



# *Coastwatchers*

*Eurobodalla's environment group*

Newsletter 1 June 2016

## Climate Change Denial Though Censorship

Recent press reports have indicated that the Commonwealth Department of Environment, censored any mention of sensitive Australian environmental issues, in a Report prepared by the UN.

The UN report entitled **“World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate”**, was prepared by UNESCO, UNEP, and the Union of Concerned Scientists. It considered the affects of Climate Change on World Heritage areas throughout the world.

The sections in the Final Report relating to Australia were removed. These considered the impacts of climate change on the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu National Park and the Tasmanian Wilderness.

The Guardian newspaper reported that all mention of Australia had been removed from the Final Report, which was released on Friday 27 May 2016. The Guardian, indicated a Commonwealth Environment Department spokesperson was quoted as saying that “recent experience in Australia had shown that negative commentary about the status of World Heritage properties impacted on tourism”. As a consequence of this censorship, Australia was the only populated continent in the world that was not mentioned in the Report.

The Draft Report contained a section on the Great Barrier Reef as well as other sections on Tasmania and Kakadu. These were removed. The Draft Report described climate change as “the biggest long-term threat to the [Great Barrier Reef] today, and to its ecosystems,

services, biodiversity, heritage values and tourism economy”.

It concluded that “without a comprehensive response more in keeping with the scale of the threat, the [reef]’s extraordinary biodiversity and natural beauty may lose its world heritage values”.

The timing of this removal coincided with reports of major bleaching and death of coral on the Great Barrier Reef.

The Section of the report addressing the Tasmanian Wilderness was also removed. As with the Reef it also addressed the adverse impacts of climate change on the World Heritage Regions of Tasmania. The Draft Report was considered at the time of the wild fires in the Tasmanian Wilderness (January 2016), when 10s of thousands of hectares of Wilderness were destroyed. It was reported that the Premier of Tasmania was again concerned that the fires would impact on tourism and damage the Tasmanian ‘brand and reputation’.

Kakadu National Park was also considered in the Draft Report and that section was also removed. The Draft Report had concluded that climate change would have adverse impacts on the Kakadu National Park through increased rainfall, sea level rise and fire on the eco-systems in the Park. In, particular, there was concern that the fresh water wetlands could be inundated with salt water.

Professor Will Steffen from the ANU who reviewed the draft Report on the Great Barrier Reef, responded to the Commonwealth Department’s actions

“As a scientist, I’m angry. As an Australian, I’m disgusted.”

“ I’ve spent a lot of my career working internationally, and it is very rare to see something like this. Perhaps in the old Soviet Union, ... but not in western democracies”.

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## **Dargues Reef Gold Mine - Still in Limbo**

In the last Coastwatchers Newsletter in March 2016, it was reported that NSW Planning had indicated that they would conclude their assessment of Unity Mining’s response submission shortly, and the matter would be referred to the Planning Assessment Commission in April 2016.

It would then up to the Commission to determine its timetable, which could be between 1-3 months to conclude the process. It may involve public hearings or meetings, an issue for the Commission. Time has moved on.

Unity Mining had indicated to the Australian Stock Exchange, that it expected the matter to be finalized in May 2016, but that date has come and gone.

The word now is that the matter should take another month, with the Department of Planning’s assessment to be completed just after the 2 July Commonwealth election.

Coincidences do happen. Whoever said that politics and planning were not mixed, especially when the two Commonwealth marginal seats, which surround the Dargues Reef Mine, Eden Monaro and Gilmore, are extremely marginal and vulnerable. Let sleeping dogs lie until after 2 July!

The following stories confirm the concerns of locals to the Dargues Mine.

## **Solomon Island Tailings Dam Finally Overflows**

Health authorities in the Solomon Islands have warned villagers living downstream of the defunct Gold Ridge Mine on Guadalcanal Island, not to use river water because it could be contaminated by arsenic, cyanide and heavy metals.

The warning follows the uncontrolled release of untreated water from the mine's tailings dam following heavy rainfall. The mine's owner, local landowner company Gold Ridge Community Investment (GCIL), has since released more waste into the River to prevent a dam collapse.

There have been fears that the tailings dam's walls could collapse and send a torrent of water and toxic mining waste into the communities downstream.

The Solomon’s Ministry of Health and Medical Services has released a statement advising downstream communities not to use the river for drinking, cooking and bathing. The Ministry has also advised villagers in affected areas to prepare to evacuate their homes quickly, if the dam wall collapses.

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## **Centennial Coal To Plead Guilty to**

In an earlier Newsletter, mention was made of a coalmine collapse into the Wollangambe River, near Lithgow, which in turn affected the Blue Mountains World Heritage area.

More than 200 tonnes of coal fines have been removed from the River, after a wall collapsed at the Clarence Colliery in July 2015. The coal fines have been collected by hand, placed in bags and removed from the remote and rugged terrain by helicopter as part of clean-up

efforts.

