

**AUSTRALIA UNLIMITED? ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATE IN THE AGE
OF CATASTROPHE, 1910-1939.**

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Abstract

Between the First and Second World Wars, Australia was under significant social, political and economic pressures. It has been generally argued that these problems stifled environmental debate, encouraging governments to look to large-scale development schemes for solutions. In turn, the few critics of these schemes were ruthlessly attacked as not having the national interest at heart. This article contests this interpretation of the period. It argues that there was an environmental debate, with a wide range of interests pushing for conservation, the development of National Parks and limits on these development schemes.

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INTRODUCTION

Eric Hobsbawm coined the term *Age of Catastrophe* for the period, 'from the outbreak of the First World War to the aftermath of the Second', during which the world, 'stumbled from one calamity to another'.¹ The term is particularly apt for Australia. During the second half of the nineteenth century its economy had developed rapidly. Australia's democratic institutions were well in advance of Britain's and Federation in 1901 was achieved smoothly.² In contrast the first third of the twentieth century was disastrous: politically, economically and socially. Structural deficiencies in the economy, particularly an over emphasis on agricultural exports, contributed to the heavy impact of the Great Depression on Australia. However, poor economic performance was not confined to that short event, but rather was a consistent feature of a thirty year period.³ Indeed, between 1911-2 and 1937-8, real GDP per capita rose by only a *total* of two per cent (or less than 0.1 per cent per year).⁴ Politically, Australia was destabilised by a growth in support for both Fascism and Communism, religious divisions, disputes over the powers of the Federal and State Governments, the tendency of the major parties to split or collapse and even unsuccessful attempts at coups.⁵

During this period there were a number of attempts at large-scale agricultural developments, mainly but not exclusively in the underdeveloped states of Western Australia and Queensland. These schemes proposed the rapid transformation of the environment, either by irrigating arid areas or clearing dense forest in high-rainfall areas. Their inspiration was in a wave of pro-development literature which argued that the agricultural potential of Australia had been previously underestimated. Foremost of these writings was Edwin Brady's *Australia Unlimited* (1918). For these schemes farmers were drawn either from British migrants (*Empire Settlement*) or World War One veterans (*Soldier Settlements*). Quickly conceived and developed as solutions to the problems of the period, most of these schemes were economic failures due to a combination of under capitalisation, lack of training and knowledge, the marginal nature of the areas and falling world commodity prices.⁶

Much of the focus in the literature is on how little opposition there was to these hastily conceived schemes and how those who did raise objections were ruthlessly crushed. In particular, the geographer Griffith Taylor and the forester Harold Swain have been presented as environmental martyrs swept aside by the irresistible wave of support for rapid development.

Taylor was highly critical of arguments that arid areas could be easily farmed and that if the interior was fully utilised Australia's potential population was 100 million. He was also sceptical of development in the tropical north and argued that it was only possible through an easing of immigration restrictions contained in the White Australia Policy. As a result the Sydney University

¹ Hobsbawm 1994: 6-7.

² Under Federation, the six Australian colonies agreed to be one country under a federal system of government. The colonies were renamed states.

³ Schedvin 1970.

⁴ McLean 1987: 323 Table 12.1. I am particularly indebted to Eric Jones and the late Lloyd Robson for their perspectives on this period.

⁵ See Cathcart 1988: in particular pp. 40-3 for his account of the unsuccessful attempts to persuade the World War One General John Monash to undertake a coup. In his novel *Kangaroo*, D.H. Lawrence fictionalised the rise of fascism which he had seen in Australia in 1922.

⁶ For general coverage of these schemes see Bolton 1981: 135-143; Lines 1991: 164-195 and Powell 1993: 11. For specific schemes see Bolton 1972 and Gabbedy 1988 for Western Australia; Legg 1984 and Lake 1987 for Victoria and Fitzgerald 1984: 49-88 for Queensland.

academic was often attacked in the press, had his textbook banned in Western Australia and after failing to gain a full chair moved to the USA in 1928.⁷

Swain was Director of Forests in Queensland from 1918 and Chairman of the Queensland Forestry Board from 1924. He opposed the clearance of forests for agriculture and championed National Parks, reforestation and the development of scientific forestry. He repeatedly clashed with those who promoted agricultural expansion. In 1931 a Royal Commission on Northern Development found that Swain worked to, 'stifle further land settlement in the Far North' and he was dismissed. Swain moved to New South Wales, where he served as Commissioner of Forests and he later worked for the United Nations.⁸

