

Landscape and Man

A CONSERVATION PROGRAM FOR WESTERN TASMANIA:
ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

by Bruce W. Davis,
University of Tasmania.

ABSTRACT

A conservation program for Western Tasmania is outlined, involving a regional resource inventory, structure planning processes, a land-use classification system and public participation in decision-making. The program could be initiated by the local community on a "self-help" basis, but if the program is to have any sustained impact, then formal institutional arrangements will be required, involving State finance and assistance. In executing the conservation program, attempts should be made to incorporate aesthetic values and resource management principles into research and administrative processes.

INTRODUCTION

Western Tasmania possesses a unique blend of natural beauty and man-modified landscapes. If the area's distinctive character is to be retained, then careful management will be required. Who should undertake this formidable task and how are the various land-use options to be analysed? Which features of the region should be preserved and which resources exploited? How feasible is a mixed strategy of nature conservation, yet economic and social development?

THE NEED FOR CONSERVATION

The term "conservation" is here taken to mean the wise use of resources. Conservation and development are often presented as a dichotomous choice, but in reality all decisions about ecosystem management involve tradeoffs and satisficing solutions. In this sense "conservation" involves not only the retention of some ecosystems in a near-natural condition over time, but also the selective exploitation of other resources under strict environmental controls. The preservation of man-made objects, such as mining relics, railway workings and archaeological sites may also be considered important. The overall aim should be to retain viable representative samples of regional landscapes, flora and fauna and human artifacts, for scientific, educational, recreational and aesthetic purposes.

There are a number of pressing reasons why a conservation program for western Tasmania should be established:

1. The existing pattern of economic dependence on minerals exploitation, forestry production and sea fisheries might not be sustainable indefinitely. Minerals depletion and overcommitment of forest resources are possibilities in western Tasmania (Jones 1975, State Strategy Plan Task Force 1976); moreover the economic viability of such products is threatened by international commodity markets, trade restrictions and transport costs (Sinden 1972, Routley & Routley 1974, Pearce 1975). Tourism is a highly competitive business, but conservation measures may enhance the prospects of this strategy for western Tasmania, relative to other development alternatives (Peat, Marwick & Mitchell 1972, Wilde & Smith 1975, State Strategy Plan Task Force 1976).
2. Demand for wilderness experience is increasing exponentially in all parts of the world (Clawson and Knetsch 1966, Fisher and Krutilla 1974, ACF 1975) not only because

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of increased leisure and affluence, but also from a desire to escape an increasingly materialistic technological milieu (Fraser Darling and Milton 1966), Thompson 1972). Tasmania possesses most of the remaining bastions of scenic splendour and untrammelled wilderness in south-eastern Australia and will have to service at least half of the nations population in this regard (ACF 1974). It makes social and economic sense to retain significant wilderness areas to cater for this identified and growing demand.

3. There is an ongoing need to preserve representative ecosystems as scientific reference points. Western Tasmania possesses many distinctive landforms, also flora and fauna not found elsewhere in Australia or other parts of the world. There is a duty towards mankind for Tasmanians to act as guardians and trustees of these gene pools and terrestrial features.

4. A key aim should be to maintain the distinctive environment and quality of life of West Coast residents. Changes are bound to occur over time, but dysfunctional consequences need to be avoided (Sinden 1972, Dempsey 1974). The significant point is to enhance the social and economic well-being of the existing population, while leaving some options open to future generations.

Even if the desired strategy is merely to maintain the status quo, some form of land-use management will still be required. In the absence of any regional conservation policy, the area is susceptible to the nibbling attrition of Garrett Hardin's "tragedy of the commons" (1972).

PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT

In order to establish a viable regional conservation program, the following conditions must be met:

(a) The area to be conserved should be identified; the aims of conservation specified and the authorities having jurisdiction in the region should be nominated.

(b) Scientific information must be obtained about the ecosystems to be managed. Data should also be collected and analysed on social and economic aspects of the region.

