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February/March 1994

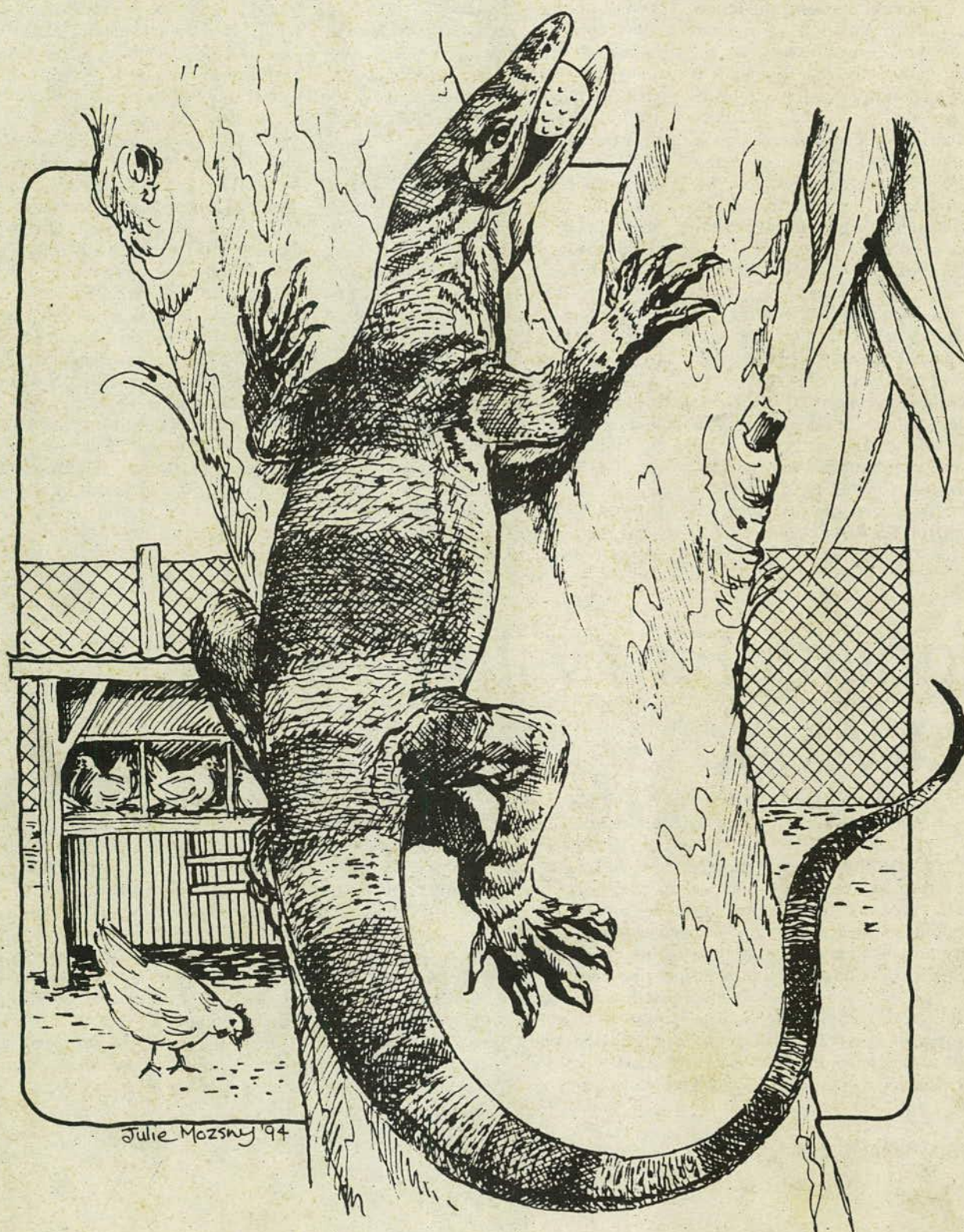
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Environs



THIS ISSUE: ● Bushfires, ● Coffs Tourists Discouraged,
● River Committee Stacked, ● Toxic Schools, ● Transport Policy

the north coast environment magazine



Julie Mozsny '94

BUSHFIRE BUSHFIRE

Wildlife devastated

The January bushfires in NSW have inflicted a terrible toll: four people dead, 185 homes destroyed, and hundreds damaged, and huge areas burned. As the emergency abates the cost to wildlife is just starting to be assessed. And the outlook is not good.

In what is described as one of the most devastating blows to Australian wildlife in hundreds of years, the Wildlife Information and Rescue Service estimates that 90% of wildlife in areas affected by fire have been destroyed.

Liane Poulton, chair of Sydney WIRES, says she has seen only a small variety of animals emerging from the fires and even then in low numbers. She worries this might be an indication that whole colonies of animals have been killed.

Underlying its concerns, WIRES says it has been notified of only five animals that have survived the fire that has all but destroyed Royal National Park: two Dollar birds, two Ringtail possums, and a Green tree frog. While the total number of survivors from the Park is likely to prove larger, the relative few to have been

brought to WIRES attention highlighted its concerns for the survival of colonies - a concern shared by others.

"I think that because it was such a holocaust, that there will be very little surviving," says Darill Clements, a spokeswoman for Taronga Park Zoo. "Birds and reptiles will probably be the ones that survive the best".

While only 0.5% of the total area of NSW has been burned, the NPWS says that for non-flying and non-burrowing animals in those areas "there would be a significant mortality rate".

The fires have destroyed vast tracts of bush, trees have been stripped, and for those animals that did survive there is little if any shelter remaining, and not much food. So they are flocking to the suburbs in search of either, but the worry is that they will be vulnerable to attack by domestic cats and dogs. "They just end up on the edge of suburbia and they have nowhere to go. If everything has gone then the birds can get back when the bush has grown back. Reptiles are a bit more of a problem. But things like Bandicoots that are very vulnerable to cats and dogs

would have no hope. It is possible that divisive forces like this will have long-term effects in creating local extinctions," said Erna Walraven, curator of Taronga Zoo. She says mammals such as kangaroos, wallabies and koalas are least likely to have survived, especially in areas where the fires were very strong.

Mr Barry Fox, associate professor at the University of NSW, who has studied fire's effect on wildlife for 20 years, has identified a post-fire recolonisation pattern. While some animals survive the initial fire, two weeks after the blaze most wildlife will move on in search of food. The first arrivals, after about three to six months, will be house mice searching for seeds that have fallen from trees. Next comes the native mouse and after about two years, small insect-eating marsupials will return, depending on the amount of ground cover. Four years pass and the native rats arrive until, finally after about six to eight years, the wildlife population returns to normal. Rain will speed up the process.

from: *The Australian* 11/1/94

Fighting Fire with Fire Will Not Work

There is an assumption, by some Australians, that the bush has to be kept clear of shrubs and leaf litter and that this needs to be done with fire. Reducing fuel is very necessary around farms and houses, but why in wilderness areas?

Scientific research and commonsense observation show that within two or three years of reducing fuel by fire

the quantities of litter are up to what the fire authorities claim as dangerous. If the area is then burnt again and again there are many species of flora which will not survive.

In Tasmania, following the disastrous fires of the '60s it was decided that the bush surrounding Hobart should be burnt every seven years. Fire Control authorities have now discovered that they now have a much more fire-prone veg-

etation than they had before and some areas have been reduced to grass which has to be burned every year. So frequent fires are not the answer.

If there are large wilderness areas criss-crossed by roads then it is easy for firebugs to go in and light up. This has happened even when fire fighters are battling blazes. There is far less danger if there are no roads in wilderness areas and in any case it is not a

wilderness area when it is open for vehicles.

The areas that could be dedicated as wilderness areas in this State amount to less than 5%. Surely that is not too much to leave free of human impact, for the unique plants and animals of Australia. We have wrecked a lot of this land in our 200 years.

by James Tedder, Secretary, North Coast Environment Council

BUSHFIRE

BUSHFIRE

FORESTS AND FIRES

I'd like to add a few personal thoughts about the reaction to recent New South Wales fires. These largely come from a background of being involved in both forest protection campaigns and local reforestation groups.

After a flood, it's amazing how many farmers don't want rain. So after a bushfire, people not wanting bush is fairly inevitable I guess. But there are compelling human survival reasons, of course, to have both rain and forest cover. We can't exist without them. Indeed the lack of forest cover in Australia is at least a contributing factor to the extreme weather conditions that fed the recent fires.

Suburban Forest Cover

One of the likely reactions to the fires in leafy suburbs is going to be to cut down trees and clear large firebreaks. This, multiplied by the number of suburban dwellers near forest areas, could amount to a huge loss of forest cover. I think we have to campaign against this happening. Some suggestions:

1. The best way to plan against suburban intrusion of fire is on a neighbourhood basis, not individually. Groups of neighbours together should plan their fire protection strategies, not individuals. And they should seek expert advice.

2. In some cases, fire will only ever approach from one direction. Where this is known tree planting and retention can be based on knowledge of the fire risk rather than wholesale tree removal.

3. Fire retardant tree species can be used productively in many areas.



National Parks, Forest Reserves, etc.

Watch these regenerate. All the areas near Narrabeen for instance suffered a similar fire in 1978.

The main argument I hear coming from the North Coast Nationals is about regular burn-offs and the National Parks authorities are responsible for the fires. Others have rebutted these rather silly arguments - as silly as "if we didn't have any bush we wouldn't have any bushfires". (Nor would we have air pollution if we didn't have air).