Taylor and Swain are presented as heroic individuals, out of step with the time they live in, while advocating policies much more acceptable to modern Australian sentiments. Flannery describes Taylor as 'one of the greatest and most courageous scientists that Australia has ever produced'. Swain, according to Fitzgerald, 'emerges as a figure well ahead of his time; although it is doubtful whether his views would find acceptance in contemporary Queensland'. Frawley described Swain as 'zealous and eccentric', and the 'odd man out' with other foresters.⁹

However, the literature does not present Taylor and Swain as participants in any sort of a debate. Rather they are lone voices, quickly and absolutely overwhelmed by their significantly more numerous opposition. In turn, those arguing against them are only portrayed sketchily. Brady, despite writing the most influential pro-development book, is given little attention, really only being drawn as a villain against the two heroes. Flannery, for instance, simply describes Brady's work as, 'its written contents are laughable. Its distortion of undeniable reality seems infantile today'.¹⁰ Most significantly, the literature does not explore whether Taylor and Swain had any supporters or allies, or were able to sway opinion. Nor is there much consideration that others advocated environmental protection, with differing results. Exacerbating the limitations of this literature is the tendency towards seeing Australian history in periods, in this case resulting in a number of detailed works finishing either in 1900 or in 1914.¹¹ Overall the impression given is that while there were some important early debates about the environment in the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1960s and beyond that it became a serious issue.¹²

This article contests this interpretation of a lack of environmental discussion in Australia between the Wars. My argument is that there was significant debate, that it involved more than just the instance of Taylor and Swain, that there was widespread concern about the environment and that the ideas of *Australia Unlimited*, particularly the large agricultural development schemes, were opposed. Rather than being just an unimportant phase, the period from 1910 to 1939 was crucial to the development of conservation in Australia, forming a foundation for the rise of environmental consciousness later in the century.¹³

This focus of this article is on the debate regarding the widespread forest clearance which was stimulated by *Australia Unlimited*. There was also great discussion concerning the wisdom of

⁷ Powell 1993: 15-38; Lines 1991: 171; Flannery 1994: 363-6; Griffiths 1996: 186; Hutton and Connors 1999: 57-8.

⁸ Fitzgerald 1984: 81-3 & 87; Hutton and Connors 1999: 53-5; Frawley 1999.

⁹ Flannery 1994: 363; Fitzgerald 1984: 83; Frawley 1999: 144.

¹⁰ Flannery 1994: 359. See also Lines 1991: 168; Powell 1993: 9; Griffiths 1996: 186; Haynes 1998: 144. Many other writers make no mention of Brady.

¹¹ Ritchie 1989 and Bonyhady 2000 stop in 1900. Powell 1976, concludes in 1914.

¹² For environmental concerns in the late nineteenth century see Powell 1976; Bonyhady 2000; Bolton 1981: 37-102; Hutton and Connors 1999: 27-56 & 75-88. Note that this is a much more substantial body of literature than for the first half of the twentieth century.

¹³ Much of this concern may be characterised as *conservationist*, that is critics were concerned that the resources of the forests could be put to better economic uses, for example for timber or water production rather than farming. However, as will be noted later, some expressed *preservationist* views, that is Nature should be preserved and valued for its own sake, even if this was at an economic cost to society.

farming more arid areas and given its relevance to modern concerns about drought, salinity and environmental degradation, this is an issue which needs greater research.¹⁴

The article is divided into five parts. The first outlines Brady's arguments in *Australia Unlimited*. It is important to understand what he was proposing in order to understand the arguments of those who opposed him. Furthermore, Brady usually only receives passing mention in the literature and has not been the subject of any critical study by environmental or economic historians.¹⁵ The second section examines the writing of *Australia Unlimited* against the context of the times and Brady's broader career. The third considers the debate over whether the Lamington Plateau should be farmed or declared a National Park. This debate reached its height between 1910 and 1915, the period when Brady was just commencing *Australia Unlimited* (and for this reason I have extended the time period considered forward to 1910). The fourth details the burst of interest in nature which characterised the 1920s, leading to a number of writers and artists mounting influential arguments for forest preservation. The fifth section considers the role of forestry interests, which also argued against forest clearance.

