



# Wollombi Valley Landcare Group News for November 2013



## Coal Seam Gas in Wollombi Valley – an Update

*on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November at the Wollombi Tennis Clubrooms  
commencing at 2 PM.*

On this occasion we will be hearing from Steve Phillips, the regional coordinator for the Lock-The-Gate Alliance in the Hunter Valley, who has agreed to give an update on the current status of proposals for Coal Seam Gas (CSG) exploration in the Wollombi Valley and surrounding areas.

While you may have thought that the CSG had a gone away, it remains a threat with gas and mining companies pressing ahead with their plans. Steve will also show a new 36 minute documentary on CSG, followed by time for questions and discussion afterwards.

This meeting is also our last meeting for the year and in keeping with past tradition after the formal part of the meeting we will be having our Christmas party. There will be BBQ facilities, so bring along something to cook and a salad or a plate of goodies to share, and of course something to drink.

Put the meeting on 30th November in your diary now.

*Everyone is welcome, so don't hesitate, come and join us for an update on CSG and some festive celebrations.*



*The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Inc, or any other Landcare agency or government department, but are presented to promote discussion about and the practice of sustainable land use and environmental responsibility.*

## Report on Wollombi Valley Small Farms Fair, 2 & 3 November



Did you attend the fair? Apart from the market stalls, there was loads of entertainment, a ride on mower parade, Museum displays and historical re-enactments, workshops and a trade show with lots of machinery and equipment on show for the budding farmer.



And who could forget the lantern parade as the children of the Valley showed off the lanterns they had created, glowing in the dark as the parade snaked its way through the village, always under the watchful eye of their parents.

The hot weather on Saturday and Sunday was testing and our tent only just survived. And as the winds picked up resulting in an early closure on Sunday, I have acquired (only temporarily Chris and Louise) a family of wombats that had inhabited our stand during the Fair.

We talked to several newcomers who had bought bush blocks and were now wondering what to do. We also distributed membership forms and leaflets describing the advantages of membership. We sold several books and recruited a new member – welcome Clare Crawford.

Overall a worthwhile weekend and maybe next year the weather will be a bit easier on us all.

Special thanks to all those who helped on the stand, Julie Hartley, Camilla Dorsch, Andrew Mortlock, Janet Ho, Sue Taylor and David Atwell. Also, Graham who was there to set up and take down as well as being there most of Saturday.



## Meetings for next year

Coming up with ideas for Landcare meetings is always a bit of a challenge, so that is why we are always asking for your input; after all Landcare and the meetings we hold are intended for the members, like you and me.

As usual the Committee have been collectively scratching their heads and come up with a few proposals:

- Seed collecting and propagating
- Bee keeping and honey production
- An information meeting focused on the needs of new property owners in the Valley

Are there other topics of interest to you and probably other Landcare Members? Please let us know.



## Wollombi Brook Regeneration Project

Take a short stroll along the footpath next to the Wollombi Brook at the end of Negro Street and you will see the regeneration and revegetation work that has been carried out by Wollombi Valley Landcare Group members and other interested members of the community over the past few years.

The project site survived last summer's intense hot weather and floods.

The work group meets once a week usually on Thursday at 10am (9am in summer). New volunteers are always welcome. There is no need to be able to attend regularly and volunteers can spend as much time as suits them on the day.



Photo courtesy of John Brigg

The site has beautiful sunlit and shady spots to work - next to the babbling brook amongst twittering birds. It is a delightful place to spend the morning and contribute to a community project that is an important part of our town's attractions.

Come along and have a look, or stay and offer some ideas or learn about regeneration, revegetation, native plant species or other areas of interest. If you would like to get your hands dirty bring good gardening gloves. Enjoy a late morning tea and, on hot summer days, a dip in the brook after your labours.

For more information contact Chris Jackson on 4998 8660 or 0417 885 037 or by email to [louisehicks@bigpond.com](mailto:louisehicks@bigpond.com).

