

Tasmania's environment is one of its most important strengths. Environmental values and sustainability are now at the forefront of policy and planning decisions and Tasmanians place great value on their clean air and water, their renewable energy and their unique natural environment.

Environmental issues in Tasmania had a high national profile during the 1970s and 1980s with Lake Pedder, the Franklin Dam and Wesley Vale firmly etched in many Australians' memories. In retrospect, these controversial issues proved to be 'watersheds' in Tasmania's and Australia's recent environmental history leading to much greater emphasis now being placed on environmental values. Extracts from an article by a former Senior Policy Officer with the Tasmanian Department of Environment and Land Management are provided below that outline the issues involved in each of these three controversies. The site of the proposed Franklin Dam and also Wesley Vale are both located within the Cradle Coast Region Tasmania, while Lake Pedder is located just outside the Region's boundary.

This Section also includes some information on the Tasmanian World Heritage Area (WHA), environmental complaints with regard to industrial pollution, the potential threat to the environment by foxes entering Tasmania from the Australian mainland, and the value placed on early nineteenth century cultural heritage.

## 5.1 Managing Tasmania's environment<sup>1</sup>

Attitudes to environmental management have changed over the past thirty years. In Tasmania this can be illustrated by briefly tracing the history of three socially divisive resource development issues which polarised the 'environment-versus-development' debate. Lack of transparency in the development approval process, together with public and government frustration over the uncertainty of outcomes, eventually led to a review of environment and planning laws, and the subsequent development of an integrated resource management and planning system (RMPS). The objective of the RMPS is to ensure a sustainable future for all Tasmanians.

### *Setting the scene for reform*

#### **Lake Pedder debate**

In 1972, following 12 years of escalating public protest and criticism, Lake Pedder in South West Tasmania was flooded to supply 82 megawatts of electricity for industry. In hindsight this was effectively the end of an era that saw development over-ride environmental values. On the one hand UNESCO had described the lake as 'a unique wilderness of incomparable significance and value', on the other was the continuing government policy of hydro-industrialisation; a policy that involved developing Tasmania's potential hydro-electric power generation to attract resource development industries with offers of large volumes of low-cost electricity. There was a fundamental public clash between the economic growth and efficiency model, espoused by government and the Hydro-electric Commission (HEC), and the emerging conservation movement. Such was the depth of the public disquiet over the flooding of Lake Pedder that a Commonwealth Government Committee of Inquiry was established in 1974. The Committee recommended a revision of development approval processes to avoid similar confrontations in the future. These recommendations were ignored by the Tasmanian Government of the day and further confrontation followed with the HEC's subsequent proposal to dam the Franklin River.

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<sup>1</sup> Extracts from an article by Bob Davies, former Senior Policy Officer, Department of Environment and Land Management. This feature article was published in the *2000 Tasmanian Year Book*.

## 5.1 Managing Tasmania's environment *continued*

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### Franklin Dam debate

The 1980's Franklin Dam dispute was again primarily concerned with the environmental management of south west Tasmania and the protection of wilderness values. The dispute was to embroil the Labor Government, the HEC and the conservation movement in open confrontation and was eventually resolved when the Commonwealth Government bought into the debate.

It began with the HEC proposing that an integrated hydro-electric power development be built initially involving the damming of the Gordon River below its confluence with the Franklin River, and later damming the Gordon River above its confluence with the Olga River. The environmental cost would have been the destruction of 35% of the remaining South West Wilderness area including significant Huon Pine habitat.

Public protests, a referendum and a change of government in 1982 did not make the dams issue go away. The newly elected Liberal Government determined to progress the Gordon-below-Franklin project.

However, the Commonwealth Government had meanwhile applied to the World Heritage Commission for the listing of the threatened area and in late 1982 it was revealed that Australia's nomination of the south west as a World Heritage Area had succeeded.

The Tasmanian government remained intransigent and refused to accept Commonwealth Executive Council approved regulations under the *National Parks and Wild Life Act* (Cwlth) aimed at halting the Franklin Dam development. The Tasmanian Government took the issue to the High Court, but in June 1983 the court ruled that legislation to stop work on the dam was valid. The Franklin was saved, but at huge political and social cost. The process had divided the Tasmanian community (up to 1,300 people had been arrested during the course of the Wilderness Society's Franklin blockade) and the rift has been slow to heal, a situation prolonged by a new and emerging environmental debate over forestry.

