

North East Highlands National Park Proposal



This proposal highlights the need for National Park status for the area covering Mt Victoria and The Blue Tier in north east Tasmania. This proposal is part of a greater reserve proposal to protect high conservation value areas across Tasmania.

In 1997 the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) Final Recommendations Report stated that a single reserve is the best outcome for Mount Victoria and The Blue Tier, and that in the longer term, a National Park classification is a more appropriate tenure. ¹(p66, 80-82)

This Reserve Proposal will seek to:

- delineate an area for immediate full reservation.
- maximize the area of high quality habitat in reserves.
- recognise the inadequate reserve outcomes for the area from the RFA and Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement.
- preserve biodiversity.
- stop fragmentation of native forest.
- safeguard the water catchments of the 14 rivers which have their headwaters within the boundary of the reserve proposal.
- recognise the significance of glacial refugia.
- recognise the role of intact native forest as a carbon sink and the role it plays in producing clean air and water.
- conserve valuable historical and culturally significant sites.
- acknowledge original custodians and recognise that the current process of clearfelling a forest prior to assessment of Aboriginal heritage must be stopped immediately.
- provide jobs rich tourism growth to the north east and support the concept of the Trail of the Tin Dragon and proposed multi-day bush walk.
- protect the native wildlife and their habit

Photographs by Lesley Nicklason
Additional photography Kay Jones

Compiled by Lesley Nicklason and Tom Millen and Jeremy Ball.

Reserve maps by Alwyn Davidson, Tasmania map by Tim Chatwin

Editing by Cynthia Atherton

North East Highlands National Park proposal supports the Tasmanian Greens Forest Transition Strategy and the Wildcountry Initiative.

Printed on recycled paper
copyright 2007

Federal Election 2007

Table of Contents

1. Welcome
2. National Park Proposal map 1
3. National Park Proposal map 2
4. Background
5. RFA and TCFA
6. Climate change
7. Glacial Refugia
8. History
9. Recreational opportunities
10. Economic opportunities
11. Flora
12. Fauna
13. Water
14. Rivers map
15. Business as usual
16. Bibliography and list of photographs.