(c) Organisational arrangements will need to be established to administer the conservation program. This will necessitate the recruitment of an interdisciplinary taskforce, plus the establishment of machinery for consultation, coordination and inter-governmental relations.

(d) There will need to be some provision for the resolution of disputes, plus review and appeal procedures for circumstances in which interested parties believe that inappropriate land-use decisions have been made.

(e) A monitoring program will also be required, in order to identify whether or not conservation performance is being achieved.

It is not a simple task to devise and implement such a planning scheme within a mixed economy possessing a federal system of government. Even if appropriate institutional arrangements can be established, some difficulties may remain about information for decision-making. According to Sinden (1972):

"The management of any natural resources ... involves the application of inadequate data to a complex situation with poorly defined objectives."

The Australian Advisory Committee on the Environment (1974) assessed the situation a little differently:

"Land-use planning and management in the past have not generally ensured that the economic benefit derived from the use of land has been consistent with environmental quality and the satisfaction of

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the community's need for land. ... This has occurred because of insufficient understanding of the Australian environment, ecology and characteristics of land, because of the lack of national land-use policy, fragmented administration and because of inadequate public knowledge about the Australian environment, in combination with inappropriate community attitudes."

There are a number of interrelated reasons why Australian land use management has proven somewhat ineffective to date:

- (a) Current claims on land resources are largely resolved on an ad-hoc basis, often without adequate assessment of the available options and without any review of the land-use balances generally being created.
- (b) The States are in active competition for development. This often results in expedient political decisions contrary to resource management principles and lacking appropriate consideration of social and environmental impacts.
- (c) Fragmented administration within the States leads to a kind of "territorial imperative" amongst resource agencies and comfortable accommodation to vested interests.
- (d) Token acceptance is given to conservation concepts, environmental protection and multi-purpose management, but operational practices negate such objectives.
- (e) Elitism and narrow professional values mean that the general public are rarely consulted about resource management decisions (Spigelman 1972, Beneviste 1973, Henning 1974).

Despite these apparent weaknesses, some positive advances may be recorded:

- (a) A number of federal committees have investigated and reported upon environmental issues warranting attention. These reports go well beyond mere fact-finding exercises, to indicate ways in which existing policies and practices may be improved. Examples of such investigations include the Report of the Lake Pedder Committee of Enquiry (1974), the Report on the National Estate (1974) the Senate Select Committee Reports on Air and Water Pollution (1969 and 1970), plus various statements on forestry practices and other specialised resource problems.
- (b) Most of the Australian States have now established central planning authorities, regional planning bodies, land councils and the like, which provide needed overviews of resource management problems and mechanisms for resolving disputes about resource allocation.
- (c) New techniques of data collection and project appraisal have been adopted, greatly improving information for decision-making. Recent developments include infra-red sensing, improved magnetometer surveys, laser applications and more sophisticated computation. Operations research techniques, cost-benefit analysis, critical path programming and other forms of systems analysis have been refined and utilised.
- (d) New forms of conservation practice have emerged through revised national parks legislation, the establishment of environmental protection agencies, regulations for the protection of historical and anthropological sites and the adoption of public inquiries for resolving land-use disputes (eg. see the Preliminary Report of the South-West Advisory Committee, June 1976).
- (e) An outpouring of academic research, plus the demands of eco-activists, has raised issues and identified problems hitherto unperceived. Among the more significant issues are those of amenity rights (Sax 1970, Kinber and Richardson 1974) and a new earth-ethic based on moral and philosophical considerations (Passmore 1974, Schumacher

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1974, Stone 1974). These approaches challenge some of the basic tenets of technological materialism and thus shake the very foundations of western capitalism. No wonder entrenched interests view these perspectives with alarm! Yet other democratic theorists believe that the new philosophies constitute the basis upon which post-industrial society must rest (McHarg 1969, Caldwell 1975).