Chris Jackson  
Laguna

## Weed Management Review

The Natural Resources Commission invites community and stakeholder submissions on the Issues Paper for the review of weed management in NSW. The Minister for Primary Industries has requested the Natural Resources Commission to undertake an independent evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of weed management arrangements in NSW, with the view of informing the further development of the proposed NSW Biosecurity Act, and other relevant strategies under the NSW Biosecurity Strategy.

Submissions are invited until **Friday 6 December 2013**. Go to <http://engage.haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/weed-management-review> for more information and to have your say.

## Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Contacts

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## The threat of Bushfires – Prepare. Act. Survive.

It is only a few weeks ago that our valley was covered in a thick haze of smoke from bushfires in surrounding areas. One of the largest fires near us and the cause of much of smoke was the Howes Swamp fire that burnt out 45,860 ha of bushland. It is now under control, but it was only 3 km west of Boree Village and within the Wollemi and Yengo National Parks. We were fortunate that conditions and prevailing winds didn't cause it to move toward Wollombi, only 35 kms away. And we haven't started summer yet!



Wollombi Volunteer Bushfire Brigade have undertaken a number of workshops aimed at raising the level of community awareness. And hopefully you have now prepared a Bushfire Survival Plan for your family and property. If not then why not? It is too late to think about it when the fires are approaching.

You can download a copy of the booklet about how to prepare a Bushfire Survival Plan, at [http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp\\_content.cfm?cat\\_id=2709](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=2709) where there is a your Bushfire Survival Plan template plus information and factsheets, or if you have a smart phone(iPhone or Android) then download the **MyFirePlan** app. And while you are at it, also download the **Fires Near Me NSW** app. Both are free!

The **Fires Near Me NSW** app pinpoints your location and then shows a map with all the fires within a 50 km radius. You can then zoom in as necessary and get more details.

Oh, and while you are at it and have finished fiddling with your phone, don't forget to prepare your property - there are lots of tips and suggestions on the Rural Fire Service website [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)



## State Govt New Plans for Hunting in National Parks

At the beginning of July this year the NSW government decided to drastically change its plans for hunting in our national parks. Their earlier plans, due to legislation being tabled by the Fishers and Shooters Party in the Upper House, meant that virtually anyone with a weapon, as young as the age of 12, could go hunting animals in national parks under the guise of culling feral species.

This resulted in a major outcry, from the vast majority of the public, citing many reasons albeit public safety was probably the leading one.

Even though the concerns of the public were impressive enough, in forcing the state government to change their minds, I do believe that the investigation into the Game Council ensured that the plans were doomed. The report found that the Game Council, which was to run the hunting program in national parks in place of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, found that "... the Council has no overarching governance framework, lacks the skills and resources to ensure effective compliance and found breaches of record keeping and privacy legislation" (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-05/nrn-game-council-gone/4800282>).

In its place, the Department of Primary Industries will now run all of the activities, which was allotted to the Games Council, whilst the controversial hunting program was scraped altogether. The state government then turned back to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for its advice and expertise in implementing a program which would, from the very outset, deal with the stated aims of feral animal control.

As a consequence the government has announced a comprehensive program which will have a trial period take place first to see whether it is effective. This trial period is planned to start in October in 12 national parks scattered across the state. It will be strictly controlled by rangers from the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the following form:

Each National Park will be split up, as under the previous plan, into three zones. Each zone will determine the method of culling to be used. The first zone will be known as "A". In this zone one ranger will partner one shooter in an overall group numbering eight people. Each shooter will be a professional. There will be no amateur shooters permitted to be a member of this group.

In zone "B" there will still be a group of eight people, but only one of them will be a ranger. The rest will be a mix of professional shooters along with a maximum of three amateur shooters per group. Whilst the ranger will have full supervision of this group, the professional shooters will team up with the amateur shooters and in turn supervise their activity.

In zone "C" there will be no shooting at all where previously shooters would have had very limited ranger supervision. This was extremely controversial as other users of national parks could likewise have been present, whilst the hunters conducted their shooting without virtually any policing as to what was actually shot.