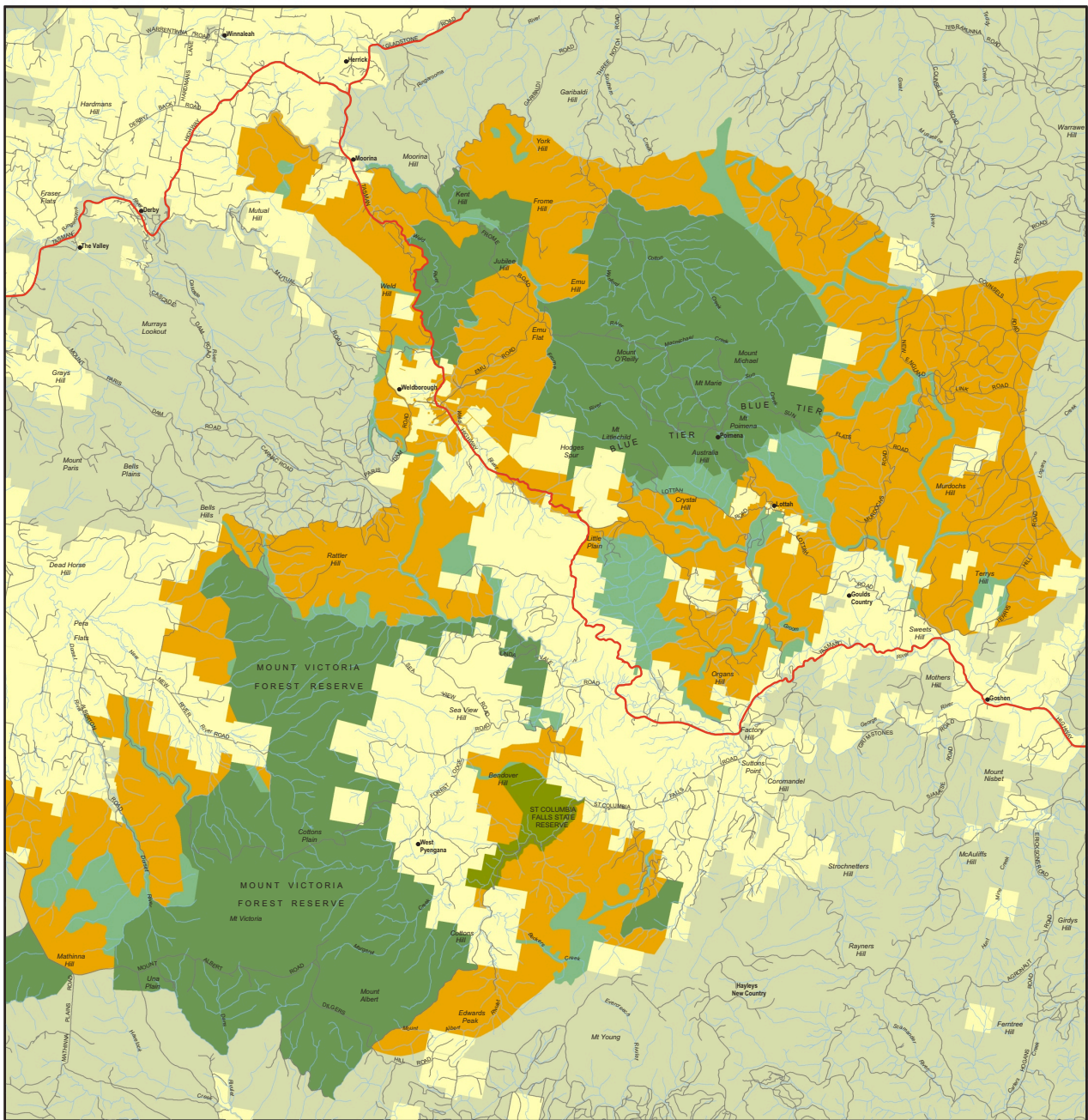
yah pulingina teewah tahwah wurawah

Gloria Andrews, Aboriginal Elder.



