



STEP Matters

Number 174 January 2014

A BUSY YEAR AHEAD

In the final few months of 2013 there was lots of activity at all levels of government relating to planning and the environment. Many policies are still under review and likely to be finalised during 2014 so this year will be even busier than 2013.

The major concern, in the longer term, is the conservative parties' mantra of removing so-called green tape in the pursuit of growth at all costs. This seems likely to unwind environmental protections in many areas such as land clearing, planning legislation and mining approvals.

There is the ever present issue of climate change with the new Abbott Government busily unravelling the policies and organisations developed over many years. Short term politics is taking priority over the hard long term decisions required to reduce the risks of harm the wellbeing of future generations.

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STEP EVENTS

Talk – Tuesday 11 February: The Powerful Owl Project

8 pm, St Andrews Church Hall, corner Chisholm and Vernon Streets, Turramurra

Dr David Bain has been running the Powerful Owl Project for the Birdlife Australia, Birds in Backyards program since 2011. Birds in Backyards is a research, education and conservation program focusing on the birds that live where people live. The project aims to identify the critical roosting and breeding requirements of the owls and the locations of important habitat areas requiring protection.

David has a wealth of experience in environmental education and also in ecological research, particularly working with threatened bird species. We look forward to hearing a lively talk on the iconic owl that is seen frequently in northern Sydney.



Walk – Sunday 16 March: STEP Track

Recreational walk exploring the vegetation communities along the STEP Track, the ecoburn preparation and bushcare history. The walk will be led by the Margaret and John Booth, pioneer members of STEP.

Time: 9 am, approx 2 hours

Meet: end of Kingsford Road, Turramurra

Grade: easy to moderate, some steep uneven steps

Contact: Margaret Booth (9449 3746
margatsoutht@yahoo.com)

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Clean Up Australia Day: Sunday 2 March, Thornleigh Oval (8.30 am to noon)

STEP member Graham Jones will run a community clean up in our usual site covering residential and bushland areas near Thornleigh Oval and the nearby entrances into Lane Cove National Park.

Volunteers are welcome. You may register at www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/Thornleigh+Oval or just turn up on the day. The registration table will be at the end of Handley Avenue near the entrance to the oval. Please bring walking shoes, hat, garden gloves, water and sunscreen. Bags will be provided for the collected rubbish.

For more information contact Graham at jonesgra@netspace.net.au.

YOUNG SCIENTIST AWARD

STEP has been sponsoring an award for a project on sustainability and the environment under the Science Teachers' Association Young Scientist Awards since 2001. The 2013 awards were presented at Wollongong University in October. Syd Smith kindly undertook the judging and Marian Haire travelled all the way to Wollongong to present a STEP book and cheque to the winner.



The winner was Aiden Giragossian from Year 9 at Barker College for his project entitled *Biofuel: Ethanol towards a Greener and Secure Energy Future*.

Given the high priority for Australia to have more secure and independent energy sources it was felt that this was the most relevant sustainability issue for the STEP award. Aiden looked at the potential for biofuel production comparing the decomposition of fruit and other vegetable materials. The experiment was backed up with a discussion of current scientific knowledge in the area, a well-presented scientific model and an excellent self-criticism statement.

STEP congratulates Aiden on an excellent and well-chosen issue for research.

HELP FOR ALL TO HAVE A SAY ON GOVERNMENT DECISIONS

EDO NSW recently launched a valuable information resource to help the community influence environmental decision making.

Law and policy have a critical role to play in the sustainable management of the environment. Successful environmental policy depends on good regulation, which in turn requires community engagement. The importance of community engagement and public participation is recognised in many of our environmental laws. The resource aims to facilitate community engagement in environmental decision-making processes and by doing so help to achieve the objectives of environmental laws.

This resource lists current and upcoming opportunities to have your say in environmental decision-making processes, and provides practical guidance on how to effectively use these opportunities. It draws upon insider perspectives from current and former government employees, and case studies of successful community engagement. It outlines ways for communities to ensure that environmental regulation achieves its objectives, for example by listing the appropriate departments to report breaches to as well as civil enforcement options.