MEANS OF MANAGEMENT

The question arises as to whether any effective administrative mechanism may be found which will provide an integrated regional conservation program, while overcoming some of the land management deficiencies previously noted. The answer lies in a combination of institutional arrangements and policies, rather than any single concept such as land classification.

The essential elements of a viable regional conservation program would appear to be:

- (a) A regional resource inventory, listing the area's assets and natural endowment, plus any prospective usage options.
- (b) A structure planning process leading to the identification of policies and programs promoting conservation and development of the region over an extended time horizon. The structure plan will need to take cognisance of local aspirations, as well as State and national objectives.
- (c) A land-use classification system, so that the region may be sub-zoned into various usage categories and conservation areas.
- (d) A monitoring system to permit periodic review and appraisal, plus a participation system to permit public inputs.

Such a program cannot be implemented without some underlying principles for guidance. Downes (1971) has developed a number of axioms about land-use management which are worthy of consideration:

"Decisions about the future use of land should take into account the following rules:

- (i) Decisions should not be made without adequate information and knowledge about the land, its capability for all possible uses and its relative suitability for each of those different uses.
- (ii) Decisions on the use of public land should not be made unless they are necessary; a reserve of uncommitted public land is a most flexible and valuable form of land use.
- (iii) Decisions on the development and use of resources of a district should be considered in relation to the whole resources of the State and for many resources, those of the whole Commonwealth.
- (iv) Decisions should be made on the basis that all purposes for which land can be used for the welfare of the community are inherently equal, but needs and priorities may vary from time to time and from place to place.
- (v) Decisions should be based on an understanding that different kinds of land have different potentialities for various uses, the most valuable land being that eminently suitable for a number of uses.
- (vi) Decisions should be made to provide for multiple-use to the greatest possible extent.
- (vii) Decisions to use the land for particular purposes should be

made in the knowledge that a suitable system of use and management to ensure that the land will continue to serve its chosen purpose, is available."

All of the above principles would seem feasible of adoption, if a system of regional conservation planning for western Tasmania is established.

STRUCTURING THE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The Area of Jurisdiction.

The first problem is to decide the boundaries of the West Coast region. Social scientists are well aware of the difficulties of determining regional frontiers, given that geographical, economic, demographic, administrative and other factors may be involved.

Some Tasmanian citizens would view Western Tasmania as extending from South-West Cape to Cape Grim, while others would define the region in terms of the municipalities of Queenstown, Gormanston, Strahan and Zeehan, with perhaps Waratah included. In the absence of any official specification, the nominated local government areas would seem appropriate.

The Need for a Regional Authority.

One of the principal obstacles to effective regional resource management is fragmented yet overlapping administration. Within western Tasmania a multiplicity of federal, state and local authorities have functional responsibility for resource management activities. No matter how expertly each agency carries out its own duties, the inevitable overall result is lack of coordination, plus some clashes of interest. Ideally, a State Planning Authority should exist to foster rational resource allocation and integrate public programs; but in the absence of such a body, some regional alternative needs to be created.

The Tasmanian Government's State Planning and Development Bill 1975 provided for the establishment of a number of regional planning authorities, each consisting of representatives of municipal councils and marine boards, aided by a small planning task force of recruited staff (Davis 1976). This legislation has not yet received parliamentary assent, but it has not prevented local authorities from establishing their own regional planning bodies in North-West Tasmania, the Tamar region and the Hobart metropolitan area. Apart from considerations of motivation and finance, no obstacle exists to the creation of a similar authority for Western Tasmania. It would surely be in the State's interest to foster and support such an organisation. One of the primary responsibilities of a newly-created Western Regional Planning Authority would be to develop an integrated conservation program for the area. Cooperation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other State authorities would be required, nevertheless a local viewpoint could be injected into resource management decision-making.

A regional Resource Inventory.