Federal Election 2007










NORTH EAST HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK PROPOSAL



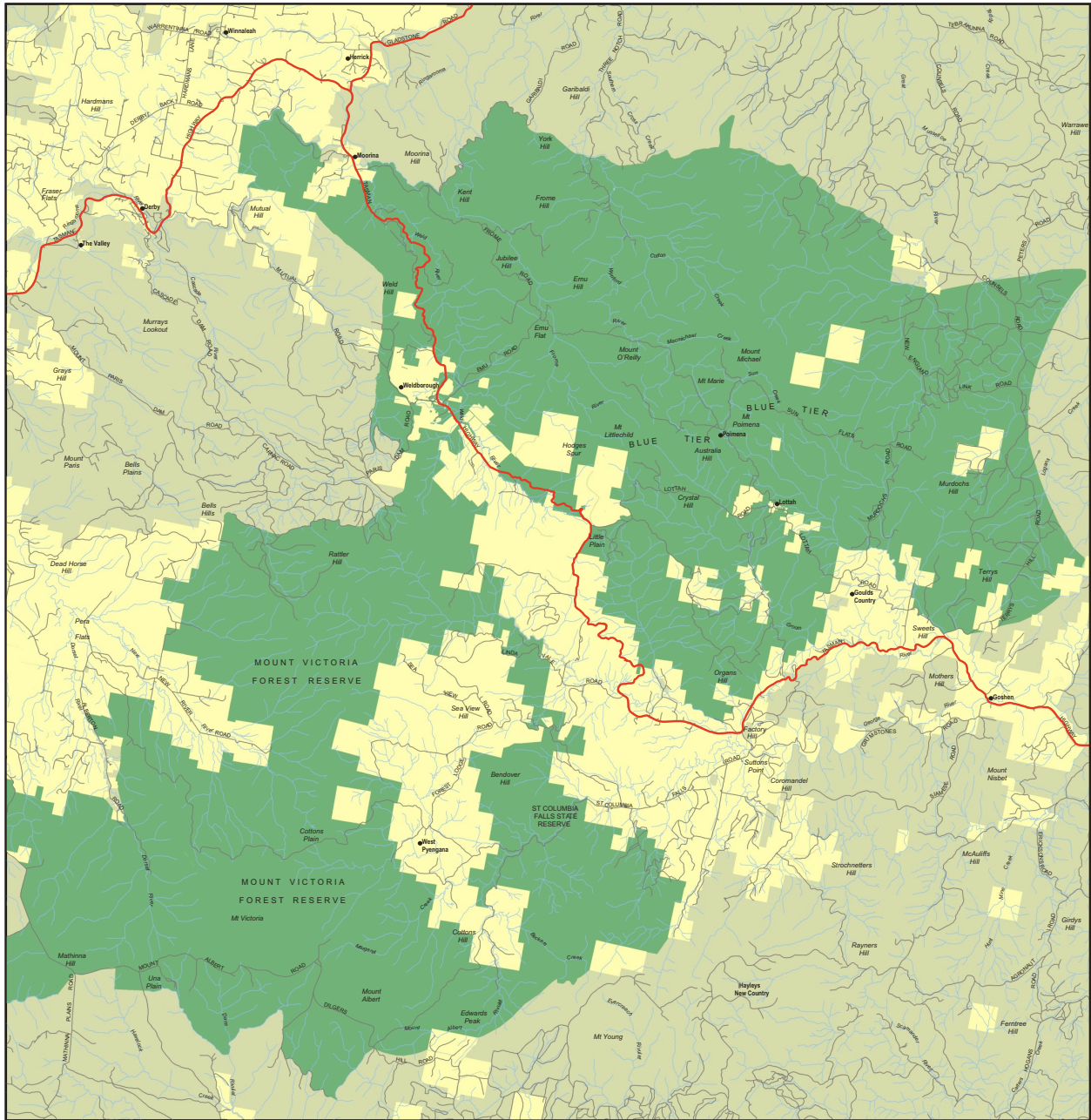
SCALE



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|-----------------|
|  | Proposed New Reserve |  | Road Network |
|  | Forest Reserve |  | River Network |
|  | Informal Reserve on State Forest or Forestry Tas managed land |  | Highway Network |
|  | State Reserve |  | Township |
|  | Private Land | | |

NORTH EAST HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK PROPOSAL



SCALE

Kilometres 2 1 0 2 4 6 8 Kilometres



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----------------|
|  | Reserve: including Proposed New Reserve
Forest Reserve
Informal Reserve on State Forest or Forestry Tas managed land
State Reserve |  | Road Network |
|  | Private Land |  | Highway Network |
| | |  | Township |

Background

The Mount Victoria-Blue Tier area lies towards the eastern end of Tasmania's north east highlands and is also known as Meenamatta country. The highlands are part of the Ben Lomond bio-region, an area defined as having a combination of landforms, biodiversity and natural characteristics that distinguishes it from the rest of the state.



The aim of this proposal is to have the existing reserves, Mt. Victoria, Frome and Blue Tier, together with a number of small pockets of reserve in the area, amalgamated into a viable, securely protected reserve.

For more than twenty years the communities of northeast Tasmania have campaigned for protection of high conservation value forests. The Mt Victoria-Blue Tier region received more public submissions for reservation status than for any other region in the whole of Tasmania during the RFA process. The campaign to have the north east forests protected has continued and involved gathering scientific data, encouraging tourism and encouraging people to visit the areas under threat from logging. Friends of the Blue Tier have conducted community-based audits of the area and lobbied all levels of government to gain secure reservation for the area.



Federal Election 2007

Regional Forest Agreement⁽¹⁹⁹⁷⁾ and Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement⁽²⁰⁰⁵⁾

Under the original RFA (1997), Tasmania was to be divided into eight bio-regions but at the eleventh hour, Tasmania's bio-regional status was reviewed and it was considered a single region, the only state in Australia to be so considered.

If Tasmania's RFA had been assessed on a bio-regional basis, the north east highlands area would have undoubtedly been reserved.

The RFA did not analyse the potential impacts of native forest logging on climate change or on the impacts to water quality or environmental flows when allocating areas for logging.

The RFA Final Recommendations Report stated;

"the Commission ...believes that a National Park classification is a more appropriate tenure for the Blue Tier in the longer term. There was considerable support throughout the public discussion process for a National Park centred on the Blue Tier and much local opinion that a Blue Tier National Park would provide a valuable recreational and tourism focus for the region. The Commission considers that the Blue Tier and surrounding areas have the potential to play a significant role in the nature based tourism product of the region and suggest that, when it is assessed that the economic potential of tourism outweighs economic mineral resource potential (which may well be ephemeral), the area be established as a National Park."^{1(p81-82)}



and also that;

"The two Mt Victoria Recommended Areas of Protection (RAPs) and the Forest Reserves have a range of natural, cultural, recreational, landscape and habitat values and, in addition to their local recreational value, have significant tourism potential for the north-east region.....The Commission agrees that a single reserve is the best outcome and that, in the longer term, a National Park comprising all reserves and RAPs in the Mt Victoria area could significantly add to regional tourism assets. The Mt Victoria RAP 205 has significant nature conservation and recreational values and contains some historic transport sites. The RAP contains tall rainforest and wet Eucalyptus obliqua forest community, both of which do not meet old growth forest reservation targets of the RFA."

^{1(p67)}

Of the approximate 58 029 hectares of new formal reserves granted by the TCFA(2005) only 1 731 hectares were reserved in the North East Highlands ^{8(p18)}. The RFA Final Recommendations Report should be heeded and National Park status granted without further delay.