The website for this resource is www.edonsw.org.au/have_your_say.

EDO UNDER ATTACK AGAIN!

In December the Australian Government ended, without warning, \$10 million in funding over four years, for nine states and territories' Environmental Defenders Offices (EDOs), which specialise in public interest environmental and planning laws.

The funding cuts threaten closure of EDOs in Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and North Queensland. For other EDOs in NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria the federal funding reductions will see a cutback in legal services to the community, and follow a series of state funding cuts.

'Many Australians who care about protecting the environment will be alarmed about losing their EDOs,' said EDO NSW executive director Jeff Smith.

'This comes at a time when climate action in Australia is being dismantled, when the Great Barrier Reef faces unprecedented threats and when Canberra is intent on handing back environmental powers to the states and territories'. This would lead to a lowering of environmental standards for major developments and threaten environmentally sensitive areas such as the Great Barrier Reef.

The EDOs provide thousands of individuals and community groups across Australia, each year, with free legal advice on environmental and planning laws relating to new building or mining developments, water issues, pollution, indigenous and heritage issues. The EDOs have also run a number of landmark court cases for community groups across Australia including high profile cases against new coal mines, pollution of rivers by power stations, overdevelopment in residential areas and the potential impacts of coal seam gas developments on local water resources.

Please help by signing the EDO petition on www.edonsw.org.au/save_your_edo.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT GIVES ONE-STOP SHOP POWERS TO NSW GOVERNMENT

The Australian and NSW Governments have signed a new bilateral agreement to create a single environmental assessment process, less than two days after public submissions on the agreement closed. Under this agreement, the NSW Government is responsible for assessing projects relating to matters of national environmental significance under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). An agreement is expected to be signed within 12 months, which would formally make the NSW Government responsible for approving projects under the EPBC Act.

It's shutting the gate after the horse has bolted for the Australian Government to surrender its environmental powers to the NSW Government at a time when so many of our state environmental protections are under review.

In the past the Australian Government has played an essential role in safeguarding nationally and internationally important natural areas such as Tasmania's Franklin River.

HUNTING TO RESUME IN STATE FORESTS

In October the Minister for Primary Industry, Katrina Hodgkinson, announced the intention to declare 358 state forests available for hunting subject to the result of a risk assessment to be undertaken by the Forestry Corporation. Under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act the Minister has to give 30 days' notice that hunting will resume. Following the recent release of the risk assessment hunting may resume from 3 February in 200 state forests.

Hunters are required to carry a GPS so there is no excuse for wandering into an excluded zone. Hunters also are required to complete online training on navigation and the rules for hunting.

There is an online booking system intended to give Forestry Corporation one day's notice to adjust operations. Comment – one would have thought hunting would be excluded from forestry operation areas and one day's notice will be very disruptive to the scheduling of operations.

As pointed out in a press release from the National Parks Association, organiser of the *No Hunting in National Parks* campaign, it is unlikely that the program will be informed by a scientifically designed regional pest animal strategy. Recreational game hunting does little to reduce feral animal populations and can actually make things worse if it isn't a component of a targeted and supervised program such as the NPWS model that has been adopted.

THE PROTECT SYDNEY'S WATER ALLIANCE

Prior to the 2009 election Barry O'Farrell promised that mining would not occur in any water catchment area. As described in the article by Dr John Martyn in STEP Matters Issue 173, existing mining operations are damaging Sydney's water catchment. Despite this strong evidence of damage the Government approved the extension of BHP-Billiton's Dendrobium longwall coal mine in February. Coal seam gas exploration is another threat.

A coalition of 50 groups from across Sydney, the Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Blue Mountains was launched in October to protect Sydney's drinking water supply from destructive mining practices. The group, called the Protect Sydney Water Alliance aims to amplify public concern about risks to our water supply and demand accountability from the Government.

