

## Attitudes to the environment

(The 1972 Flooding of Lake Pedder and the 1983 Franklin Dam decision)

### Timeline

- 1955 Lake Pedder National Park proclaimed.
- 1962 The South West Committee formed.
- 1965 ACF founded in Melbourne.
- 1967 Proposal to flood Lake Pedder as part of the Middle Gordon Scheme and Save Lake Pedder National Park Committee formed.
- 1972 Flooding of Lake Pedder.
- 1973 Federal Committee of Enquiry and Tasmanian Environmental Protection Act.
- 1974 Australia ratified the World Heritage Convention.
- 1976 Tasmanian Wilderness Society formed (Wilderness Society in 1984).
- 1977 Fraser/Kutikina Cave rediscovered.
- November, 1981 Fraser government lodges UN application for the Franklin River to be granted World Heritage status.
- 12 December, 1981 NO DAMS protest for the Tasmanian Energy Referendum.
- May, 1982 pro-Franklin Dam Liberal Party wins office in Tasmania.
- December, 1982 Blockade of the Franklin and Franklin classified as a World Heritage Area.
- January, 1983 Prime Minister Fraser offers \$500 million compensation (to stop the dam) to Tasmanian Liberal government but it is rejected.
- March, 1983 Bob Hawke wins federal election. They immediately announce intention to stop the dam.
- April, 1983 Hawke introduces legislation to protect World Heritage sites.
- July, 1983 High Court decision that Commonwealth has valid powers over World Heritage zones.
- June, 1984 Tasmanian Premier Gray accepts \$276.5 million in compensation.

### Background

- The perspective of nature as a resource was predominant in the twentieth century but other attitudes began to develop during this time.
  - More people began enjoying recreational activities in nature like bushwalking and appreciating nature purely for the scenery.
- After WWII the Government proposed the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electricity Scheme, a hydro-electric and irrigation project.
  - This reflected community attitudes towards nature at the time.
  - The scheme would tame the environment and create energy for more industry in the area.
- Because of the work of environmentalists overseas, such as Rachel Carson who fought the spread of DDT in America, Australian attitudes began to shift towards conservation.
- In 1965 the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) was formed.
- *The Great Extermination* by Jock Marshall became a prominent text for Australian conservationists.

## Lake Pedder

- Lake Pedder was formed 10,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age and became a popular bushwalking destination in the 1950s.
- In 1954 the Hobart bushwalking club recommended to the state government that the area around the lake should be made a scenic reserve.
- In 1955 the lake was proclaimed a national park of 23,000 hectares.
- In 1962 the South-West Committee was formed to further protect the lake.
- In 1967 the Tasmanian Hydro-Electricity Commission (HEC) proposed a new development that would flood Lake Pedder.
- In response, protestors formed the Save the Lake Pedder National Park Committee.
- In the 1960s the HEC was a significant force in Tasmania:
  - They provided 90% of the State's power.
  - They were a major source of employment in the state.
- They argued that the growth of Tasmanian industry and population was reliant on power being produced by the Middle Gordon scheme.
  - They had a vision for Tasmania to be transformed into a producer of cheap, clean power.
- Both major political parties and the majority of Tasmanians supported the HEC's scheme.
- In contrast, protestors argued that Lake Pedder was precious and that national parks were to be protected for future generations. They also presented the importance of the region as a wilderness reserve.
- Olegas Truchanas became a significant voice of the opposition to the scheme.
  - His speeches and pictures of the region were instrumental in garnering support for the movement.
- The push by the conservationists for greater protection saw the Lake Pedder National Park extended in 1968.
  - Still, major portions were reserved for development and the next year, part of the national park protection was revoked.
- The protestors organised a Lake Pedder pilgrimage to protest the HEC's continued pursuit of their earlier plans.
  - Nearly 2000 people visited the lake.
  - A large public meeting in the Hobart Town Hall was held but the motion calling for a referendum did not follow through state parliament.
- The Lake Pedder Action Committee was then formed.
  - This mobilised local, state and national groups and organisations.
  - Internationally a UNESCO petition began.
- Neither Labor nor the Coalition responded to the protests between 1969 and 1972.
- By December, 1972 the flood was only a few miles from the Lake Pedder beach.
- A Labor victory in 1972 gave the protestors hope, but the state government still refused to negotiate.
- The United Tasmania Group (UTG) formed and contested the state election.
  - The environment was a major influence on the group.
  - Both political parties declared that the Lake Pedder was not an election issue but UTG disagreed and brought it into the public spotlight.
  - UTG did not win any seats but they had successfully demonstrated that the environment was an election issue and brought the conservation debate into Australian politics.

