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TCT Crossword
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Due to circumstances beyond her control our copy-editor and proofreader does not always see every article before it goes to press. We apologise to readers for any errors appearing in the newsletter – past, present and future – and to Janice Bird for any consequent damage to her professional reputation.

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Front cover: Giant kelp forest at Bicheno on the east coast of Tasmania that no longer exists. See story on page 6 ‘Listing of giant kelp forests as endangered’
Photo: Jon Bryan (photo taken approximately 1989)

Advice to TCT members making electronic payments for membership/donations
If making electronic payments directly into the TCT bank account please ensure you include your name so that your payment can be correctly identified and receipted!

Email version of newsletter
The Tasmanian conservationist is now available in PDF format for members who would prefer an electronic version.

Please send us an email at tct.administration@gmail.com including your name and home address and the email address you would like us to use, and we will email the Tasmanian conservationist to you.

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Parks and Wildlife Service ignores safety recommendations for Cape Hauy Track – walkers at greater risk of death

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust in a media release recently (Tuesday 5 March 2013) called on the state government to immediately close the recently upgraded Cape Hauy Walking Track in Tasman National Park because it is being operated contrary to the Parks and Wildlife Service’s risk assessment and walker’s lives are being placed at increased risk.

The upgraded Cape Hauy Track, the first stage of the proposed Three Capes Track, was officially opened on 3 October 2012. The Cape Hauy Visitor Risk Assessment was approved on 7 September 2012 by the Parks and Wildlife Service General Manager, Peter Mooney. The risk assessment was tabled with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in November 2012 and is a public document.

The Cape Hauy Visitor Risk Assessment recommends a safety handrail at the end of the Cape Hauy Track (page 10) but a visit by the TCT Director on Saturday 2 March 2013 (as shown in photo above) confirmed that this has not been installed.

The PWS has operated the Cape Hauy Track for five months contrary to its own risk assessment, which says that installation of a handrail at the end of the track is a ‘minimum’ requirement, is ‘urgent’ and failure to do so will increase the risk that walkers ‘would die’.

There are no excuses for putting walkers’ lives at greater risk and the track should be closed until the safety barrier is installed. We can only guess that the reason for this failure to protect walkers is to save money, because the Three Capes Track is already grossly over budget, and to avoid criticism of the visual impacts of safety measures. This failure calls into doubt the PWS’s capacity to manage walker safety associated with the remainder of the Three Capes Track and raises the possibility of additional safety-related cost over-runs and unacceptable visual impacts.

The Cape Hauy Visitor Risk Assessment

Recommendations:

• ‘Install at a minimum a type C handrail at the end of the track (site 6)’ (page 10)
• The risk associated with the viewing area at the end of the track is ‘Urgent and requires mitigation as soon as possible’ (page 9)
• The consequence of walkers falling over the 60m-high cliff is that they ‘would die’ (page 7) and installation of a handrail will reduce the probability of this happening (page 17).

A likely scenario at the end of the track is described: ‘A large group sitting at the end of the track (Site 6) and a person close to the cliff edge gets up after sitting for some time – unsteady, they trip over their pack or someone else’s and, unable to recover, fall off the cliff’ (page 7).

The TCT is also concerned that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works may have been misled regarding management of risks associated with the Cape Hauy Track and Three Capes Track generally.

In its 7 December 2012 report to Parliament (available on the Parliament of Tasmania website) the committee recommended ongoing funding of the Three Capes Track ‘in accordance with the documentation submitted’ (page 30) but now it seems that a key document provided to the committee, the Cape Hauy Visitor Risk Assessment, has not been implemented.

The PWS also gave assurances during the committee’s hearings in relation to risk management which may have been misleading.

The committee’s report concluded that:

• ‘The Committee was however, particularly concerned that the new track will provide easy access for a much larger number of visitors to extremely dangerous cliff faces’ (page 29)
• in relation to the Cape Hauy Track, ‘Mr Mooney assured the Committee that the PWS were “extremely conscious” of the risks and that some of the people walking this track will be “people that may be on their first two-hour venture”’ (page 29)
• ‘The committee accepts the assurances Mr Mooney has made in relation to both the risk assessment strategy and subsequent safety installations’ (page 30).

The TCT has written to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works requesting that it reconvenes its investigation into the Three Capes Track and determines whether or not it was misled by the PWS regarding safety management on the Cape Hauy Track and the Three Capes Track generally.

Peter McGlone
Director
TCT presentation to the Select Committee

On 17 January 2013 Alistair Graham and Peter McGlone gave a presentation on behalf of the TCT to the Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry (Select Committee) into the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill (TFA Bill). The councillors seemed very keen to hear the TCT’s views. Questions focused mainly on our key concern, i.e. that the TFA Bill, if unchanged, will lead to the weakening of the Forest Practices Code or prevent it being strengthened, leading to negative impacts on biodiversity.

There were a few questions regarding certification and, surprisingly, none regarding the Vision Statement, which we see as seriously flawed, nor the implications of the TFA Bill for the possible reform of Forestry Tasmania. Our full submission, including attachments, is available on the Parliament of Tasmania website: www.parliament.tas.gov.au. The key points raised are included below.

Will the Legislative Council address the TCT’s key concerns?

From questions and comments during our presentation and during the several days on which we attended the hearings, it looks as though a clear majority of councillors acknowledge and to some extent share our key concern that the TFA Bill will lead to the weakening of the Forest Practices Code or prevent it being strengthened.

The councillors did not want to discuss any amendments at length nor express support for or opposition to them. This may come later, after the formal committee process has been completed. It was not possible to gauge how concerned any councillors are and whether any, let alone a majority, would support our suggested amendments to safeguard the Forest Practices Code.

It is also not possible to determine whether they were truly concerned and would want to address this flaw in the Bill, or would just use our concerns to justify voting against it. We are seeking meetings with key councillors to press them to support our proposed amendments.

Will the Select Committee process affect how the Legislative Council will vote?

The Select Committee has received more than 100 written submissions, totalling many thousands of pages, and heard 57 presentations over 12 days of hearings, which have been transcribed into 1145 pages of Hansard. The committee has also had countless hours sitting in private.

What will be the result of this be? If you were thinking the Select Committee would come up with a clear, agreed recommendation that would tell us how the councillors would vote, then you will be disappointed. On 11 February 2013 the Chair of the Select Committee, Paul Harris, was quoted in the Examiner and Mercury newspapers saying that the committee’s report would contain findings but would not include any recommendations. He said it would be up to each individual councillor to propose amendments. Put another way, it seems clear that the committee could not reach a consensus view on the TFA Bill and the outcome will be decided on the floor of the Legislative Council – it sits again on 19 March.

Let’s hope that all the work of the committee is not a waste of time and helps councillors to identify flaws in the Bill and what amendments are required to fix them.

How will the councillors vote? Will there be amendments?

By protocol, the President of the Legislative Council, if called upon to vote, is required to vote down a Bill. For the TFA Bill to be passed, a 7:7 split vote must be avoided. A minimum of eight votes are needed for it to pass; with only seven votes against, it will fail.

During the debate on the Bill in December, all councillors except the President stated their voting intention. They were split 7:7. It seems very clear, that six are strongly opposed and five are supportive and three are sitting on the fence.

Why would the opponents propose amendments? The councillors appear to be feeling enormous pressure to not block the TFA Bill, to avoid the tag of being an obstructionist house. But at the same time they face pressure from their constituents and some in the forest industry not to ‘lock-up more areas’ or ‘close down the forest industry’. So, they could pass a greatly amended Bill and leave it to the lower house to decide its fate. Both supporters and opponents will propose amendments to gain support of the three fence-sitters – Tony Mulder, Rosemary Armitage and Adrianna Taylor.

This is why we have some hope that the TCT’s amendment to safeguard the Code has a chance.

The most likely amendment that the opposing councillors will seek is to enable each house of the Parliament to vote for or against each individual reserve or small batches of reserves, enabling councillors to vote against reserves that are opposed by their constituents. This would probably appeal to the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania (FIAT), who could actively lobby against the reservation of areas with important timber resources. The Australian Government would be happy as long as the World Heritage Area extension was approved; having the Tasmanian Parliament reserve those parts of the extension which are currently state forest, 123,000ha, would be a bonus. The signatory ENGOs would say they are concerned but would not withdraw their support for the TFA Bill. This all sounds feasible.
The $64,000 question is: will the Legislative Councillors support our proposed amendment to safeguard the Forest Practices Code or will they support the ‘sovereign risk’ amendment proposed by the FIAT which, in effect, will guarantee that the Forest Practices Act and other acts cannot be strengthened in any way that restricts industry?