AUSTRALIA UNLIMITED

In *Australia Unlimited*, Brady argued that Australian farmlands were, 'highly fertile and unlimited in area'. The development of railways, irrigation projects and smaller more intensive farms were necessary for Australia to achieve this potential. Rather than eight or nine million people, Brady proclaimed that Australia could be home to 200 million.¹⁶

Technology could overcome all environmental constraints. Brady claimed that:

It has now been proven by meteorologists that Australia is not a drought-stricken country. Increased production in recent years has been due, not to better seasons – for the seasons have not been exceptionally rainy – but to improved farming methods, particularly in “dry” areas, and also to an extension of [water] conservation, storage, irrigation, better transport and the artesian supply.¹⁷

While his focus was primarily on drier areas, Brady also envisaged the settlement of the coastal forests. Forest clearance was, 'a heroic struggle between man and nature'.¹⁸ Forests such as the Big Scrub of Northern NSW, had initially been seen as of limited value, but once cleared had proved to be excellent dairying country. Closer settlement, Brady argued, would further increase its productivity. More intensive methods, particularly an emphasis on fodder crops, would enable average farm sizes to fall from 200 to 80 acres (83 to 33 hectares).¹⁹ Brady advocated widespread forest clearance of the coast from Bega (Southern NSW) to East Gippsland (Victoria), the Atherton Tableland, Tully, Bloomfield and Daintree River Valleys and the McPherson Ranges (Queensland), South-West Western Australia and North-West Tasmania, areas totalling between seven and ten million acres (approximately three to four million hectares) of forests.²⁰

Brady anticipated that there would be opposition to his plans for forest clearance from conservationists and timber interests. However, he dismissed these, arguing, 'Regrets for the

¹⁴ For recent partial explorations of these issues see Griffiths 1996: 176-192; Haynes 1998. However, both these sources only deal briefly with Brady.

¹⁵ The thesis by Webb 1972, is primarily an analysis of Brady's literary output.

¹⁶ Brady 1918: 56 & 88.

¹⁷ Brady 1918: 97.

¹⁸ Brady 1918: 766.

¹⁹ Brady 1918: 202.

²⁰ Brady 1918: 270, 457, 506, 687 & 765. Brady also argued for clearance of the rainforests of the Atherton Tableland in *Land of the sun* (1924: 105-7).

destruction of timber need not trouble us. Fields are worth more than trees; a fact, which self-constituted forestry authorities are loath to admit'.²¹

Australia Unlimited was the inspiration for a wide range of schemes and policies. The governments of Western Australia and Queensland, large states with small populations, were enthusiastic supporters of migration and agricultural expansion. The more established states, particularly Victoria and NSW, developed agricultural schemes for their returned soldiers. At the Federal level, *Australia Unlimited* shaped the policies of both sides of politics. The conservative Nationalist-Country Government of Stanley Bruce (1923-1929) followed a policy of agricultural expansion under the slogan, 'Men, Money and Markets'.²² It linked agricultural expansion with closer ties with Britain, which would provide the initial migration and capital for development and ultimately the market for the output. In turn, the Labor Government of James Scullin (1929-1932) tackled the Great Depression with a campaign of 'Grow More Wheat', which could have come straight out of *Australia Unlimited*; indeed its targets were very close to those set by Brady a decade earlier. Encouraged by a proposed fixed price, wheat growers planted an extra three million acres (1.25 million hectares), a 20 per cent increase, in one year. However, when the Federal Government was unable to pass legislation for a fixed price, the scheme, the Australian wheat industry and many of the ideas of *Australia Unlimited* collapsed.

Why was *Australia Unlimited* so influential in the period after the First World War? According to Powell, 'It did very well because it offered a well-timed corroboration of the ascendant nationalist-imperialist line and because its confident air insinuated the idea that Australia had been undersold'.²³ By being released at the end of the First World War, it tapped into widely held views that Australia had to develop further in order to better able to protect itself. It should also be remembered that it came out only 17 years after Federation. Whereas previous agricultural development schemes had been organised by individual states, *Australia Unlimited* argued for a national effort. Working together as a nation had just been successfully demonstrated during the War, Brady's attractive argument was that this could continue in other fields.

THE MAKING OF AUSTRALIA UNLIMITED

Why was *Australia Unlimited* written by Edwin Brady, a fairly unsuccessful journalist? It was a big production, over a thousand pages, 'a magnificent, gold-embossed, lavishly bound and illustrated, two-volume set', a 'profusely illustrated doorstopper'.²⁴ Who paid for it? Was it all Brady's doing or were their other hands at work? Our sources are imperfect and it is not possible to answer all these questions completely. However, it is important to see that *Australia Unlimited* was a product of its time and that Brady had influential supporters.

Brady is generally identified as a journalist, though his interests were much broader than this. He edited a number of Labor newspapers, contributed poetry to the *Bulletin* and had limited success with some travel books. His most successful occupation was as an advertising agent and he used this to subsidise his literary interests. He was an inveterate schemer, though his lack of capital prevented any of them coming to fruition. At the time he started work on *Australia Unlimited*, he was seeking government subsidies for establishing three business schemes: a farming colony in the Northern Territory, a timber concession in eastern Victoria and an irrigation project in NSW.²⁵

The genesis of *Australia Unlimited* was a short travel book, *Picturesque Port Phillip* (1911). It told the story of Brady's adventures in driving a motor car around Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay.

