, but the laws will not be able to be implemented without penalty.

"As if that's not bad enough, the tribunals are kangaroo courts: one, they exclude the press from their procedures; two, they exclude all other citizens; three, they exclude all other parties participating in an advisory role - the only parties are the national governments. So if a law in New South Wales or Queensland relating to asbestos, food additives, pesticides, chemicals in the workplace, for

example, is seen by these tribunals as restrictive on imports, the premier of NSW or the attorney-general cannot go to Geneva to contest the case before the tribunals."

According to Nader, transcripts of proceedings will not be made public and the alleged breach, the evidence and the submissions will all, in practice, remain secret.

"To top it off, environmental, consumer and workplace safety issues will be decided by a three-person tribunal made up of trade specialists who are allowed to pursue simultaneous business careers."

Little debate

Nader and Public Citizen, set up in the early '70s, recently managed to force a limited debate in the US. "All of the environmental groups are against it [GATT], all the consumer groups except one are against it and all the unions are against it." Nader describes the attitude of most elected representatives as: "If it's got 'free trade' on it, stop thinking! And don't ask what else it has on it."

The draconian agreement almost passed the US congress with President Clinton's support in early October, but with some "divide and rule tactics", the vote was postponed until early December.

In Australia, GATT, as such, does not even go before parliament. Green Left Weekly was informed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that a few amendments will go before the House of Representatives to make already existing WTO-relevant legislation totally consistent. These amendments are trade related and primarily concern tariffs and intellectual property rights - then, Australia is signed, sealed and delivered to the corporations.



● *New trade regime
'destroys democracy'* ●

"In parliamentary countries and dictatorships there's almost no public debate", confirms Nader. "There are massive rallies in India. There a million farmers protested against the patenting of seeds by the agribusiness companies, whereby farmers will have to pay royalties on their seeds. But largely, once a prime minister sends a trade minister to Geneva and once a dictator sends an emissary to Geneva and they sign the agreement, you're not going to get a battle in parliament."

In the US, opponents of GATT offered a prize to any member of the Congress who had read the agreement and could answer 10 simple questions on it. Only one of the 535 legislators came forward willing to try to answer the questions. "None of them have read it!", Nader declared.

"In order to grease the passage through the US Congress they [the administration] got a special fast track law through, so that this trade agreement is voted up or down with no amendments permitted. So, here's a trade agreement that doesn't stick to trade, that meddles in health, safety and human rights, that subordinates these factors to trade and is going to be voted on in an autocratic way.

"This is the end of linking trade with human rights. Furthermore, the US will not be able to pass a law proposed by

Senator Harkin of Iowa banning the import of products from child labour factories abroad. That is considered, under GATT, an illegal process standard, that is, products of like nature cannot be discriminated against based on how they're produced. So [you can have] seven, eight and nine-year-olds in an Indian factory manufacturing carpets headed for Gimbel's in New York and you cannot ban that import. Only prison labour products are banned.

Safety

"Here we are, almost in the 21st century and we're rejoining an international regime that subordinates non-commercial living standards to the dictates of trade. It isn't trade that has to get on its knees before the tribunals of Geneva to prove that it's least consumer damaging in terms of health and safety; it's the reverse."

US food safety requirements are higher than international standards set in Rome but, under the new GATT, Brazil, for example, will be able to ship fruit to the US with DDT and other chemical residues which US standards currently prohibit. Brazil will be able to argue in Geneva that the US standards are restricting trade. Eventually, international standards could be knocked out.

Harmonising of standards "is going to be lowest common denominator". Nader uses the example of truck weight standards to illustrate his point. "The US allows 80,000 pounds maximum, Mexico 175,000 pounds - which way do you think it's going to go? Especially as the trucking industry in the US hates wants to go the Mexican road. It might not go to 175,000 pounds, but it sure ain't going to stay at 80,000."

It was put to Nader that some Third World countries are opposed to international environmental, worker or consumer standards, claiming that they act to their disadvantage in competition with the West. While conceding that the West has suppressed the prices of raw materials in the Third World, Nader, in a typical rapid-fire response, insisted that it is necessary to separate repressive arguments from legitimate ones.