Summary of the TCT submission to the Legislative Council

• The need to ensure that the Forest Practices Code is not downgraded – and the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) that implements it is not undermined – and that the FPA’s advice currently before the Minister, to upgrade the Code to improve its biodiversity conservation provisions, is acted upon.

• The importance of ensuring that any certification of native forest harvesting regimes is a genuine attempt to incorporate best practice forestry, rather than allowing additional reservation to excuse poor standards, and that overcutting native forest as part of a transition to plantations is not given any imprimatur of sustainability.

• The importance of recognising the serious deficiencies in the Signatories’ Vision Statement included as a Schedule to the Bill as a de facto statement of government forest policy; and the resultant dangers of exempting Vision- implementing actions from the state’s planning and environment laws.

• The need to ensure that government commitments to reform Forestry Tasmania (in line with advice from URS Australia’s Strategic Review stage 2 report of August 2012) are not frustrated, and that fundamental reform of institutional arrangements for the management of both State Forest and reserved land is undertaken as a matter of urgency.

• The need to recognise that the TFA Bill would deliver significant conservation outcomes, primarily through reservation of wilderness and World Heritage-value forests on public land.

• The importance of recognising that the Commonwealth, with the support of the Tasmanian Government, is likely to proceed immediately with a renomination of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, to extend the boundaries to the east and north, based on Map C annexed to the Signatories’ agreement.

• The importance of getting it right on ‘forest carbon’ policy, not only to take advantage of commercial opportunities afforded by reductions in greenhouse gas emissions associated with reduced levels of logging, but also to avoid the perversities associated with encouraging the development of biomass or biofuel industries based on wood from native forests.

Peter McGlone

Vale Helen Gee

The TCT Board and staff wish to acknowledge the great conservation work that Helen Gee achieved before her early death on 19 December last year. Her public involvement in conservation issues can be traced back to 1967 with the campaign to save Lake Pedder, continuing with her input into the declaration of the Douglas-Apsley National Park in 1989, and her continued commitment to working towards greater recognition of the necessity to protect the biodiversity of Tasmania’s dry eucalypt forests.

Helen was a founding member of the Wilderness Society, a campaign officer for the Tasmanian National Parks Association, the convenor of the Lake Pedder Restoration Committee and of the South East Forest Protection Group, a councillor with the Australian Conservation Foundation and a member of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Consultative Committee.

Alongside these commitments, Helen also compiled and edited three books on the natural heritage values of Tasmania: The South West Book: a Tasmanian wilderness (1978), The Franklin: Tasmania’s last wild river (1978) and For the forests: a history of the Tasmanian forest campaigns (2001).

Helen’s great love of the environment was and will continue to be Tasmania’s gain for generations to come, as a result of her work throughout a life focused on the natural values that she recognised as worth preserving. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and vision will be sadly missed.

Peter McGlone
On 7 February 2013 the federal Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPAC), Tony Burke, decided not to include the entire Tarkine (403,000 hectares were nominated) on the National Heritage list. Instead, Minister Burke listed a much smaller but still highly important portion of the Tarkine, the ‘Western Tasmanian Aboriginal Landscape’.

**Tarkine heritage listing refused by Tony Burke**

The decision by Tony Burke not to list the vast majority of the Tarkine as a National Heritage site, contrary to the advice of the Australian Heritage Council, is bad enough, but his justifications for this decision were disgraceful.

When we requested from the Department of SEWPAC a formal statement of reasons for this decision we were told that none had been produced and that we should refer to the transcript of Minister Burke’s media conference for his reasons.

In this statement and other media comments, the minister explains that he decided not to list the entire Tarkine because of the social and economic impacts of such a listing, on mining in particular, but he failed to refer to any expert advice or analysis of these impacts. He does refer to a letter from state government.

The minister did not effectively explain why he failed to achieve a better compromise. Clearly he could have listed some of the areas with the highest environmental value while excluding those of greatest importance to the mining industry.

Based on advice from his department, he argued that you cannot protect any part of the Tarkine’s environmental values without protecting it all.

The other reasons given in the minister’s media conference were in relation to the two visits he made to the Tarkine while deliberating about his decision. He describes his great surprise at finding that the tracks he was walking on followed old railway lines and he also noted remains of old aqueducts used during early mining operations. He was also surprised at the experience of visiting the Savage River mine, which is right in the heart of the Tarkine.

The AHC advised that the Savage River mine and a good area around it had been excised from the area nominated. Also, while it impacts on the wilderness values of the surrounding area, the remaining nominated area was mainly high value wilderness. The minister failed to provide evidence for how the presence of aqueducts and old railway lines detract from the area’s environmental value, nor did he consider whether they may have value as European cultural heritage.

It is disappointing that Mr Burke, as environment minister, ignored the advice of the AHC, appears not to have sought any counter advice from relevant experts (e.g. in regard to the socio-economic impacts and wilderness quality) and instead has made (based on our interpretation of the transcript of Mr Burke’s media conference) a decision based on his own personal and poorly substantiated opinion.

Perhaps the worst aspect of the minister’s statement was the implication that heritage listing and mining or other economic uses necessarily clash, and that listing would ban or greatly restrict future mines.

Listing the Tarkine as a National Heritage site would be a recognition of its values, and any development proposed would require assessment as to whether it would have significant impacts on these values. Clearly some mines or other developments would clash with these values but some may not or, more likely, the minister of the day would approve them regardless of the impacts. The minister does flag the likelihood that heritage listing would create a more complicated and longer assessment process for all proposals and more stringent conditions would be expected – and he could not support this. It is a disgrace that Australia’s national environment minister could not support heritage protection for the Tarkine simply because it would delay mining developments.

But the minister seemed intent on giving the environmental movement a total defeat, purely for political reasons. It seems that it’s time for the Labor Party to distance itself from the Greens, and his decision is promoted as a pro-jobs decision.

The Tarkine National Coalition has requested that the minister prepare and provide a formal statement of reasons for his decision. This should be good reading.

**Western Tasmania Aboriginal Cultural Landscape Heritage site listed by Tony Burke**

It is greatly disappointing that the undoubted values of the entire Tarkine region have not been recognised and listed on the Register of National Heritage. But it is also disappointing that this decision overshadowed the listing of the 20,000ha Western Tasmanian Aboriginal Cultural Landscape Heritage site. The importance of the coastal portion of the Tarkine for Aboriginal heritage and the potential value of the listing for its management was largely missed in the media coverage.

We are still digesting the legal meaning of the listing. Contrary to comments made by Minister Burke, it is clear that long-established but annually licensed recreational practices such as off-road vehicle driving will not be exempted under provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act dealing with prior authorisations and lawful
continuations of use. What is unclear is whether this listing will convince this minister to be more proactive than Peter Garrett in dealing with the collective impacts of all recreational vehicles. The previous minister’s view was that each individual vehicle trip would need to be demonstrated as having a significant impact on an EPBC Act listed value for it to be an action controlled under the Act.

The following text is taken from a brochure produced by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. It provides a wonderful description of the site’s Aboriginal heritage values.

Dotted along Tasmania’s wind-swept western coastline are the remains of numerous hut depressions found in Aboriginal shell middens. These are the remnants of an unusual, specialised and more sedentary Aboriginal way of life that began almost 2000 years ago and continued up to the 1830s, based on the hunting of seals and land mammals and the gathering of shellfish.

Sites within the Western Tasmania Aboriginal Cultural Landscape include some of the best evidence of the lifestyle of Aboriginal people in the area, showing how groups moved seasonally up and down the west coast of Tasmania and their subsequent economic development around the products of hunting.

In particular, the apparent absence of fish bones and the presence of marine and terrestrial animal bones in some middens, when taken in conjunction with the hut sites, are an important expression of this specialised way of life.

Archaeological work from the 1960s through to the 1980s found evidence of early villages, established approximately 1900 years ago next to an elephant seal (Mirounga leonina) colony. Based upon the large number of seal bones found in the midden, it is believed that the elephant seals were a major component of Aboriginal people’s diet in the area.

