

PROPOSALS FOR A MYALL LAKES NATIONAL PARK, N.S.W. – A CASE STUDY IN STEMMING SAND-MINING

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Introduction

I was fortunate to spend a Saturday recently at Kanangra Walls with Sir Edmund Hillary. Something he said cut very deep: In any other country in the world this would have been a national park years ago.' He was right, too – because I believe that in Sweden, Mexico, the United States, Russia, Uganda – and certainly in Holland – an area such as Kanangra would have been a national park years ago.

The same goes for a system of lakes 70 miles north of Newcastle in New South Wales: the Myall Lakes should have been dedicated years ago.

The National Parks Association of N.S.W. put up a proposal for a Myall Lakes National Park to the local Council and the Lands Department in 1961. It seemed to have everyone's approval but after all the deputations, all the reports, all the talk – nothing came of it.

The State Planning Authority of N.S.W. was set up a few years ago. One of its stated, urgent tasks was to survey the New South Wales coastline so that natural coastal areas could be dedicated for public use. In 1964, the Chairman, Mr. Nigel Ashton announced to the Terrigal Summer School of the National Trust and Australian Planning Institute on the subject of The coastline and foreshores of New South Wales,' that:

'There are large sections of the coastline where natural areas should be established on scientific or recreational grounds. These areas may be divided into two categories:

- (a) places of primitive appeal; and
- (b) places of great natural and landscape interest.

The former must remain unaltered The SPA is engaged on preliminary surveys of the coastline .

... But he ended on a plaintive note:

... The Authority needs all the help it can obtain in the task of developing and preserving the coast properly.'

In another talk at the Summer School the Chief Planning Officer of the State Planning Authority, Mr. Henry Wardlaw, set up the hypothetical problem of how to provide for the State's population of 20 million

in 50 years time

– a population whose members will each have 5 weeks' annual leave and be able to afford to enjoy it. He said that at any time in a 10-week period in midsummer, 5 million men, women and children would be on holiday.

He went on to invite the School to look at the resources available to accommodate this crowd – basically, 800 miles of coastline from which must be excluded 150 miles of metropolis between Port Stephens and the Shoalhaven. (If he had foreseen the decision to build a certain atomic power station he would have extended this figure by 20 miles to Jervis Bay).

Suppose , Henry Wardlaw said, 'that of the remainder, 150 miles finds its way into national parks . . .' one hundred and fifty miles of New South Wales coastline into national parks! That was in 1964, but today, in late 1969, we cannot see much more than a possible total of 100 miles. In only five years the national park potential of the New South Wales coastline has been *reduced by a third*.

Outside the immediate environs of Sydney there are no coastal national parks.

Recent government decisions allow the mining of 54 miles of the 60 potential miles on the North Coast. Thus instead of 150 miles of first- class national park, as Mr. Wardlaw was supposing, we are only concerned now with some 100 miles, of which over half will have been degraded to third-class parkland by mining.

Mr. Bentham s clock said the time was a quarter-to-12 or maybe only twenty-to-12. It was right.

The Sim Committee

In October 1965, the then Minister for Lands and Mines in N.S.W., the Hon. T. L. Lewis, set up a committee to investigate the conflict between beach mining and conservation on the North Coast.

The Committee consisted of government officials, representatives of mining interests and one private conservationist – in his own right. (Although Mr.

Noakes said in his paper on mineral sands that park interests were well represented, they were not).

The Committee met in private and its discussions were sub judice. During its life, protests from conservation bodies regarding sand-mining were quieted by advice that the whole matter of such mining was *under consideration*. Meanwhile leases continued to be issued.

The Sim Committee – named after its Chairman – worked for two years on its primary term of reference, which was to propose a system of parks for the North Coast. Then the Minister for Lands abruptly withdrew the primary term of reference.

The Committee was left with its secondary term of reference: to resolve conflict between sand-miners and existing park proposals on the North Coast. Of the 400-mile coastline, only 60 miles were the subject of existing proposals.

Withdrawal – at a stroke of the Ministerial pen – of the primary term of reference cleared six-sevenths of the coast for leasing by the miners. This was the first blow to the Sim Committee.

The second came with the public announcement by the Minister for Lands, *without prior advice to this committee*, that the Jerusalem Creek/Evans Head area would be cleared and subdivided for a pastoral development. Of the dozen areas under consideration by the Committee this 40,000-acre tract was the largest.