Causes of Fires

It will be very interesting to see what comes out of a very thorough analysis of all the recent outbreaks and their causes. It would be good if all the "blaming" waited until this analysis is done.

One thing to watch is the frequency with which arson is attributed as a cause. As I understand it, at present a fire start is attributed as arson if there was no likelihood of a lightning strike in the area, no fall-out from an adjoining fire that could have started a new blaze, and no-one owning up to starting the fire.

That's a pretty broad definition. I would really like to see "arson/pyromania" type cases separated from "human misuse of fire" type causes. The latter, I suggest, is currently called arson and that's not helping us to plan strategies against future outbreaks of this magnitude. I don't think the farmer burning off who loses control or the camper who drops their lit primus (both too scared to tell authorities) are really in the same case as arsonists. The former can be prevented by proper education, and I suggest might have been a very significant factor in recent outbreaks.

I'm interested in other thoughts about this, and have appreciated the press releases I've seen so far. It seems that environmental education which has done very well in terms of making people aware of some problems (waste etc.) needs to be extended greatly in the area of fire use so that human use of fire is no longer such a threat to our forests.

by Ian Peter (Ian Peter is the founder of the Pegasus computer network, and can be contacted by email:

ianp@peg.apc.org)

via Pegasus (conference: oz.green)

Richard Laxton

B.Comm ACA (NZ)



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Coffs Harbour car leaflet campaign

Tourists ...not worth the trouble



Judging by the terrified response from the Coffs Harbour City Council and the Coffs Harbour business community, it would seem activists have devised a powerful weapon in the war against rampant growth in the city. The following text was published in a three fold brochure, headed 'DEAR TOURIST', and placed under the windscreen wipers of hundreds of tourists' cars throughout Coffs Harbour on Tuesday, January 4, 1994.

So effective was this action that it was widely reported by ABC radio. The use of economic terrorism (as it has been referred to in the local press) is a cheap and legal weapon to use against developers and fast-buck tourist operators who are usually well financed and able to buy whatever publicity they need in order to mould the general public's thinking. These carpetbaggers and snake-oil salesmen are unlikely to persist with a project in an area where they know they will encounter effective resistance, therefore, with weapons such as this at their disposal, any small group of activists can be an effective force in the battle to preserve their environment and lifestyle from predatory acts.

Tourists

..not worth the trouble

Tourists and developers are to blame for water restrictions and sewage spills which have become a daily fact of life for residents of this neon and plastic north coast tourist trap.

Residents of Coffs Harbour have suffered increasingly severe water restrictions for the past three years as Council goes out of its way to encourage growth in population and tourist numbers. Growth that has exceeded the ability of the infrastructure to cope.

This has resulted in a backlash against tourism and tourists as residents attempt to hold onto the remnants of their fast disappearing lifestyle.

Put yourselves in our place, would you welcome tourists when you know they cause water restrictions? When you know they overload the sewerage system,

resulting in untreated sewage washing up on our beaches? When you know the crime rate soars whenever they hit town? No, we are sure you would not!

Other problems you cause us are traffic congestion, fighting over parking places and other infrastructure we pay for with our rates, and then there are the shopkeepers who raise prices and rip off locals as well as tourists.

So you can understand why we want you out of town, and why we want you out now. Of course, if you are too selfish to consider anyone but yourselves, then perhaps you should know a few facts the tourist operators will never tell you.

Water supply

Our water supply comes from the Orara River, a small stream just west of Coffs Harbour. Unlike other communities that have protected catchments, ours is used for intensive agriculture. This means that every drop of water you drink is the run off from dairy and turf farms, both of which are heavy users of chemical pesticides. You may remember that the Americans recently rejected a shipment of beef due to organophosphate pesticide contamination. That beef came from a local abattoir.

Sewer outfalls

The main sewer outfall spews effluent into the ocean adjacent to Jetty Beach and Park Beach, the two most popular tourist beaches in Coffs Harbour. Sawtell's outfall, located at the end of Sawtell Beach, does the same. You people swim in this effluent unaware of the dangers. Is it any wonder there is such a high level of middle ear and throat infections, skin disorders, and gastric complaints amongst tourists at these times? We don't think so.

Tourist overload also causes raw sewage to spill from a number of sewer overflow points into Coffs Creek, that's the one that runs through the middle of town. So please don't let your kids swim there, and take notice of the signs that warn of the chemical pollution of the creek caused by pesticide residues from farms.

A farming community

Coffs Harbour is surrounded by farms, the farmers use a cocktail of chemicals to control pests. These pesticides have been blamed for a number of birth defects, infant deaths, cancers and other illnesses. The council also sprays toxic chemicals to control weeds and insects along roadsides, in parks, reserves, and gardens, the very places used by tourists. The summer holiday season coincides with the peak chemical spraying period, including the aerial spraying of toxic chemicals which often drift across the town.

Thinking of coming to live here?

If you think this would be a nice place to come and live, remember that most of the land that is for sale was once agricultural land, and much of it is so contaminated with highly toxic pesticide residues, such as arsenic and dieldrin, that the Department of Agriculture say it is unsafe to allow livestock onto it. Council have recently begun mapping the contamination and already they have found over 700 homes built on contaminated land. In fact, many of the houses built here since the mid-sixties have been built on such land. The legal implications are horrendous, so Council have asked the government to raise the safe residue level to get them out of trouble. They don't care about people, only money.

Goodbye

So, we have no regrets in bidding you a fond farewell, there are plenty of other places you can go for a holiday, we have only one home, and it will be much nicer here without you.

*from Richard Clowes
via the Pegasus Computer Network*

Pesticides and the Environment

Extracts from:
**"30 Years After Silent Spring:
The Poisoning Continues"**
a Greenpeace booklet

The world around us is now infiltrated by silent chemical assassins. In just a few decades, pesticides have tainted the entire planet - carried in rivers, rain and fog; poisoning the feeding webs of birds, fish and animals; contaminating soils, polluting oceans, killing plants. Pesticides are now even destroying the ozone in our upper atmosphere.

While farmers face the greatest exposure to pesticides, consumers are also clearly at risk from eating contaminated food. Scientists cannot tell the long-term effects of eating low levels of residues of multiple pesticides over many years.

Worldwide, an estimated 25 million people in the developing world are poisoned by pesticides every year, with more than 220,000 deaths or almost 48 poisonings per minute.

While insecticide use in the US increased more than ten times since 1945, pest damage to crops has more than doubled. In fact, more than 99% of insecticides never even reach the pest, instead hitting non-target organisms and contaminating the environment. The pesticides kill beneficial organisms, leading to further pest outbreaks and forcing farmers to use more chemicals. This, as Rachel Carson warned, leads to pests becoming resistant to the poisons. By 1992 over 650 species of weeds, insects and fungi had become resistant to commercial pesticides.

Some Australian crops use large quantities of pesticides. Almost six and a half



thousand tonnes of just two types of pesticides (Endosulfan and synthetic pyrethroids) were used on cotton in 1991/2.

Today, the fastest growing pesticide markets are in developing countries. They are also typically those countries least able to both control pesticide sales, distribution or use, and to protect human health and the environment. For example, while developing countries account for less than one-fifteenth of the global pesticide market, they account for more than one half of the global pesticide poisonings and three-quarters of the deaths. Pesticide use in developing countries is concentrated on export crops, such as cotton, fruit and vegetables. In Pakistan, for example, 95% of all insecticides used in 1987 were applied to cotton.

The storage of pesticides is often a recipe for disaster. For example, tucked away in numerous remote villages throughout Papua New Guinea quantities of DDT can still be found. These are remnants of the public health campaign to control mosquitoes. Often DDT is leaking from disintegrating cardboard boxes, stored in rusty tin sheds dangerously close to waterways that provide village drinking water.

There is no safe way of disposing of pesticides. Landfills often leak while incineration can create carcinogenic dioxins. Thus disposal may well compound the problems of use and unsafe storage.

The best way to avoid the human and environmental damage from pesticides is

to avoid using them. This is the basic premise of an internationally-recognised approach known as the "Precautionary Principle". We must adopt it as a matter of the utmost urgency.

It is clear that we want a new approach to farming. What kind of logic says that we need to use poisons to grow food? We need an ecological agriculture, based on procedures which complement rather than destroy natural ecosystems. Organic farming is one alternative proven by experience. Its rejection of synthetic agrochemicals offers great benefits to people and planet alike.

Greenpeace calls on governments to act now by:

1. Prohibiting pesticide companies from trading in banned, unregistered and severely restricted pesticides or production technologies, especially between north and south.
2. Changing agriculture policies to encourage farmers to convert to ecologically sound alternatives, such as organic farming.
3. Drawing up national or regional action plans for rapidly phasing out harmful pesticides and introducing ecological alternatives.

YOU can help achieve these aims by writing to your politicians and telling them that we cannot continue poisoning the earth. Public pressure is the antidote to pesticide poisons.