The Environment Protection Authority has held 42 inspections at the site, and has begun prosecuting Centennial Coal in the Land and Environment Court. Clarence Colliery is a subsidiary of Centennial Coal. Centennial Coal has indicated that it will be entering a plea of guilty to the charges.

The EPA has indicated that the collapse was a major environmental incident and will pursue a tier one offence in the Court. Such an offence can carry a maximum fine of \$2 million for a company.

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### **Brazilian Prosecutors Launch \$58 Billion lawsuit against Samarco, BHP and Vale**

Federal prosecutors in Brazil have filed a \$58.2 billion civil lawsuit against iron miner Samarco, and its owners Vale SA and BHP Billiton. This follows a collapse of its Tailings Dam at the Germano Mine. 19 people died and devastating pollution occurred in nearby rivers, and the Atlantic Ocean.

The lawsuit, is also against the two States impacted by the spill, and the Federal Brazilian Government, and is the result of a six-month investigation led by a Task Force set up after the disaster.

The total damages, prosecutors said, were based upon the costing structure of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the United States when BP's total pre-tax cost for that spill reached \$US53.8 billion.

In a separate lawsuit in March, Samarco, Vale and BHP, agreed to pay the Brazilian Government an estimated \$7.51 billion, which was to repair damage caused by the spill.

Federal Brazilian and State prosecutors were not part of that settlement, which they criticised, saying it was insufficient and lacked the legal mechanisms to ensure the companies would fulfil their obligations, making it little more than a "letter of intent".

The roles of the Brazilian State and Federal Governments were also questioned, with prosecutors accusing the State of Minas Gerais, where the spill occurred, as being guilty of negligence in permitting the faulty Tailings dam and failing to monitor it.

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### **Bulk Buy of Solar Panels SHASA**

The South Coast Health and Sustainability Alliance (SHASA) is seeking expressions of interest from anyone who wants to benefit from a low cost quality solar system to reduce their energy bills.

SHASA is a not-for-profit community group based in Eurobodalla who help to make renewable energy more accessible and affordable. It is coordinating a solar bulk buy for the Eurobodalla community.

SHASA has been actively negotiating a bulk buy discount for quality solar systems at the best price and with the best local installers. This will help buyers navigate the world of solar, as SHASA has done all the research to give peace of mind, and make sure people get good quality systems from reputable local installers at a discounted price.

SHASA received funding from the NSW Government's Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) through its Community Renewable Energy program for the in-depth research into solar solutions.

Mark Fleming from OEH said "Solar bulk buys have worked well in other regions with households, families and businesses buying quality solar systems to reduce annual electricity bills".

Participation in solar bulk buy is easy. Go to [www.shasa.com.au](http://www.shasa.com.au) and fill out the non-binding expression of interest form. The bulk buy will be open for three months until the end of August. If you have further questions you can email [shasateam1@gmail.com](mailto:shasateam1@gmail.com) or call Paul Dolphin 0429 204 924.

SHASA will have a stand this weekend at the Enviro Expo at the Village Centre in Batemans Bay. The event is on Saturday the 4<sup>th</sup> of June and runs from 10am to 4pm. They will also be officially launching the bulk buy in Moruya on Tuesday the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 5pm-7pm at the OEH Demystifying Solar Roadshow at the Anglican Church Hall, Moruya.

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## Nature Conservation Council News

1. The NCC has moved offices to:

14/338 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box 20232, World Square, NSW 2002

tel 02 9516 1488

email [ncc@nature.org.au](mailto:ncc@nature.org.au)

2. The NCC Annual Conference will be held at the University of Sydney on 22-23 October 2016

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## New NSW Land Clearing Laws on Public Exhibition

The NSW Government has released its new land clearing laws. There are two Bills, the Biodiversity Conservation Bill and the Local Land Services Amendment Bill.

The NCC has stated that if these draft Bills pass the NSW Parliament there will be an increase in land clearing and remnant bushland destruction.

There is an 8 week public consultation period finishing on 28 June 2016. Coastwatchers members are encouraged to make submissions.

The NCC said the Draft Biodiversity Package, will spell disaster for nature in NSW by enabling the return of broad scale land clearing and habitat destruction across the State.

The NCC said the Bills would enable big agribusiness and property developers to sweep away the Native Vegetation Act 2003 with the introduction of much weaker nature conservation laws.

In Queensland, land-clearing rates trebled under the Newman LNP Government. The NCC considered that the Baird Government has squandered an historic opportunity to develop strong conservation laws to address the mounting extinction emergency in NSW. If substantial changes are not made, there is a high risk these Bills will make things worse, than better.

The Native Vegetation Act 2003 was introduced in NSW (and similar Acts in other States) as a means for Australia to meet its Carbon Emissions Target in the early 2000s. This was an initiative of the Howard Government. They paid \$billions in grants to the States to achieve this result. If the 2003 NSW Act is now repealed, the Commonwealth should consider demandin a refund of the \$billions paid to NSW.