The Alliance has released polling that shows overwhelming opposition to coal mining and coal seam gas development in drinking water catchments. The poll, conducted by Essential Research on behalf of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and Lock The Gate, found 87% of people support banning coal mining and coal seam gas (CSG) activities in water catchment areas and within 2 kilometres of rivers and wetlands.

Sydney's drinking water, which comes from catchments that stretch from the Shoalhaven and the Illawarra to the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury, is a critical resource for more than 4.5 million people.

Metropolitan Special Area have been defined in areas surrounding our dams to protect Sydney's water supply by acting as a buffer zone to help stop nutrients and other material from washing into the dams. These areas are so sensitive that you can be fined \$44,000 for walking across them.

And yet Sydney Catchment Authority figures show that the four coal mines that undermine these areas drain about 3 billion litres a year from the water supply. That is enough water to fill 1,200 Olympic-sized swimming pools or for 43 million 10-minute showers.

Mining is also responsible for releasing tonnes of iron, manganese and other contaminants into the streams that flow into our drinking-water dams.

The important nature conservation values of the catchments are also being trashed, including the delicate upland swamps that help to provide clean, fresh water during dry periods.

Coal seam gas fields are now the latest threat, with exploration licences covering most of the catchment. During CSG extraction, millions of litres of water are pumped from deep beneath the earth, threatening ancient aquifers and producing vast quantities of polluted water..

ROLE OF THE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

On 11 January the *Sydney Morning Herald* had an intriguing job advertisement for the CEO of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH). This office now comes under the Office of the Premier and Cabinet.

The OEH website describes its role as:

- to support the Premier, the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Heritage in performing their executive and statutory functions;
- to develop and lead policy, reform and education in sustainability, biodiversity and native vegetation, coastal protection and Aboriginal cultural heritage; and
- to manage 7 million hectares of national parks and reserves.

The Heritage Branch works with communities to identify important places and objects and provide guidance in looking after heritage items.

The advertisement described this role as:

- ensuring vibrant natural assets for the health and prosperity of NSW;
- supporting economic development without devaluing the environment;
- helping save the environment and money through efficient use of resources;
- protecting, celebrating and sharing our heritage;
- encouraging communities to enjoy national parks and value their local environment; and

- build resilience to climate change and environmental hazards and risks.

What are 'vibrant natural assets'? How does one measure this? It would be very interesting to read the applicants' descriptions of how they will achieve this goal.

The first three items seem to be all about giving priority to economic growth with the hope that the environment will survive somehow. Is this another example of the NSW Government's belief that the economy can thrive without ensuring we have healthy waterways, agricultural landscapes and bushland?

PLANNING LEGISLATION

The *Planning Bill* moved from the NSW Legislative Assembly to the Upper House in November. The Legislative Council made almost 50 amendments to the Bill. The amendments removed the controversial code assessment provisions that allowed development that met prescribed criteria to go ahead without any opportunity for community comment. The Government intended that this would apply to about 80% of developments.

A definition of 'environmentally sensitive area' was added. This definition is a crucial part of the current legislation whereby complying development cannot occur in areas such as critical habitat, wilderness areas and land identified by local plans as:

- environmentally sensitive;
- of high Aboriginal cultural significance;
- of high biodiversity significance.

An amendment was also made which would remove provisions in the newly-made mining policy that would give priority to economic considerations over environmental and social factors.

The *Planning Bill* will return to the Legislative Assembly in 2014 and the Government may not accept the Upper House changes.

We are still not happy

We still consider that the legislation should go back to the drawing board. The basic structure breaches the pre-election promise to return decision-making powers to the community. Instead, it uses high level strategic plans that will predetermine what happens at the local level.

The major concerns with the Bill are:

- It would give developers more rights than other citizens. Developers will have new rights to override local plans and challenge council zoning decisions, with no corresponding rights for affected community members.