Leslie McInnes
Herbalist/Homoeopath



48 Jellico St
Macksville
NSW 2447

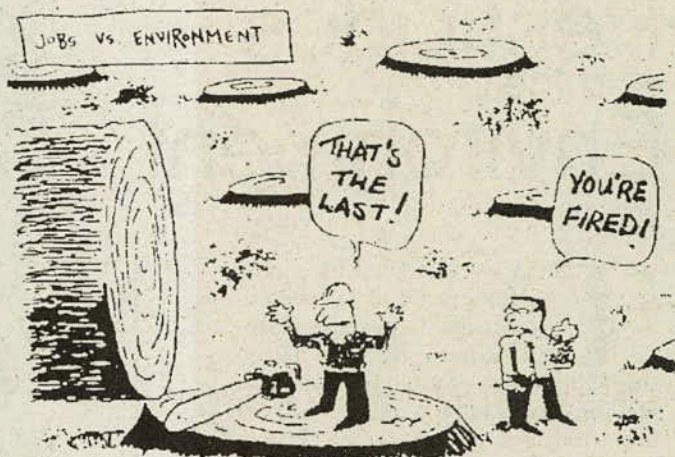
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Sawlog Driven in Victoria

BULLSHIT
The Concerned Residents of East Gippsland (CROEG) have exposed yet another false claim by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in Victoria that the timber industry in East Gippsland is a "sawlog driven industry".

The 1993/94 logging coupe approvals in East Gippsland's forests amounted to 5797ha or 12.5 footy fields a day to be logged for the next 12 months. Since those coupes were approved (despite conservationists objections) another 1188 ha have been allocated to the mills, bringing the total number of footy fields to over 13 a day!

But this isn't the worst of it - the largest proportion of these new areas are to be logged primarily to supply woodchips to the increasingly fussy woodchip market. As is now common knowledge, a massive amount of lower grade pulp timber is felled and left in coupes due to the low market demand for "imperfect" chip logs. However, Diashowa has agreed to buy woodchips if they can be whiter, which requires a certain type of tree. So, while other coupes are being butchered and trees wasted, another vast area of forest is to go down in order to feed this spoilt export industry.



The amount of sawlogs coming out of these forests is 3 cubic metres per hectare (a trivial 4 truckloads per coupe). To make this operation viable, it would have to supply at least 10 pulplogs to 1 sawlog. Apparently the royalty being paid

on the pulplogs is a puny \$8 a tonne! One doesn't need to be an economist or ecologist to see this as a senseless and outrageous crime!
by Jill Redwood
in Potoroo Review No.136 -
newsletter of CROEG

World Scientists WARMING WARNING

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is trying to alert humans to their destruction of Earth's support systems. In a "Warning to Humanity" signed by 1,500 scientists (including half the world's Nobel Laureates) they predict that current trends may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know.

THE WARNING

"We senior members of the world's scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it, is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.

WHAT WE MUST DO

"Five inextricably linked areas must be addressed simultaneously:

1. We must bring environmentally damaging activities under control to restore and protect the integrity of the earth's systems we depend on.
2. We must manage resources crucial to human welfare more effectively.
3. We must stabilise population.

4. We must reduce and eventually eliminate poverty.
5. We must ensure sexual equality, and guarantee women control over their own reproductive decisions.

HOW TO DO IT

"The developed nations are the largest polluters in the world today. They must greatly reduce their over consumption, if we are to reduce pressures on resources and the global environment. The developed nations have the obligation to provide aid and support to developing nations, because only the developed nations have the financial resources and the technical skills for these tasks. Success in this global endeavour will require a great reduction in violence and war. Resources now devoted to the preparation and conduct of war - amounting to over \$1 trillion annually - will be badly needed in the new tasks and should be diverted to the new challenges.

THE HELP OF MANY

"We require the help of the world community of scientists - natural, social, economic, political.

We require the help of the world's business and industrial leaders.



We require the help of the world's religious leaders.

We require the help of the world's peoples. We call on all to join us in this task

A new ethic is required - a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the earth. We must recognise the earth's limited capacity to provide for us. We must recognise its fragility. We must no longer allow it to be ravaged. The ethic must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant peoples themselves to effect the needed changes. The scientists issuing this warning hope that our message will reach and affect people everywhere."

Eco Sphere Vol 14 No.1

at least - no herbicides
① and Councils should not get it the way
and weeds they can use it instead.

mention

HOT WATER

Large Scale Weed Control Without Herbicides

② A revolutionary High Pressure Hot Water Weed Killing System was recently launched in New Zealand by Waipuna Systems Pty Ltd. It consists of a computer controlled boiler supplying high temperature water under pressure through hand-held nozzles directly onto the weeds. The spraying is done at close range to the weed area and is remarkably safe to bystanders. Only hot water is used, it is totally chemical-free, and can be used in any weather conditions.

The system can replace the use of toxic herbicides currently used by our local councils. The Toxin Action Group has obtained details and has written to the Coffs Harbour and Bellingen Councils outlining the features of this new system and asking them when they will purchase and implement it.

③ The Leichhardt Municipal Council has already announced its intention to use the system and estimates savings of \$140,000 per annum compared to the conventional toxic systems.

Spokesperson for TAG, Don Want, asserts:

"With a very urbanised municipality such as Leichhardt able to save \$140,000 pa surely the North Coast Councils could save well in excess of this amount. The real advantages however, are the safety aspects and guaranteed public acceptance of this system: no problems with spray or vapour drift, operator safety, no contamination worries of land or waterways, the list goes on. You can even drink the medium as it goes

into the system to be heated: it's just water!"

There are a number of indirect advantages for the Councils also, such as the system not being affected by rain immediately after treatment, no need for the Councils to issue extensive spray warnings to the public, no need for Councils to maintain and administer "No-Sprays Listings" etc.

Leichhardt Municipal Council Mayor, Cr Larry Hand said, "This council understands the deleterious effect that herbicide spraying has and that's why we pursued a more environmentally friendly system. We will be leading the way with a method which is kind on the pocket and won't harm our residents or their pets."

.....Will this be the attitude of our councils? ④

make news

SOUTH EAST FORESTS

Endangered Fauna Case Won

A n application by State Forests (formally NSW Forestry Commission) for a licence to log an area containing threatened species has been withdrawn after an environment group assisted by the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) prepared to take the case to court.

The South East Forests Conservation Council (SEFCC) appealed against the decision of the NPWS director to take endangered fauna from two proposed national parks in Cathcart State Forest in southern NSW.

State Forests must prepare a Fauna Impact Statement (FIS) before logging an area. In this case, despite the NPWS director finding only six of the 29 requirements of the FIS were adequately met, he granted the licence to "take or kill" endangered fauna. It was this approval which SEFCC was going to appeal

against in court, when State Forests sought to withdraw the application.

So why did State Forests back down? EDO solicitor David Mossop suggests the department became worried it would lose if the Court was given the opportunity to examine the merits of the decision. Land and Environment Court judge Justice Stein, who awarded costs to SEFCC, said evidence submitted to the court showed that state ministers had pressured the NPWS director to giving the go-ahead to approve the licence, despite the inadequate FIS.

Deputy director of the Parks service, David Papps described the FIS as "an appallingly inadequate document even by Commission standards".

from: "The Environmental Defender" Dec 93 - the newsletter of the Friends of the EDO

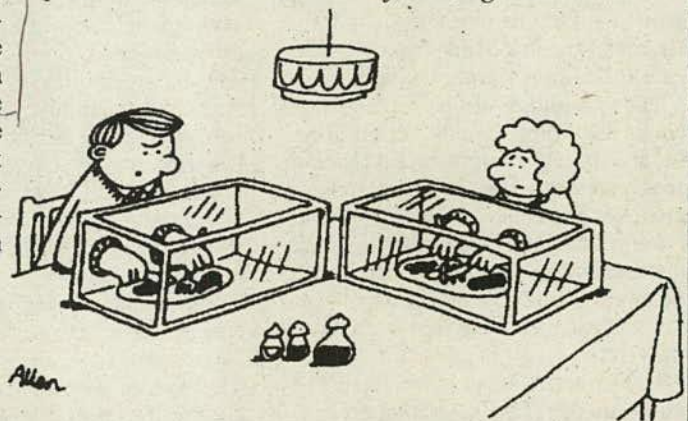
* Nuclear Neighbours

⑤ The Indonesian government is planning to build 7 to 12 nuclear reactors. Our Japanese friend, Mitsubishi Corp, is to build these reactors and sell them back to the Indonesians. Fallout from an accident could contaminate vast tracts of Australia. One reactor is planned to be built in an area known for its seismic activity where 200 people were killed last year by an earthquake and tidal wave. from Greenpeace. Autumn '93

* Radioactive Roxby

⑥ Reports of radioactive meat entering the human food chain have recently come to light. Kangaroos drinking from the Roxby Downs tailing ponds and overflows are the

source of the meat. Apparently, the SA Health Department and the National Parks Service have known of this problem but kept silent. from Origin March '93



Children & Chemicals

The development of a child's immune system takes the best part of childhood. Many chemicals which have been on the market for years are only now being found to seriously impair or weaken the immune system. The toxicology of substances affecting the immune system is a recent area of study and unfortunately, insufficient research had taken place on the majority of toxic chemicals before they were released on the population.

Children have been identified as being at greater risk from chemical exposure because they can inhale/ingest more chemicals per body weight than do adults. Children have a faster respiratory rate and thus inhale more chemicals per unit body weight than adults. Studies show that children's immature digestive systems also allow them to absorb more toxic chemicals than adults. A child's brain continues to develop after birth and is affected by neurotoxins. Solvents, which are proven neurotoxins, have been shown to pass the blood-brain barrier.