"When you get a country like Mexico that brutalises workers who try to form independent trade unions to raise wages, then you've got a government competing ... based on repression, not on efficiency or innovation."

Now middle-aged, but still impassioned, Nader told *Green Left Weekly* that GATT will tie the hands of consumer

groups. "We can battle with politicians in Albany and Washington because we have some access, some press, we have some judicial rights. How are you going to deal with Geneva's closed tribunals and secret harmonisation committees? That's why it's very anti-democratic."

When Nader testified before Congress, he stated that his first criterion for judging a world trade agreement is: "Does it damage democracy?"

"These trade agreements strengthen the power of multinational corporations and exclude the participation of and reduce the power of citizen groups, environmentalists, consumers and trade unions."

Although hundreds of strategies have been formulated to counter the WTO, Nader says that "our job now is to try to stop it before the Congress approves it".

Clinton has not publicised the GATT agreement and has not held one press conference on the subject, says Nader. "I've challenged Vice-President Al Gore to debate [on TV]; he debated [former presidential candidate] Ross Perot on NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. I've challenged high government officials to pick their audiences randomly, anywhere in the country and if I don't win three to one on the debate, I'll concede defeat. They have an impossible authoritarian message to sell, and they don't want to debate."

"We have a very large citizen trade coalition made up of dozens of groups all over the country - trade union, environmental, consumer and farmer groups - that are opposed to GATT. But the business/government axis is extremely powerful - and it will be even more powerful if this gets through", Nader warned.

from *Green Left Weekly* No. 164,
October 26, 1994

via Pegasus computer network

via *Green*

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Two thoughts on the drought

Buy-up marginal land

While I sympathise with anyone who is unable to earn a living. I am not convinced that throwing money at unfortunate farmers is a sensible long-term solution to the ongoing manmade destruction of the NSW and Queensland bush regions. Surely it would make more sense to use government and charity funds to buy up large tracts of unprofitable farmland and allow it to revert to its natural state. If the amount of marginal farmland was reduced, there would be more water to spare next time drought occurs, as it inevitably will. This might also reverse the decline in numbers of many endangered plants and animals whose chances of survival are rather more remote than those of the farmers.

Letter to the Editor, by Chris
Spurgeon, Yagoona. 12/9/94

Unsustainable

The imperative to make individual profits from agriculture in Australia has caused severe misuse of the land. Farmers desperate to make a living in the face of high interest rates and collapsing prices for exports like wool are forced to overgraze their land and allow it to degrade. Heavy clearing of land for crops also reduces rainfall and increases erosion, making both drought more likely and land more vulnerable to the effects of it.

When droughts hit, farms start going under and the water catchments just keep shrinking. The only solution offered by the free market to this situation is the shutting down of "unviable" farms and privatisation or cost incentives for water use. Ecologically sustainable farming methods and water waste reduction technologies don't rate a mention. To be able to cope with droughts - which are not an accident but an inherent part of the Australian climate - we need democratic planning that manages vital resources like water in the interests of community.

The parched countryside is a stark lesson on the need for communal resources like water to be managed and used in the interests of the majority.
Green Left Weekly. No 163,
19 Oct 1994

KURANDA SKYRAIL: dispute escalates



by Kate Minnett and Sean Purcell

Despite the threat of legal injunctions, activists opposed to the building of a private 7.5 kilometre tourist cable car in World Heritage-listed national park between Cairns and Kuranda, north of here, conducted a series of actions in October.

However, 16 members of the newly formed non-violent action group Save Australian Forests for Everyone (SAFE) who were involved in a 10-day action were arrested and fined. Two campaign coordinators were jailed.

The protesters are appealing against their sentences; one activist, who was detained on October 13 by three drug squad officers, strip-searched, interrogated and had her bag inspected under suspicion that she was harbouring drugs for use in the courtroom gallery, has filed an official complaint of police harassment. No drugs were found.

The same day that a large contingent of anti-skyrail arrestees and supporters were attending court, skyrail workers and police trespassed on the privately owned base camp land and chainsawed three-quarters of the branches of a tree in which Manfred Stevens has been tree-sitting for more than 130 days.