Analysis of the faunal remains from the West Point midden indicates that mainly young calves were killed; indicating that up to 1900 years ago Aboriginal people inhabited the area in summer when young seals were being weaned.

Evidence of similar patterns of movement are also found in southwest Victoria, however the diversity of hut depressions in the Western Tasmania Aboriginal Cultural Landscape are greater, making it of outstanding national heritage value to all of Australia.

Peter McGlone

Letter to the editor

The Mercury

28 February 2013

Cable car survey results disputed

Adrian Bold (‘Boost for Cable Car concept’, Mercury, 27 February 2013) has had 1700 people complete his online survey who support a cable car on Mt Wellington. These respondents are self-selected, i.e. Mr Bold has failed to seek a sample of the Hobart community which is independent of any bias. No claims can be made about this result being a reflection of the broader Hobart population.

More supporters of the cable car would be expected to attempt a self-selected survey. Also, we don’t know how many respondents come from outside of Hobart or are known to the proponent.

The other problem is that respondents are given only very basic information by Mr Bold about the potential impacts of building a cable car. I wonder how many supporters would change their opinion if they were told that large areas of forest would need to be cut down to protect the very expensive infrastructure from wildfire and falling trees. Large fire breaks would be needed around each pylon and under some or all of the cable. To protect against falling trees upslope of the cable and pylons, forests may need to be cleared for a distance greater than the height of the trees.

This survey is not a boost for the cable car – just a boost for Mr Bold’s Facebook page.

Peter McGlone
In August 2012 the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, decided to list the ecological community ‘Giant kelp marine forests of south east Australia’, as endangered under the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The listing recognises the severe decline, up to 98% in the case of one population, in the area of sea floor covered by giant kelp forests off Tasmania, which has been a cause of concern among scientists and conservationists for more than a decade. The original nomination in 2009, by Humane Society International, specified giant kelp forests in Tasmanian waters, but the listing also covers the occurrence of the community off Victoria and South Australia. The Tasmanian Conservation Trust strongly supported this nomination in a submission during the public consultation part of this process.

The ecological community meets the following criteria for listing as endangered:

• severe decline in functionally important species
• severe reduction in integrity across most of its range such that regeneration is unlikely in the near future, even with human intervention.

Giant kelp plants *Macrosystis pyrifera* literally form underwater forests, up to 35m tall, anchored on rocky substrate and reaching to the surface, where they form a canopy. Giant kelp forests were once very widespread and formed an extremely important part of the Tasmanian marine ecosystem, providing both food and physical habitat for a wide range of marine species. Kelp forests may also improve local water quality and buffer coasts from strong waves.

The fact that neither the community nor *Macrocystis* has been listed previously at the state or federal level as threatened is particularly concerning, as it means that precious time that could have been used to mitigate some of the threats has been wasted. The prime threats to the kelp forests, noted in the Scientific Committee’s (SC) Advice to the Minister, are a climate-change-driven increase in sea surface temperature, associated with the southward extension of the East Australian Current (EAC), and a corresponding expansion in the range of kelp-grazing sea urchins. Not only is rising sea surface temperature a problem for giant kelp, but the EAC is nutrient poor compared with the sub-Antarctic waters which it is displacing. Impacts on water quality from land-based activities (such as forestry) and aquaculture are also noted as a threat.

The Advice recognises the long-spined sea urchin, *Centrostephanus rodgersii*, as the major invasive threat to giant kelp forests. The urchin’s numbers have increased rapidly, to the extent that it has caused serious damage to shallow rocky reefs, mowing down the giant kelp plants that grow there, so that ‘urchin barrens’ now cover significant areas. The urchins are known to remove an entire kelp plant just by eating through the stalk at its base. While warming water is recognised by the SC’s Advice as causing the southward spread of the urchin, it notes that ‘historic’ overfishing of large rock lobsters, *Jasus edwardsii*, which are the urchin’s only natural predators, has allowed urchin numbers to increase. Reefs in marine protected areas where rock lobster fishing is excluded seem to have far fewer urchin barrens than unprotected areas.

In late 2011 the TCT urged the federal environment minister to refuse an export permit for Tasmanian rock lobster, on the basis that the industry is the prime cause of the spread of *Centrostephanus*, and indeed will ultimately cause a decline in the rock lobster fishery itself as habitat important to the fishery is lost to urchin barrens. The submission was supported by scientific data and reports. An abalone industry submission also specified that the spread of the urchin, due to removal of rock lobsters, is harming the abalone fishery. The point of these submissions is that the rock lobster fishery is a current and continuing cause of the spread of *Centrostephanus*, not simply a historic threat.

Climate change is a major cause of the decline of the kelp forests, both because *Macrocystis* does not grow as well in warmer water, but also because *Centrostephanus* breeds more effectively in water above 12°C. Of course, managing climate change is a universal challenge which requires concerted action at many levels to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, other threats only make the survival of giant kelp forests in warming waters more
difficult. The ‘Conservation Advice’ approved by the minister recognises that specific actions can be taken, which will be detailed in a recovery plan. Unfortunately the only action proposed with regard to the urchins at this stage is research into effective control methods, plus ‘targeted control’. Although scientific research already clearly shows that large rock lobster predation is the only known effective control method, there is no mention of the rock lobster fishery in any of the proposed actions or research. Critically, there is no strategy to increase the density and/or numbers of the large rock lobster to a level at which they are able to successfully predate on Centrostephanus urchins and restrict the expansion of urchin barrens. This is a particular problem on the east coast where the rock lobster biomass in large areas is now estimated to be 10% or less than virgin biomass (i.e. the biomass that was present before modern fishing activities began).

The SC’s Advice notes that it is difficult to separate the impacts of the various threats involved. If there was an adequate system of marine reserves on Tasmania’s east coast it would be possible for scientists to more precisely determine the causes of decline. As well as protecting species and communities vulnerable to impacts such as overfishing, marine reserves are an excellent way of ensuring that such scientific assessments can be made. By observing the diversity, growth and survival of marine species within the reserve compared to surrounding areas, scientists are able to reach conclusions about the impact of various factors, such as climate change and fishing.

‘Considering’ remnants of giant kelp forest for protection in marine reserves is a priority action in the Conservation Advice; however, the forests occur in Tasmanian waters. We can only hope that this listing will give some impetus to the declaration of further marine reserves in eastern Tasmanian waters. After all, as with the giant kelp forests themselves, it has been shown time and again that marine reserves are vital for ensuring recruitment, including of commercially exploited species, to surrounding waters.

Now that the giant kelp forests have, in theory, some hope of protection, it is seriously concerning that the federal government has agreed via COAG to devolve the Commonwealth’s powers over threatened species and communities under the EPBC Act to state governments. Climate change is largely a matter for the federal government and, while it has acted with the ‘carbon price’ legislation, there is much, much more to be done; and it is the Tasmanian Government’s poor management of the rock lobster fishery, and tardiness in establishing adequate no-take marine reserves, that essentially allows the ongoing expansion of Centrostephanus barrens.

The TCT welcomes this overdue listing. However, with threats such as climate change and an invasive species that thrives in warmer water and whose only predator has been effectively been removed by a fishery, the TCT holds grave fears for the future of this unique and valuable ecological community.

Sharon Moore

References


On 18 February 2013 the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities decided that the Van Diemen's Land Company (VDL) dairy farm expansion proposal at its Woolnorth property is a controlled action under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and will be assessed by an environment impact statement (EIS).

In our submission on VDL’s referral to the Australian Government, we recommended that this proposal be rejected outright but, if not, that it should be assessed through the most stringent process. Having this proposal assessed through an EIS is a good outcome and is certainly justified.

Most of the impacts of this proposal will result from the permanent clearance and conversion of 1818 hectares of native forest for use as dairy pasture and therefore the direct impacts will be severe and permanent. As found by VDL’s consultants, all of this 1818ha is habitat for the endangered Tasmanian devil and vulnerable spotted-tailed quoll. There will be little possibility to undo the damage done if the proposed mitigation and offset measures prove, down the track, to be ineffective or less effective than expected.