- It would permit use of strategic compatibility certificates that would deliver massive windfall profits for developers, increasing corruption risk in the system. The Independent Commission against Corruption raised concerns about the broad, unfettered discretion given to key decision makers, including the Minister for Planning and the Director-General of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. These concerns persist.
- It would diminish the role of expert agencies in assessment of high-impact developments such as coastal sub-divisions and marinas.
- It would largely deny communities access to the courts to appeal decisions. Restrictions on merit appeals will be maintained, despite repeated calls from ICAC to expand third-party merit review rights. Third-party merit review rights enhance development approval decisions and reduce corruption risk by subjecting decisions to judicial scrutiny.

GARIGAL NATIONAL PARK PLAN OF MANAGEMENT

The draft amendment to the Plan of Management (PoM) of Garigal National Park has been approved by the Minister for the Environment. The main initiatives in the amendments are to add extra horse riding trails and to provide for the construction of a mountain bike track (see *STEP Matters*, Issue 171, p3).

The Review of Environmental Factors (REF) relating to the mountain bike track proposal in the Bantry Bay section of the park was also approved. This is required from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and its purpose is to assess likely environmental impacts and to determine how or whether the project should proceed subject to any necessary mitigating measures. STEP's submission had many criticisms of the draft REF. It is not clear how many of these have been addressed.

There were approximately 280 submissions received for the PoM amendment and the Review of Environmental Factors combined, with a wide range of issues covered. The NPWS supported recommendations in relation to mountain biking and horse riding regarding visitor education and enforcement including signage, design of tracks to minimise environmental impacts, monitoring, cross-tenure matters and closure and rehabilitation of unauthorised tracks.

The PoM now allows for the establishment of two connected loop trails at Bantry Bay:

- 3.6 km Eastern Loop consisting of 2.25 km single-width track with the remainder as

land management trail of an advanced-intermediate grade; and

- 2.85 km Western Loop consisting of 1.5 km single-width track with the remainder as land management trail of an easy-intermediate grade.

Both single-width trail components would be 'one-way' and ridden in a north to south direction.

Construction is expected to commence in mid-March 2014. The PoM provides for a high priority to be given to track closure and rehabilitation as well as the new track construction. Here's hoping that the closure of illegal tracks that have damaged the Coastal Upland Swamp areas near Wakehurst Parkway will be enforced.

STEP is still concerned about the precedent that this bike track creates for similar tracks in other national parks.

The PoM provides for rationalisation of the walking tracks within the park and new tracks that will improve linkages with Narrabeen Lakes and Ku-ring-gai National Park. This is welcome as the area is currently beset with lots of rough old tracks that lead to suburban streets.

Currently there is very little signage to encourage walkers to experience the beautiful views and bushland within the park. This will also be improved.

All these developments have been given a high priority in the PoM but there is no statement of expected timing.

DO YOU NEED NATURE?

If you live in Sydney or Melbourne, the University of Sydney wants to know how much you think your wellbeing depends on nature being a part of your daily life. Lucy Taylor, a PhD researcher from the Faculty of Science is working on the survey.

Does being able to see trees from your office window, or chat to neighbours in a local park make you feel better mentally, physically and socially? The answer to those questions can help local councils understand the resources needed to maintain our cities in a way that benefits human health and wellbeing.

Assoc Prof Dieter Hochull, the leading researcher from the School of Biological Sciences, said:

These are not frivolous concerns. Given that over half the world's population now live in urban areas and about 80% will by 2050, understanding how urban ecosystems work is vital to our sustainability and to how governments plan our cities.

There is a comprehensive body of research detailing the benefits of our interactions with nature in urban settings. Qualitative and self-reported evidence is supported by data measuring stress hormones, cardiovascular health, concentration and weight.

A study in the US found that people with a view of a natural setting recovered from surgery more quickly than participants with a view of a brick wall, just one of many studies showing that a view of nature, especially water, has tangible benefits.

Research in the UK shows that exercising in parks has greater benefits than exercising inside, with benefits that include expediting recovery from mental fatigue, stress reduction and improved mood and self-esteem.