Opponents of the skyrail development, the longest passenger cable car system ever proposed anywhere in the world, know that it will set a precedent for similar private developments in national parks.

The system requires 36 pylons of up to 40 metres, 21 of which require the clearing of wet tropical rainforest. Additional clearing includes two "stations"

within the World Heritage area. These stations are to have shops and walking tracks constructed. The developer, Skyrail Pty Ltd, was not required to provide specifications for these before being given approval to begin the project. There will also be a "swathe" clearing along several sections of the route. This will entail lopping the tops off rainforest trees and cutting trees down completely to allow the cable to come closer to the ground.

Skyrail will carry 600 people an hour. The cable cars travel at 18 kilometres an hour, and a car will travel over any given section of the rainforest every 33 seconds. Skyrail estimates that it will double the current tourist visitor numbers to Kuranda from 2000 to 4000 a day.

Skyrail will cost \$35-\$40 million to construct. It will provide between 20 and 30 jobs - an investment of perhaps \$1.5 million for each new job.

Although the project involves a massive intrusion into the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and a national park, the project has not undergone an environmental impact assessment (EIA).

A study produced in 1989, which the Queensland government insists on calling the substantive EIA, received a scathing critique from the Commonwealth government in 1990. Because of this critique, the consultants for Skyrail issued defamation proceedings against the Commonwealth but have refused to bring the matter to court. That action is still current and the Commonwealth critique is sub judice.

Some ancillary studies have been done, none of which either individually or in combination amount to an EIA, nor do they attempt to address any of the concerns put forward over the past four years.

The Skyrail project has been opposed by the Wet Tropics Management Authority, the (Commonwealth) Rainforest Management Unit, the Australian Heritage Commission and the Australian Committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It is opposed by the Djabugay Tribal Corporation, representing traditional owners, as well as by Greenpeace, the Wilderness Society and the Australian Conservation Foundation. It has been vocally opposed in the Senate by the Australian Democrats and the Greens (WA).

Its sole base of support comes from the Queensland Premier's Department (Office of the Coordinator General) and its subsidiary, the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage.

Kate Minnett is from the People Against Kuranda Skyrail and Sean Purcell is the coordinator of the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, from Green Left Weekly No 165, November 2, 1994


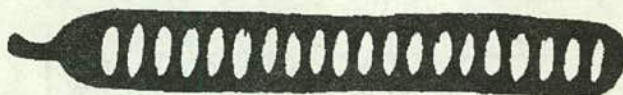
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GREEN NEWS



Hand-in halon fire extinguishers

The Federal Minister for administrative services, Frank Walker, has put out a call for Australians with old halon fire extinguishers in their homes to hand them in to be destroyed to help save the ozone layer. The halon, a fire suppressing gas, is up to 16 times more harmful to ozone than CFCs. There are reported to be two million halon extinguishers in Australia, holding 4000 tonnes of halon. The yellow halon fire extinguishers can be taken to local fire stations.

TREE Magazine Oct 1994.

Go Organic

A study by the US Environmental Working Group, who specialise in pesticide issues, has shown that even after scrubbing, peeling and coring many fruit and vegetables, chemical residues still remain. Apples may need the most scrubbing as 8 types of pesticide residues were found on the fruit. Of the apples tested, 52% had multiple residues on them. Yet one more reason to "Go Organic".

The Age 23/5/94 via Potoroo Review

Better Uses for our \$\$\$

Did you know that the Federal Government is spending \$10 billion in 1994-95 financial year on the military - \$26.8 million a day, or more than \$1 million every hour!


The government is about to release a Defence White Paper which will set down the guidelines for the economic, political and military role Australia plays into the 21st century. Defence Minister Senator Ray has written that he does "not think it appropriate" to "call for public submissions before publication of the White Paper" because defence and security policies require consideration of "highly complex issues". The "Blue Paper Project" believes it is time the government listened to what we choose to have our money spent on. Would you rather

have, for example, earth, air and water regeneration programs or new frigates, war planes and submarines? These are the sort of questions which need to be debated in our community.