- The Whitlam government signed a World Heritage Treaty at the UN.
  - They then offered \$8 million to preserve Lake Pedder but the state government refused.
  - The protest grew from 1000 signatures collected to save Lake Pedder in 1967 to 17500 signatures in 1972.
- These final protests did not halt the progress of the bill through parliament and the flooding began.
- After the flooding the Lake Pedder Action Committee pushed for an enquiry which was appointed in 1973.
- By 1974 the flooding was complete forming the Huon-Serpentine Impoundation.
- Despite the failure to save Lake Pedder, many see it as the start of a national focus on environmental issue and the wilderness movement.
- The movement of UTG was also significant because it signalled the beginning of the Greens political party in Australia and a greater focus on environmental issues in political debate.
- This event also highlighted (to some degree) a shift in thinking in relation to the way that Australians approach the environment; between exploitation (without questioning the right of humans to use the land) and protection (for the wilderness' sake).
  - Although HEC remained a dominant force and retained the support of the majority of Tasmanians, conservationists began to have more successes.
  - In 1973 they succeeded in protecting parts of inner-city Sydney from demolition.
  - In 1976 the Tasmanian Wilderness Society (now the Wilderness Society) was formed and environmentalists successfully stopped sandmining on Fraser Island.
  - Conservationists began focussing on the Franklin-Lower Gordon campaign in 1978.

### The Franklin Dam

- Part of the Gordon-below-Franklin Scheme (the HEC's plan for increasing hydro-electricity in Tasmania).
- In 1975 the ACF and Tasmanian Wilderness Society had pushed for the extension of existing protection in the area.
- In 1977 there extensions were granted but there was an awareness that HEC was surveying the area.
- The ACT pushed for the Federal Government to recommend the area for World Heritage Status and this was proceeding.
- In 1978 there were already 24 power stations and the Pieman River scheme under construction.
- In October, 1979 the HEC report was released to the government suggesting a hydro-electricity development on the Gordon river (which feeds out of the Franklin).
  - There was immediate outcry from conservationists who began a campaign to save the Franklin.
  - The HEC responded with a campaign of their own to demonstrate to Tasmanians that their development represented essential technology and progress.
  - They promised economic advantages (like lost costs and jobs), environmental advantages (like the use of clean renewable energy) and minimal negative impact on animal habitat and scenic areas.
- In contrast, conservationists argued that the site should not be developed because:
  - The Franklin was Tasmania's last wild river (one of four such area in the world)
  - It had many important plants and trees.
  - Scientifically the area was valuable and had not yet been fully researched.
  - Huon pines could be used for carbon dating (scientifically valuable).
  - On Heritage grounds due to Kutikina cave (not discovered until 1981).
  - World Heritage listing pending status.
  - Economically because the HEC had overestimated power needs and the jobs created were only short term.