The third reverse for the Committee came when the Government issued the Committee's Report to interested bodies with incorrectly drawn maps which gave a misleading impression of the Sim Committee's recommendations. The maps had to be redrawn. As they were produced by the Mines Department the errors are difficult to accept – and I have chosen my words with what I believe is proper constraint.

Throughout the Sim Committee's deliberations the Rutile and Zircon Development Association took the view that its members were entitled to mine the whole of the coastline. In this they were, and still are, fully backed by the sweeping powers of the New South Wales Mining Act 1906, as amended, which overrides all but about two other Acts. The miners on the Sim Committee were not a majority, but they negotiated from a position of strength. If the Committee became deadlocked on any issue, i.e. unable to reach a unanimous compromise, then the provisions of this archaic Mining Act would apply and the miners could take the lot – except cricket pitches, as Dr. Ratcliffe in his paper reminded us. Racecourses and cemeteries are, I think, exempted, too.

The Rutile and Zircon Development Association not only negotiated from a position of strength but they took the initiative too. They insisted that the conservationists had to prove their right to any areas at all; and even in those areas the miners insisted that they were entitled to a dredge-path, an access road and power lines.

Thus, because of the threat of the Mining Act in the background, the Sim Committee compromised conservation values again and again. Faced with the difficulty of equating monetary values with intangibles such as recreation and scenery, the Committee elected to consider only verifiable scientific data in the case for preserving any area. It was a tragic mistake to abandon the major, growing, and multifarious public interests involved in scenic amenity, recreation and tourism. While the miners retained the strength of their position from an outmoded law, those representing conservation abandoned their own legitimate base for what looks to me very close to an academic ivory tower.

Not every scientist, of course, will agree with me. Nevertheless, I believe it was a major mistake too, to pass over all question of the emotional attachment Australians have for Australian landscapes. This question – a mainspring, incidentally, of much of our literature and of our cultural life – together with the broad philosophical questions of man's relation to his land, seem to have escaped the Sim Committee altogether.

Last night Mr. Bentham talked to us about husbandry of the land. A similar concept, going back to the Book of Genesis, is 'stewardship of the land' but so pressed about by miners, subdividers and roadbuilders were the members of the Sim Committee that they failed to write

these universal issues and their local implications into the report.

I must emphasize that the conservation societies were not invited to nominate representatives to the Sim Committee. The members were appointed by the Minister. When the report was handed to representatives of the societies they were told by the Ministers for Lands and Mines that it was for their information, not for their 'consideration', and furthermore that it would be implemented forthwith by the granting of mining leases.

In summary, the report recommends that of the 400-mile coastline only 60 miles be dedicated as parkland and of that 60 miles only about six miles of coastline are to be exempt from mining. But dredges, roads and power lines are to be allowed to cross even those six miles.

The proposed park areas are 10 in number and total only 100,000 acres. Nine out of the ten areas are to be mined. Mining will be allowed twice over 20 years. In 1967 one company alone, Mineral Deposits Limited, had mining and prospecting leases in New South Wales totalling 63,000 acres. It will by now have a greater acreage at its disposal than is contemplated for the public of the whole State. No one denies that there is much valuable material in the Sim Report. But a compromise which preserves only six miles out of 400 miles of the major recreational resource of N.S.W. is no compromise. It is a national disaster.

Implementation

The Committee's report was presented to the Ministers for Lands and Mines early in 1968. It was tabled in Parliament in December 1968. Parliament did not discuss the Report until the week before last when a Labor Member of the Upper House, the Hon E. G. Wright, moved 'That the areas over which the Committee has reached unanimous agreement be dedicated National Parks without further delay'. The motion was lost on party lines by 23 votes to 18.

The nett result of the whole Sim Committee operation thus has been to hold up all conservation proposals on the North Coast of N.S.W. from 1965 to the present time — while prospecting and mining leases continued to be issued. These years have also seen a significant increase in the daily capacity of the various mineral processing plants.

The Secretary of the Rutile and Zircon Development Association not unexpectedly considers 'the Sim Report is a most valuable document in any approach to the land-use problem'.

Myall Lakes Committee

The Myall Lakes Committee was formed by a number of organisations following the Sim Committee debacle. Not only the major conservation societies, but also the Institute of Architects of Australia (N.S.W.) and the Australian Planning Institute nominated members.

The two aims of the Myall Lakes Committee were to propose a major national park at Myall Lakes, 70 miles

north of Newcastle, and to draw attention to the need for a system of parks on the North Coast.