### Wesley Vale pulp mill debate

Between March 1988 and March 1989 a conflict over the siting of a \$1 billion kraft pulp mill at Wesley Vale (near Devonport), the disposal of its processing wastes, and the availability of close to 2 million tonnes of pulpwood per year to feed the demands of the plant, took centre political stage. At issue was the transparency of development approval process, opportunity for public scrutiny of economic, social and environmental data, and the adequacy of the environmental impact assessment process conducted under the provisions of the *Environment Protection Act 1973*. The overlapping Commonwealth requirements were also of concern, especially for the developers, Noranda of Canada and North Ltd, as the project came under the purview of the Foreign Investment Review Board.

The conservation movement argued that the increase in woodchips needed to feed a pulp mill of the size proposed for Wesley Vale would inevitably lead to a substantial increase in woodchip demand, which in turn had the potential to threaten National Estate and World Heritage forests. But, from a state and Commonwealth government perspective, the mill had the potential to provide employment and attract investment to an area of high regional unemployment. It was also claimed the mill would offer substantial balance of payment benefits to the Australian economy. With such polarised views the stage was once again set for confrontation. Local residents in particular felt threatened by the impact of a rail spur and sulphur dioxide emissions on the local rural economy, and there were further concerns about the risk of organochlorines, in waste water discharges, on the marine environment of Bass Strait. An added disquiet arose about the level of timber royalties to be paid for the wood used by the mill, and what benefits the state would actually gain from the mill's development with substantial profits to flow off-shore.

After prolonged debate and disputation at State and Federal Government levels, the developers (Noranda and North Ltd) decided that they could not afford continued expenditure without a guarantee that approval for the project would finally be granted, and cancelled the project.

## 5.1 Managing Tasmania's environment *continued*

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### **The need for change**

As can be seen from these three examples, the planning and development approval process had failed to deliver outcomes which met the needs of Government for investment or increased employment; developers for certainty of process; or indeed the wider community. These failings had led to deep community division; concern for the transparency and adequacy of impact assessment processes; and, had given investors a negative impression of the difficulty of doing business in Tasmania. The Tasmanian Government had not heeded the recommendations of the 1974 Federal Government Inquiry into the flooding of Lake Pedder, or other commentators who, over the years, had also called for legislative reform. However, by the late 1980s concern for the environment and the sustainability of past practices had become mainstream political and social issues.

### **Subsequent legislation**

A more integrated approach to sustainable development has been a feature of important legislation and policy changes introduced during the 1990s in Tasmania.

In 1993 the *Land Use Planning Approvals Act* was introduced. The Act provides for a uniform set of environmental impact assessment principles for development approvals.

In 1994 the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act (EMPCA)* was introduced with a new generation of environmental management tools.

In 1997 the *State Policies and Projects Act* was passed providing framework for implementing legally enforceable statewide policies for such matters as coastal protection and water quality management.

There is a current view that improved environmental management and business efficiency are complementary.

The importance of Tasmania's environment, together with principles of sustainable development are now core values in policy and planning decisions and have wide community acceptance.

### **'Tasmania Together'—environmental goals**

The *Tasmania Together* document, released in 2002, was a major project that allowed the people of Tasmania to have a say in their social, economic and environmental future. Extensive and elaborate community consultation was undertaken throughout this project. *Tasmania Together* is now enshrined in law and is used to guide decision making by the Tasmanian Government.

The four environmental goals in *Tasmania Together* are:

- Value, protect and conserve our natural and cultural heritage.
- Value, protect and maintain our natural diversity.
- Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.
- Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way, now and for future generations.

## 5.2 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area<sup>1</sup>

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Natural and cultural properties that are considered to be of 'outstanding universal value' and that meet the criteria of the World Heritage Convention may be entered on the World Heritage List. The list is compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee. Signatories to the Convention (such as Australia) undertake to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations the properties entered on the World Heritage List.

There are two World Heritage properties in Tasmania: the Tasmanian Wilderness and Macquarie Island. Large sections of the Tasmanian Wilderness fall within the Cradle Coast Region Tasmania. The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (WHA) was listed in 1982 and covers 1.38 million hectares (approximately 20% of Tasmania). It features a diverse array of both natural and cultural features of global significance, e.g. pristine habitats for plants and animals that are found nowhere else in the world and the most significant and extensive glacially modified landscapes in Australia.

The Tasmanian Wilderness WHA is one of only 13 World Heritage properties that satisfy all natural criteria for selection and one of only 23 that satisfies both natural and cultural criteria. At the time of listing, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area satisfied 7 of a possible 11 criteria, more than any other World Heritage Site.

The unique wildlife, ancient plants, stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage of the Tasmanian wilderness all contributed to its successful nomination for World Heritage.

Currently, management of the WHA is according to principles and practices set out in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan (updated in 1999).

There are good access roads into the WHA. There are also good walking tracks with huts and camping areas for visitors on long walks. It is relatively easy to get close to lakes, rivers, mountains, open plateaus and thick rainforests.

