

INTRODUCTION

by Robert Taylor
Editor

In December 1989 1.38 million ha of central, west and south-west Tasmania was inscribed on the World Heritage list as the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (WHA). This inscription was, however, preceded by a long history of intense public controversy over land use. The battles to save Lake Pedder and the Franklin River from inundation for hydro-electric power development received world-wide publicity. The first section of the WHA was listed in 1982 and consisted of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park, Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and Southwest National Park. Despite its status as being of international significance, both a Labor and Liberal State government proceeded with plans to construct a dam in the Wild Rivers National Park. In 1983 the incoming Federal Labor government passed legislation to give force to its international obligations under the World Heritage convention to protect the area and the power scheme was subsequently halted.

Controversy over logging of forests surrounding the WHA led to the Commonwealth setting up the Commission of Enquiry into the Lemnathyme and Southern Forests in 1987. This eventually led the Federal Government to nominate significant areas of forest adjoining the already listed WHA. Following the State election in 1989 the Green Independents in the parliament negotiated an increase in the size of the nominated areas in return for supporting the formation of a Labor government.

Declaration of the WHA, however, has not dampened public debate over use of the area. The process of developing a management plan for the WHA has involved seeking the public's views with over 600 submissions being received. A draft of the plan was prepared by the Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage (DPWH), after taking account of these submissions, and then reviewed by the WHA Consultative Committee (consisting of independent experts from a variety of relevant fields) and State and Commonwealth agencies. This draft plan was released for public comment and attracted 1,300 submissions. A proposed final management plan was endorsed by the WHA Standing Committee. However, a change of State Government in early 1992 led to a review of this plan being undertaken by the new Minister for Parks, Wildlife and Heritage. One hundred and thirty changes to the plan were made by the Premier's office without reference to those in the DPWH who had formulated the plan. These changes allowed greater use of the WHA by so-called traditional users and permitted further development of tourist facilities. Further controversy has

recently erupted over the closure of Benders Quarry in the WHA with a jobs versus environment debate ensuing.

This special issue of *The Tasmanian Naturalist* is intended to provide readers with a more informed background to the controversies which have accompanied the WHA Management Plan than that usually presented in the media. For instance, what is so important about Exit Cave, and what damage, if any, is quarrying causing?

In the first paper, Prof. Jamie Kirkpatrick examines the plan in terms of the goal of maintaining biodiversity. While praising the plan as one of the best documents of its type prepared in Australia, Prof. Kirkpatrick points out features of the plan which threaten biodiversity conservation. Simon Cubit puts the case for the recognition of the European uses of the area as being of great cultural significance requiring recognition in the plan. He remains totally disillusioned with the plan despite the most recent changes increasing recreational access. Rolan Eberhard provides us with a background to the controversy over Benders Quarry. The significance of the area (and of karst in general) and the effects of quarrying are explained. Scott Poynton details the proposals for the construction of a forestry road across the Snowy divide. In the next two articles, officers of DPWH (Sally Bryant, Jennie Whinam and Jane Balmer) outline the research and management activities undertaken by the Department in the area of flora and fauna management. Pierre Horwitz provides his views of the DPWH's flora and fauna program in the WHA. While agreeing with the need for applied research, Pierre questions the value of inventory-type research and the emphasis that seems to be placed on particular groups of species or communities to the detriment of others. In the final article, Janet Slater outlines some of the impacts of marine debris on coastal environments in the WHA.