The British government agency, Natural England recommends that urban residents should have greenspace less than 300 m from their homes. The European Environment Agency states that people should be able to access green space with no more than a 15 min walk.

Much of this research has occurred overseas so the aim of this online survey is to find out whether urban adult residents of large cities in Australia and New Zealand experience the same benefits of interacting with animals and plants as shown in many of the international studies.

Lucy Taylor states:

If people live in the inner-city and never experience trees or wildlife, then they may be deprived from experiencing the benefits that those who regularly take a walk around the harbour or through a park would receive ... Access to nature has the potential to become an issue of social justice.

All answers to the survey are anonymous and can be accessed at www.whoneedsnature.com. The survey ends on 30 April 2014.

AUSTRALIA'S HOTTEST YEAR WAS NO FREAK EVENT: HUMANS CAUSED IT

This article was written by Sophie Lewis (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Melbourne) and Dr David Karoly (Professor of Atmospheric Science, University of Melbourne). David is also a member of the Climate Change Authority (due to be closed by the Abbott Government) and the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists. It was published in The Conversation on 6 January 2014 – see <http://theconversation.com>.

The Bureau of Meteorology has confirmed that 2013 was the hottest year in Australia since records began in 1910. Unusual heat was a persistent feature throughout the year. For the continent as a whole, we experienced our hottest day on record on 7 January. Then

January was the hottest month on record, and the 2012–13 summer was the hottest recorded for the nation. The nation-wide temperature record set for the month of September exceeded the previous record by more than a degree. This was the largest temperature anomaly for any month yet recorded.

Averaged across all of Australia, the temperature for 2013 was 1.2°C above the 1961–90 average, and well above the previous record hot year of 2005 of 1.03°C above average.

What caused these extreme temperatures? Climate scientists have a problem: because climate deals with averages and trends, we can't attribute specific records to a particular cause. But our research has made significant headway in identifying the causes of climate events, by calculating how much various factors increase the risk of extreme climate events occurring. And we have found sobering results.

We previously analysed the role human-caused climate change played in recent extremes across Australia. For various record-breaking 2013 Australian temperatures, we investigated the contributing factors to temperature extremes using a suite of state-of-the-art global climate models. The models simulated well the natural variability of Australian temperatures.

Using this approach, we calculated the probability of hot Australian temperatures in model experiments. These incorporated human (changes in greenhouse gases, aerosols and ozone) and natural (solar radiation changes and volcanic) factors. We compared these probabilities to those calculated for a parallel set of experiments that include only natural factors. In this way, natural and human climate influences can be separated.

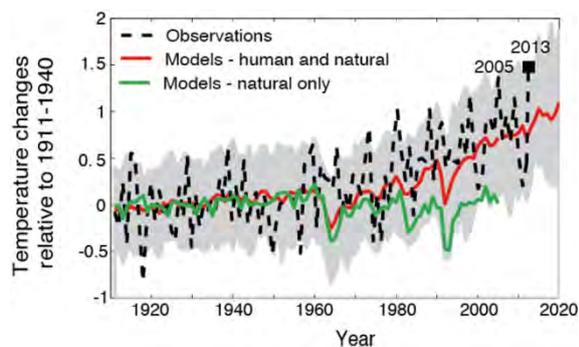
In our previous studies, we then applied an approach (known as Fraction of Attributable Risk) widely used in health and population studies to quantify the contribution of a risk factor to the occurrence of a disease. Health studies, for example, can quantify how much smoking increases the risk of lung cancer. Using the climate models, the Fraction of Attributable Risk (FAR) shows how much the risk of extreme temperatures increases thanks to human influences.

In our earlier study of our record hot Australian summer of 2012–13, we found that it was very likely (with 90% confidence) that human influences increased the odds of extreme summers such as 2012–13 by at least five times. In August 2013, Australia broke the record for the hottest 12-month period. The odds of this occurring increased again from the hottest summer. We found that human

influence increased the odds of setting this new record by at least 100 times.