There is great uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness of mitigation and offsetting measures and some are unsubstantiated or untested. If the project is to go ahead, it is vital to take the opportunity now to assess and possibly improve these measures. There are also numerous indirect, downstream and landscape-level impacts which are very complex and require detailed assessment.

We also argued that VDL failed to adequately assess whether there are feasible alternative ways of expending its dairy.

Under the EIS process the minister must prepare assessment guidelines and may provide for public comment on a draft of the guidelines. This is an important additional step which should ensure that all aspects of the proposal and the possible impacts are identified and properly assessed. The EIS process could take six to 12 months.

**TCT’s concerns regarding the VDL proposal**

**Direct impact on Tasmanian devil and spotted-tailed quoll**

VDL’s consultants found that the proposal would result in the clearance of 1818ha of native habitat of the Tasmanian devil and spotted-tailed quoll.

The impact on the Tasmanian devil is even more concerning given the Woolnorth population is disease-free and is being considered by the Tasmanian Government for inclusion in the insurance population for the species, through the construction of a fence to prevent them from contacting diseased devils.

Feasible alternatives not considered

We assert that VDL may be able to proceed with its dairy expansion without clearing any native forest but the proponent has failed to consider this option. We believe that VDL has inappropriately dismissed the need to consider alternatives which have less environmental impact, basing its decision on irrelevant and unsubstantiated financial concerns. No financial assessment was provided with the documentation.

VDL should be required to properly consider feasible alternatives, including:

- proceeding with the dairy expansion without any land clearance: therefore scaling back its expansion
- proceeding with the dairy expansion without any land clearance but instead looking to purchase already cleared land.

The TCT estimates that the land clearing component equates to only 10% to 20% of VDL’s dairy expansion, the vast majority coming through improved pasture management and converting some existing pasture from beef to dairy.

**Indirect impacts**

The clearing and converting of 1818ha of native forest to dairy pasture would have indirect downstream impacts on wetland/riparian habitats from sediments, fertilisers, chemical use and grazing from the dairy expansion. The EPBC Act–listed species that could be affected are the Tasmanian azure kingfisher, dwarf galaxias and possibly the striped marsh frog.

Many of these indirect impacts are very complex issues and the TCT has not been able to attempt a full assessment of the likely impacts and management responses. In the EIS process the Australian Government should insist on a very thorough assessment of the overall proposal and, in particular, look very closely at indirect impacts.

**Value of the offset reserves questionable**

The VDL proposal involves setting aside 4297ha (3421ha formally protected and 876ha informally protected) of habitat of both Tasmanian devils and spotted-tailed quoll; however, much of this land has numerous environmental and legal constraints and arguably has little development potential. We argue that, while the proposal to formally protect much of this land is commendable, most of these areas may not be under threat and therefore their formal protection should not be counted as an offset which is contributing to the conservation of the two species.

**Construction of supplementary dens**

The potential loss of dens is proposed to be offset with the construction of supplementary dens, but we understand that this has never been tested and therefore it may not succeed. It appears that
the approach proposed is not referenced to any expert opinion or published papers. Until and unless such evidence is provided, we recommend against supplementary dens. Instead, if clearing is approved, the location of all dens should be identified and an area of forest retained around them.

Habitat fragmentation and corridors
VDL proposes to mitigate the potential impact on devils and quolls from increased fragmentation through the retention of corridors in areas proposed for clearing and improvements to existing corridors. However, this approach appears not to be referenced to any expert scientific opinion (in regard to benefits for devils and quolls) and only asserts a potential benefit.

VDL claims that the effectiveness of corridors in maintaining devil populations is dependent on retention of prey abundance and seasonable availability and we have concerns regarding this issue (see below).

Roadkill
The commitments made in the roadkill avoidance strategy are commendable. But it must be acknowledged that roadkill cannot be 100% avoided and therefore some loss of devils and quolls can be expected even if the best possible strategy is prepared and implemented.

Devil prey management
We note that a devil prey management plan is proposed; however, this plan is yet to be prepared and should be provided to the Australian Government as part of the recommended assessment.

As with a number of other long-term management issues (e.g. roadkill mitigation, corridor management), we are concerned as to whether VDL will continue to be committed to and resource appropriate devil prey management. When assessing this and other long-term management issues, the Australian Government must consider legal mechanisms which ensure appropriate management is maintained and resourced for the life of the operation and that this is subject to strict legal penalties.

Devil fence
While the VDL documents acknowledge that a heads of agreement has been signed between VDL and the state government for construction of a devil fence to protect the disease-free devils on Woolnorth, this does not guarantee that the fence will be built, let alone that it will be effective. While VDL alone cannot control whether the fence is built and is effective, it is disappointing that the proposal fails to include a firm commitment to construction of the fence; this should be required of VDL, if possible.

Peter McGlone

While the use of 1080 poison for control of native browsing animals reached a historic low in the financial year ending 30 June 2012 (just 0.42kg statewide), it has spiked since then, rising to 0.588kg for the period 1 July to 30 November 2012. Minister Brian Wightman is committed to ‘reducing the level of 1080 use in line with’ the Tasmania Together target of zero 1080 use by 2015. The TCT will continue to push for 1080 use to be reduced in order to reach this goal. Note: although the Tasmania Together board has been abandoned for cost-cutting reasons, the Premier has committed to retaining the TT targets.

Critical to ending the use of 1080 poison is the retention of the Browsing Animal Management Program (BAMP) within DPIWPE to offer farmers assistance in implementing alternative effective control measures. The BAMP was established in August 2011 (with a two-year time frame) to assist farmers in achieving productivity gains by reducing the impact of browsing wildlife. All efforts are made to control wildlife without resorting to 1080. BAMP officers conduct on-site visits and are able to calculate financial loss due to browsing wildlife. They are also able to assist farmers with developing an integrated browsing strategy and providing up-to-date information on advances in fencing. The BAMP also runs field days and has visited 37 properties in relation to browsing damage management. Research from the Alternatives to 1080 program found that landowners in the north of the state were losing between 12% and 100% of new pasture growth on rested paddocks. The average loss was around 60% in the first 100m from the bush edge. Trials conducted on farms that had properly installed wallaby-proof fencing found that 35% more stock could be carried.

The BAMP only has funding until the end of the financial year, 15 months before the 2015 phase-out deadline. Re-funding of the BAMP was one of our top priority recommendations in our submission on the State Budget for 2013–14 and this issue was raised with the Premier in person at the Community Sector Budget round-table meeting on 19 December 2012. The TCT’s submission on the State Budget for 2013–14 is available on the TCT’s website.

Jennifer Rowallan
Biodiversity Officer

Peter McGlone
While cable car advocate Adrian Bold continues to capture media attention with his proposal for a Facebook poll to find 2000 Hobartians to support his cable car proposal, the real job of finalising a new Wellington Park Management Plan continues slowly in the background.

The Wellington Park Management Trust (the Trust) is currently reviewing the issues raised in the 264 submissions made on the Draft Management Plan in October 2012 (including the TCT’s) and has released the ‘Summary of Representations’ that is being used to guide its responses (see http://www.wellingtonpark.org.au/assets/wellingtonpark_mngtplanreview_representationssummaryweb.pdf).

Most media coverage of Mt Wellington and the review of the management plan has focused on the proposal to construct a cable car on the mountain; many other very important issues are almost entirely ignored. The following is a summary of the key points made in the TCT’s submission, including our comments on the cable car – the full submission is on the TCT’s website.

**Summary of the TCT’s submission on the draft Wellington Park Management Plan**

**Purposes for setting aside Wellington Park**

The introduction to the Plan states purposes for which Wellington Park is reserved, as set out in the Act. These are:

(a) the provision of recreational and tourism uses and opportunities consistent with the purposes specified in paragraphs (b) to (e);

(b) the preservation or protection of the fauna or flora contained in or on the land;

(c) the preservation or protection of the natural beauty of the land or of any features of the land of natural beauty or scenic interest;

(d) the preservation or protection of any features of the land being features of historical, Aboriginal, archaeological, scientific, architectural or geomorphological interest;

(e) the protection of the water catchment values of the land.

The TCT believes it is vital that the Plan emphasises that the purpose expressed in paragraph (a) is conditional on it being consistent with the purposes stated in paragraphs (b) through to (e). The purposes stated in paragraphs (b) to (e) are not conditional and therefore should not be compromised to facilitate the purpose stated in paragraph (a). In this way, the Act establishes a clear hierarchy of purposes and this should be accurately and clearly expressed in the vision and objectives of the Plan.