The demise of my child's health on beginning school led me to investigate the various chemical exposures he experienced within the school environment. The findings were alarming and varied. Exposures came from cleaning products, air fresheners, whiteboard markers, paints, glues, etc. A solvent called *ethylene glycol mono butyl ether* is found in "Wipe Clean" - used to clean the children's desk tops - and in "Mop n Strip" - used to strip the floors during the holidays.

The toxicology of this solvent is extremely disturbing. Briefly, it causes eye, nose and throat irritation, blood changes, upper respiratory tract irritation and may cause liver and kidney damage. It is readily absorbed by the skin and its uptake is enhanced by the addition of water (could wet sweaty arms on desks be of concern?). Cleaners are advised to "dilute" it in water!

The United States Environment Protection Agency (USEPA) cannot recommend a safe level of exposure to the

Ethylene Glycol Ethers. "Based on data available they cannot establish molecular size or weight above which there are no concerns for adverse affects on human health".

Reports have come in, via the Union, that cleaners from approximately 20 schools in the Coffs Harbour region have removed these products. Some cleaners have removed all toxic chemical cleaning agents and replaced them with less toxic alternatives, such as vinegar, soap, Tea-tree products, etc. Following removal of these toxic cleaning chemicals, reports have come in of reductions in skin irritations, respiratory problems and nauseous headaches among cleaners, teachers and students!

Paradichlorobenzene is an organochlorine and is used as an air freshener in the toilets. In most cases the blocks are within the reach of children. It has also been used in the cupboards in the classrooms as it is effective in killing silverfish, moths, cockroaches, etc. It is a very volatile chemical and fumes can build up in confined, poorly ventilated areas. This organochlorine is absorbed into the body by inhalation and ingestion. Exposure may cause headaches, runny nose, eye irritation, liver and lung damage and disruption to the central nervous system. This product is withdrawn from schools IF parents complain. When supplies run out it will be "removed" from all schools! The Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety recommends that entry into the water or sewer system be avoided. The World Health Organisation has classed it as a probable human carcinogen.

poisons
in the
school

The response by the Department of Education, North Coast Region, to the presence of the abovementioned toxic chemicals in their schools, was in the form of a "Circular to Principals" October 1991. It stated: "In recent times the Department has become aware that certain cleaning agents and deodorisers available through Government Supply Department may not be environmentally friendly. As a result to changes to the Annual Requisition system, Principals are no longer obliged to use government supply items. Schools may now purchase cleaning materials of their own choice."

How many principals filed this information away without realising its implications? No follow-up information was made available to them.

Tung Oil is a chemical used in heavy duty areas such as assembly halls. Cleaner's complaints have ranged from feeling nauseous, passing out, to hallucinating when exposed to this product. **Tung oil** has immunosuppressive effects. Published

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Environmental Law in 1994

literature states that: "Chronic Epstein Barr Viral Infection may be reactivated by **tung oil**." (reference held).

Xylene is a solvent which is found in some white board markers and textas and many pesticides. Exposure to *xylene* can effect the central nervous system, eyes, gastro-intestinal tract, blood, liver, kidneys, and skin. There are *xylene*-free alternatives.

111 Trichlorethane is a solvent found in liquid paper and other products. The solvent acts as a narcotic and depresses the central nervous system. Acute exposure symptoms include dizziness, incoordination, drowsiness and effects on the cardiovascular system. More than six years ago liquid paper containing this solvent was advised not to be used in schools - by the Department. A water based alternative is available as well as the new stick-on tape product. However, parents, unaware of its potential danger continue to purchase the product and the Department is still supplying it on requisition!

Carpeting and adhesives emit toxic chemicals. Once installed they can act as a "sink" for pesticide and asbestos particulate and as a breeding ground for dust mites. Scientists from Anderson Laboratories, Massachusetts, observed neuro-muscular and respiratory reactions in mice exposed to new carpet. The mice also showed muscle, kidney and brain degeneration and many died. Carpeting and associated glue materials can contain up to 120 chemicals, many of them toxic and carcinogenic.

Other toxic exposures children can experience around the school are from the pesticides and herbicides used. Their dangers have been already documented.

The removal of toxic chemicals from my sons's school environment, saw cessation of the headaches and stomach pains he continually complained of and as he no longer felt ill in the classroom situation his social and emotional development progressed to a level of normalcy. His fine motor coordination markedly improved. His immune system also strengthened and his general health noticeably improved.

by Ann Want

The second edition of *The Environmental Law Handbook: Planning and Land Use in New South Wales* by Professor David Farrier, has recently been published.

Professor David Farrier was one of the founding members of the environmental defenders Office (EDO) back in the early 1980's. He saw that existing community law centres didn't have the resources to deal with a specialist area like environmental law.

"There were opportunities for litigation in the legislation, but no obvious litigant. Environmental law needs a focus, and the EDO became that focus for public interest in environmental law."

Which environmental law issues will dominate in 1994? He predicts pollution control will be big news, as the State government attempts to combine five old pieces of legislation governing pollution into one super Act.

Inland rivers will also come under scrutiny with the rewriting of the 1912 Water act, and a major review currently being carried out by the EDO. Questions will come up, such as whether there should be an environmental allocation from rivers.

David also raises the question of how to protect Australia's native plants and animals on private land. He is currently developing policy on this issue, and points out the Commonwealth government's international obligation to protect



biodiversity through the Biodiversity Convention, signed at UNCED.

"National Parks aren't large enough or representative enough to protect Australia's biodiversity. We should be looking a lot more closely at ensuring private land is managed effectively. I think a combination of legal requirement, and financial incentive would encourage farmers to retain vegetation and keep down feral animals.

"I can see in the future, landholders farming the land for biodiversity and being paid for providing that service, almost like private rangers on their own land." *The Environmental Law Handbook: Planning and Land Use in New South Wales* by Professor David Farrier is published by Redfern Legal Centre Publishing. (\$50) Suitable for use by university students, government departments, and community groups.



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"WHAT ON EARTH CAN A WOMAN DO?"

Results of consultations on Women and Environment: A Survey carried out by the National Women's consultative Council. (20 pages)

This interesting (and empowering) little booklet is a summary of a survey in which 3000 Australian women were asked to give their views on a range of questions relating to the environment. Women were also invited to give their views, and to say what they as individuals had been doing for the environment, in a series of nation-wide workshops held in 1992.

The results have been neatly summarised into a number of main areas. For example, 75% of survey participants viewed problems with waste management (including the issues of recycling

and of disposal of toxic wastes) as the greatest threat to our environmental quality. Nuclear threats, loss of plant and animal life, poverty, land degradation, energy use, war, and population growth were also of concern the majority of women.

It is interesting to note that participants are currently most active in areas such as recycling, in the reduction of chemicals use, and in minimising energy consumption both in the home and workplace and where transport is involved (for example by lobbying for cycle paths and traffic calming).



The survey also highlighted the fact that most women have special skills that could be particularly useful in solving environmental problems. For example, an analysis of current activities as reported by participants found that nearly 80% are involved in education and training of some sort, both at home and in the workplace. Since it was reported by the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups that environmental education is critical, then it is apparent that the high level of involvement of most women in education (in general) can be seen as a potentially very valuable resource.

Similarly, the "capacity to see issues as a whole", the "ability to resolve conflict and to negotiate" and the high level of involvement in the "caring, nurturing and protecting" of children are all precious skills that can be translated into working for a better environment.

However, this survey reveals more than what most of us already know, as it also uncovered the feeling of many women that they are being asked to bear too much of the blame for environmental damage, by using disposable nappies, buying food in convenient packaging or from fast food outlets etc.... The point was made by one seminar participant that:

"Manufacturers should be held responsible for their environmentally damaging products. Don't put all the onus on women, expecting them to solve domestic waste problems when it is manufacturers who create waste."

This booklet takes only a few minutes to read, but it would reward anyone who is feeling snowed-under by the burden of "enviro-guilt" that we all carry around. Available from the NVCA library, it also contains contacts information for those women interested in community action for the environment.

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THE NASA images show: EARTH BREATHS



Scientists at NASA's Ames Research Center, California, have created the first geographically precise image of the Earth "breathing" - ie removing and releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The dynamic computer model shows monthly changes for carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as microbes decompose plant debris in the Earth's soil. Using recently assembled satellite images of the global land surface, Dr Christopher Potter, an ecologist at Ames and Steven Klooster, another Ames scientist, modelled how decaying plant matter responds to changes in temperature and precipitation.

"Remote-sensing satellites give us a new, unique view of the Earth as a living, breathing system," Klooster said. "Before, we had only 'snapshots' or static pictures from space. Continuous satellite coverage now shows us seasonal changes and helps us understand how carbon is distributed between the tropics and high latitudes and how that distribution changes from month to month."

"The carbon stored in soils is the sleeping giant of global warming," said Dr Potter. (Carbon dioxide is a potent greenhouse gas, trapping heat close to the Earth that would otherwise radiate into space. Many scientists think that increased amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, produced as byproducts of human activities, are trapping enough heat to eventually warm the Earth's atmosphere.)

Potter said scientists are concerned that even a small degree of greenhouse warming from the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation could release increased carbon dioxide from the soil, setting up a chain reaction. A slight warming of the Earth's surface could cause temperature-sensitive microbes to decompose carbon more rapidly, releasing increasing amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This increased carbon dioxide could then feed back into the climate system, raising temperatures further and beginning the cycle again.

The Carnegie Ames Stanford Approach (CASA) Biosphere model (as it is called) shows annual production of carbon dioxide from soils is 10 times that produced by fossil fuel emissions. The model shows that plants, however, absorb carbon dioxide in amounts equal to that produced by the soils, balancing the output.