Another fundamental change, and just as important as the zoning restrictions explained above, is the selection of amateur shooters for their participation in the shooting program. Previously it was unlimited in training and ability. All that was required was an "R" shooters licence, which meant around 17,000 people would have had the right to go shooting in our national parks.

The new plan means that amateur shooters are now strictly selected and trained. National Parks will invite specific individuals to participate in the program after they have passed a training program including demonstrated shooting skills, requiring a one shot one kill ability, along with species recognition to ensure that they are indeed shooting the appropriate feral animal and not a protected native one.

Similarly the National Parks and Wildlife Service have full control. All authority and responsibility for the program starts and ends with them. The Game Council, which no longer exists, has no say in the matter or any other outside agency.

*Written by David Atwell*



# NSW government to press on with 'high risk' coal seam gas project

By Michael West, Business columnist, SMH

Date: November 21, 2013 - 10:11AM

The NSW government has steamrolled the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in pushing ahead with a coal seam gas project despite advice that it is high risk.

In a submission which has been confidential until now, the EPA has warned the Department of Trade and Investment against approving the disposal of waste water at AGL's Gloucester project as it would lead to dangerously high salt levels and the potential destruction of farmland.

In spite of this, the trials at Gloucester have already begun, with AGL's chosen method for disposal of waste water ("produced water") being to "irrigate" it over the floodplains of the Avon River. Should the project continue as planned, some 2500 tonnes of salt a year will be sprayed over the surrounding farmland, an outcome which an independent geo-technical engineer Professor Philip Pells said could be disastrous for the environment.



Controversial: Gloucester Valley, the proposed site for the coal seam gas project. Photo: Dean Osland

Pells is not anti-CSG. He approves of the AGL operations at Camden but says the geology at Gloucester is far more sensitive as the basin structure beneath the project means the underground aquifers are "intimately connected" with the surface water. Further, AGL has no proper procedures for disposal of its high-saline waste water.

For its part, AGL has said the disposal of produced water from its CSG project will have a "neutral or beneficial effect on water quality". Neither Pells, local community groups nor, as is now evident, the scientists from the EPA agree.

However, the EPA appears to have been neutered by a bureaucratic shuffle. "The EPA is being ignored," says Pells. No one appears to be in control. The trials were approved by the Department of Mineral Resources but now the process seems to have been taken over by the Office of Coal Seam Gas".

Moreover, Pells says the salinity data espoused by both the government and AGL is misleading. A spokeswoman for the Department of Industry said the water approved for irrigation was "two to five times less salty than water in the surrounding surface aquifers that also flow into the Avon River".

Professor Pells, an expert on groundwater, said this statement was "just not true".

"The water they are using is Produced Water stored in the Tiedeman dams... The irrigation water is of lower salinity because it has been diluted with Avon River water.

Even more bizarrely, Pells points out that the data which AGL claims to be using on rainfall salinity does not exist. AGL has been dismissive of salinity claims on the basis that rain contains as much salt as will be in the two million litres per day of saline Produced Water approved for the Gloucester project and has cited data from the Bureau of Meteorology to support its claims.

However Pells says the Bureau of Meteorology does not record salinity in rainfall. This was put to AGL. The company is yet to respond. AGL has not used data from the CSIRO, which began recording rainfall salinity recently. It cited "maximum" coastal salinity rates, claimed to be from the BOM. But the Avon catchment area is not on the coast. It is 50 kilometres inland.

Pells says there has been a failure of governance. "It became very clear that we have reached a very strange position in NSW.

"The Department of Planning is now totally in control, with Mining, Water and EPA reduced to advisory status. "(The produced water issue at Gloucester) is not within the province of the NSW Office of Water. Based on available information they do not have the authority to deal with this. It is also not within the province of the EPA, unless Produced Water is discharged directly into a stream or river. It is also not within the Department of Agriculture, as it relates to petroleum extraction.

"It has also become clear that the Aquifer Interference Policy is not being applied in a general and rational way, and at present may have no teeth."

Pells says the approvals process had become a debacle which now seemed to be officiated by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, with some inputs from other Departments which had no authority.