**Clearing and management of native vegetation**

The Plan should incorporate a policy that aims to reduce, to the absolute minimum, the permanent loss or conversion of native vegetation and ensure that all activity, use and development within the Park aims to avoid degradation of native vegetation and, where possible, vegetation quality is improved.

As an absolute minimum the Plan should commit to ceasing all broad-scale clearing and conversion (as per the Tasmanian Government Policy for Maintaining a Permanent Native Forest Estate Policy) and this should apply to both native forests and other native vegetation on all lands within the Park.

A vegetation clearing and management policy should also prohibit all clearing and conversion, for any purpose, of native vegetation which is:

- habitat of threatened species or threatened vegetation communities;
- in an area of high visual sensitivity; or
- in an area subject to high risk of landslip, erosion, storms or flooding.

New uses and developments which are not essential should be limited to already cleared land. The policy should include a definition of an essential development, which should include those required for management actions, e.g. fire management, and should not include new tracks, huts, camping areas and/or commercial facilities.

**Vision and objectives**

The aim of the Plan should not be to make Mt Wellington ‘accessible’ ‘by all’ but to make it accessible to as many people as possible while retaining the values of the Park.

The first objective in the draft plan states that tourism and recreation should be developed and promoted ‘consistent with the appreciation and enjoyment of environmental, water catchment and cultural values’, whereas the Act says it must be consistent with ‘preservation and protection’ of those values.

**Two approval processes**

The TCT supports the two approval processes that currently apply in the Park; in particular, it is essential that the Trust maintains its twofold veto over developments that require approval under the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act (one veto before and one after approval by local councils). Only the Trust has responsibility for considering the Park as a whole and to ensure any development proposal is consistent with the Plan.

**Why the TCT is opposed to a cable car**

The draft plan contains no explanation or justification for its proposal to remove the current prohibition on development of a cable car and change it to a discretionary use and development, which is contrary to the vast majority of submissions to the Wellington Park Discussion Paper released in late 2011.

The TCT is opposed to a cable car or any other transport system which would require major new infrastructure on the mountain. We support the introduction of a shuttle bus or similar service to the...
Pinnacle, as long as it utilises the existing road.

Our reasons

- The draft Plan allows a cable car to be considered and assessed through a set of criteria and processes, but this is not sufficient to protect the mountain and reassure members of the community who do not want one. This uncertainty diminishes community support for the Plan.

- Cable cars cannot be hidden and cannot be built without major destruction of native vegetation and other natural and cultural values. All cable cars involve:
  - pylons – ugly structures which on Mt Wellington would be visible from many vantage points and involve major clearing of vegetation for the pad plus an area for fire protection
  - cables and gondolas, which cause visual and, potentially, noise pollution
  - a large terminus building at the summit (and possibly also a restaurant), which on Mt Wellington would be a major eyesore and require destruction of vegetation and geological features.

- The Pinnacle and eastern face of the mountain are where most sightseers and other visitors go; a cable car facility will clash with most people's experience and enjoyment of the area.

- There is no need for a cable car because there is a road to the Pinnacle which is open most of the year. When it is not open, travel to the Pinnacle should be supplemented by an all-weather shuttle bus.

- The road would probably need to be closed to make a cable car profitable and this would clearly place an unfair and unwarranted impost on tourists and locals alike. If the road was not closed then proponents would most likely want government assistance to build and operate a cable car, which would also be unfair on taxpayers.

- The Wellington Park Act states that, among its purposes, the Park was reserved for 'the preservation or protection of the natural beauty of the land or of any features of the land of natural beauty or scenic interest', and that other uses must be consistent with that aim. Any cable car built on Mt Wellington would diminish its beauty and scenery to some degree and this is inconsistent with the reasons for which the Park was reserved.

- The approved Springs development includes a restaurant and information centre, which should satisfy those people wanting this type of comfort and service when visiting the Park. Such development does not need to be replicated on the summit – and development of similar services on the summit could actually inhibit investment in the Springs. The Park has an impressive number of visitors who enjoy a diverse range of mainly low-impact activities, including many who are paying customers of a growing number of businesses operating in the Park. A cable car could serious clash with their use and enjoyment of the mountain.

- Chapter 8 of the draft plan identifies the very large number of tourists and others who visit the Park, and can point to no data which says any of them are disappointed in the experience they have. Apart from vague reference to public debate about dissatisfaction with facilities at the summit and desire among some for a cable car, no evidence is provided.

**Recommended criteria**

If the Plan recommends that a cable car be considered as discretionary, we recommend that certain criteria must be met:

- That any use or development in the Pinnacle Special Area be limited to areas that are currently developed, e.g. on the site of the viewing shelter, the height of any new development is the same as the current ground level and structures are entirely covered with natural materials.

- That restriction is placed on any commercial developments in the Pinnacle Special Area such that they do not unduly compete with or dominate those commercial developments which are currently permitted at the Springs. This would achieve the intent of the Plan, that 'The Springs is the favoured area for a visitor centre and for services facilitating longer visits'. One criterion which should be required is that commercial food facilities in the Pinnacle area only provide take-away food and drinks (along with appropriate disposal facilities) and not sit-down facilities.

- That proposals can only be considered if they involve no clearing and conversion of native vegetation, i.e. all infrastructure is to be established solely on already cleared land, and there is to be no use or development in areas identified as having high visual sensitivity.

- That any cable car proposal should be conditional upon the Pinnacle Road being kept open to the public at all times, except when the Trust deems it should be closed for safety reasons, e.g. due to snow or ice. Any cable car proposal must be shown to be financially feasible with the road kept open and without government assistance.

- As security against a cable car being built and failing, for financial or other reasons, and its infrastructure being left in the Park, that the proponent must be required to submit funding to the Trust to cover the complete cost of removal of all permanent components of the cable car

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and rehabilitation of all impacts. The total cost of removal and rehabilitation should be determined by the Trust, subject to independent financial assessment.

Wildfire

In Chapter 5 of the Plan, it is stated that ‘wildfire remains the largest threat to the Park both in the short term and into the future, and thus requires a significant management focus’. The Plan makes the additional point that the Park has within it vegetation communities which are adapted to fire and therefore require some burning, and other communities which are highly vulnerable to fire and require protection from it.

It also states that, while there are no records of recent fires caused by lightning, evidence from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area suggest that this may change in the future. The Plan includes the following ominous quote from the 2010 DPIPWE report Vulnerability of Tasmania’s Natural Environment to Climate Change:

In the decade of fire seasons 1991–2000, unpublished Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service records show 14 lightning fires were recorded on reserved land with a total area burnt of 11,245ha. In the seven fire seasons from 2000–2001 onwards there were 155 lightning fires and 160,698ha of reserved land burnt. Lightning is now the major cause of wildfire in the TWWHA, whereas in 1986 it was considered that ‘in Tasmania there is no strong relationship between thunderstorms and fire’ (Bowman and Brown 1986).

The TCT believes these factors require that fire be made the highest management priority in the Plan and consideration be given to fire management for ecological purposes, overriding other fire management objectives if required. This might involve forgoing fuel-reduction burns for asset protection in sensitive vegetation.

Many non-essential activities and developments recommended in the Plan could be halted, scaled back or slowed down to help free up existing resources for fire management.

Dog exercising

The TCT strongly supports the requirement stated in the Plan that all dogs in the Park be restrained on a lead. We also support the prohibition on dogs accessing Silver Falls Track, Lost World Track, North-South Track and picnic areas in the Park.

Formal camping, huts and new tracks, lookouts etc

The TCT recommends that formal camping, huts, new tracks and any other related infrastructure only be permitted in already cleared or highly degraded areas. We do not support the potential establishment of new tracks in the remote zone.

We recommend that there be no further tracks constructed for recreational purposes and that an upper limit be set on the number, extent and scale of viewing shelters, lookouts and picnic/barbecue facilities.

Proposal for a multi-day recreation track

The TCT does not currently support the development of a multi-day recreational track on Mt Wellington. The process whereby this proposal was recommended and received funding for a feasibility study was not transparent or public and we do not want to encourage any project which is funded in such a manner. We recommend that a statewide study be done to identify priorities for potential multi-day recreation tracks and, if possible, that the funding provided for the Mt Wellington track be allocated to a statewide study.