Federal Election 2007

Climate change

In 2006 Sir Nicholas Stern, in the conclusion to his unprecedented report, *The Economics of Climate Change*, highlighted the fact that a major contributor to climate change was deforestation. *“The loss of natural forests around the world contributes more to global emissions each year than the transport sector. Curbing deforestation is a highly cost-effective way to reduce emissions.”*⁴

Tasmania accounts for half of Australia’s emissions from native forest logging (19 Mt CO₂ per annum). Protecting native forests is one of the quickest and easiest ways to reduce Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, with the added benefits of protecting biodiversity and conserving water.⁶



At least 80% of the native forest logged from the NE highlands ends up as woodchips^{2(p.53)}. Less than 5% of the carbon from native forest ends up in relatively long lived wood products. ^{6(p.9)} After clearfelling, the large volume of remaining biomass is burnt, releasing tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

While the CO₂ is eventually recaptured if the forest is allowed to re-grow, in the case of native forests the recapture time is centuries. In the meantime, the CO₂ is in the atmosphere acting as a greenhouse gas, just as if it had come from the burning of fossil fuels.

Glacial Refugia

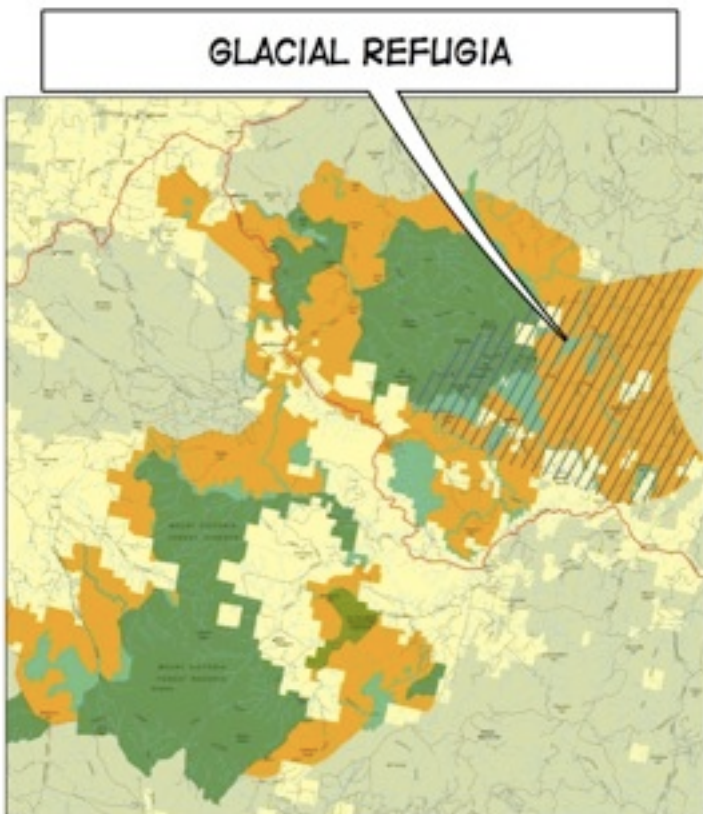
The north east face of the Blue Tier is the cradle of the rainforest of northern Tasmania. It was here that the Gondwana forests receded under the assault of the ice age and survived. This area is known as refugia (refuge). It protected rainforest species and the giant Eucalyptus regnans which have since recolonised the north east of Tasmania. The only other significant glacial refugium in Tasmania is located at the Henty Gorge on the west coast. Glacial refugia are seen as vitally important for the preservation of biological diversity and are critical to the survival of species during climate extremes. Refugia remain ice free during periods of glaciation. This allows plants to persist and then recolonise surrounding regions at the end of the glacial period.⁵

“ Due to the fact that this forest grows on the side of an escarpment, during times of global warming species may be able to adapt by recolonising further up the escarpment. This type of refugia is referred to as ‘hot’ refugia, and plant assemblages have a better chance of surviving global warming by migrating vertically.”^{3(p23)}

The RFA used the study by Kirkpatrick and Fowler (1996) to assess ‘refugia from past processes’ and although the study stated:

..rainforest or mixed forest occurring on the eastern slopes of Blue Tier deserve secure reservation and National Estate listing,

the recommendation was not adopted in the RFA.^{3(p12-13)}



History

Aboriginal people moved freely throughout Tasmania for thousands of years and acted as custodians of the land. The proposed reserve encompasses Aboriginal heritage that deserves secure reservation.