Recent extreme temperatures are exceeding previous records by increasingly large margins. The chance of reaching these extreme temperatures from natural climate variations alone is becoming increasingly unlikely. When we considered the 12-month record at the end of August, it was nearly impossible for this temperature extreme to occur from natural climate variations alone in these model experiments.

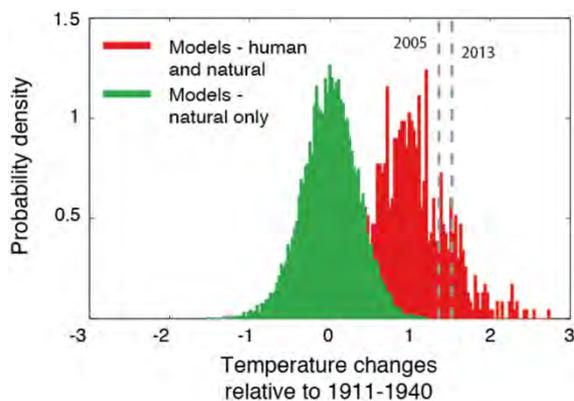
We have just completed a preliminary investigation of contributing factors for the record Australian temperature in the 2013 calendar year. In the model experiments, it is impossible to reach such a temperature record due to natural climate variations alone. In climate model simulations with only natural factors, none of the nearly 13,000 model years analysed exceed the previous hottest year recorded back in 2005.



Australian annual temperature changes (relative to 1911–1940 average) for observations (dashed black) and model simulations with natural influences only (green) and with both human and natural influences (red). The grey plumes indicate the range of values simulated across nine global climate models used.

Average Australian temperature anomalies are indicated for 2013 and the previous hottest year on record in 2005. David Karoly & Sophie Lewis

In contrast, in model simulations including both natural and human factors, such as increasing greenhouse gases, record temperatures occur approximately once in every ten years during the period 2006 to 2020. (On a mathematical note, as there is no instance in which the record hot yearly temperature occurred without human contributions, the FAR value is one.)



Probabilities of annual average temperatures for Australia from climate model simulations including natural influences only (green) and both natural and human climate influences (red) for model years 2006–2020. The vertical lines show the temperature anomalies observed in 2013 and in 2005 (the previous hottest year observed).

David Karoly & Sophie Lewis

Clearly both natural climate variability and global warming from humans contribute to recent temperature records. Natural variability always plays a major role in the occurrence of weather and climate extremes. But in the case of our recent hottest year on record, human-caused global warming made a crucial contribution to our extreme temperatures.

Our extensive catalogue of 2013 record-breaking events in Australia occurred in a global context of increasing temperatures that must be considered. Globally, 2013 will likely rank as the sixth hottest year recorded.

So to return to our question, what caused the 2013 record hot year across Australia? Simply put, our climate has changed due to human activities. Recent extremes, such as this hot year, are occurring well outside the bounds of natural climate variations alone.

ABBOTT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE – A DIRECT ACTION PLAN

Just before Christmas the Australian Government released the Emissions Reduction Fund Green Paper. This paper sets out some detail on the operation of the Direct Action Plan that is the Government’s policy to replace the carbon tax and emissions trading scheme. Under the Direct Action Plan there will be a reverse auction whereby companies will bid for funding of emission reduction projects. Money will be allocated to projects that are expected to provide the largest reductions for the lowest cost. A total of \$1.5 billion has been budgeted over the next four years.

The Paper demonstrates several doubts about the effectiveness of the policy:

Will the Fund attract projects that would have gone ahead without subsidy because they are

part of a current business plan and are beneficial on a cost/benefit basis. This would mean that funds are denied to a new project that would lead to further emission reductions, that is there would be no additionality.

It will not be clear until mid-2015 how business as usual baselines will be calculated that will establish the yardstick of emissions reductions. If the baseline uses each company's historical measures rather than some sort of best practice measure, companies that have moved early to make reductions will be disadvantaged.