As previously noted, regional land-use planning must be based on appropriate and accurate scientific information, plus demographic, economic and social factors. Existing State data collections may not be appropriate for this purpose, hence special regional analyses may be required. No prescribed format or classification exists for such assessments, but if some care is exercised about inventory structures and taxonomies, information may later be extracted for a variety of purposes.

If the major resources of Western Tasmania are to be accurately assessed, then existing information compiled by government agencies and private enterprise must be collated and supplemented by selective fieldwork. A regional resource inventory should not be limited solely to soil, geological or botanical characteristics; it will also be necessary to identify scenic assets, endangered areas, anthropological sites and other

features. Indeed the variety and uniqueness of the region should be primary targets for investigation. This aspect of the conservation program is one where some public participation is feasible and to be encouraged. Not all the evidence collected will be scientifically reliable, but community preferences and interests will also have been identified.

The Structure Planning Process

In recent years traditional land-use planning based on rigid zoning concepts has been replaced by more flexible structure planning involving innovative policy processes and adaptive programming (Whitby *et al.* 1974, Edmunds and Letey 1973, Bruton 1974). A shift has occurred away from restrictive regulatory approaches towards more constructive orientations and systems management (Chadwick 1971, Faludi 1974, Allison 1975). This new structure planning is of an interdisciplinary kind, with greater opportunities for public input (Skeffington 1969, Spiegel 1968) plus the identification of options which permit some adjustment to changing circumstances. The technique is now well established overseas (Bor 1974, Glasson, 1974, Ratcliffe 1974) but is relatively new to Australia as yet.

As far as Western Tasmania is concerned, structure planning would be executed by the Regional Planning Authority, acting in consultation with State Government. The process would involve identification of strategies and programs for the conservation and development of the West Coast region over the next ten to fifteen years and encompass matters ranging from housing, transport and employment to the provision of welfare services and community amenities. Given the resource endowment of the region, minerals and forestry production, fishing, tourism and allied conservation measures would receive high priority.

A Land-Use Classification System.

It may seem paradoxical to suggest that a flexible structure planning approach should be allied to a relatively rigid land-use zoning scheme involving specific categories and defined boundaries. Yet the two concepts are complementary and essential. During the past few years a series of ad-hoc decisions by Tasmanian government departments and authorities has created an array of land-use categories having official or unofficial status. National parks, state reserves, conservation areas, investigation sites, regional parks, forest reserves, municipal recreational areas, crown land and other classifications have been mooted or adopted. The problem with many of these categories is that they present too stark a choice between ongoing preservation or outright exploitation i.e. there is no clear grading between conservation and development. The State Government has not created an adjudicating body, such as the Land Conservation Council in Victoria, to weigh options and determine allocations. In consequence, a competitive and conflictive situation is developing, as public agencies scramble for territory and resources.

It would seem appropriate for the Tasmanian Government to establish a state-wide system of land classification, with categories ranging from long-term preservation to public or private exploitation. In the absence of any national or international agreement about categories or criteria, Tasmanian authorities may have to devise a classification system appropriate to local needs. Various models of land classification have been devised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the New Zealand and United States National Park Services and other organisations (Hutchings 1971, Report on the National Estate 1974), but all of the classification systems tend to follow a similar pattern:

Zone Classification 'A'

Areas of outstanding scenic or topographical interest, which warrant permanent preservation under national park or state reserve legislation. Only limited service facilities permitted in such areas, except at one or two public access points where a wider range of tourist amenities would be provided, under strict environmental controls.

Zone Classification 'B'

Regional recreation parks, possessing considerable scenic value, but where a wider range of human activities would be permitted, under some environmental controls.

Zone Classification 'C'

Conservation areas where environmental controls may apply and landscape preservation plus flora and fauna protection is practiced, but limited and selective resource utilisation activities are also permitted. Selective logging or small-scale mining operations are possible examples. Remedial action would be required when operations ended.

Such areas might have time tenures permitted for resource exploration, the land being transferred to other categories if development did not occur within a stated period.