The Myall Lakes area was chosen because it was the last major area available on the whole North and South Coastlines of New South Wales with real national park potential. It is also our last unpolluted coastal lake system and a most important area for botanists, ecologists, zoologists and geomorphologists. It is also the prime area of the State for water-oriented recreation.

Within a few months the Myall Lakes Committee had raised \$3,000, commissioned consultant planners and agreed on a National Park Proposal for the Myall Lakes.

The Proposal or Plan was deliberately made similar to a plan then being prepared by the Government's National Parks and Wildlife Service. We added several peripheral land areas but the major difference between the two schemes was that the Government scheme, prepared in accordance with the Sim Committee recommendations, would allow mining over the bulk of the land area of the park. The Myall Lakes Committee's scheme rejected mining in the proposed park. Within a few further months the proposal was printed and presented to all Members of the State Parliament.

The proposal is to dedicate 69,000 acres of land and 27,000 acres of lake as a total 96,000 acre park with about a 26-mile sea frontage — *unmined*. By comparison, the Sim Report proposed the dedication of only seven miles of coast front of which only two miles would be unmined.

The plan is specifically designed to serve large numbers of people — but not in the form of a continuous coastal sprawl. Instead, there are about eight *intensive-use* areas spaced so as to leave the most natural areas intact.

The plan should appeal to the commercial interests in the existing centres because it concentrates development on those centres rather than dispersing it elsewhere. It is definitely water-oriented as far as usage is concerned.

Three marinas are proposed and a marine extension including offshore islands. It accepts that fast motor-boats must be restricted to areas where their wash will not erode river banks or the peaceful atmosphere of wilderness areas within the park. The existing prawn-fishing industry is protected.

The plan proposes the acquisition of some private properties by negotiation at current values. Where hardship would be involved the plan proposed that existing property holders be allowed to remain for the remainder of their lives.

Nevertheless, months before the Myall Proposal was published, it had been thoroughly condemned in the local press.

The Myall Lakes Committee at the outset had invited representatives of the Stroud Shire Council to meet the Committee. However our invitation was merely 'noted' by Council.

The day after the proposal was presented to the Minister it was publicly condemned by the Stroud Shire President in the local press. It made no difference that the president probably had not seen the report itself.

The Committee was accused of being "a Sydney-based committee" — which is about the dirtiest epithet a man from Buladelah or Tea Gardens can apply. It was claimed that the Committee wanted to turn the whole lake system into a vast nature reserve — keeping all humans out. Conservationists were going to ban all boating, stop all development, drive local residents off their land and ruin them financially.

How much of this hysteria was whipped up by one or two subdivision-minded landholders and the sand-mining companies? We will never know. But whatever the miners said behind the scenes they certainly were not backward in attacking conservationists in the metropolitan press.

We were castigated for repudiating the Sim Report. 'Sapient Americans' were quoted in favour of mining against 'wilderness snobs'. Conservationists were accused of being a 'lobby' by, of all people, the very public relations organisation formed by the sand-mining firms!

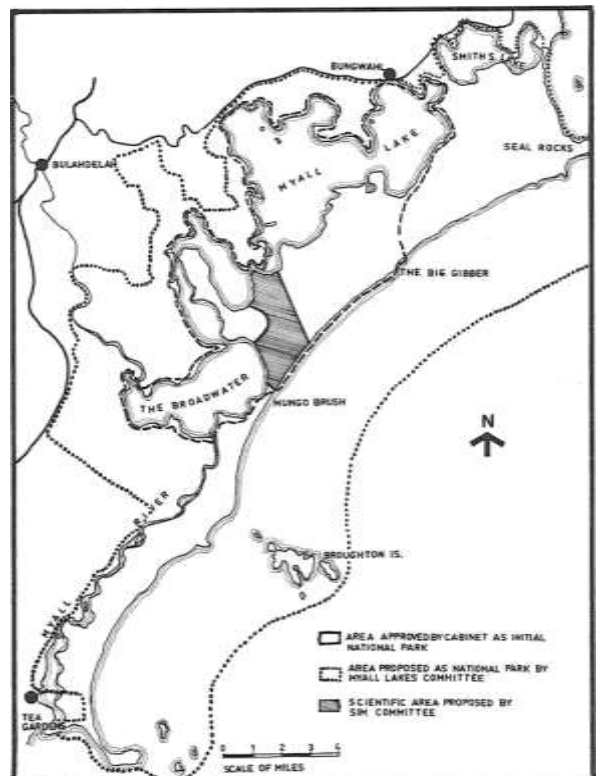
The then N.S.W. Minister for Conservation, Mr. Beale opened Conservation Week with a sneer at conservationists: 'Some dedicated conservationists,' he said, 'seem to have set their faces against all development'. A spokesman for the Rutile and Zircon Development Association stated: The diversity of nature has become a religion substituting for progress,' and referred to the 'extreme nature preservation groups ...

the exclusive nature conservationists.' And the Secretary of the RZDA described the Myall Lakes Park Proposal as 'a bigoted and one-sided argument for total nature preservation'. All these themes were summarised by Margaret Jones in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' as 'Conservation versus progress'. That's a pretty neat phrase — but its too neat to be true. No conservationist wants to stop all progress. After all only one-two percent of N.S.W. is parkland.