²¹ Brady 1918: 768.

²² Formed in 1919, the Country Party appealed to the interests of small farmers, particularly returned servicemen.

²³ Powell 1993: 9.

²⁴ Flannery 1994: 359; Powell 1993: 9.

²⁵ Webb 1972: 47-66.

Published by George Robertson, it was a straightforward commercial venture, complete with advertisements and product placements (such as the tyres and petrol used). However, there are sections dealing with the untapped potential for development of both the region and Australia. Brady conveys this information through accounts of discussions with business people who he meets, a device also used extensively in *Australia Unlimited*.²⁶

After success with *Picturesque Port Phillip*, Brady commenced work in 1912 on *Australia Unlimited*. Again the publisher was George Robertson and it is not clear whether the idea was his or Brady's. As the project developed, tensions arose as Brady pushed for a more political work, whereas Robertson envisaged a less controversial travel book. Robertson paid Brady £50 a month, though Brady had to pay his own travel expenses around Australia.²⁷

Some of the financing for *Australia Unlimited* came from the state governments, as demonstrated by Brady's dispute over payment with the Western Australian Government.²⁸ Unfortunately, the arrangements, particularly the amount of editorial control which these governments expected, are unclear. Brady probably developed this pattern while in advertising and had used it in *Picturesque Port Phillip*. He was to use it again in *Land of the Sun* (1924), which was openly financed by the Queensland Government. Brady also unsuccessfully sought government sponsorship for volumes on the development potential of northern Australia (1925), Tasmania (c1935) Australian manufacturing (*Industrial Australia*, c1925) and updated versions of *Australia Unlimited* (c1935 and 1947).²⁹

Brady was a long-time member of the Australian Labor Party. Gregarious by nature, he developed strong friendships with many influential politicians, including Prime Ministers J.C. Watson and W.M. Hughes, Queensland Premier and Federal Treasurer E.G. Theodore and NSW Premier W.A. Holman, as well as writers connected with Labor, such as Henry Lawson.³⁰ Such contacts proved advantageous in writing *Australia Unlimited*, for example, W.A. Holman used his influence with the West Australian Premier to settle the payment dispute.³¹

However, there is no evidence that any of Brady's political friends were telling him what to write. Probably Brady's views evolved over the long term and were influenced by contact and discussions with these politicians. In this sense, Brady's writing reflected the pro-development sentiments of the Labor Party. Nonetheless, while this connection was informal, the suspicion remains that various governments may have had stronger and more formal influence through their sponsorship of *Australia Unlimited*.

THE LAMINGTON PLATEAU

In 1910 the Queensland Minister for Lands, Digby Denham, ruled against a proposal to create a National Park on the Lamington Plateau in southern Queensland. After visiting the site, he stated that,

For anyone to regard the Lamington Plateau as a national park, is under the circumstances, an extreme view. One cannot get away from the track cut, the vegetation is so dense, and I think public interest would be served much more by having some 30 to 50 families located on the plateau and the altitudes retained [ie high peaks reserved], especially those spots

²⁶ See for example, Brady 1911: 32.

²⁷ Webb 1972: 66.

²⁸ Webb 1972: 68.

²⁹ Webb 1972: 77-9, 87 & 103.

³⁰ Webb 1972: 22, 29, 68 & 82. Brady's strong connection with Labor explains why the conservative Bruce Government did not openly link its policy of 'Men, Money and Markets' with *Australia Unlimited*. However, in 1923 Brady did publicity work for the Bruce Government (possibly organised through Hughes who had switched parties) and in 1925 sought its sponsorship of a Northern Australia book, see Webb 1972: 77-9.

³¹ Webb 1972: 68.

where tree ferns luxuriate, than by having a nominal national park which is practically inaccessible except to those who will undergo great hardship, and which is yielding no results.³²

The idea for a National Park on the Lamington Plateau is generally credited as first being raised in a paper read by Robert Collins to the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia in 1896.³³ However, Collins, a wealthy pastoralist and Member of the Queensland Parliament, actually only proposed that opening the area to farming would allow in tourists.³⁴ Over the next few years, the idea of a National Park gradually evolved and gained weight after Queensland proclaimed legislation for setting up National Parks in 1906.³⁵ Collins saw the Plateau as having a mix of uses, in 1905 he asked the Government to investigate, 'its suitability for ordinary settlement, the purposes of a National Park or health resort sanatorium or what not' and probably thought of the National Park as extending for either 640 or 960 acres (270 or 400 hectares).³⁶