- The HEC had few controls but lots of influence and had not fully investigated alternative power sources.
- In 1981, Aboriginal caves were discovered making the area even more precious. Found items included:
  - 40,000 stone flakes
  - 250,000 bone fragments
  - This gave evidence that there had been human activity in the area for 20,000 years.
  - Archaeologists believed that the cave site was among the top five in the world in importance.
  - This cave was first called Fraser Cave in a nod to the PM and later renamed Kutikina (Spirit) Cave by local Aboriginal groups.
- In December, 1981 a referendum was held by the Tasmanian government on the issue.
  - The ballot only gave a choice between larger and smaller dams.
  - Environmentalists launched a “no dams” campaign to persuade Tasmanians to vote against dams by voting informally.
  - The results were divided; 43% for the HEC site, 8% for the alternative site and 45% informal votes (for the environmentalists campaign).
  - The government interpreted this as an endorsement of the HEC proposal.
- After the referendum the Tasmanian Wilderness Society tried to raise more support throughout Australia.
  - Bob Brown (their leader) toured the mainland.
  - There were rallies in Sydney and Melbourne.
  - The protestors began planning a blockade of the river to prevent work on the project.
- Support came in for the protestors from a variety of sources:
  - The Mayor of Strahan wanted to save the river and tourist industry of his town.
  - Australian archaeologists supported Aboriginal ownership and protection of the caves.
- In December, 1982 the situation was tense between conservationists and the HEC and government.
  - Premier Robin Gray lashed out at protestors for challenging the state’s right to development.
  - He said the area being developed was unattractive to most people “11 months of the year.”
  - His position was supported by many Australians.
  - *The Canberra Times*: “the protestors were thwarting the wishes of the democratically elected parliament.”
- On 14 December, 1982 environmentalists protested at relevant locations.
  - 2613 people came from all over Australia.
  - Big names included Bob Brown and David Bellamy, the British botanist.
  - The blockade lasted for almost three months.
  - 1200 protestors were arrested for trespass.
  - This showed what protestors had learnt from Lade Pedder in that they were trained in non-violent strategies and the press found access to very few negative images of protestors.
  - Bob Brown dressed conservatively and was filmed shaking hands with the policeman who arrested him.
  - This press brought the Franklin into the consciousness of people who had not previously considered it.
  - The Franklin became a national issue through this press coverage.
  - By this point the Government had received 18000 letters of protest.
- In late December, 1982, 3500 rallied in Queenstown in support of the dam.
  - Placards such as “bury a greenie – fertilise the south west” were common.

- So were t-shirts like “keep warm this winter, burn a greenie.”
- Some of this anger related to feelings that the state’s rights were being jeopardized by protestors.
- The Fraser government offered the state \$500 million to stop the scheme but this was rejected.
  - Fraser backed off saying he respected state rights.
  - Both Labor (Bob Hawke) and the Democrats said they would stop the dam if they gained power.
- Conservationists organised a huge protest on the eve of the federal election in 1983.
  - 20,000 people rallied in Hobart.
  - At the Melbourne protest Bob Hawke assured 15,000 protestors that if Labor were elected the dam would be stopped.
  - ACF and Wilderness Society letter-boxed households in marginal seats and placed ads in newspapers.
  - In March 1983 Labor won and the Franklin campaign was said to be a large contributory factor.
- The new Labor government immediately announce that the dam would not be built.
  - But most Tasmanians did not vote Labor.
  - The HEC continued its development.
  - The Tasmanian government threatened to leave the Commonwealth if the federal government didn’t back off.
  - The federal government passed the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act giving it control over all World Heritage (including the Franklin).
  - Premier Gray responded by challenging the law on the grounds that the federal government was interfering with something that should be a state matter.
  - This issue went to the High Court as it was a question of the interpretation of the constitution.
  - In July 1983 the High Court ruled in favour of the federal government.
  - The Labor Party followed through on their election policy and Gray accepted \$276.5 million in compensation from the Commonwealth.
- Links exist between the two events in many ways:
  - Lake Pedder’s failure enabled Franklin’s success in some ways: the environmentalist movement largely developed because of Lake Pedder and the protestors learnt from their mistakes during the first campaign.
  - Lake Pedder started the process of changing Australian’s perceptions of the environment as a resource to something that is worth protecting in its own right.
  - There is still some pressure to restore Lake Pedder.
- Changed attitudes are difficult to assess:
  - The fight is seen as going on long after 1983 for many protestors (and ongoing for some).
  - The Wilderness Society said in 1983 that the Labor Party showed “no commitment to save the south west wilderness from dams, woodchipping, mining or other exploitation.”
  - The High Court decision was significant, but related to the interpretation of the Constitution, not the Franklin specifically. Nonetheless, the case was taken to the High Court in the first place because of the Franklin debate.
  - This decision has since been used to protect important environmental areas like the Daintree and the Tasmanian Lemnathyme.
  - The main change in attitudes was the popularisation of conservation during this period and the politicisation of environmental issues.
  - This changed the political climate and rhetoric surrounding the environment.

- This is seen in the rise of the Greens as a political party; they went on to form a coalition government in Tasmania in 1989.
- Nonetheless, later issues in Tasmania, such as the Wesley Vale pulpmill would suggest that attitudes were not widely changed.
- Furthermore, the Gray government used the compensation money to plan more dams at other sites in the southwest.
- The debate also caused a rift in Tasmanian society that was difficult to heal. This fight has been prolonged by ongoing environmental debate over forestry.
- The strategies used to win the Franklin campaign have been used in many other environmental battles in Australia since.