Canberra has decided to build six submarines costing \$850 million each. Just 10% of this - \$510 Million - could fund a range of vital research and practical projects for environmental protection and sustainable development programmes. We at the "Blue Paper Project" believe that our country's security cannot be ensured by piling up sophisticated weapons. Security really comes with jobs, steady food supplies, homes, clean water, warmth, education and health care, democracy and human rights.

Write down what you think and send it to the "Blue Paper Project", PO Box A899, Sydney South 2000. So it can be submitted together with other submissions and letters to Senator Ray in Canberra.

Dolphin Victory



The marine park, Sea World Australia, had a legal permit to take dolphins from the wild for their park. When the busy people from Australians For Animals discovered this they took action. After weeks of intense negotiations and lots of publicity, the good news came when Sea World publicly announced their intention to never again catch dolphins and whales from the wild.

AFA Bulletin Sept 1994.

Antarctic airstrip abandoned

The controversial French airstrip in Antarctica, which began to be constructed in 1982 without following the Antarctic Treaty environmental procedures, has finally been abandoned. Five sea-bird rich islands were blasted and crushed to form the runway. Last year, before the first test flight was planned, a giant wave flooded it, causing severe damage to the rocky strip.

Potoroo Review Sept/Oct 94

Wildlife Profit

Each year, thousands of birds are smuggled out of Australia, destined for the European and US markets where collectors pay small fortunes for the privilege to cage our Australian wildlife. Nine out of ten birds die in transit, but the value is so great the criminals still profit. Prices can be as much as \$100,000 for a pair of Palm Cockatoos, \$32,000 for a pair of Pink Cockatoos and \$28,000 for a pair of Gang-gangs. But the smuggling does not stop with birds, Australia's unique pythons and lizards are very highly prized by the illegal markets. The highest fine for a single offence in Australia was only \$15,000 and is usually much less. The trade is not only cruel, but is a major conservation threat.


Humane Society International Inc, PO Box 302, Avalon, NSW 2107.

Victoria's rare species threatened

The cold misty Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands of Victoria are the only home of the Leadbeater's Possum which until 1961, was thought to be extinct. Now the Victorian National Parks Association have found more Leadbeater's Possum Zone 1 Habitat - which should be protected from logging - has been clearfelled. This is despite assurances from the Dept of Conservation and Natural Resources that it would improve its methods of mapping after the last "accidental logging" of its habitat.

VNPA Newsletter August 94.

Toxins Stopped



The Australian Minister of Agriculture recently decided to ban organochlorines such as Heptachlor, from mid-1995 onwards. Until then, imports will be reduced by 98%. This move is thanks to the tireless efforts of many toxic chemical campaigners over the years.

The Greener Times May 94



Too
technical
for our readers
pam 3

A turning point for the chemical industry

DIOXIN

In St Louis, Missouri, on July 30, Dr Barry Commoner gave the keynote address at the Second Citizens' Conference on Dioxin. Following are excerpts.

I am convinced that 1994 will be seen as the year in which - despite every effort of the chemical industry and its journalistic allies - the true dimensions of the ominous threat of dioxin to human health became known. Dioxin and dioxin-like substances represent the most perilous chemical threat to the health and biological integrity of human beings and the environment.

The history of dioxin is a sordid story - of devastating sickness inflicted, unawares, on chemical workers; of callous disregard for the impact of toxic wastes on the public; of denial after denial by the chemical industry; of the industry's repeated efforts to hide the facts about dioxin and, when these become known, to distort them. We need to learn what must be done, now, not merely to diminish, but to end the menace of dioxin and its many toxic cousins.

The chemist learns to favour the production of a particular molecule by controlling temperature, pressure and other conditions and, more precisely, by introducing a catalyst.

But the process is never perfect; some unwanted molecules that happen to be very stable and resist further transformation will persist - as waste. [Dioxin is one of these stable waste products.] Toxic waste is not simply a matter of poor housekeeping or bad management; it is an inescapable part of chlorine-based chemical production.

In 1985 the EPA [US Environmental Protection Agency] issued its first formal cancer risk assessment of dioxin. EPA estimated that people would be exposed to the one-per-million risk if they lived near soil contaminated at the level of one part per billion.