Denham's decision seemingly ended the push for a National Park. The Plateau was opened for settlement. In 1911 the first farmers arrived, eight O'Reilly brothers and cousins. Following the track cut by the advocates of the National Park they began clearing the rainforest, using a technique of cutting by hand, drying and burning which was commonplace to all Australia's coastal forests.³⁷

However, the rapid incursion of the O'Reillys stirred up opposition. Under the leadership of Romeo Lahey, the son of a timbermill owner, a new campaign began. In contrast to Collins' idea of a small National Park, Lahey proposed that 47,000 acres (just under 20,000 hectares) gazetted as a timber reserve in 1902 be declared a National Park.³⁸ Lahey gained the strong support of farmers from nearby Mt. Tamborine (where a National Park had been created in 1908) and presented a petition in favour of his proposal with the substantial number of 521 signatures of local voters. Denham, now Premier, continued to back land clearance and settlement, until his government was defeated in the 1915 elections. The new government immediately proclaimed a National Park.³⁹

The debate over the Lamington Plateau is important for five reasons. First, it demonstrates the depth and breadth of support for preserving forests from clearance for agriculture in this period. It is notable that this campaign occurred in one of the most pro-development states and that its supporters included timbermillers and large numbers of local farmers.⁴⁰ Second, it resulted in a very large area of rainforest being protected, not just some small scenic gullies. Third, there was an awareness that farming in such marginal conditions was always likely to fail. The O'Reillys struggled and were not joined by other farmers. Elsewhere, it was apparent that clearing and

³² *Brisbane Courier* 18 June 1910.

³³ See for examples: Groom 1949: 64; Goldstein 1979: 133; Hutton and Connors 1999: 33.

³⁴ Collins 1897: 20-5. It has been suggested that Collins may have mentioned National Parks as a verbal aside, but not included them in his written paper, see Jarrott, 1990: 3. There is also a mystery as to the extent which Collins was influenced by the development of National Parks in the USA. In 1878 he visited Yosemite in California, but it was not declared a National Park until 1890. He did not visit Yellowstone National Park (1872). For a detailed exploration of the origins of the Lamington National Park, see Frost 2003.

³⁵ Previous to this, National Parks in Australia and elsewhere had been legislated on an individual basis. The Queensland legislation was the first to establish a framework for the creation of National Parks.

³⁶ Jarrott 1990: 4-7.

³⁷ Frost 1997; O'Reilly 1944: 74-9. The O'Reillys' clearing of the rainforest was recreated in the 1949 feature film, *Sons of Matthew*.

³⁸ Jarrott 1990: 4 & 20. At this time other rainforested National Parks were typically small, including Witches Falls on nearby Mt. Tambourine (1907), which was 324 acres (135 hectares); and in Victoria, 49 acres (20 hectares) at Bulga (1904), 750 acres (315 hectares) at Tarra Valley (1909) and 557 acres (230 hectares) at Ferntree Gully (1928, but unofficially a National Park much earlier). Collins continued to push for a compromise of preserving some small areas from settlement until his death in 1913, see Jarrott 1990: 26.

³⁹ Groom 1949: 73-82; Jarrott 1990: 20-38; Hutton and Connors 1999: 33-4. The full text of the petition, listing eight reasons for declaring the National Park is in Groom 1949: 81-2.

⁴⁰ Frost 2003.

farming forests held a high chance of failure. In the Otway Ranges of Victoria, for example, the agricultural scientist Thomas Cherry lamented in 1913 that, 'the pioneers have in too many cases worn themselves out in the struggle against the scrub'.⁴¹ Fourth, the foundations were laid for future campaigns. Lahey continued to push for more National Parks, was a key supporter of Harold Swain and in 1930 established the National Parks Association of Queensland which would be instrumental in the declaration of a large number of National Parks during the 1930s.⁴² Fifth, the outbreak of World War One did not curtail the campaign nor stop the Queensland Parliament from considering the matter. Indeed, Lahey was able to use the war to his advantage, pushing the Queensland Government to finally declare the National Park, 'as I want to get away to Europe to my next duty, but cannot leave this one unfulfilled'.⁴³

WIDESPREAD INTEREST IN NATURE

The decade or so after the end of World War One was characterised by a substantial increase in interest in the natural environment. This was manifested in a number of ways. Nature studies was a popular pastime. Bushwalking, including both day-trips and overnight walks, attracted large numbers. Tourism boomed in scenic areas, most notably the mountains and the coast. Wildlife watching developed in both natural areas and in specially constructed sanctuaries or wild zoos. Commentary on nature became a major topic in books, newspapers and radio.