The model also shows 60% of the carbon dioxide is produced and absorbed at tropical latitudes. Monthly observations of climate, solar radiation and satellite data at a one-degree latitude/longitude resolution for the entire globe, drive the model. Soil and vegetation types are also included because different types of plant material decompose at different rates. Green, leafy matter decomposes easily; woody stem debris takes longer. The CASA model shows that the slowly decomposing soil carbon is predominant in most ecosystems. It is especially abundant in colder northern latitudes.

Recent warming trends in the Arctic tundra, other research indicates, may have produced an increased release of carbon dioxide from the large amounts of carbon stored at high latitudes.

The CASA model is also one of the first to simulate global soil emissions of nitrous oxide, another important greenhouse gas. Potter said human activity is rapidly changing the nitrogen cycle.

"A significant part of the nitrogen used in agricultural fertiliser ends up in the air, dramatically changing atmospheric


concentrations of nitrous oxide. When it finds its way into the stratosphere, it also aids ozone depleting reactions", he said.

The CASA model can be used to study how tropical deforestation and changes in land-use effect emissions of atmospheric trace gases. It can bring a better understanding of the role of forests and land-use change in global biochemical cycles.

Models like the CASA approach, which are verified by independent observations and continually refined, are an important element of NASA's Mission to Planet Earth (MTPE). MTPE focuses on the interactions of large-scale environmental systems, such as Earth's plant life and the atmosphere and climate. The goal of MTPE is to collect, analyse and distribute data that ultimately will allow humans to make informed policy decisions about how their actions are affecting the global environment.

Understanding the links between large environmental systems, in this case land surfaces, atmospheric chemistry and climate, is a fundamental goal of NASA's Mission to Planet Earth (MTPE). Using satellite data, other measurements, and analytical research, MTPE is dedicated to understanding how the Earth's global environment is changing, and to distinguishing natural changes from human-induced changes.

The Ames research is part of MTPE's primary focus on climate change. NASA Press Release via Pegasus Computer Network



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WATER



USE 75% LESS. ..a revolutionary system of broadacre irrigation

A Sydney man has developed a revolutionary system of broadacre irrigation that uses 75% less water for the same area of crop and results in significant energy savings because less water needs to be pumped.

Ken Uzzell is a qualified greenkeeper working as Curator/Systems Curator at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Ten years ago he became interested in marrying irrigation and computer technology to improve the performance and economy of irrigation. He knew, from CSIRO figures, that crops often need as little as 5% of the water they are given, but decided that the only way to reduce irrigation was to measure the water in the ground. Ken took the problem to a friend who is an instrument manufacturer. Together they came up with a simple and accurate moisture probe that is not affected by chemicals, fertilizers, sewage or even earth movement caused by tremors or tractors.

"It is my eye in the ground," Ken says. "It is a plastic tube filled with crushed rock and we measure the differ-

ence in electrical potential from dry to saturated. We've patented the probe and it measures to an accuracy of plus or minus one per cent." Cables link the probes to a computer in the Curator's office and the data is continually analysed to show water content and indicate when irrigation is required.

"The probes certainly changed the way I'd been irrigating for over 20 years", Ken says. "Most of what we had been doing was completely wrong. We used to always think that too much water was better than not enough. What we were doing was encouraging shallow root development and creating a damp environment where fungus, disease, mildew and insect pests thrived.

"To combat these problems we had to use vast quantities of chemicals: pesticides, fertilizers and fungicides, which only made the situation worse."

"We needed a method of delivering water to the roots where it is needed. We found what we were after with the 'leaky hose' underground watering system developed by Nutek systems. This has been

around for 17 years but has achieved little acceptance. It was a good product looking for a market.

"The leaky hose is made from rubber recycled from old tyres. It is porous so that the water leaks out into the surrounding earth. You can put the water exactly where you want it and at the right depth to encourage the best root growth for the crop you are growing. Because it is underground, you get no evaporation loss and the probes tell you how much to pump. Warm water can be pumped through the system to promote growth at cold times of the year."

Ken says that leaky hose irrigation is being used to water native plants in the medial strip of the new Coolangatta to Brisbane freeway. Before the installation of the hose, the ground was like concrete and 70% of the plants were dying. Now the earth is soft and full of worms and the plant mortality rate is down to 1%.

Grass cannot be watered from below alone because it needs some washing of the foliage to remove dust and fertilisers. In contrast, the cotton crops that Ken is working with near Walgett are desert plants, they need no surface spraying and can be entirely watered by the leaky hoses. Nutrients and fertilisers can be added to the water and in time of flood, air can be pumped through the hoses to reduce waterlogging and suffocation of the cotton roots. Ken is now experimenting with air bubbled into the ground with the water. "Nitrogen - the main constituent of air - is attacked by microbe action in the soil and turned into a natural nitrate fertiliser."

With no above ground irrigation, there is little weed growth so expensive cultivation is reduced. Marigold has been planted between the cotton rows to produce natural pyrethrum which deters insect pests.

According to Ken, the combination of the moisture probes and the leaky hose irrigation technology can help solve the salt problems experienced over much of Australia's prime agricultural land. "Continual irrigation is lifting the water table and this is bringing the salt to the surface. The water table in some NSW orchards is just one third of a metre from the surface. By using less water, we can get that water back down toward where it used to be."

For further information, contact Ken Uzzell Ph 02 456 1866. from: Energy Focus Vol 2 No 10



Ronald McDonald sues activists

Worldwide hamburger giant, McDonald's is suing for alleged libel two London Greenpeace activists who distributed leaflets criticising the corporation's practices.

In 1985 London Greenpeace (a small, independent collective) launched an anti-McDonald's campaign, initiating an annual day of opposition on October 16 (UN World Food Day).

The group claims that McDonald's, the world's largest property and food service organisation, with annual sales approaching \$40 billion, is guilty of:

- * exploiting workers through low pay and military-style work and no union coverage;

- * indoctrinating children with Lstg100 million spent annually on ads;

- * destroying the environment with packaging, waste and the effects of beef ranching.

McDonald's initially attempted to ignore such opposition, but later to counter it, and began to use the legal system to prevent unwelcome criticism. The Scottish Trade Union Congress, the Guardian newspaper, Channel 4 and activist groups were forced to apologise to McDonald's or face expensive court actions.

The two activists, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, have refused to give in. Although denied legal aid and faced with enormous costs to defend themselves against the transnational corporation, they are fighting on. They stand accused of distributing, not even writing or publishing, a leaflet entitled "What's wrong with McDonald's - everything they don't want you to know".

*A support group has been formed to do research for, and help finance, the case, which is due to go to before the British courts in early 1994. McLibel Support Campaign can be contacted: c/o London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1.
from GreenLeft Weekly*

Great Escarpment Walk

A Great Escarpment Walk has been proposed by concerned environmentalists. Similar to the Coastwalk, two years ago, some details are still to be worked out.

The proposal so far is to walk from Barrington Tops to the Garden of Eden, a property just over the Queensland border. The routes are being worked on now, with groups working on the trail through their own bio-region. The walk will be along the Central Great Escarpment, through Wilderness and Old Growth forests. It can divert to threatened Old Growth areas and other hotspots, and draw attention to them, much in the manner of Greenpeace yacht trips up the coast or the ACF Coastwalk.

It is hoped that walkers will be largely self-funded, but they would like financial and logistical support from TWS branches and Environment Centres/Groups as they pass through their areas. Up to eight identified Wilderness areas, - Barrington, Werrikimbee, Oxley, New England, Guy Fawkes, Mann, Washpool, and Lost World, will be traversed.

The departure will be from Barrington Tops on May the 1st, 'Mayday'. This is International Workers Day among other things. The duration is estimated to be between three and six months.

There are three main aims:

- 1: To support Native Title.
- 2: To support the declaration of identified Wilderness areas.
- 3: To support NEFA's World Heritage nomination of the Central Great Escarpment.

The walkers will be from: The Wilderness Society (primarily Armidale branch), the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA), the Bellingen Environment Centre, the Wingham Forest Action Group and interested individuals. They will also have the support of The Great Walk organisation, which has successfully held similar walks in Australia. They have begun seeking (and getting) permission from local Aboriginal Land Councils, and hope lots of Kooris will be on the walk.

The organisers say:

"Campaigns are often negative in appearance, saying 'don't log this or mine that'. This will be a positive celebration of our ancient forests. It will raise awareness of their biological values, beauty, healing and inspirational qualities. It will promote healthy communal living. We will learn about bush tucker and self-sufficiency, and hopefully gain a Koori perspective on the areas we pass through from the Traditional Owners.

We also aim to do some fundraising, both before and during the Walk. This will be by sponsorship of walkers, soliciting of donations and by having slideshows, talks, music, etc, at local halls along the way. We need support crews and vehicles to prepare campsites and halls, give walkers days off, send out press releases.

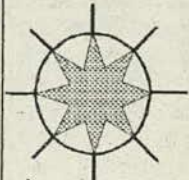
There is much organisation needed if we are to get this show on the road by May. We need people to check out the routes beforehand, to find good campsites, to set up supply caches, to do Koori liaison, etc.

Anyone interested should call Marty Branagan at Armidale TWS and Barriga Environment Centre on (067) 711155, Anton or Cath at Bellingen Environment Centre on (066) 552599, or Mick on (075) 330254."