The late 1800's saw feverish mining and exploration hit the area and a tin mining boom drove the north eastern economy. The proposed reserve conceals a treasure trove of mining relics. The glorious descent of Australia Hill, with its boilers and jockey wheels wreathed in foliage, to the echoing chambers of the Don mine, the memories of the old mining families live on. The Chinese were an integral part of The Blue Tier's history and old timers still talk of playing poker with Chinese miners who kept pennies behind their ears and nose for good luck.



The Tin mining boom saw hundreds of Chinese migrants arrive in north-eastern Tasmania. The forest has since reclaimed the slopes but their presence lingers on. One of the most famous Chinese-Australians, Thomas Jerome Kingston Bakhap (1866–1923), grew up on The Blue Tier. Bakhap learnt to speak Cantonese from his adoptive Chinese father, Gee Sing Ge Bakhap, a herbalist and grocer. Thomas Bakhap served as a member of the Tasmanian House of Assembly from 1909 to 1913, resigning to take up a position as a senator for Tasmania in Federal Parliament. Bakhap served until his death in 1923. During an era when the White Australia Policy was in full force, Bakhap spoke out for Chinese-Australians and advocated the need for Chinese history and language to be taught in schools around Australia.

"I believe that the majority of the Blue Tier is an area where those other values (culture and tourism) appreciably outweigh the potential forestry returns. It is an incredibly special place where the relics of some of Tasmania's formative industrial experiences can be appreciated within a setting of naturally regenerated rainforest. The juxtaposition and interweaving of cultural and natural histories is quite evocative and, I believe, unsurpassed in Tasmania for impact and poignancy. It is a place where we can readily see and hopefully learn from the dynamic landscape the lessons of our environmental misunderstandings, rather than simply be consigned to repeating them."^{2(p15)}

Greg Jackman, Archaeologist and author of 'An Archaeological survey of the Blue Tier tin-field

Recreational opportunities

“we celebrate not the track, but the wild and beautiful places it passes through”

The Blue Tier - Mt. Victoria area provides the best bushwalking in north east Tasmania, offering walks that are suitable for every age and level of ability.

The area is already well known for its diversity of walks – from the wheel chair accessible Goblin Forest Walk on the Blue Tier to a 7-day trail – with numerous options for short, medium or day walks. Visitors have the opportunity to see stunning waterfalls, ancient forests and climb mountains for a panoramic view of the northeast corner of Tasmania.



The 7-day track from Mt. Victoria to the Blue Tier has been walked by locals and tourist groups. Though not a formal walking track, it highlights the need and desire for an extended bushwalk in the northeast – to relieve pressure on other popular Tasmanian tracks such as the Overland and South Coast Tracks as well as to showcase the magnificence of the area.

The northeast highland track is unique in that it is possible to walk the track with just a daypack – camping and cooking gear can be transported by vehicle between campsites, which have been located specifically to allow for this kind of experience.

The 65 km. track is made up of 33 kms of old disused roads, a further 10 km. utilises existing tracks, with just 2 sections of new track required to be constructed. Old water races from the mining era make fantastic walking tracks, adding a touch of history to the experience.



In 2002 OUTDOOR Magazine completed the 7-day walk – the cover story article claims, *“the northeast highlands track revealed wonders right to the end, offering remarkable variety and a different experience from other Tasmanian trails. It surpassed all expectations and has the potential to be a truly world-class multi-day walk, but only if its integrity is kept intact.”* Carl Roe, Club Editor, Outdoor Magazine.

Economic opportunities

Once resource security is established with the declaration of the North East Highlands National Park, eco-tourism investors will be able to invest with the knowledge that visitor numbers will continue to grow. National Park status will create many jobs including rangers, forest guides, interpretation officers, track builders as well as associated private developments such as high, medium and low cost accommodation. Major eco-tourism developments are being established in the region and the granting of National Park status will see the re-badging of the north east as a wilderness destination.

All political parties have put their support behind the Trail of the Tin Dragon project. This initiative links the stories of mining and the Chinese heritage in north east Tasmania. Between Launceston and St Helens a creatively interpreted touring route is being established. The North East Highlands National Park will be dissected by the main touring route, making it an easily accessible, wilderness jewel in the Trail of the Tin Dragon.



The booming Chinese economy means that more Chinese people than ever before are able to travel overseas. By developing the Trail of the Tin Dragon brand for the region and by target marketing the unique Chinese family heritage connections within the proposed reserve, the north east of Tasmania could become the destination of choice for the new Chinese traveller. By ensuring explanatory signage within the reserve is in Chinese script and local accommodation is culturally sensitive, the north east can capitalise on the burgeoning Chinese

80 percent of tourists who come to Tasmania engage in some form of nature based tourism. Unfortunately, successive governments have not invested in nature based tourism in the north east. Economic and employment opportunities from accommodation, guided walking trips, wilderness photography, walking clubs, mountain biking, bush food and Aboriginal guided interpretation will all be possible if the reserve is created.