Communication and electricity facilities

The Plan should include stronger requirements in regard to existing or already-approved communication and electricity facilities within the Pinnacle Specific Area, Natural Zone, Remote Zone and Drinking Water Catchment Zone. The Plan should state that the Trust will actively seek to work with infrastructure managers to regularly investigate financially viable technological developments that might allow removal of or improvements to existing facilities, thereby reducing impacts on the values of the Park.

Park boundaries and expansion

The TCT strongly supports the inclusion of the three identified parcels of land into Wellington Park and commends the Hobart City Council and Glenorchy City Council for agreeing to these inclusions. We support the work done by the Trust to identify and additional 15 properties for possible inclusion and acknowledges the importance of these properties in regard to management of the Park.

Funding management

Throughout our submission, the TCT made recommendations to ensure that more resources are made available for implementing the Plan and, in particular, protecting the values of the Park. We support the work done by the Trust to identify an additional 15 properties for possible inclusion and acknowledges the importance of these properties in regard to management of the Park.

We recommend that the Plan be amended to ensure that all non-essential management actions and developments are halted, scaled back or slowed down to ensure greater allocation of resources to key management actions. For example, this would involve a moratorium on building of any new tracks, huts and camping grounds until fire management has progressed to a satisfactory level.

Wellington Park Management Committee

The TCT strongly recommends the inclusion of recreation, community and conservation positions on the Wellington Park Trust management committee.

Peter McGlone
In November last year, a review of the Animal Welfare Act 1993 was undertaken by the Tasmanian Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) and the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment (DPIPWE). The AWAC identified 20 proposed changes to the Act, on which the wider community was asked to comment.

One of the issues highlighted in the TCT submission was the need for regulation of pet shops, including a ban on displaying kittens and puppies in pet-shop windows, with a focus instead on selling shelter animals via pet shops. The TCT also suggested that all cats and kittens sold in pet shops be microchipped and desexed before sale.

Also highlighted was the TCT’s view that there should be fairer representation of relevant NGOs on AWAC. Currently there are only two non-government groups represented on the AWAC and one of these is not Tasmanian and cannot be expected to have a vested interest or active involvement in Tasmanian issues. In the submission it was suggested that the TCT should be represented on the AWAC as it is experienced in dealing with a wide range of issues relevant to the AWAC’s objectives, such as 1080 poison, threatened species, wildlife, feral animals, and cat and dog management. A full copy of the TCT’s submission can be found on the TCT’s website.

Jennifer Rowallan
Biodiversity Campaigner

Photo: Jennifer Rowallan

Being a responsible pet owner

While you may think your dog will not attack wildlife, it is instinctive for them to hunt and protect their territories. Dogs have a natural tendency to chase wildlife when they are off-lead in bush areas or on beaches. Research conducted by WIRES (Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service) in New South Wales found that attacks on wildlife were almost evenly split between cats and dogs.

Dogs in the bush

- Dogs off-leash in bushland areas can cause a number of problems for wildlife.
- They can trample vegetation, scratch and dig, resulting in habitat disturbance and/or destruction of ground-dwelling wildlife such as echidnas, quolls, bandicoots and bettongs.
- Dog scents attract other dogs so that areas where one dog has been are repeatedly disturbed by other dogs that visit the area.
- Research has shown that the smell of urine acts as a repellent to some wildlife such as macropods and possums. Wildlife is likely to stay away from areas where dogs have repeatedly urinated as they no longer feel it is safe.
- Dogs may chase wildlife, which can cause myopathy (shock) in macropods, resulting in the death of the animal and any pouch young.
- Dogs spread zoonotic diseases (diseases that can be spread from animals to humans and vice versa) as they can carry transmittable pathogens for diseases such as toxoplasmosis.
- Dogs can pick up and spread parasites such as worms, mange, ticks and fleas.
- When they attack wildlife, dog bites cause severe infection and/or crushing of internal organs or bones, which can result in death.

Dogs at the beach

Beaches are critical nesting, feeding and resting (roosting) habitats for shorebirds and seabirds between 1 September and 31 March each summer.

Seven species of beach-nesting birds reside in Tasmania; many, such as little terns, fairy terns and red-capped plovers, are experiencing serious population declines.

- Unsupervised dogs can easily destroy nests and eggs and kill or injure both juvenile and adult birds.
- Dogs can cause adult birds to leave a nest, which results in eggs becoming too hot or too cold and the young not hatching.

This is why it is important that dog owners observe information signs on beaches and follow regulations to keep their dog on a leash or restrict their presence during the bird-nesting period.

Jennifer Rowallan
Biodiversity Campaigner

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Jennifer Rowallan
Biodiversity Campaigner

Photo: Jennifer Rowallan
Lifespan and breeding

- Domestic cats (Felis catus) are descendants of the African wild cat (Felis silvestris lybica).
- Cats occur on every continent around the world, except the poles.
- Female cats can begin breeding at 20 weeks (5 months) of age.
- Females go into heat and are receptive to breeding 3 or more times a year. Males can breed year-round.
- The average litter size for a domestic cat is 4 (but can range from 2 to 8).
- Female cats may have up to 3 litters per year and can breed until they are between 9 and 12 years old.
- One female cat can have up to 120 kittens in its lifetime.
- Indoor cats may live as long as 15 or 20 years. (Indoor cats live longer, healthier and safer lives than outdoor cats. The average lifespan of a cat is increased by 10 years by keeping it indoors).

Pet owner statistics – national

- 33 million pets are owned nationally in Australia.
- 2.6 million pet cats are owned nationwide.
- It is estimated that around 63% of Australian households own some type of pet, of these:
  - 40% own dogs
  - 26% own cats
  - 53% own a dog and/or a cat.
- An estimated 1 in 5 households in Australia feeds a cat that it does not own.

Pet owner statistics – Tasmania

- Tasmania is the leading state in Australia for dog and cat ownership per capita.
- Approximately 78,000 cats are owned in Tasmania.
- There are 16 (pet) cats for every 100 people in Tasmania (the national average is 11 per 100 people).
- There are 21 dogs per 100 people in Tasmania.
- Only about 5% of all cats arriving at cat shelters in Tasmania are microchipped.
- The desexing rate for cats in Tasmania is estimated to be around 12% to 20%. The national average varies between 40% and 90%.

Feral Cat Statistics

- There are an estimated 18 million feral cats in Australia.
- There are approximately 150,000 feral cats in Tasmania.
- Unowned or semi-owned cats make up a considerable part of the cat population.

Euthanasia statistics

- For every person that is born, 15 dogs and 45 cats are born – there are simply too many cats and dogs and not enough homes for them all.
- An estimated 250,000 to 400,000 cats and dogs are euthanased annually in Australia.
- 40% of all dogs and 75% of all cats that enter shelters in Australia are euthanased.
- Approximately 130,000 cats are euthanased annually in Australia (15 per hour).
- More than 4000 cats are euthanased in Tasmania each year.

Cats and wildlife

- All cats will hunt. Every cat kills an average of 25 to 32 animals (birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals) per year (8,500 animals killed nationally per hour).
- The Australian Veterinary Association estimates that 74 million native Australian animals are killed by cat attacks each year.
- Cats have been implicated in the decline of a number of small mammal species across Australia.
- Predation by feral cats is listed under federal government legislation as a key threatening process for 35 species of threatened and endangered birds, 36 mammals, 7 reptiles and 3 amphibians (81 species!).
- A number of native birds and mammal species (as well as domestic stock) are affected by infectious diseases transmitted by cats. (The cat is the only host for the protozoan Toxoplasmosis gondii)

Desexing

- Female cats can become pregnant from 4 months of age.
- Both males and females can be desexed from approximately 10 weeks of age (or when they have reached 1kg in body weight).

At what age should I desex and microchip my cat?

The perfect time to desex your cat is when it is 12 weeks old, when it is not quite old enough to get pregnant (16 weeks) but old enough to have an operation and a microchip inserted.

What about desexing my old cat?