Via the Pegasus computer network

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Total Catchment Management Committee Committee Membership Furore

Bellingen Council has written to the Minister for Lands and Water Conservation, George Souris, expressing its complete dissatisfaction with the process involved in selecting the local Total Catchment Management committee (TCMC).

Council has been informed that local Member, Andrew Fraser, had told a Farmers Association meeting that he had persuaded farmers to accept nominations to the TCMC, even though they had not nominated.

Alan Lloyd of Bonville was present at the meeting in Coffs Harbour on November 25, when Mr Fraser said that in future farmers must apply for positions on TCM committees otherwise he would be embarrassed at having to appoint farmers who had not nominated in place of greenies who did nominate.

Councillor Mark Troy said the TCM committee announced last week could not work because it was loaded with political and extractive industry representative. "Their priorities will be extractive industries rather than the management and restoration of the river".

Positions on the TCM committee were advertised earlier this year and resulted in 17 applications, nine of whom were selected to form the committee. The selections took place on June 15, but no announcement was subsequently made. After a time it became apparent to Council that the problems being experienced in the appointment of this committee could not be attributed to normal public service delays. "Attempts were made over a period of months to have the committee formalised so that the available funding could be utilised", said Cr Dethridge.

"Councillors may recall a discussion which took place in Council Chambers about a month ago when it was suggested that the delays stemmed from the fact that Mr Fraser was unhappy with the composition of the Committee"

"I approached Mr Fraser at the Bellingen Show on November 13 and spoke to him about the TCM. Mr Fraser said that there had been insufficient land-



‘loaded with
political and
extractive
industry
representatives’

owners amongst the applications and that he had asked Gus Raymond to supply him with names and that the committee would be appointed now that he had the names." Councillor Dethridge said.

Cr Dethridge said that of the nine nominations which were chosen by the selection panel, only 4 now remained on the committee. "There are, however, seven names of people who did not nominate for a position. "It is interesting to note that the committee now includes members of the PPP, members of the National Party and all the surnames of the SEPP37 applicants from this Shire," she said. "It's not a coincidence that all those who applied for continuing use rights for gravel extraction under SEPP 37 are members of the Committee"

The Bellingin Environment Centre has called for Mr Fraser's resignation and an inquiry into the selection process.

"There are 7 people on that committee who did not even nominate for a position. If Andrew Fraser thinks it is democratic to ignore a committee selected by a panel of government department representatives and instead ask a National Party member to supply him with names of other sympathetic National party stooges who did not even nominate by the closing date in July, then we believe he is not doing his job as people's representative to the parliament and therefore should resign and let us get on with the job of Total Catchment Management", said BEC spokesperson Tracey Mylan.

"Andrew Fraser has a history of inciting hatred by National Party members against greens and we believe he is using his political position in an unjust and dangerous manner. We believe the TCMC is to be used as a front organisation for gravel extraction and logging interests. It is interesting to note that members of this committee are also members of the Bellinger Valley Landcare Group, who will not allow environment centre members to join. There are people genuinely interested in managing our river in an ecologically sustainable manner and they're just being shunned, feared and rejected", Ms Mylan said.

Ms Helen Iggulden, in a letter to the editor, explained that she was one of five out of the nine members duly appointed by the selection panel to the TCMC "who Mr Andrew Fraser has personally decided are unsuitable for this position. I would like to have it explained to me by Mr Souris, or even by Mr Fahey, why, after having been duly selected and appointed by a panel legally convened for that purpose, I have been considered unfit to further the objectives of the Bellinger TCMC."

"I would also like to know why the other four appointees who have been replaced, all far better qualified than I am, were also considered unfit, and why we were all replaced on the list of appointees, apparently in the Coffs Harbour office of Mr Fraser by people who did not apply, were not nominated, and were never con-

sh

the Tweed as well!
Henry Jones of TREE

environs, the north coast environment magazine

Total Catchment Management Committee



All Fixed up in the Tweed



sidered by the official selection panel.

"In these times of ICAC, Ombudsmen - and the growing desire on every hand that people in public life should begin to put morality before pragmatism, and quality of life before commercial greed - I cannot believe that our community will let this cynical exercise pass as "Democracy 1993" - a phrase I have heard attributed to Mr Fraser in describing his own TCM committee manoeuvrings" said Helen.

Mr Don Williams has stated, in a letter to the editor: "Mr Fraser's approach to Mr Gus Raymond smacks of the practice of Party branch stacking. A practice Mr Fraser would well know is called rotting. The obvious intent to put a strait jacket on the TCM committee as the government committee members should be heavied, or as Mr Justice Stein recently said in the NSW Land and Environment Court "Ministerial will prevailed"

"Did we really expect any other outcome given Mr Fraser's rabid anti-environmentalist stance, his crass abuse of those perceived as Greens, the endorsement and support for that anti-conservation, red-neck and developer lobby group RAGE. "It also calls into question the political nous of a politician who evidently lacks the intelligence to know when to back off", concluded Mr Williams.

Source: The Bellinger Courier-Sun
Dec 8 1993.



Total Catchment Management (TCM) is supposed to be a holistic, community based approach to land and water management. Via legislation enacted in 1989, the present government set up a structure which oversees the formation of TCM committees. The committees are composed of bureaucrats and community representatives. The local member of parliament advises the Minister on his choice of applicants for the community representative positions.

The TCM committee's role is basically a consultative and advisory one, with very little direct power and only a small budget. Perhaps their most important task is their role in the administration of federal government LandCare grants.

Large sections of the farming lobby in particular were extremely wary of, and even hostile to, the formation of TCM committees. The reaction from the farming lobby in the Tweed river valley was as negative as anywhere in the state. At a meeting in Murwillumbah approximately two years ago they voted to oppose the formation of a local TCM committee. This in part explains why we are amongst the last to have a committee put in place.

However, the farming lobby need not have worried because during the two year delay it appears that Don Beck, our local national party member of state parliament, in his typically ham-fisted political style, has arranged for the local committee to be totally dominated by his farmer mates. Of the eleven community mem-

bers, nine are conventional farmers and one is a commercial fisherman. I would wager that eight of those generally vote for the national party!

To add insult to injury, in his launching speech, the Minister for Lands and Water Conservation, Mr Souris, who is also a member of the national party, had the gall to actually claim the committee fairly represented all the groups which have an interest in catchment management. Urban residents who have an increasing impact on the catchment and who also have an interest in preserving its resources have only one representative, Bruce Graham. The increasing number of small-acreage rural-residential ratepayers have none.

It is surprising and disappointing that an apparently slick operator such as George Souris has endorsed Don's gross and inept gerrymander. His decision is further evidence that the NSW government's efforts to improve environmental administration are spent mostly on window dressing. In this case, even the window dressing is particularly tacky.

by Henry James
from: Tweed River Environment Echo,
Oct 93.





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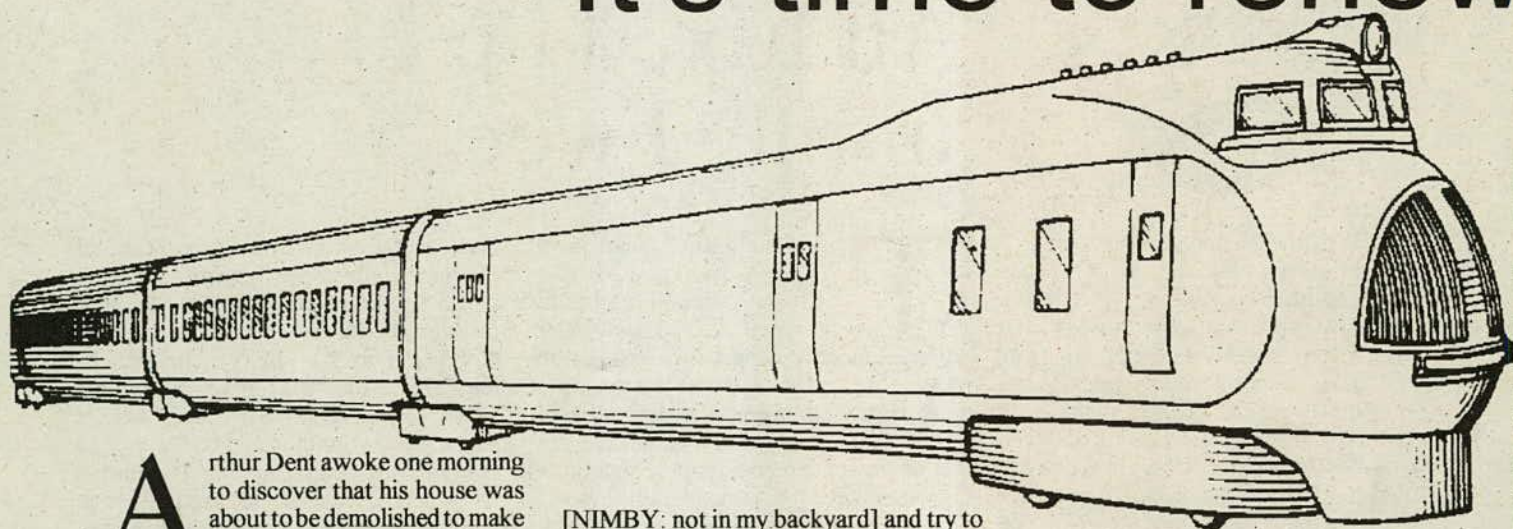
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It's time to renew



Arthur Dent awoke one morning to discover that his house was about to be demolished to make way for a freeway, and his day got worse from there. By mid-morning, clad only in his pyjamas and cowering in the hold of an alien spaceship, Arthur (the hero of Douglas Addams' science fiction trilogy *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) witnesses the destruction of planet earth in the cause of intergalactic mobility. Brisbane transport activist David Engwitch has had a similar experience.