However there *is* an important idea concealed in the phrase. Some conservationists *are* querying the adherence to *maximum growth rate economics* with its emphasis on ever-increasing production irrespective of the usefulness of the product, with its adherence to a staggering immigration quota and insatiable demand for overseas capital and concomitant overseas direction and distribution of profits. Some conservationists are calling for an economic-plateau policy instead of maximum growth rate.

Such a policy would allow a country with tremendous land-use problems more time to sort itself out. What use is it to carry out a survey of ecological groupings, if in this most florally diverse continent, such a task takes 20 years? In 20 years the ecological groups will have been

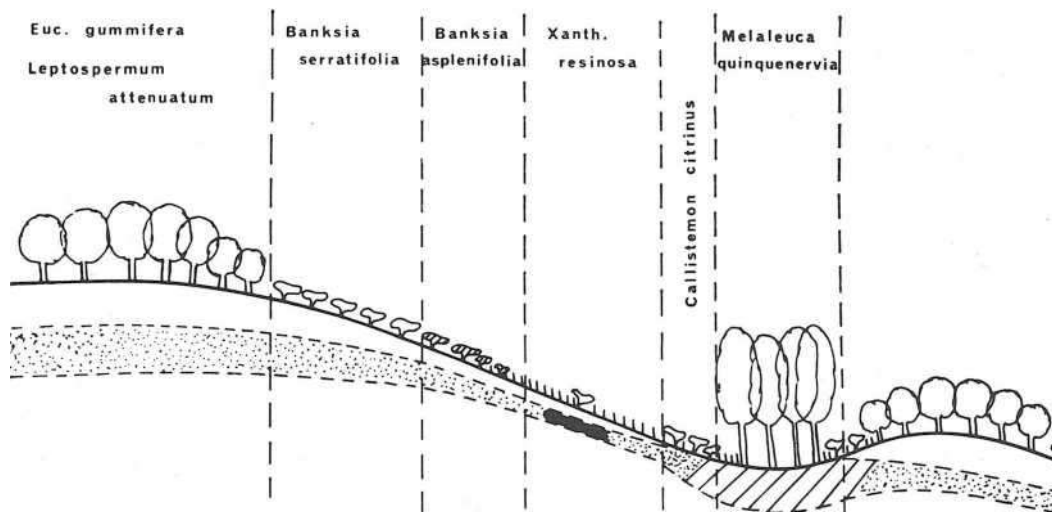
The Myall Lakes showing the national park proposals recommended by the Sim Committee, and approved by the N.S.W. Government, including the 'scientific area'.



shattered and polluted in N.S.W. by the forces of maximum growth rate economics. What I think we want is a much slower rate of expansion of consumer goods, a big cut in immigration, investment in science, education, planning and co-ordination. Thus there is some truth in the 'conservation versus progress' slogan. Conservation certainly threatens the right of mining companies to mine minerals wherever minerals lie. One measure of success in putting forward our philosophy is the abuse showered on us by the public relations officers of the miners.

Beach Sand-mining

Beach sand-mining is a short-lived industry. Estimates of its life may vary from 10 to 25 years on the N.S.W. coast. It has no programme of rationing the minerals against a national emergency or to lengthen its own life. Someone calculated that if the 100,000 acres proposed for dedication by the Sim Committee were freed from mining this would simply shorten the industry's life by 5 per cent, i.e. 15 months.



A diagrammatic section of the inner barrier dunes showing the location of some of the more prominent species in the Myall Lakes national park. The 'B' soil horizon is shown. Its texture influences the permeability of the soil to water and has a considerable effect on plants. The dotted areas are the loose 'B' horizon; the solid black area is the hard 'B' horizon. The diagonal strokes are a peaty area. *Courtesy The Australian Museum, Sydney.*

A simple diagram by Dr. Carolin of Sydney University makes the position clear. In the main the miners are working on ancient beaches now in the form of forested sand dunes. Between these dunes are little valleys. The water table appears at the surface in the valleys in the form of swamps. A 'hard pan' condition occurs here so that vegetation has to be adapted to alternating periods of wet and very dry. The height of the dunes means that vegetation will be at varying heights above the water table. Wind exposure, too, varies considerably according to position on the fore-dune or hind-dune and on the windward or leeward side. A wide range of species has grown up to fill all the ecological niches provided by these various conditions.