There is no maximum age to desex, so it’s never too late, but there are definite advantages to having it done at an earlier age. (Cats generally cease breeding between 9 and 12 years of age).
Cost of desexing & microchipping a cat

The current approximate cost of desexing and microchipping cats in Tasmania (price varies from practice to practice):

- **Females**: $150 to $220 for desexing only
- **Males**: $100 for a kitten to $170 for a mature male (for desexing only)
- The current cost of microchipping varies from $25 (Hobart Cat Centre) to $40 (various vets) per cat.

References


BIS Shrapnel Global Marketing Intelligence and Forecasting (2006) Contribution of the pet care industry to the Australian economy, 6th edn, Australian Companion Animal Council publication, Artarmon, NSW.


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**SUCCESSFUL FUNDING FOR CAT PROJECTS**

In December last year the Tasmanian Conservation Trust and Kingborough Council received advice from the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment that all their three funding applications for cat projects had been successful.

The purpose of the three projects is to raise awareness about the new Cat Management Act 2009 in Tasmania and the need for responsible cat ownership. Work on the projects has already commenced.

**Project 1: A desexing & microchipping program for pet cats on Bruny Island**

Funding for this project will be used to set up a mobile vet clinic on Bruny Island to provide residents with access to free desexing and microchipping of their pet cats. Bruny Island was chosen in part due to the difficulties faced by residents in obtaining access to vets and also to provide a follow-up for the cat desexing program that was run on the island in 2006. Islands, due to their physical isolation are recognised as important places in which to achieve cat control. Desexing and microchipping will ensure that pet cats can be easily identified during future feral cat trapping programs. Trapped cats that are not microchipped or desexed will be considered stray or feral and will be destroyed.

**Project 2: A survey of community attitudes to cat ownership**

Very little is known about the attitudes and behaviour of cat owners in Tasmania and how these factors are affecting the state’s very low rates of desexing and microchipping of cats. Funding was sought to engage professional consultants to conduct a ‘community attitudes’ survey of a cross-section of the Kingborough Community to examine attitudes to cat ownership and cat-owner behaviour. A survey of this kind has never been conducted in Tasmania before.

Results of the survey could potentially be used to identify issues to target in future education campaigns. It is hoped that the survey can be repeated in the years following education campaigns, to measure any consequent change in community attitudes and behaviour.

**Project 3: Production of an instructional DVD for the Humane Cage Trapping of cats and a second DVD promoting responsible cat ownership**

Enquiries about trapping cats are one of the most common topics councils’ animal control staff deal with. There seems to be considerable uncertainty in the community about both the legality of and correct techniques for trapping a cat. The aim of the DVD is to demonstrate the legal and humane way of operating a cage trap. Copies of the DVD will be made available to other councils in Tasmania to use as a community educational resource.

The Cat Management Act makes provision for livestock farmers and property owners living in rural areas to trap and control cats but is silent on the issue of trapping cats in suburbia.

Nothing in the new Cat Management Regulations (2012) prevents a person who has found a cat on their private land (in an urban area) from seizing the cat and either returning it to its owner or arranging for the cat to be taken to a cat management facility.

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On 25 September 2012 an east-coast man, was convicted and fined $5500 in the Launceston Magistrates Court for clearing important native forest without a permit on his property near St Helens.

While the fine issued to the landowner was lenient (it could have been over $100,000), this court decision should send a message to other landowners and contractors who are thinking of clearing without a permit.

Not only did the landowner not obtain a permit prior to clearing, he was caught in the act and refused to stop the clearing when ordered to do so by a forest practices officer. This offence is as bad as it can get and the landowner deserves to pay a higher fine.

While the area cleared was small (20ha), this did not mean the clearing had little environmental impact because the forest contained habitat for three threatened species:

• New Holland mouse (nationally listed as vulnerable)
• Tasmanian smoke-bush (nationally listed as vulnerable)
• Juniper wattle (state listed as rare).

Fortunately in this case the landowner has been stopped from converting the land to paddocks or putting houses on it. The vegetation has been damaged but, if left alone, it now has a chance to recover and may provide habitat to these threatened species once again.

Given that the landowner failed to obtain a permit from the Forest Practices Authority and failed to follow instructions to cease his clearing activities, it is highly likely that he also failed to obtain a permit from the Australian Government to clear the habitat of the two nationally listed species. We therefore have written to the federal minister for the environment, Tony Burke, asking him to instruct his department to investigate the landowner’s actions and, if it is warranted, to initiate a prosecution under the EPBC Act.

Some or all of the landowner’s land near St Helens remains subject to the EPBC Act approval 2008/4635, ‘Land Rehabilitation on St Helens Point Road, Stieglitz’, which includes the requirement for him to prepare and implement a smoke-bush management plan. We understand that this requirement arose from a previous attempt to clear the land.

Assuming this plan was prepared as was required, it is possible that the landowner’s recent actions impacted the area of land subject to that management plan and therefore contravened the requirement of the management plan and the approval 2008/4635. If this is the case then an additional offence would have been committed by the landowner and he would be liable to prosecution for this as well.

Clearing of habitats is the number one threat to species worldwide and it is vital that landowners seek approvals prior to clearing so that impacts on the most important habitats can be avoided. This case certainly shows that failure to seek approvals can lead to worse consequences for the landowner as well.

This case was reported by a member of the public so it also shows the value of vigilant and knowledgeable community members.

Peter McGlone
In January of this year, the Legislative Council Select Committee for Rural Road Speed Limits invited public comments on the proposed rural road speed limit reductions from 100km/h to 90km/h on sealed roads. The TCT and Roadkilltas.com (a website created by Chloe Lucas and Alistair Hobday to provide research material and guidelines on prevention of roadkill on Tasmanian roads) made a joint submission stating that we believe speed reductions on rural roads will result in a number of benefits for both the community and native wildlife.

The effects of wildlife collisions
Roadkill of native wildlife is a serious issue in Tasmania. Research has shown that at least 293,000 animals are killed on Tasmania’s roads every year.

In 2010 (last available numbers) 15 deaths or serious injuries of drivers or passengers in vehicles were due to animals on the road.

The RACT receives about 500 insurance claims relating to wildlife collisions every year, costing around $5 million.

Research in 2008 estimated that around 3000 Tasmanian devils were being killed on our roads each year – approx 5.7% of the entire population. Devils are scavengers and are drawn to roads by carcasses. Roadkill is an additional threat to the survival of the species that has already been significantly depleted by facial tumour disease. The Save the Tasmanian Devil Program’s Roadkill Project found that, of 100 roadkill reports for devils in which the speed limit was provided, 91 involved stretches of road with speed limits greater than 80 km/h, and there is evidence that reducing speed limits can lead to improvements in population numbers. Research in the Cradle Mountain area has shown that mortality and decline of eastern quolls and Tasmanian devils was related to increased vehicle speed, and a subsequent reduction in speed led to population recovery.

While there are road management measures which can reduce the incidence of roadkill through reducing animals’ access to and use of roads, these measures are often prohibitively expensive. Reducing driver speed is the single most effective measure for reducing roadkill.

Tourists visiting Tasmania to see its pristine environment and world-famous wildlife are shocked by the number of animal bodies on the road. With an average of one carcase every 2.7km, Tasmania is an unenviable leader in roadkill in Australia. Community reaction to media reports on roadkill (letters and online comments to newspapers) suggests that this also rates as an important problem with Tasmanians.

Potential impact of speed limit reduction
Hobday and Minstrell (2008) showed that most roadkill occurs at higher speeds – 50% of roadkill was likely to have been hit at speeds of 80km/h or above.

Their research suggests that reducing speed limits on sealed rural roads to 90km/h should reduce roadkill by around 30%, equivalent to 87,900 animals per year. A proportional reduction in costs to human lives and property could also be expected. A simplistic calculation shows that a reduction of speed from 100 km/h to 90km/h will add just 13 minutes to a two-hour journey – in reality the impact will be less, as maintaining speeds above 90 km/h for long journeys in Tasmania is unrealistic.

Research on night-time driver wildlife detection distances shows that, on high beam, safe speeds at which the driver is able to bring the vehicle to an abrupt but safe stop on seeing an animal on the road range from 83km/h for species with light-coloured fur, down to 60km/h for the dark-coloured Tasmanian devil.

We recommend that, in addition to human safety considerations, the Select Committee should take into account the reduction in wildlife roadkill when making its recommendations. Reducing wildlife roadkill will also have benefits for tourists and the tourism industry.