"I awoke one day to find a notice in my letterbox announcing a major road proposal through our suburb", he told radio journalist Tony Collins. In an interview for *Living For the City*, a radio project broadcast on youth radio station Triple J in July last year, and now published as a book, Engwitch describes the process by which he became involved in the campaign against Brisbane's Route 20.

At the outset, he was not opposed to the idea of bigger, "better" roads, but at the first public meeting called to discuss the proposal he began to get an idea of the enormous effects Route 20 would have on his suburb. He also became convinced that apart from the noise, smell and upheaval he and his neighbours would suffer, the construction of a mega-road, part of the Brisbane "ring-road" plan, would not solve traffic problems in the immediate areas, nor in the city as a whole.

So Engwitch and his fellow residents formed Citizens Against Route 20 (CART) and thus began a process which was to turn him, and most of the other active members of the group, into passionate transport activists.

"I guess one of my contributions", Engwitch told Collins, "was to argue very early on that we mustn't be NIMBYs

[NIMBY: not in my backyard] and try to push the road into somebody else's backyard, and that we must look for long-term solutions. Very quickly we got sucked into looking at city-wide solutions and the implications of traffic for the entire city.

No city in the world has solved their congestion problems by building bigger roads

"We also got drawn very quickly into seeing that what we were fighting was not some future threat but a very serious problem we already had. We found the residents on Route 20 were talking about how their quality of life had been eroded over the past 15 years through the build-up of traffic ...

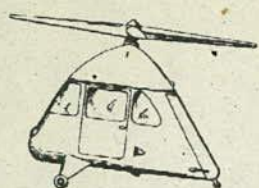
"No city in the world has solved their congestion problems by building bigger roads. In fact, the cities that have handed over most of their city to road space have the biggest traffic problems. What we're doing all the time is converting living space into road space, which simply spreads our cities further. To reach each destination in Australian cities now requires travelling three times further than our forebears did when they walked or went by public transport; that's simply because cars take up to 30 times more space to move each person than public transport, cycling or walking does."

Today CART stands for Citizen Advocating Responsible Transport, and David Engwitch campaigns, almost full time, against the cult of the private motor vehicle.

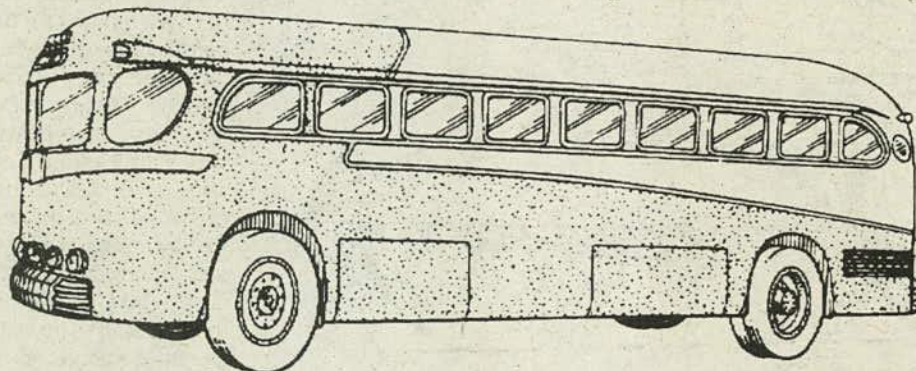
The private motor vehicle takes up an inordinate amount of space, and Australian cities have three to four times more road space per capita than European cities and almost nine times more than Asian cities. Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane are among the most car-dependent cities in the world, and car-oriented cities have no option but to spread.

Australia also has the second highest rate of car ownership in the world and the third highest rate of petrol consumption. Roughly a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions in this country come from private motor vehicles. Emissions from vehicle exhausts, even in a small city such as Perth, have contributed to a level of air pollution which is "unhealthy" by World Health Organisation standards.

A report commissioned by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) in 1991 estimated that between 1990 and 2000, 10,000 people will die in road accidents in NSW, and 14,000 people will be left with permanent brain damage or as paraplegics or quadriplegics. The same RTA report, "Road Transport, Future Directions", predicted that if current trends continue over the next 25 years, traffic congestion in Sydney will increase by 600%, carbon dioxide (greenhouse) emissions will increase by a quarter, air quality will decrease by a third, fuel consumption will increase by 23% and road accident costs will increase by two-thirds.



our public transport



Despite these predictions, based on conservative population estimates, the RTA persists with its own version of the "ring-road" plan, the Sydney "orbital", and plans for several billion dollar freeway developments are still firmly on the drawing board.

It is difficult to see how this can be justified. But the reasoning of John B. Cox, described by the October 27 Financial Review as a "transport consultant studying the effects of transport investment on the macro-economy", is enlightening on the attitude of business.

In an article entitled "Sydney uphill to pass Olympic transport test", Cox argues that Sydney must act fast to bring its transport facilities up to "best international practice" in time for the 2000 Olympics.

"Urban form and economic activity in cities are now centred on road transport", he writes. "Technology has reduced road-travel costs to less than half of those of 1970 and has caused shifts of passengers and freight from other transport modes to roads. Over 90% of all passenger traffic and almost all freight in cities go by road ...

"Olympic planners should realise that most North American and European visitors are used to 20-40% of their city travel on freeways and may be disappointed in Sydney where this figure is less than 10%."

Cox says that public transport might be seen as a solution by some, but "unfortunately, the trends are against public transport, with the percentage of all trips on public transport falling from about 30% of all trips in Australian capital cities in 1970, to less than 10% today".

Cox concludes that the "orbital" network currently on the drawing board "will be essential by the time of the

Olympics but could run into problems as funds from government and private investors dry up".

"It is hoped", he says, but not telling us by whom, "that the Olympics will focus city, state and federal resources on bringing Sydney's transport infrastructure up to best international practice by 2000".

Clearly Cox, and the interests he represents, are hoping for a massive injection of funds from the taxpayer. "Private investors are thinking twice about investment in road infrastructure", he warns.

Cox observes, rightly, that our cities were not designed with cars in mind. Australian capital cities developed around public transport, particularly heavy rail, but also light rail, or trams. In *Living for the City*, Tony Collins notes that "dumping public transport in favour of freeway building programs became a worldwide trend during the 1950s". Every capital city in Australia hired North American transport consultants to design freeways. Only Melbourne managed to hang onto its trams.

From the 1950s on, public transport spending was slashed and spending on roads increased. Cox says that the change came, "because of the technology", but technology has also made fast, efficient and relatively inexpensive light-rail eminently possible, and yet both government and private industry remain "reluctant" to invest. Surely there is some force at work other than technology.

Cox points to the trend "against" public transport, citing a drop in usage from 30% in 1970 to less than 10% in 1993, as though the increasing numbers of dwellers on the urban fringe chose not to use the non-existent services to their suburbs. He then uses the sprawl resulting from the freeway explosion to justify

further "orbital" road transport development for "suburb to suburb" travel.

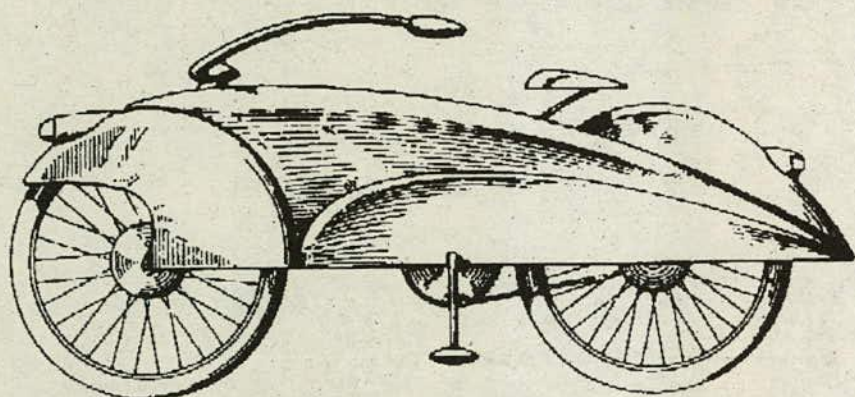
Cox assumes that once the trams were gone (in Brisbane they were all burned in a mysterious fire at the depot), any hope for further development of public transit was gone forever. In Toronto, Canada, this process was in fact reversed. Tony Collins' interview with the former mayor of Toronto, Art Eggleton, indicates that Cox's assumption is false.

"About twenty years ago", says Eggleton, "a major decision was made by Toronto to stop a major expressway ... We decided that instead of building that expressway into the heart of the city we would stop it cold in its tracks, some two kilometres into its construction, and instead build a rapid train into the downtown core ...

Australia also has the second highest rate of car ownership in the world and the third highest rate of petrol consumption

"Since then we haven't built any major roads or expressways or widened any major roads going to the downtown core. That was a very clear-cut decision to opt for a pro-public transit position and I think we're much the better for it. We've built better subway lines, we even continued to operate streetcars ...

"We have a fully integrated system that works quite well. In fact, most people



instead of building that expressway
into the heart of the city we would stop
it cold in its tracks, some two
kilometres into its construction, and
instead build a rapid train

get into the downtown areas by public transit every morning ..."