"Of greater concern is that the O'Farrell Government has assigned responsibility for approval of all our major projects to the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC). On the surface, this appears good, but this Commission (PAC) comprises 9 permanent, and 7 casual, unelected persons, and there is no appeals or review process for the merit decisions of the 3 persons PACs assigned to evaluating particular projects.

"To me it is an untenable situation ripe for corruption."

Read the EPA report at <http://images.smh.com.au/file/2013/11/21/4941228/EPA%2520letter.pdf?rand=1384985471486> and the department response at <http://images.smh.com.au/file/2013/11/21/4941230/Response.pdf?rand=1384985508819>

## **New native vegetation regulation changes**

On the 19 September the NSW Government published a new native vegetation regulation that came into force on the 23 September.

Environment Minister Robyn Parker said the new regulation will deliver a common sense approach for landholders by lifting regulatory burden and delivering a balanced regime of environmental protection and efficient agricultural management.

'Many farmers found the previous regulation excessively complicated and ambiguous,' Ms Parker said.

'These changes are not about winding back environmental protection. The regulation will deliver real and practical differences, giving farmers the trust they deserve and providing them with advice and support to get on with sustainable farming.

'The new regulation will reduce the need for dual consents, facilitate good land and vegetation management practices for councils and landholders and reduce impediments to adopting more efficient agricultural systems.

'A farmer wanting to remove a single paddock tree to put in place more efficient agricultural systems will be able to follow a self-assessable code instead of waiting to get a property vegetation plan.

'The first of the self-assessable codes for managing invasive species, clearing paddock trees and thinning native vegetation will be exhibited in October 2013.'

Parliamentary Secretary for Natural Resources Troy Grant said the changes follow extensive consultation and the recommendations of independent facilitator Joe Lane.

'These changes address many concerns about the way native vegetation is currently regulated in NSW and will be further enhanced following the introduction of the self-assessable codes next year,' Mr Grant said.

'It's important the codes are sensible and practical and there will be an opportunity for the community to provide comment.

'There has been extensive consultation in the development of these changes and we will make sure the farmers are engaged in the development of the codes.'

Ms Parker said the Office of Environment and Heritage and Catchment Management Authorities will engage with landholders and stakeholders groups in the development of the codes.

'The NSW Government is also looking to revitalise and modernise the laws to better deliver environment protection whilst facilitating sustainable economic and agricultural development.' Further information on the Native Vegetation Regulation and the changes is available at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/vegetation/ReviewofNVRegulations.htm>.

## **Bees disappearing worldwide**

Bees are responsible for pollinating more than 70 per cent of crop species, worth \$30 billion a year, that supply the world with 90 per cent of its food.

In 2010, a federal government report stated that about 65 per cent of agricultural production in Australia, including 35 industries, depends on pollination by European honey bees.

As a result, the decline in bee populations worldwide are of great concern.

In 2006, some beekeepers in the USA reported the sudden, unexplained disappearance of their bees, with no dead bodies found near the hives.

This phenomenon resulted in hive losses of 30-90 per cent and was given the name colony collapse disorder (CCD).

Since 2006, bee numbers have dropped at an alarming rate and beekeepers across Europe and the USA have reported annual hive losses of 30 per cent or higher.

The reason behind CCD is still unknown, but many causes have been put forward, including human impact on the environment - habitat loss, pesticides, monoculture and climate change - and, possibly, the most destructive, the varroa destructor mite.

According to the Australian Department of Agriculture, varroa mites are "external parasites of bees that are about the size of a pinhead, use specialised mouthparts to attack developing bee larvae or adult bees, resulting in deformed bees, reduced lifespan and ultimately the destruction of the colony or hive".

Australia is the only country in the world without the varroa mite and CCD, so the bee population is still relatively healthy.

"But many say it is only a matter of time before varroa gets here," Mr Stone said. Beekeepers, scientists and the agricultural industry across Australia hope this isn't the case.

Extract from ABC News article "Urban beehives on the increase as global bee numbers decline" by Giulio Saggin Fri 15 Nov 2013. The full report is available at < <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-15/urban-beehive-movement-in-australia-and-around-the-world/5093764>>