But the beachminers "restore such a landscape to even gradients with an almost uniform depth of water table and negligible wind protection through land form. In the process of sucking up, regurgitating and regrading the landscape, they

break up the hard pan on which the swamps were based. Such conditions simply cannot support anything like the botanical diversity of the original. The beachminers are at last beginning to abandon their claims to be able to restore' mined areas. I say this despite a recent statement by the N.S.W. Minister for Mines Mr. W. C. Fife that: 'there is ample evidence that beaches mined for rutile and zircon can be restored.

Restoration Costs

At the present time a few companies spend as much as \$1,000 per acre revegetating mined lands; the average expenditure seems to be about \$600 per acre. But the guarantee deposit required under the conditions of the leases appears to average only \$200 per acre. Thus it is possible that if the firms begin to view the guarantee deposit as an indemnity and walk out leaving it with the Government, the public will have to foot the bulk of restoration costs.

'Only 2 ½ Square Miles per Year'

In his lecture, Mr. Noakes said that the extent of the interference of sand-mining with nature has been greatly exaggerated. He said that only 2.5 square miles per year are mined. This sounds a remarkably small area for conservationists to be shouting about. But one must remember the 2.5 square miles is mined in strips about 100 yards wide. This is the equivalent of mining 40 miles of coastline per year. Allowing for additional lengths of channels for floating the dredges from one area of economic mineralisation to the next it is fair to say that the sand-miners are mining 50 miles of coastline per year. In addition there are their access roads, catchpits for topdressing, power lines, etc.

Conclusion

During this Symposium while you have been sitting here, out on your excursion, or sleeping at your home or motel, the rutile miners are working. The big dredges work round the clock. Right now a dredge is in the heart of the Myall Lakes Park Proposal – at Mungo Brush. It is probably working at the rate of 1,000 cubic yards of sand per hour.

A road has been marked out diagonally across the Scientific Area delineated by the Sim Committee (which is only half as wide as Dr. Carolin considered a minimum for viability). Stroud Shire Council has approved the road and the Minister for Lands proposes to do likewise. Stroud Council intends that it will be used for access to the whole beach and dune system which both the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Myall Lakes Committee wish to retain as a nature reserve.

We have asked all Parliamentarians to help us stop that dredge. The Ministers for Lands and Mines have refused. Only one elderly opposition member seems to have done anything – he was brave but unsuccessful.

In a very real sense this is the last chance for Myall Lakes.

Personally, I think there is a first rate case for ditching the short-lived rutile industry in favour of a much more dynamic industry: tourism. I quote from the National Bank of Australia summary 'Tourism – an Industry', published in June 1969:

'The Australian National Travel Association has estimated that in 1968 expenditure on tourism in Australia amounted to \$600 m. Of course the figure is even greater if allowance is made for expenditure on the motor vehicle industry in this field. The A.N.T.A. is of the opinion that this figure could have been as high as \$1,070 m. in 1968. In addition, international travel is already the largest single item in world trade

'During the 1968 financial year, 257,000 overseas visitors spent almost \$88m. in Australia, which made tourism our eighth biggest foreign exchange earner. There are certain aspects of earning from

tourism which should make its promotion particularly attractive. For example, tourism is a relatively stable export earner, being less susceptible to price fluctuations and trade shifts than other commodities. In addition, each country has attractions that are unique, and sight-seeing is a 'product' which can be sold repeatedly without exhaustion of the original resources.

The battle to save the last possible major coastal national park in N.S.W. from mining needs unity, dedication and hard work from a wide cross-section of the community. The Myall Lakes Committee needs money and more skilled assistance from journalists, layout and advertising people, scientists and businessmen. We need to prepare exhibitions, pamphlets, letters to parliamentarians. We may even need parliamentary candidates. Myall Lakes can be saved if we want it enough.

To date the Committee's major victory has been the unanimous resolution of State Council of the Liberal Party of N.S.W. that 'there should be no mining in the Myall Lakes Park area nor in any proposed park on the North Coast'.

All we have to do is to see that a Liberal Government respects the views of its own party members.