Flora



The Mount Victoria – Blue Tier area has unusual floral richness, with a high diversity of wet sclerophyll, mixed forest and rainforest communities. The area contains many representative forest communities, including much of the states callindendrous rainforest, mostly on Rattler Range. Plant communities range from ancient Gondwana myrtle beech rainforest, wet forests of giant eucalypts, dense gullies of blackwoods and tree ferns to drier forests with their associated shrubs, small trees and wonderful array of orchids. They reflect the area's past climatic upheavals, its altitudinal range, complex topography and proximity to waterways. A significant portion of the natural vegetation remains in a pristine state. Sub-alpine soaks become slow trickling streams which meander through creek beds lined with mosses and ferns.



Tracts of rainforest in the north east of Tasmania are of relatively limited extent and localised distribution, being virtually restricted to the northeast highlands. Here the cool, mountain climate, with its annual rainfall of 1200 – 1400 mm is conducive to rainforest growth. The extent of the rainforest coverage on the The Blue Tier and Rattler Hill was greater but past fires and mining operations have reduced some parts to what is now regenerating grasslands and sub alpine species.

Fauna

North east Tasmania's forests support a vast range of fauna including mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, frogs, invertebrates and aquatic species. The practice of clearfelling and fragmentation of habitat is driving some species towards extinction, with many other species' fate unknown.



The area is home to a number of rare, threatened or vulnerable species including; the Simpsons Stag Beetle, Northeast Forest Snail, Spotted Tailed Quoll, Goshawk, Eastern Barred Bandicoot and the Tasmanian Devil.



A report prepared by Melbourne University for Forestry Tasmania suggests that the Tasmanian Wedge Tailed Eagle could disappear from north east Tasmania if logging and clearing continues as planned. Even with no further logging in north east Tasmania, the Wedge-Tailed Eagle faces a local extinction risk of 62% and once harvesting activities are introduced the fate of the eagle worsens, facing an extinction risk of between 75% and 97% because of logging. 7(p.251-252)



Water



Fourteen major rivers have their headwaters located within the proposed reserve, including the water sources for Launceston and St Helens. An intact upper water catchment freely provides an irreplaceable, multi-million dollar environmental service, filtering and purifying water and ensuring a plentiful supply of pure, clean water for all users.

“The benefits of an intact mixed age forest include high quality water output, stable ground water storage, regular base flow needs streams which tend to permanence, a life support system for many other plants and animals and a pleasant visual aspect which humans find stirs the spirit.” David leaman¹⁰