### **Threats to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Areas**

The World Heritage Convention requires those responsible for the management of the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA to conserve, protect and pass the WHA on to future generations. At the same time Tasmania is required to 'present' it—to assist people to see and experience the area.

Managing a large natural area like the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA is not without its problems. Many of the threats to the values of the area are due to, or made worse by, people visiting the WHA.

#### **Walking track degradation**

With over 20,000 bushwalker visits to the remoter parts of the WHA every year track erosion is a major problem. The Parks and Wildlife Service uses hardening of track surfaces, education of walkers and regulations to limit impacts.

#### **Phytophthora root rot**

This is a soil borne fungus that causes plant dieback. It selectively kills a range of lowland plant species, particularly heaths. It cannot survive low temperatures so this generally limits its range to areas below 800 metres elevation. Caused by the pathogen, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, the disease is spread with the movement of soil, so walking and vehicle tracks are prime areas of infestation.

#### **Central Plateau erosion**

Erosion in the Central Plateau area is a legacy of past grazing practices and fire. Almost 11,000 hectares are affected to some degree. Recovery in this sort of environment is very slow due to the harsh conditions and frost heave (the water in the soil freezes and uproots seedlings). In some areas ground-hugging creeping species like *Grevillea australis* provide enough protection for plants to re-establish naturally. Rehabilitation may be necessary on some of the worst affected areas. Monitoring at a number of sites is continuing to assess the best measures to take.

## 5.2 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area *continued*

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### *Feral and introduced species*

Goats, deer, cats, rabbits and invasive weed species are significant threats, particularly on the edges of the WHA where it joins farmland. The Parks and Wildlife Service has an active policy of culling goats and deer (which mainly occur in the Central Plateau Conservation Area). Rabbit eradication is being investigated for small isolated populations where the chances of success are high. Weed species are also regularly targeted. Should the fox become established in Tasmania, it would pose the greatest threat to the values for which the Tasmanian World Heritage Area was listed (for more information see Section 5.4).

### *Fire*

Some plant species found in the WHA have evolved to survive repeated bushfires. Some of these communities rely on occasional fires as part of their regeneration process. Other species and communities can be killed and destroyed forever by a single fire. Plant communities easily destroyed by fire (such as the native pines and alpine plants) occur beside highly flammable communities such as the buttongrass moorlands. Peat soils occur throughout the WHA. These are organic soils made of decomposed vegetation. Peat soils will burn in the summer when they are dry. Once alight peat soils will burn underground for long periods and these fires are very difficult to put out. In the past much of the area which is now in the WHA was burnt by bushfires. The results of those fires can be seen in the dead trees on the slopes and ridges and the areas of bare gravel where the burnt peat has washed away. Research continues to work out the best ways to use and control fire in the WHA.

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1 Source: Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment <[www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au)>.

### 5.3 Environmental complaints: industrial pollution incidents

Responding to industrial pollution incidents (including air and noise pollution) is the responsibility of the State Government. Incidents generally result from:

- petroleum and chemical spills, disposals and processing;
- manufacturing and mineral processing;
- waste transport and disposal;
- food production; and
- extractive industries (e.g. quarries, mining operations).

The data below enumerates the number of complaints dealt with by the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment in 2000 and 2001 and mostly relate to larger-scale (often industrial) operations. Complaints of a more minor nature fall within the jurisdiction of individual local governments. Complaints recorded for the Cradle Coast Region Tasmania were higher than for the two other regions in Tasmania.

#### 5.3.1 Environmental Complaints, Tasmania—2000 and 2001

Issue	HOBART AND SOUTHERN.....		LAUNCESTON AND NORTH EASTERN.....		CRADLE COAST REGION TASMANIA.....		TASMANIA.....	
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
Noise	44	51	47	33	26	38	117	122
Air	155	124	122	94	291	284	568	502
Water	76	93	95	101	64	86	235	280
Waste	13	7	4	4	6	9	23	20
Oil	32	29	16	14	20	16	68	59
Chemicals	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>1 012</b>	<b>984</b>

Source: Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment <[www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au)>.

## 5.4 The threat to the environment of foxes in Tasmania<sup>1</sup>

### *The potential threat to Tasmania's wildlife*

The fox represents the single most devastating threat to Tasmania's native mammals and birds. Tasmania is recognised as a national and international fauna haven due to the lack of foxes, but should the species become established nearly all of Tasmania's native land animals would be at risk.

Despite a number of sightings of escaped foxes in Tasmania over the past 30 years, including the well-publicised case of a fox that entered the state on a container ship in Burnie in May 1998, there had until recently been no evidence that the fox had become established in Tasmania. However, the history of reported escapes in Tasmania, and the recent sightings and verified discovery of foxes in a number of areas around the state raised serious concerns that the mechanisms in place to prevent the establishment of the fox in the state are inadequate. It also raised serious concerns for the future of Tasmania's unique wildlife and agricultural industries.