Are these the Olympic visitors, to whom John B. Cox refers, who will be so "disappointed" to find so few freeways in Sydney? Or perhaps he means the visitors from LA who will hate to be deprived of the freeways upon which the average speed of traffic is 25 km per hour and upon which complete gridlock sometimes occurs, obliging drivers to leave their cars and walk to work. Or perhaps he is concerned that visitors from Athens will miss the toxic smog from their car exhausts, which is so acrid it is eating away the Acropolis.

According to the editorial in the October edition of Hell on Wheels (published by the Wolli Creek Preservation Society, the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and the Campbelltown and District Commuters Association), the

majority of taxpayers should not be amongst those "hoping" for more freeways by 2000.

"The games decision could herald a new era for Sydney", it agrees. "It could be a catalyst for advances like the AirportRailLink, more rail lines in the western suburbs, a renaissance in light rail transport, sensible urban consolidation, construction of much needed infrastructure and the protection and enhancement of parks and foreshores. In short, a massive program of urban renewal."

"On the other hand", it continues, "the Olympic decision could be used by the State Government as the rationale to ram through the RTA's disastrous expressways - the M2, the M5, the F6 and the Cooks River Valley road. It could trigger another spree of carpark construction. It could mean widening roads and demolishing houses in the inner-west.

In short, a massive program of urban blight."

Les Robinson, spokesperson for the Wolli Creek Preservation Society (which has been fighting for five years against the construction of the M5) told Green Left most members of residents' and local environment groups believe the RTA will never give up its beloved "orbital" freeway plan. He told Tony Collins that the 1991 "Future Directions" report, which predicted dire outcomes if the orbital freeways plan was not radically reviewed, was archived by the authority.

"When they found that people were looking at it", he said, "they had it declared a cabinet document so that it couldn't be discovered under freedom of information legislation".

Robinson said that the latest "Integrated Transport Strategy", released on October 21, had a "tremendous intellectual effort" put into it, but because of bureaucratic politics ended up as a "capitulation to the RTA's urban freeway strategy".

"The RTA has for years been dedicated to the Sydney Orbital", he said. "But as changes have taken place in people's understanding of cities, they have had to develop ever more cunning disguises and incarnations for their plans."

"This latest document says, yes, freeways do encourage more cars onto roads, eventually trapping cities in nightmare scenarios of endlessly increasing traffic congestion and smog. So the RTA now says, 'We're going to go ahead with our major roads, but they're only going to be freight routes'. But the M5 does not, and will not, go in the direction freight goes. Freight needs to go from the container terminal to distribution points, and there are neither feeding into the M5."




"Experience so far with the part of the M5 that's been built is that freight drivers will do almost anything to avoid



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paying the tolls, so the idea of a tollway being a freight route is incredible.

"The RTA is having to fight defensive battles within the bureaucracy to maintain the plan. Nevertheless, we see no slackening at all in the RTA's determination to proceed with the M5 ... The only thing standing in its way is the fact that they can't find any money for it. So they're trying to build it in conjunction with private investment. However, it appears unlikely that any private investment will be found for the entire \$800 million cost. As a result the RTA is going to have to put in quite a lot of taxpayers' funds to subsidise the private tollway operators."

Robinson says the community has also become cynical over so-called public consultation. The current consultation over the M5 is the second time residents have been asked to give their opinion on the freeway. Evidently the first time they didn't give the right answer.

"The first time we were asked about it, two-thirds of us said we were opposed to the freeway and preferred a rail option, and now the RTA is doing it again. Now they're asking absolutely everybody and their dog what they think about freeways. They're holding lovely evening meetings and they're inviting members of churches

They have to be seen to consult. After they consult, they can do whatever they like. It's a farce.

and sporting groups along, and getting them sandwiches and then sitting them down and saying, 'Now, where would you like to see the freeway go?', when all the time we know the RTA knows exactly where they want the freeway to go.

"They have to be seen to consult. After they consult, they can do whatever they like. It's a farce. You can only have a genuine consultation when there is equal power between the consulting parties."

Robinson says the Wolli Creek Preservation Society, in conjunction with a number of other residents' groups and environmental organisations, has decided on direct action.

"We are seeking volunteers who are prepared to engage in non-violent direct action against the construction process for the M5. We believe that nothing else is capable of stopping the RTA and state government's urban freeway strategy, and nothing else is capable of making Sydney a good place to live", he told *Green Left*. "This is going to be the biggest environmental confrontation that Sydney has ever seen, the urban Franklin."

Tony Collins also feels the much-touted "integrated strategy" should be treated warily.

"Dramatic statements and plans that make a big point of saying 'We're changing direction' tend to overemphasise the level of change that's involved", he told *Green Left*, "and when you look at the minutiae of the actual plans, what's happening is really more of the same ..."

"Most of the growth that's going to happen in Sydney in the next 20 years is going to happen out on the fringe, and it's going to be served by freeways rather than public transport."

"Those nightmare scenarios about turning into a Los Angeles-style city are still quite capable of coming true, even though transport planners are changing attitude. The NSW government can't ignore the 'Future Directions' report, but we're not seeing huge light rail and heavy rail projects actually being planned and going ahead."

When Collins first suggested the idea of a radio project on Australian cities for

the ABC youth network JJJ, he met some resistance. But he found a great deal of interest in the issues he raised among young people he talked to for the show and the book.

"We talked to hundreds and hundreds of young people across the country about what their concerns were, and they're all about public transport. Young people rely on public transport more than older people, because they haven't got cars. They're acutely aware of the need for public transport, and they're great advocates for increasing resources being put into public transport. I think young people are much more environmentally aware than they were 10 or 20 years ago, and there's no question that they think anything that will decrease the amount of air pollution is worthwhile."

Sam Wainright, national coordinator of the Environmental Youth Alliance, agrees that young people see the irrationality of more freeways and the rationality of good public transport.

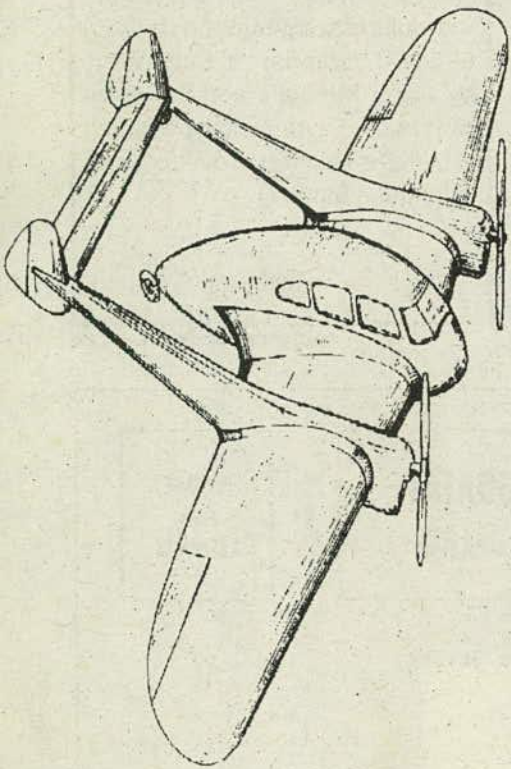
"If you're not aware of the powerful interests behind keeping us car-dependent", he told *Green Left Weekly*, "it's impossible to see what the hold-up is. If ordinary people had any say over the matter, work would begin on light and heavy rail networks for our cities tomorrow, and those freeway plans would be in the shredder."

"But we don't get to make the decisions. It's people like [NSW transport minister] Bruce Baird, who also happens to have been chief lobbyist for Esso before he went into parliament, and the owners and chief executives of companies like BHP and Ford, who really hold the reins."

"An active campaign for public transport is top of our agenda at the moment. Not only do we need it to get to school, to uni and to our jobs, but we also need it if we're going to save the planet."

by Karen Fredericks from Greenleft Weekly, via Pegasus Computer Network

Living for the City, by Tony Collins, is available at ABC shops throughout Australia.



environs, the north coast environment magazine

This Month's Cover... Goanna or Lace Monitor (*Varanus Varius*)

Those of you who keep poultry are probably well aware of the goanna's taste for eggs. Some time ago we started using old golf balls as nest eggs so we wouldn't lose so many eggs & one visiting goanna helped himself to several golf balls... we've often wondered if his digestive system coped without ill effect! The next "Chook Palace" we build will have goanna-proof laying boxes - sheet metal walls & fly-in access... easier than catching goannas, putting them in a bag, and re-locating them several kilometres away in the forest! Noel has tried this when the egg-stealing raids became too frequent. You need to make sure the goanna doesn't panic (before you can grab its tail) & mistake you for a tree... their usual escape when disturbed, their sharp claws enabling them to get a good grip, they spiral around to the opposite side so you can't see them.

Our local variety average 1.5 metres when fully grown, but can reach more than 2 metres. The female lays 6-12 eggs, often in a hole dug in a termite nest. The termites seal up the hole. The young goannas can usually burrow out, but females have been reported to return after 6-8 weeks to free their hatchlings. Goannas feed on insects, reptiles, small mammals & carrion, but are major predators of nestling birds. Several years ago we were delighted to find kingfishers nesting in a termite nest high in a tree on our place, unfortunately for the baby kingfishers, the goanna discovered the nest. The entry hole had been clawed out & the baby birds had gone a few days later... all part of the balance of the natural ecosystem!

Julie.

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