Why did Australians become so interested in Nature, particularly given these were such turbulent times? Three main factors were at work. The first was the emphasis given to Nature Studies in schools since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ By the 1920s, it was a well-established part of the curriculum, serviced by many passionately interested teachers. Interest amongst schools was reinforced by celebrations such as Arbor Day, Wattle Day and Bird Day. The last was the invention of the Gould League of Bird Lovers, which by 1935 had 100,000 members in Victoria alone.⁴⁵ Nature Studies was taught in both urban and rural schools, the O'Reillys excelled at it at their small country school.⁴⁶ A critical group of educationalists stimulated interest both in the classroom and amongst the general public through their writings and involvement with bushwalking clubs.⁴⁷

The second factor was that the environment provided an outlet or escape for the horrors of World War One. The introduction for Charles Barrett's *In Australian wilds* (1919) explains that the author has returned from the War, but, 'he has come back, not to tell us of war, ... but to drop quietly into the old haunts and seclusions and give us in his first published words just the old hobby and the old home things'.⁴⁸ Another returned soldier, Horatio Jones, turned his back on his pre-war urban life and built a rough artists/ writers camp in the Dandenong Ranges.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Cherry 1913: 23. Rainforest was generally known as 'scrub'.

⁴² Hutton and Connors 1999: 71-2. The O'Reillys remained on the Plateau gradually shifting from farming to tourism, see Frost 2002: 12-13.

⁴³ Groom 1949: 82.

⁴⁴ Kohlstedt 1997.

⁴⁵ Robin 2002.

⁴⁶ O'Reilly 1944: 61-4.

⁴⁷ The bushwalking/nature writer Robert Henderson Croll was senior clerk in the Victorian Education Department, see Griffiths 1996: 170. Myles Dunphy, a bushwalker and advocate of a National Park in the Blue Mountains, was a lecturer in Architecture. Like many teachers he found that his occupation gave him long holidays for bushwalking and seaside vacations, see Meredith 1999: 147. Note Meredith's charting of how Dunphy's views changed slowly from conservation to preservation.

⁴⁸ Barrett 1919: 10. Griffiths 1996: 137-8, notes that the publicity for this book emphasised Barrett as a returned soldier seeking peace in the bush.

⁴⁹ Jones was injured during the War and on return to Australia called off his impending marriage. He was joined by his two sisters, who had both lost their fiancées in the War. See Petersen 2002.

War casualties were specifically commemorated in a range of projects, including the building of the scenic Great Ocean Road along Victoria's rugged western coast, an ANZAC memorial road to the Lamington National Park and the establishment of the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane.⁵⁰ Many returned servicemen may have seen bushwalking clubs and camping as ways of recapturing feelings of camaraderie and adventure. One bushwalking club, the Wallaby Club, offered ritual and commemoration through its 'ANZAC stick' a tree root salvaged from a Gallipoli trench and fashioned into a walking stick to be carried only by its president.⁵¹

A third factor was that changes in society may have added to the attractiveness of the natural environment. Bushwalking and nature-based tourism were popular amongst the growing urban population.⁵² The place of women in society changed rapidly, most notably through a massive rise in employment after the War. This flowed through into recreation. Previously an elite male-only pursuit, walking became popular amongst women. Indeed, the term bushwalking was coined in 1927 to describe a club for mixed groups of walkers.⁵³ Some of the new walking clubs were based on offices or factories, while others were promotional vehicles for new media companies, particularly radio and cinema. Particularly popular were *mystery walks*. Like today's mystery flights the participants did not know where they were going until the day. One included 2,000 walkers and another required two seven carriage trains to reach its destination.⁵⁴ Bushwalking guides and newspaper columns were highly popular. Croll's *The open road in Victoria: being the way of many walkers* (1928) was a practical guide with a range of walks to be followed by bushwalkers. It sold out immediately and a second edition was published in three weeks.⁵⁵

In Queensland, Lahey and his supporters promoted the Lamington Plateau as an ideal holiday destination for groups, such as women and office workers, who had not previously been usually associated with the outdoors.⁵⁶ Tourism resorts in forested mountainous areas catered for large numbers of what today would be termed *mass tourists*. In the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne, in 1929-30 42 guesthouses provided over 1,000 beds, about twice the accommodation capacity in the area today. At nearby Healesville, there were over 100 guesthouses and it attracted 8-10,000 visitors at Christmas and Easter. Healesville Sanctuary, a wild zoo with indigenous fauna, opened in 1930 and by the late 1930s was attracting nearly 100,000 visitors a year.⁵⁷