Jennifer Rowallan, TCT Biodiversity Campaigner
Chloe Lucas, Roadkilltas.com

References
Dolan, C 22 Jan 2012, Mercury: ‘Speed trial aims to reduce roadkill’.
Lawrence, C and Donnelly, C (2011) Save the Tasmanian Devil Program Roadkill Technical Report: initial results and recommendations’, Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, DPIPWE.

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However there are a couple of issues to consider before attempting to catch a nuisance cat in a suburban area:

- Cats are regarded as property under common law and anyone trapping a cat in an urban area should be aware that there is potential for the owner of the cat to take civil action against the person who trapped their cat. This situation, however, has not been tested in Tasmania to date.
- Only legal traps such as cage traps can be used.
- No-one can, under any circumstances, enter another person’s property to trap a cat without permission.
- The person setting the trap is responsible for the welfare of the cat and must not harm it in any way or kill it. Doing so is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 1993 and the Cat Management Act 2009.
- If a cat caught in a trap has identification, it must be released immediately where it was found.
- Cat management facilities have the right to refuse a cat that has been trapped if they have reason to believe the cat is an owned pet.

A draft report to Kingborough Council has been prepared, reviewing the range of cat-related bylaws and policies currently applied by various local councils across Australia has been prepared. The policies include:

- dusk-to-dawn cat curfews
- 24-hour cat curfews (cats to be confined on owner’s property at all times)
- council policies restricting the number of cats permitted per household (usually a maximum of two)
- annual cat registration requirements with local councils
- cat control provisions within Development Control Plans
- ‘cat free’ developments or estates
- restrictive covenants on properties
- ‘cat at large’ or nuisance animal provisions (including fines for trespass) under local laws
- cat-prohibited or ‘no-go communities’
- ‘last-cat’ policies in island communities.

It is hoped that Kingborough Council will consider introducing one or more bylaws of this nature in order to achieve greater cat control at a local level.

Meg Lorang
Project Officer
Kingborough Cat Management Program

Back in May 2007, an article entitled ‘World Heritage Embarrassment’ was published in the Tasmanian Conservationist (#311), highlighting the stand-off by the Tasmanian Government on funding for a program to remove rabbits, rats and mice from Macquarie Island and its credibility on nature conservation in one of the most important reserves in Australia.

The following two articles are from the Macquarie Dispatch Issue 11, published in August 2012, recount just how successful the program has been, once it got off the ground. The articles are printed with permission from the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service.

In the nine months since the last rabbit was found and dispatched on Macquarie Island, there’s been no let-up in the hunting team’s efforts to ensure that any remaining rabbits are removed from the island.

As reported in the previous Macquarie Dispatch, a total of 13 rabbits have been found and killed since aerial baiting finished in July 2011. The last rabbit killed was in November 2011 and project manager Keith Springer is confident that rabbit numbers are now extremely low, with a ‘best guess’ estimate that there may be fewer than five rabbits remaining on the island.

A fresh team of hunters joined the effort in April 2011 with four of the 2011/12 team selected to stay on with the project. Peter Kirkman is this year’s eradication team leader after joining the project last year as assistant team leader under Peter Preston. The eradication team includes six hunters and six dog handlers.

The team’s first month on the island was taken up with familiarisation and training in recognising rabbit signs such as grazing, scratchings and droppings and in hunting techniques including trapping, fumigating burrows and shooting. The dog handlers were paired with the dogs in an effort to find the best fit of skills and personalities. Each of the dogs has different skills; some are good on rock stacks, some for ranging at a distance from their handler, and some are best for close work in the thick tussocks.

The island is divided into six hunting blocks, with dog handlers and hunters tackling one block for a four-week period. Each block has two huts and the teams roam between the huts, returning to the island’s station at the end of the month’s field work for four days of catching up on emails, phoning home to loved ones, socialising and resting. Peter downloads all of the GPS units carried by the hunters and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map. In June 2012, they covered 2,233km in their search for rabbits and a map produced of their patrols and coordinates the combined tracks onto a map.
Of course, as time goes on the job gets much harder, with so few rabbits remaining. Although the winter weather is very hard on both dogs and people, it has its advantages for locating rabbits – a light cover of snow highlights any rabbit tracks or droppings, and the shorter days and long nights are ideal for spotlighting. With each growing season, the vegetation will continue to recover and finding sign of rabbits will be that much harder. It’s also hard to know which rabbit is the last.

Progress toward the eradication goal is reviewed annually based on the principle of continuing hunting for two years after the last known rabbit is accounted for.

Winners and losers in vegetation recovery

That Macquarie Island is rapidly recovering from the incredible devastation that resulted from the grazing pressure of a rabbit population estimated at greater than 100,000, is indeed heartening, but the question is, how long will it take for a new ecological equilibrium to become established?

Senior ecologist with the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), Dr Jennie Whinam is among those who have seen the island at its worst and are now keenly documenting the recovery.

DPIPWE scientists started monitoring the island in the 1980s and are now analysing 30 years of vegetation data up until the beginning of the eradication program. They hope to travel to the island this coming summer and begin recording the vegetation recovery.

What was obvious to all who visited Macquarie in recent years was just how bad the island looked as its most charismatic species, such as the megaherbs and large tussocks, largely disappeared from some areas under intense grazing pressure.

What was worse, according to Jennie, was the landscape-scale ecological changes.

‘The island had changed to a very simple island. It was a much less exciting and complex mosaic of landscapes and vegetation and the specialness of it had gone with the loss of the iconic species,’ Jennie said.

It had become so bad that staff on the island had fenced off known populations of certain species like the prickly shield fern (*Polystichum vestitum*) in the hope of preserving them for the day when the island was free of rabbits.

‘At this time the rabbits were so hungry they started burrowing under the fence to eat the rhizomes. What is just so amazing now is that, in some areas that weren’t fenced, people are seeing the tiny little fronds starting to unfurl.’

While the island started ‘greening up’ within six months of the removal of rabbits, scientists acknowledge that ecological recovery will be a long process.

‘The thing about sub-antarctic and alpine environments is that things happen slowly...but the photos I’ve seen so far just bring joy to my heart. With one of the photos sent to me of the native silver leaf daisy, *Pleurophyllum hookeri*, I realised I’d never seen a landscape of pleurophyllum that didn’t have rabbit damage, so to see an entire hillside of it without a single bit of rabbit damage was very exciting.’

While Jennie is confident that the island will look significantly different in as little as five years’ time, she is mindful of the message from colleagues involved in other sub-antarctic island restoration projects – expect the unexpected.

‘The sleeper is what will happen with the weeds. There are three weed species on the island and we’re expecting some of them to increase initially and then hopefully decrease as the native species re-establish. What we don’t know is whether there have been new arrivals that have gone unnoticed simply because it’s been very hard for us to identify plants when they were so heavily grazed.

‘The initial response will be fast and lush, but it’s likely to be 20 years before we can start talking about what the new ecological equilibrium will be.’

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CROSSWORD #10

Across
6. Symbiotic relationship in which one organism benefits and other is not significantly helped or harmed
8. Critically endangered Eurasian antelope
9. Louse egg
10. Metallic element
12. Constellation
13. *Current TCT President, John _ _ _ _ _
14. Unit of pressure (abbr.)
15. Loom part
16. Third-largest baleen whale
18. Half note, or unit of volume
19. Lie
23. Major European peninsula

Down
1. *Site proposed for hazardous waste disposal facility
2. A peak of The Hazards, Freycinet National Park
3. *E in EPBC
4. Symbiotic relationship in which one organism benefits and other is harmed
5. Alternative name of maned sloth, a Brazilian mammal
7. Symbiotic relationship in which both organisms benefit
9. _ _ _ _ _ _ Point, one of two no-take marine nature reserves enlarged in 2009 (4, 3)
11. Natural lake inundated in 1972 by damming of two rivers
15. *One of the capes proposed to be traversed by Three Capes Track
17. Ireland
20. Symbol of element tantalum
21. To higher point
22. Greeting

* denotes solutions to be found in previous issue of the Tasmanian Conservationist (issue 327)

solutions to crossword #9

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☐ I wish to renew my membership

☐ I wish to make a donation

☐ I have paid via EFT (BSB 067000 ACCT 28043114 Commonwealth Bank
Account name: Tasmanian Conservation Trust Inc)

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