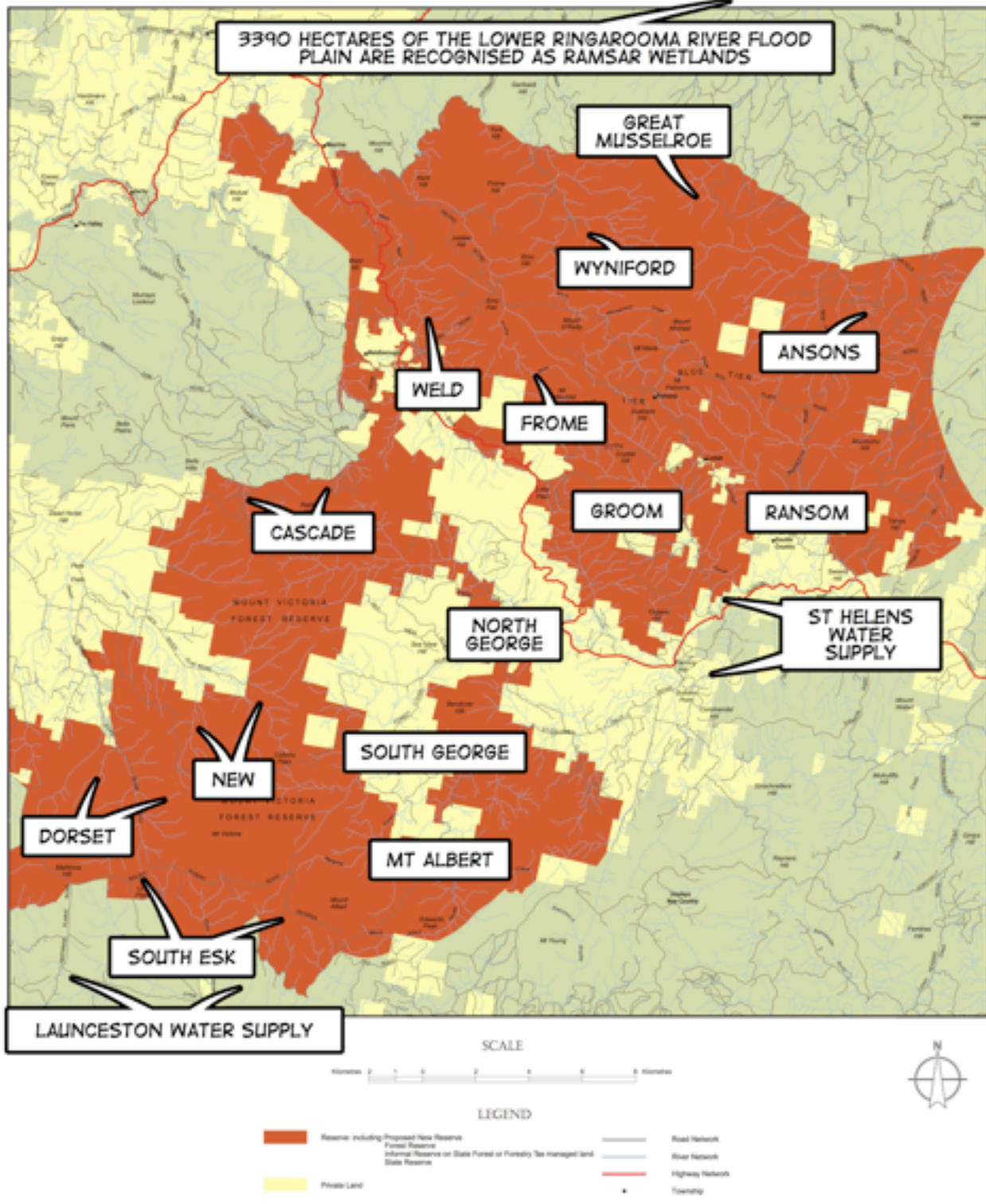
3390 hectares of the Lower Ringarooma River Flood Plain are recognised as Ramsar Wetlands of International Significance. The Dorset, New, Cascade, Weld, Frome and Wyniford Rivers, which all have their headwaters in the proposed Northeast Highlands National Park, feed into the Ringarooma River. In order to maintain the integrity of this Ramsar Wetland these river systems must be protected. ⁹



Associate Professor Brian Finlayson (Hydrologist) says: *“the vegetation cover plays a critical role in the catchment water balance..the combination of steep slopes, high rainfall and granite soils on the Blue Tier should give cause for extreme concern to anyone contemplating logging operations..”*

^{2(p16)}

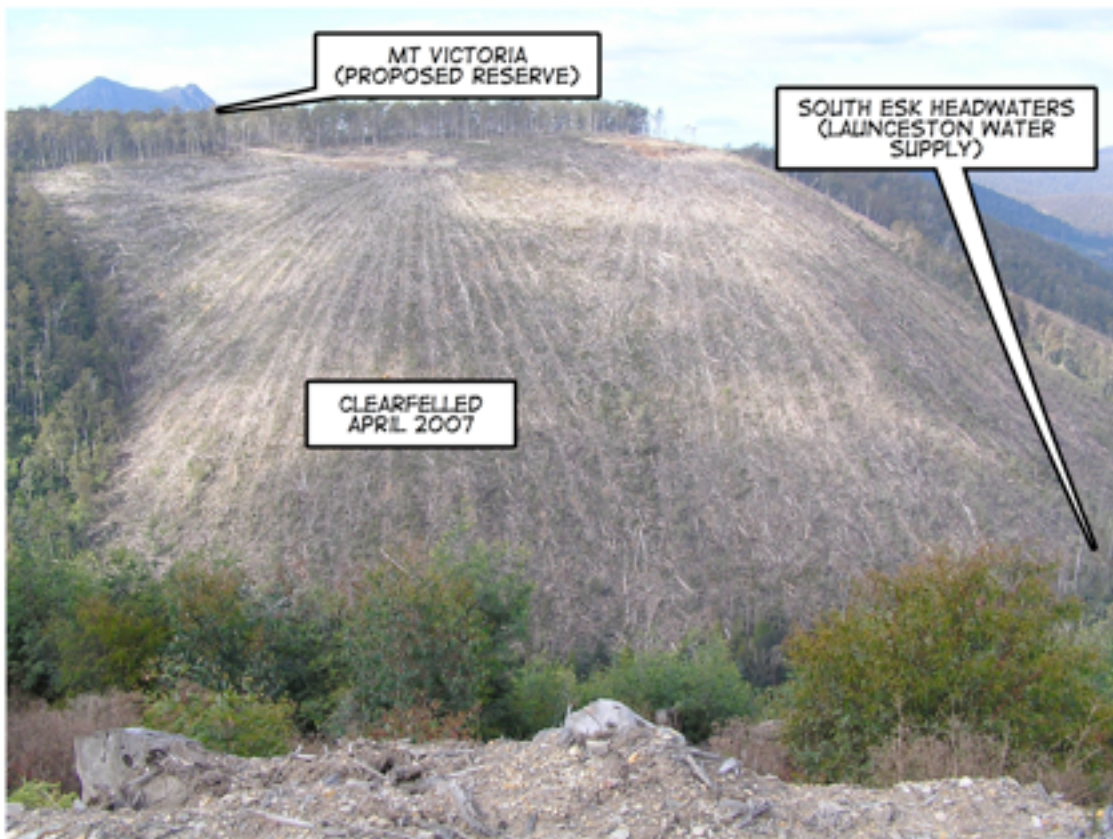
The proposed National Park boundaries encompass the headwaters of 14 major rivers.