It is not clear what will happen if a company increases its emissions above its baseline. The Green Paper states that the government will not be punitive.

This situation draws into question whether the Direct Action Plan can provide any level of certainty that the goal will be achieved of a reduction of 5% below 2000 levels by 2020.

To cap it all off the financial commitment made by the Government is only for 4 years. This situation could jeopardise the ability of companies to borrow money from financial institutions. The projects are likely to take more than 4 years to implement and a financial institution is likely to want longer certainty of government support.

BURNING NATIVE FORESTS FOR ELECTRICITY – A COSTLY IDEA?

In July 2013 the NSW Government announced the intention to amend the Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Regulation 2009 to allow:

... invasive native scrub and logging debris from approved forestry operations on state forest or private land ... [to] be burnt to generate electricity.

Environment groups across the state are concerned the change will lead to wholesale destruction of native forests and woodlands to feed the electricity generators. With the current downturn in international demand for native forest wood the logging industry is counting on electricity generation as its lifeline.

The EPA will shortly be putting the draft regulation on public exhibition to enable consultation to occur. For more details see www.epa.nsw.gov.au/epamedia/EPAMedia13071101.htm.

Wholesale logging of native forests will not only be harmful to wildlife it will also increase greenhouse gas emissions as explained in the article below written by Dr Judith Arani (Economist, Fenner School, ANU), *The Conversation*, 22 December 2011 ([http://theconversation.com/is-using-native-](http://theconversation.com/is-using-native-forests-for-energy-really-carbon-neutral-4285)

[forests-for-energy-really-carbon-neutral-4285](http://theconversation.com/is-using-native-forests-for-energy-really-carbon-neutral-4285)).

Is using native forests for energy really carbon-neutral?

Australia's forest conflict gets easier to solve as every day passes. In reality, the conflict will solve itself if the government can just resist reviving the environmentally and economically inferior native forest part of Australia's 'forest' industry. The government must not open native forest wood to the energy market.

Some are proposing that Australia's forest future lies in burning native timber to produce electricity. Proponents argue this 'bio-energy' is a sustainable energy source. But just as Australia's forest wars seem to be coming to an end, conflict over bio-energy could restart the fight.

Why are we fighting over forests?

We cannot understand Australia's forest conflict and its solution without unpacking the word 'forest'. To environmentalists, 'forest' means native forests – self-regenerating ecosystems. To the forestry industry, forests are both native forests and plantations (agricultural crops).

Understanding the solution to Australia's native forest conflict lies in seeing the industry's two competing parts: native logging and plantation logging.

Between 85 and 90% of Australia's production of sawn timber and wood panels is now plantation based. Native forests represent a small and declining market share. The future of native logging was set in the 1960s when the Australian Government, skilfully lobbied by the forestry industry and foresters, embarked on a nationwide softwood planting program geared for sawn timber.

A couple of decades later the maturing plantations drove unrelenting structural change in sawmilling: a benefit for the economy and for workers. But rather than coming up with a new non-extractive use for native forests (enjoyment, biodiversity conservation, carbon and water sinks), governments opened native forests to woodchip exports.

Australia's forest conflict erupted. It has never subsided.

The rise of plantations

In the early 1990s, the forestry industry lobbied for a new wave of subsidised planting, this time for hardwood chip exports. The Australian Government responded with tax minimisation plantation-managed investment schemes. These schemes were a predictable economic disaster but the trees keep growing despite the wave of company collapses (Timbercorp, Great Southern Plantations, Willmott and so on).

And so the story repeats. Today, plantations

have already displaced slightly more than half of Australia's hardwood chip exports. We can expect a near-complete cessation of native forest chip exports in the near future.

Demand is the other side of this industry story. Japan's demand for hardwood chips has been flat since the mid-1990s and China is implementing a sophisticated forest policy to avoid liquidating global forests.

Should bio-energy be on the forest agenda?