[In October 1990 EPA and the Chlorine Institute - an industry group - convened a conference at the Banbury Center in Long Island.] The purpose of the conference was to review new data about

how dioxin caused cancer in order to provide a "scientific" basis for a new risk assessment. The "new data" were studies that actually went back to the 1970s.

The EPA participants in the Banbury Conference hurried back to Washington with news that prompted the administrator, William K. Reilly, to predict that a new reassessment would in fact reduce the dioxin risk. But the new attempt to downgrade the dioxin hazard, like all the earlier ones, has failed.

In failing, it has not simply confirmed the important but narrow result of the 1985 risk assessment that dioxin is an enormously potent carcinogen. It has also greatly expanded the range and biological impact of dioxin's effects, at levels of exposure already experienced by the entire US population.

Apparently Americans are sufficiently exposed to some very general source of dioxin to put us all well above the "acceptable" cancer risk of one in a million, and within range of its numerous other harmful effects. That source is chiefly food.

The general spread of dioxin and dioxin-like chemicals in the US environment has already exposed the entire population to levels of these extremely toxic substances that are expected to cause a number of serious health effects. These include an average risk of cancer of 100 or more per million in the entire US population - 100 times greater than the risk standard that has triggered EPA remedial action.

The EPA document also acknowledges that the newly appreciated hazards of dioxin go far beyond the risk of cancer. The expected non-cancer effects include:

- disruption of endocrine hormone systems, especially those related to sexual development;
- disruption of critical stages of embryonic development, for example of the nervous system;
- damage to the developing immune system, leading to increased susceptibility to infectious diseases.

These are intergenerational defects, imprinted for life on the developing foe-

tus by the effect of dioxin on the mother and sometimes the father.

[Chlorinated molecules] are rare in living things; only about 600 such substances have been identified, compared with tens of thousands of different organic substances made by living things that are not chlorinated. Moreover, not a single chlorinated compound has been identified as natural in mammals.

Chlorinated organic compounds like dioxin are incompatible with the distinctively complex hormonal systems and developmental processes that are characteristic of vertebrates, especially mammals.

The industry's chief defence against shutting down the use of chlorine in chemical manufacturing is that it is essential to the manufacture of most of its products (true), which are in turn essential to most other industries and agriculture (not so true).

Synthetic organic chemicals - plastics, pesticides, detergents and solvents - have deeply penetrated the modern world. This was done not so much by creating new industries as by taking over existing forms of production. After all, we did have food before synthetic pesticides, and there was furniture, flooring and paint long before plastics.

The chemical industry is the source of persistent, dangerously toxic substances that must be eliminated. To meet that obligation, the industry must change its methods of production - and, where necessary, its products - beginning with the elimination of chlorine.

We are at a turning point not only in the history of dioxin, but of the chemical industry itself. What has brought us to this point, I am convinced, is the environmental movement - at its powerful grassroots. Let this conference be the start of new campaigns and new victories - for the sake of the environment and the people who live in it.

From Rachel's Hazardous Waste News (US).

via: Greenleft Weekly 162 Oct 12 94 and the Pegasus computer network

Chlorine: the industry that kills

On September 13, 1994, the US Environmental Protection Agency released its draft reassessment of dioxin compounds. The term "dioxin compounds" includes not only the most potent dioxin (often called TCDD) but also dioxin-like compounds such as certain dioxins, furans and PCBs. Approximately 90% of our dioxin burden is provided by these dioxin-like compounds and only 10% by TCDD.

The draft report demonstrates the profound potency of dioxin and dioxin-like compounds, and the astonishing range of their toxic effects. That, however, is the easy part. What is much more difficult is to halt the production, use and incineration of chlorinated compounds, which involves political action and change.

Although written in a dry, sometimes unnecessarily technical manner, the reassessment information is terrifying. The thousand-page report includes the following findings:

1. Current, average levels of dioxin are causing damage.

The average amounts of dioxin compounds that humans and wildlife in industrialised countries are now carrying in their bodies cause changes in hormone levels, increased production of certain enzymes and changes in cell function, and create a new human cancer risk ranging from 1 in 1000 to 1 in 10,000. In other words, average levels of dioxin contamination are harming people and wildlife.