Zone Classification 'D'

Areas where major development activities are permitted and virtually expected to occur. Some environmental controls would exist, but appropriate to the kind of activities involved eg. hydro-electric development, forestry production for woodchips or other purposes, large-scale minerals extraction and processing, agricultural activities etc.

Remedial works would be expected when exploitation ceased to occur.

Zone Classification 'E'

Areas of special scientific, historical or educational interest, used as reference points by specialists or the community. Special regulations and access restrictions might apply, with severe penalties for damage or destruction.

Monitoring and Review.

Such a land-use classification system cannot effectively operate unless procedures exist for the resolution of disputes, reclassification of land and monitoring of overall performance. Despite the existence of an Environmental Protection Act, Tasmanian resource legislation is generally deficient of such safeguards (Davis 1975, Burton and Richards 1975), moreover Australian legal processes are somewhat ineffective in protecting amenity rights (Environmental Law Reform Group 1973, Mosley 1973, Australian Government Seminar on Environmental Law 1974). If this situation is to be corrected, then new initiatives will be required at both State and Commonwealth levels. So far there is little evidence that innovative land policies are being formulated by either level of government.

ASSETS TO BE SAFEGUARDED

It would be inappropriate in a paper of this kind to attempt to prescribe which areas of Western Tasmania should be safeguarded via a regional conservation program. The most that can be attempted is to indicate the kind of features which might warrant inclusion in such a conservation agenda:

- (a) The Lower Gordon River and the wilder gorges of the Franklin River system represent waterways worthy of preservation in the national interest. Hydro-electric development in Tasmania has reached the stage that few rivers are left unregulated, moreover the economics of utilising remaining sites is growing steadily less attractive (Davis 1972, Wilde 1976).
- (b) The barren hills of Queenstown constitute a distinctive landscape, despite being essentially man-modified terrane. We tend to think that barrenness constitutes protection, nevertheless some management decisions will be required in future years and the protection of such areas needs to be guaranteed.
- (c) Representative examples of both mixed forest and rain forest need to be conserved

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at various locations within Western Tasmania. People tend to believe that the area is rich in such resources, but land is being cleared at an alarming rate for various purposes and pressures exist to convert native forest to plantations or monocultures for milling and woodpulp production.

(d) The West Coast possesses many fine beaches and secluded coves, but these are gradually becoming threatened by vehicle access and erosion, plus numerous bushfires in coastal vegetation. It does not suffice to reserve a narrow coastal strip of land; surveys are needed to identify areas for conservation and appropriate management practices.

(e) A complex network of exploration tracks and former railway workings provides access to mountains, rivers, waterfalls, mining relics and other features of interest. Prospectively these assets offer considerable recreational potential for tourists, photographers, historians, botanists and bushwalkers. Management is required to make such features available to the general public, while ensuring that the essential character of the region is maintained. A State foot-track network should be provided, also specified routes for four wheel drive vehicles. Controls are needed to prevent a multiplicity of vehicle routes from being developed.

(f) Western Tasmania may constitute the last habitat of the thylacine and does possess some unique flora and fauna. A regional conservation program should take such items into account.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper an integrated schema has been presented for land-use management in Western Tasmania, with particular reference to conservation values. It has been claimed that such a program would necessitate a regional information system, structure planning process, a land-use classification system and considerable local inputs of organisation and knowledge. The claim may be made that such a process might prove unduly bureaucratic or that existing State agencies could discharge these functions. The author believes that this is not necessarily the case. No reason exists for complacency about land-use management in Western Tasmania. Moreover existing institutional arrangements do not provide any integrated program of conservation for the area. Either increased State intervention is required or local residents must initiate their own community conservation program. The scenic beauty of Western Tasmania is too valuable an asset to be frittered away.

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Bruce W. Davis

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Plate 31. - The Henty Surface and the West Coast Range from Eden.