Business as usual

Land management issues are especially of concern in the north east of Tasmania. The forested area of Tasmania has experienced a vast transformation since the practice of clearfelling and burning native forest was introduced in the 1980's. Vast tracts of native forest have been converted into monoculture tree plantations and remnant native forest vegetation is under severe threat from continued industrial scale logging. The proposed Gunns pulpmill and continuing woodchip export will destroy vast tracts of native forest outside of reserves. It is vital that additional areas of high conservation value native forest be protected in Tasmania.

These land management practices not only threaten ecological systems but impact upon human lifestyles, clean and reliable water supply, tourism, food production and have human health ramifications



Please help us.

Bibliography

1. Inquiry into areas to be reserved under the Tasmanian-Commonwealth Regional Forest Agreement Final recommendations report ISBN 0724623 1997
http://www.rpdc.tas.gov.au/plu/inquiries/rfa_tas
2. Upper Catchment Issues Tasmania, *Journal of Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Incorporated*, Vol. 2 No1A, Book 1 of 2 ISSN 1444-9560
3. Upper Catchment Issues Tasmania, *Journal of Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Incorporated*, Vol. 2 No1B, Book 2 of 2, ISSN 1444-9560
4. N.Stern, *The Economic Impacts of Climate Change*, (Summary of Conclusions)HM Treasury, London, 2006,p.xxv
5. S.Lloyd, *The Blue Tier a natural history*, 2006,p.7
6. Blakers.M, 2007, *Working Paper 2: Forests: vital for climate protection*. Green Institute, www.greeninstitute.com.au
7. Fox JC, TJ Regan, SA Bekessy, BA Wintle et al. 2004. Linking landscape ecology and management to population viability analysis. University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
8. Supplementary Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement, 2005
<http://www.daff.gov.au/rfa/regions/tasmania/rfa/supplementary>
9. Kirkpatrick JP and Harwood CE (1981) The conservation of Tasmanian wetland macrophytic species and communities)
10. Leaman,D. Water and the Role of Forests, 2003, leaflet no.3.

All photos taken by Lesley Nicklason except *

Cover photos: Wedge tailed eagle – *Aquila audax*, Hoplogonis, crayfish, fungi, fern

Table of contents – photos: cradle tree (*e. regnans*, Blue Tier)- Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*)- Groom River – Blue Tier foothills

Welcome: - petroglyphs 1. circles 2. markings (* Kay Jones)- Blue Tier plateau with view to Mt. Albert and Mt. Victoria

Background: court day march (*Bridget Nicklason)

RFA and TCFA Myrtle

Climate change: smoke plume, Burnt forest – Havelock Creek catchment, White gum

Glacial Refugia : *e. subcrenulata* – alpine yellow gum – Crystal Hill, Blue Tier

History – Photo: Boiler – Blue Tier mining era 1880's

Recreational opportunities- Photo: Bushwalking emu flat, Groom River valley, Blue Tier.

Economic opportunities-Photos: Blue Tier Giant, Anchor Stamps

Flora -Photos: - climbing sundew (*drosera macrantha*)- white fungi (*hygrocybe mavis*), Rattler Range, Orchid

Fauna -Photos: - wombats (albino adult, *Vombatus Ursinus*)- northeast forest snail (*anoglypta launcestonensis*) - quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*)

Water – Photos: trashed creek – mutual valley, northeast tas. intact watercourse – Groom River, Blue Tier

Business as usual Photo: Mt. victoria cable logging – Havelock Creek catchment – tributary of the South Esk River

Back page - Photo: goshawk – (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*)