(Dioxin compounds are carried by the air, water and animals throughout the world, because most dioxin compounds are extraordinarily persistent and build up in the food chain, in the fats of animals.)

While the EPA refers to this contamination as "background" levels of dioxin, tissues of humans frozen from 100 years ago contain almost no dioxin. These current "background" levels are the direct result of chlorine-using industries (including the pesticide industry), which came into existence in the 1920s. Most pesticides are chlorinated and/or manufactured using chlorinated compounds.

2. Those exposed to higher than average dioxin levels are experiencing even more damage.

Some people (and wildlife) have what the EPA calls "special" exposures. These groups include certain occupational groups (e.g., in chlorine-using and incineration industries), people living near dioxin-emitters (e.g., chlorine-using pulp mills, medical waste incinerators burning chlorinated materials), nursing infants and subsistence fishers.

Dioxin compounds cause several types of cancer, disrupt the orderly growth of organs in embryos and irreversibly impair how the organs function, kill embryos, reduce fertility, cause abnormalities in and reduce the size of male sexual organs, cause the immune system to be overactive in some cases and in other cases suppress the immune system.

Immune system impairment decreases the ability of a person to resist viruses, bacteria, parasites and cancer. Dioxin compounds may increase risk of diabetes and increase endometriosis in women.

3. The main route of dioxin contamination is food.

In the USA, people receive almost 90% of their dioxin contamination from eating dioxin-contaminated milk, dairy products, beef, pork and chicken. The terrestrial food chain becomes contaminated primarily by dioxin compounds that settle out of the air from incineration of chlorinated materials.

Ironically, hospital waste incineration is listed by the EPA as the largest source

of airborne dioxin compounds in the US, and municipal waste incineration as the second. The EPA states that together, these two sources produce about 90% of air emissions of dioxin, although it has monitored very few incinerators.

The draft report does not mention that the materials being incinerated include such products as chlorinated plastics, PVC products, white paper, pesticides and solvents from Monsanto, Dow and other chlorine-producing and chlorine-using corporations.

Now that the EPA draft reassessment is out, the chlorine and waste incineration industries would like us to debate further exactly how much dioxin causes exactly which types of damage by exactly which mechanisms.

However, more risk assessment of dioxin is not what is needed at this point - 15 years ago, research showed that dioxin caused miscarriages in monkeys at one part per trillion parts body weight. What is needed is for corporations, businesses and consumers to stop producing and using chlorinated chemicals; almost no chlorine use is currently essential. Until the production and use of chlorine compounds and incineration of chlorinated materials are eliminated, the killing and damage will continue.

Pesticide Action Network Updates Service

via: Greenleft Weekly 162 Oct12 94 and the Pegasus computer network



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environs, the north coast environment magazine


This Month's Cover... Green Tree Frog (*Litoria caerulea*)
As I've just recorded RAINFALL!!! for the 5th day in a row, for the first time in over 6 months, I've celebrated by illustrating one of our favourite wet & warm weather visitors. Around October each year Green Tree Frogs reappear around the house, some in odd places! A favourite day-time resting place is between the overlapping glass panes & the fly screen in the loo window. As many as eight of them wander back to sleep the day away after a night out hunting, or mating in our dam or one of our water chestnut ponds. Their diet consists of moths, insects & even small birds & rodents according to frog expert Michael J Tyler.

Some sleep in the down pipes or water tank, often waking up to croak loudly if it looks like rain during the day. On one occasion, on an early morning walk along the beach (15 minutes by car from home!) I put my hand in my raincoat pocket to find a frog had taken up residence while my coat was hanging in the laundry!

The scientific name - *Litoria caerulea*, literally means Blue Tree Frog, so named because the first specimens sent back to England to be described & named were pickled in alcohol which turned them blue!

Although Green Tree Frogs are plentiful, many of our other frog species are at risk from over clearing of their habitat, or use of chemicals, as they often feed on insects which have been sprayed with pesticides.

Season's Greetings ... Julie.



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Environs is published every other month on a voluntary basis to bring together reports from a large number of environmental organisations. Many groups are affiliated with Environs, including the Bellingen Environment Centre, and the Nambucca Valley Conservation Association.

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