Australia's plantation industry success is a pragmatic opportunity to resolve our native forest conflict. The forestry industry, however, wants to burn native forest wood for energy in Australia or export as pellets to feed overseas power stations. This would retain some native forest logging businesses, state forestry agencies and associated employment.

Environmentalists want native forests protected. Ecological scientists advise that we have the opportunity to avoid large greenhouse gas emissions and achieve substantial removals of atmospheric greenhouse gases by ceasing native forest logging and letting previously logged native forests regrow and not log them again.

Fewer and fewer people buy native timber products. Energy is the only immediate and substantial market if native forest logging is to effectively continue. The contemporary question is: what is the climate implication of using native forests for energy?

Time is of the essence. In Australia, we log native forests on roughly 60-year cycles. If we log a 60-year-old stand of native forest for energy production today, the carbon emissions from logging will occur soon after. The forest will not regrow enough to return to today's carbon stock level until 2070. It took this long to grow: it takes this long to replace.

Is burning wood pellets for energy the best use of stored carbon?

Logging native forests for energy is climate negative for virtually the entire logging cycle. Furthermore, the emissions from enacting this scenario today would max out over the next 10 to 20 years: a critical time in our climate challenge.

Native forest bio-energy is all pain and no climate gain

The Australian Government remains spooked by decades of politically challenging forest conflict. But more recently it has made some good policy decisions.

In particular, it said that domestic electricity made using native forest wood would be ineligible for renewable energy certificates. This stopped a (government-engineered) revenue stream enhancing its commercial viability.

But the government ignores the essence of time and maintains its contradictory position that logging native forests is carbon neutral. This means that selling native forest wood pellets to Europe, China, Japan or any other country is carbon price free.

If this becomes the future for Australia's native forests, the climate will be negatively impacted and Australia's forest conflict will keep raging. All pain for no gain.

Ending Australian's native forest conflict takes a government that can make that wise and strategic stitch in time – now – and rule out native forest wood from the energy market.

WORLD PARKS CONGRESS IN SYDNEY

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) holds a world forum on protected areas every ten years. It is exciting news that the next congress will be held in Sydney Olympic Park from 12–19 November.

It is expected that some 3,000 delegates from 160 countries will attend.

The ultimate aim of the Congress is to position parks and protected areas firmly within broader goals of economic and community wellbeing. The key themes will be:

- **PARKS** – aim to strengthen policy and gain commitments for the expansion, connectivity and better management of parks and protected areas to cover all areas important for biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- **PEOPLE** – how to foster the equitable governance of parks and protected areas to empower communities (including indigenous peoples) to become involved and to benefit.
- **PLANET** – explore the promotion parks as nature-based solutions to global challenges such as climate change and food and water security.

See www.worldparkscongress.org for details

STEP CONSTITUTION – ANY VOLUNTEERS TO HELP WITH AN UPDATE?

STEP’s constitution was last updated in 2009. The legislation governing non-profit and charitable organisations has changed recently. STEP now covers more than our original area of Ku-ring-gai. It is time our constitution was updated.

We would be very grateful for any offers from members or friends with a legal background interested in helping us with this review.

ORDER FORM

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STEP INFORMATION

STEP Matters

The editor of *STEP Matters* for this edition is Jill Green, who is responsible for all information and articles unless otherwise specifically credited. The STEP committee may not necessarily agree with all opinions carried in this newsletter, but we do welcome feedback and comments from our readers, be they STEP members or not.

All issues (from when we began in 1978) can be viewed online, usually with full-colour illustrations.

Feedback

Send complaints, praise, comments or letters to secretary@step.org.au. Please feel free to share your copy of the newsletter with friends, neighbours and business colleagues.



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New Members

New members are always welcome to join STEP and to make themselves available for the committee should they wish to do so. The effectiveness of STEP is a factor of the numbers of members we have, so please encourage your like-minded friends and neighbours to join.

STEP Committee

Jill Green – President
Robin Buchanan – Vice-president
Frank Budai – Treasurer
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Andrew Little
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