

# AQUARIAN ACTIVISTS

C.D. FIELD

School of Life Sciences  
New South Wales Institute of Technology  
Broadway NSW 2007

Flushed with the success of victories in the battles to protect rain forests in New South Wales and wilderness areas in Tasmania, local conservationists are now preparing to defend areas of threatened wetlands. A wetlands coalition of several conservation organisations has been formed in New South Wales with the aims of reminding government of their promises, creating an inventory of threatened wetlands and giving support to protecting specific wetlands. The coalition is demanding that a State environment policy should be gazetted requiring that all remaining wetlands be preserved through appropriate zoning in environmental plans; buffer zones be declared and controls placed on nearby development to ensure protection of water quality and habitat. The coalition is also demanding that action should proceed under such legislation as the Coastal Protection Act, Heritage Act, Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, National Parks and Wildlife Service Act, Fisheries and Oyster Farms Act, to prevent any clearing or draining of wetlands that may be allowable under present zoning. These laudable aims appear as a distinct echo of the past.

Nearly a decade ago, the Australian Commission for Man and the Biosphere pointed to the conflicts that existed over the use of Australia's coastal and estuarine resources. Since that time, many calls have been made for more information on existing wetlands and for clear policy statements on the conservation and development of such areas. The velleity of governments in approaching such complex problems is well documented. Even a cursory journey along the coastline of New South Wales reveals substantial developments impinging on the relatively meagre estuarine resources. Canal developments at Tweed Heads, Yamba and Urunga, a coal loader on Kooragang Island and more marinas that can be counted, are just a few examples.

A slightly more penetrating look shows that the effects on the remaining wetlands of such developments are not known nor are they being well monitored. There appears to be an acute lack of information about the quantity, quality and quiddity of our wetlands. Local, State and Federal Governments should agree on a set of basic principles for the management and protection of significant wetland areas and they should act to achieve a balance between the use of wetland resources and their conservation. As a contribution to the debate, "Wetlands" has invited the New South Wales Minister for Environment and Planning to present an article for our next edition on the progress that has been made in formulating a policy for the development and conservation of wetlands. It will be interesting for both activists and pacifists to see whether the tide is ebbing or flowing.

So the battle lines are being drawn and public opinion is about to be mobilised as part of the wetlands campaign. It is to be hoped that emotion and rhetoric do not overshadow logic and hard facts, as there is a sound case for the proper management of wetlands without recourse to hysteria. However, the objectives of the wetlands coalition deserve support, so in the words of the Mock Turtle:

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?"