This surge in interest in the natural environment was translated into action to preserve natural areas, particularly forests, from agricultural and other development. In NSW, during the early 1930s bushwalkers successfully campaigned against the clearance of the Blue Gum Forest and for the creation of a National Park in the Blue Mountains. In Queensland, walkers and tourists supported Romeo Lahey's campaigns, resulting in the declaration of 183 National Parks comprising over 500,000 acres (210,000 hectares) by 1940.⁵⁸ In Victoria from 1928, a range of groups engaged in a campaign to preserve from logging 3,200 acres (1,350 hectares) of mountain ash (*eucalyptus regnans*) in the Cumberland Valley in the Yarra Ranges.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ The Great Ocean Road had the dual purpose of commemorating the War and providing work for returned servicemen. Employment was also provided for returned servicemen in forestry, see Frawley 1999: 151. ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Lone Pine was a particularly bloody battle fought by Australian troops in the Gallipoli campaign.

⁵¹ Griffiths 1996: 170.

⁵² Though interest in nature amongst farmers should not be underestimated, see Frost 2002.

⁵³ Meredith 1999: 93-102; Hutton and Connors 1999: 66-70.

⁵⁴ Wheeler 1991: 45-9; Frost 2000.

⁵⁵ Griffiths 1996: 170.

⁵⁶ Groom 1949: 122-156. Note the extensive use of women in promotional photographs for the Lamington Plateau in O'Reilly 1944 and Groom 1949.

⁵⁷ Frost 2000.

⁵⁸ Goldstein 1979: 134.

⁵⁹ Hutton and Connors 1999: 66-8 & 70-2; Groom 1949: 90-168 & 204-5; Meredith 1999: 121-8; Bonyhady 1993: 10-11. In 1903 John Muir had visited the Yarra Ranges to investigate whether or not the mountain ash were taller than California's *Sequoias*, see Bonyhady 2000: 275-7.

Public interest in preserving forests was reflected in the works of a wide range of writers and artists. Three are considered here. The first was Sir Arthur Streeton, famous as one of the key members of the Heidelberg School, which had revolutionised Australian art in the 1880s. In the 1920s, Streeton moved to the Dandenong Ranges in Melbourne, where he became involved in the campaign to save the Cumberland Valley. Increasingly he represented the impact of forest clearing in paintings titled *Our Vanishing Forests* (1934) and *Gippsland Forests for Paper Pulp* (1940). In *Silvan Dam and Donna Buang AD 2000*, Streeton presented an apocalyptic future vision of the forests of the Dandenong Ranges. As described by Bonyhady, 'the only trees in Streeton's painting were dead. The hills were so eroded and barren that when the painting reappeared in 1992 it was thought to depict the Flinders Ranges [in the Outback]'.⁶⁰

The second example was Keith Hancock, Professor of History at the University of Adelaide. In 1930 he wrote *Australia* as one of a British 'Modern World' series of volumes on various countries. Hancock launched a scathing attack on forest clearance. The early settlers were 'invaders', who 'hated trees' and,

The greed of the pioneers caused them to devastate hundreds of thousands of acres of forest-land which they could not hope to till or to graze effectively. To punish their folly the land brought forth for them bracken and poor scrub and other rubbish. They ruined valuable timber to make a few wretched farms.⁶¹

Hancock also attacked Bruce's policy of 'Men, Money and Markets' as being simplistic and ill thought out.⁶² Significantly, unlike his fellow academic Taylor, Hancock was not criticised as taking a disloyal position, nor was his book banned. The popularity of *Australia* demonstrated that by 1930 attitudes to the environment and development schemes had shifted.⁶³

The third example was *My Australia*, written by two young women, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw under the name M. Barnard Eldershaw. Echoing Hancock, they wrote of a history of, 'bitter hostility towards trees'. However, rather than just considering utilitarian conservation their concern was more spiritual,

There is nothing sadder or more forsaken than bush after the ring-barker has been through it ... It seems like more than the death of the trees, it is the land itself that is stripped, exposed, brought low. Everything dies with the trees.⁶⁴

FORESTRY

One intriguing group which argued against the expansion of agriculture advocated by *Australia Unlimited*, was that of forestry interests. Forestry and agriculture competed directly for the use of Australia's forests. Most importantly they could not *both* share the forests. Farmers needed to rapidly clear large areas for crops or pastures. Burning was the quickest and cheapest method, though it destroyed the timber. Most farmers did not wish to leave any adjoining timber reserves or woodlots, which they saw as harbouring pests and potentially fuelling bushfires. Brady, despite having interests in sawmilling, argued that, 'fields are worth more than trees'.⁶⁵ In the coastal forests, agricultural expansion had to take place at the expense of the forestry industry. Not surprisingly, it was in the interests of forestry to oppose these development schemes.