78 native vertebrate species would be at risk if the fox became established. Of these, 34 species have locally restricted ranges, 16 are suspected to be already declining in distribution and 12 species are threatened according to Commonwealth or state threatened species legislation. This list does not include invertebrate species, many of which would also be at risk of fox predation.

Threatened and high conservation significance species at risk include:

- Eastern barred bandicoot
- Tasmanian bettong
- Long nosed potoroo
- Eastern quoll
- Southern brown bandicoot
- Long tailed mouse
- Velvet furred rat
- New Holland mouse
- Hooded plover
- Little tern
- Fairy tern
- Ground parrot
- Ground thrush
- Painted button quail
- Great crested grebe
- Green and gold frog
- Tussock skink
- Glossy grass skink.

The Tasmanian pademelon and Tasmanian bettong, both of which thrive in Tasmania, are now extinct on the mainland because of the fox. The mainland eastern barred bandicoot has also been reduced to a mere 200 surviving individuals because of the fox. The young of unique species such as the Tasmanian devil and the spotted tail quoll that are left unattended in dens are highly vulnerable to fox predation.

More widespread species like ducks, shorebirds, ground nesting birds, blue tongue lizards, mountain dragons, skinks and frogs are all highly at risk. Even animals such as the little penguin and platypus are at risk. Additionally, foxes are carriers of disease and spread environmental weeds.

### *The threat to Tasmania's agricultural industry*

Domestic poultry, sheep and lambs are targeted by foxes. Foxes can also carry diseases which impact upon both native wildlife and domestic stock. They are known carriers of distemper, parvovirus, canine hepatitis, heart worm, hydatids and sarcoptic mange. It is believed that the individual fox which escaped from a container ship in Burnie in May 1998 had a 12% chance of carrying heart worm.

In Europe, the fox is the main carrier of rabies. Should rabies ever be introduced into Australia, foxes would likely be the main agent of its spread.

### *The Fox Free Tasmania Taskforce*

The Tasmanian Government established the Fox Free Tasmania Taskforce in 2002. The Taskforce comprises 12 full-time and 14 part-time staff and is tasked with not only eradicating foxes now but to maintain Tasmania 'fox free' for the future. Field Teams are based at Burnie, Launceston and Hobart. The Taskforce concentrates on four key areas:

- an eradication program to kill all foxes that are in Tasmania at present;
- scientific research to understand the impacts of foxes upon Tasmanian wildlife;
- quarantine inspections to prevent future fox importation; and
- an awareness and information strategy to encourage all Tasmanians to assist the eradication program.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment <[www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au)>.

## 5.5 Preservation of cultural heritage sites<sup>1</sup>

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Tasmania places a high value on its remaining early nineteenth century cultural heritage sites. Examples of such sites within the Cradle Coast Region Tasmania, that can be readily accessed by visitors, include Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour near Strahan and Highfield House at Stanley (Circular Head).

The **Sarah Island Historic Site**, located in Macquarie Harbour, is Tasmania's oldest convict settlement, operating from 1822 to 1833. Located on the rugged West Coast and separated from the settled east by a vast tract of mountainous wilderness, Sarah Island was proposed by Lt Governor Sorell as a place of banishment and security for the worst description of convicts and as such developed the reputation as one of the severest of the penal settlements established during the history of transportation.

However, the island was also a successful centre of industry. Pining and shipbuilding were among the trades carried out by the convicts. In its day, Sarah Island was the largest shipbuilding yard in Australia.

Sarah Island is accessible via cruise boats which operate on Macquarie Harbour out of the West Coast town of Strahan. These cruises also continue up the lower reaches of the Gordon River, and often take in the narrow entrance to Macquarie Harbour, known as Hells Gates.

**Highfield House**, located in Stanley on the North West Coast, can be regarded as the 'birthplace' of European settlement in Tasmania's North-West. Built from 1832–1835 as a residence for Edward Curr, chief agent of the Van Diemen's Land Company, the house represents an important part of Tasmanian historic heritage. The history of the North-West region of Tasmania is inextricably bound up with the story of the Van Diemen's Land Company.

Indentured labourers brought out from Britain and also assigned convicts made up the bulk of the Van Diemen's Land Company's workforce at Circular Head in the early years.

In 1982 the Tasmanian Government acquired the Highfield property with funds from the National Estate and has carried out extensive restoration works. The Highfield Historic Site is open for public inspection seven days a week during summer, and on Saturdays and Sundays during winter.

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1. Source: Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment <[www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au)>.