⁶⁰ Bonyhady 1993: 11-12.

⁶¹ Hancock 1930: 33-4.

⁶² Hancock 1930: 155.

⁶³ *Australia* went through many printings and was used in schools and universities until the 1970s.

⁶⁴ Eldershaw 1939: 222-3.

⁶⁵ Brady 1918: 768.

In Queensland, the defence of forestry was led by Harold Swain, whose opposition to farming ultimately led to his dismissal. While Swain's story has been extensively covered in the literature, two important points have often been overlooked. First, Swain allied himself with those advocating the protection of forests through National Parks, in particular Romeo Lahey (himself from a sawmilling background). He realised that by itself, the timber industry was unlikely to succeed and therefore needed to make some sacrifices in a coalition with conservationists. Second, forestry support for National Parks did not begin with Swain. For example, the creation of Queensland's first National Park at Mount Tamborine in 1908 was supported by foresters who indicated that they believed the area had no timber of value. Similarly, forestry interests seemed to prefer that the timber reserve on the Lamington Plateau be declared a National Park rather than be cleared for farming.⁶⁶

An interesting counterpoint to Swain is the case of Sir Herbert Gepp in Victoria. Trained as a chemist, Gepp worked in mining and rose to be General Manager of Australian Paper Manufacturers (APM). Formed in 1926, APM initially manufactured paper from imported pulp and waste paper, as Australian eucalypts were not suited for existing technology. However, in the 1930s APM took advantage of successful experiments conducted by the Federal Government, in the making of paper by blending pulp from softwoods and eucalypts. By 1940 APM were operating a full-scale paper and pulp mill in Victoria.⁶⁷ APM's success, albeit with heavy government subsidies, significantly increased the commercial value of forestry relative to agriculture.

Gepp was highly critical of the type of views put forward in *Australia Unlimited*. He argued that it was just as dangerous to talk of unlimited development as it was to consider stopping all development. Either view was too extreme and he was worried as a businessman, that such talk, 'damages our credit abroad and hampers the formation of rational plans for development'.⁶⁸

Gepp believed that agricultural development in forested land should be curtailed. He saw forestry as both more economically viable and better for the environment than farming. In a 1936 address to a group of farmers, he warned,

Man's inhumanity to trees will make countless future millions mourn. The dead trees remain like gaunt sentinels guarding the monuments to man's mistakes. I have seen the efforts which have made one blade of grass and much bracken grow where wonderful trees grew before. I have seen the unpaid labour of the pioneers commemorated only by dead trees, much bracken, little grass and deserted homesteads; and I have seen the land ... begin to slip into the valleys on its way to the sea. The trees, as we discovered rather late, are an integral part of the continent. Take them away and other changes follow.⁶⁹

Unlike Swain, Gepp was not attacked for adopting such a position. This was probably due to his position as a private businessman, his broad background in science and business and his efforts in utilising eucalypt forests to replace imported raw materials. It may also have reflected a shift in public opinion. By 1936, forestry may have been more appealing than the largely discredited wide-scale agricultural schemes.

⁶⁶ At this stage National Parks and their uses were loosely defined and understood. It may be that foresters believed they could still access the timber (as indeed is now happening in Australia under the guise of 'environmental thinning'). For similar competition over forest resources in Tasmania, see Petrow 2002.

⁶⁷ Dargavel 1995: 40-1. In turn, the increase in forestry also generated debate. Streecon, for one, was highly critical of using forests for paper pulp. He prepared a text to accompany his *Silvan Dam and Donna Buang AD 2000*, explaining that it was a, 'protest to the citizens and Parliaments of Victoria' over the 1936 granting of a 500,000 acres (210,000 hectares) timber lease to APM, see Bonyhady 1993: 11-12.

⁶⁸ Gepp 1939: 27.

⁶⁹ Gepp 1939: 130-1.

CONCLUSION

There has been a tendency to view the early part of the twentieth century as a period in which environmental concerns were at their lowest. Faced with mounting environmental, political and social problems, Australians, it is argued, turned to large scale agricultural development schemes as the solution. These were pursued with little thought for their environmental consequences. Those isolated individuals who spoke out, such as Taylor and Swain, were so out of step with mainstream interests, that they were quickly and ruthlessly dismissed. Such a view reinforces common notions that environmental debate is only a recent phenomenon.

However, this article provides evidence of wide ranging environmental concerns in this period. Development proposals, such as those contained in Brady's *Australia Unlimited*, stimulated reactions. Support for National Parks, forest conservation, nature studies and bushwalking all grew strongly. This was a period of debate. Most importantly it was a period when environmental concerns became widespread throughout Australia.

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