



STATEMENT FROM KEVIN FRAWLEY

(NPA President 1986-89; Life Member 1992)

1. Background

My interest in the natural environment (the 'bush') and sense of wonder about nature derives from my childhood. It has never left me.

I was born in Bundaberg, Queensland, in 1950. My grandfather and uncle worked a small sugar cane farm and over the years I spent quite a lot of time there. While most of the rainforest and other tree cover had been removed from the good basalt soils in the Bundaberg district, there was still a lot of bush around, especially where the soils were poorer.

Some of the time on the farm was spent helping out, but there was still plenty of time to go fishing and crabbing or just exploring around the dirt roads and tracks on my bike or exploring along the river. My father and I and the rest of the family, also went fishing a lot. I loved the bush and the coast and going fishing, camping out and 'exploring'.

At the time, I don't think we thought much about the future of these places: that the coastal fishing places would be swallowed up by coastal strip housing development; the river spoilt by a barrage; the bush camping places becoming 'caravan parks'.

However, I didn't really know much about the plants or animals. There was no biology or environmental studies in primary school nor most of secondary school. The school curriculum was geared to the development ethos of the state and desensitised pupils to the environment. We learnt about 'development' - how, for example, the 'useless' wallum and brigalow was being turned into pine plantation and farmland. So a whole generation grew up on this politically determined 'growth' and 'development' diet.

2. The Transition

In the late 1960s, I went to University and Teachers' College and then to Cunnamulla for two years teaching and then to Perth. In Western Australia, I travelled extensively. Most of it still had the wild and remote feeling. I also started reading the newly appearing environmental literature: books like Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers* and Barbara Ward and Erne Dubos's *Only One Earth*. Of course, Australia as a whole was now in transition, with a wave of social change - of which the new environmentalism was just one part.

I completed my first degree at the University of Western Australia and my Honours Thesis work formed part of a major environmental study of the Blackwood River estuary at Augusta. Following this, I went to a position at James Cook University and spent three years immersed in the wonderful environments of north Queensland. This period was instrumental for me, in developing my understanding of the philosophy, politics, concepts and practices of environmental management.

In 1979, now with three small children, I came to Canberra enrolled for a PhD at the ANU. I was essentially a '9 to 5' scholar. Weekends were for camping, skiing, bushwalks and going to the coast. Soon, I was starting to take an interest in local and regional conservation matters. In December 1979/January 1980 with a group of friends, we formed a four Kombi van 'flotilla' and did an extensive tour of the alps beginning in the Brindabellas, covering much of Kosciuszko National Park and some of the Victorian Alps. I had little experience before then of the 'high country'.

3. Joining NPA

I cannot remember which year I joined NPA ACT but it must have been 1979 or 1980. The Association came to my attention when I saw a newsletter on a noticeboard at ANU and went along to



a meeting. There are three things I remember about my first meetings: (i) most of those present were older than me; (ii) there was a lot of discussion about bushwalking and other trips away; (iii) there was a small library of books looked after by (I think) Sheila Kruse.

In 1980 I got quite involved in making detailed submissions to the plan of management review for Kosciuszko National Park. I was rattling out submissions on my Olivetti portable when I should have been doing my PhD. I had sensed the pressure on Kosciuszko during our lengthy visit and my submissions took a strong biological conservation line. I had seen the beginning of the growth of tourism in North Queensland and its actual and potential environmental impact. Under the term 'ecotourism', I had seen the industry promoting itself as a partner to conservation and remained a cynic (I still remain a cynic!). I thought the writing was on the wall for Kosciuszko with the resort development proposals for the park.

At the time, I joined a few NPA walks and remember some of them vividly. On a walk to Jagungal, I got huge blisters on my heels and saw my first Corroboree frog. I had an enjoyable trip down in the Deua on a walk led by Bob Story. However, most of my extensive outdoor activities were with family and friends, so NPA was for me less of a social club than it was for many members. I joined more for my conservation interests and especially my concern for national parks than for the bushwalking and social side.

In 1982 I gave the Year of the Tree talk at an NPA monthly meeting. The topic was the management of the north Queensland rainforest. By now the Daintree rainforest issue was emerging, following the years of conflict in NSW and the historic decision by the Wran government in 1982 to stop rainforest logging and declare new national parks such as in the Border Ranges. During this time I was involved with the Native Forest Action Council in Canberra.

4. The NPA Committee

Neville Esau and Denise Robin were president and vice-president respectively in the early 1980s, and in my view formed a formidable team. Both Neville and Den had a good grasp of conservation and national park concepts, as well as the political and bureaucratic decision making process. Importantly, they did not begin from compromise positions in conservation activities. Neville has written a perceptive analysis of the 18 years from the formation of the NPA ACT to the declaration of the Gudgenby Nature Reserve in 1978 in the ACF publication *Fighting for Wilderness*. He and I attended the conference which was the basis of the book. Den also had a wide range of contacts in government and was excellent on strategy and in people skills. Both were, and remain, passionate conservationists. They were instrumental in the final stages of getting Namadgi National Park declared in 1984, taking Minister Uren out to what was to become the park and outlining what it should encompass. I learnt a lot from them.

In 1984 I was elected to the NPA Committee. A new sub-committee structure was formed in that year and I became convenor of the Environment sub-committee. There was also now a Namadgi sub-committee. In October 1984, the Namadgi National Park Consultative Committee was formed. Den Robin was the Association's representative and I became the substitute when she couldn't attend. I think this Committee was one of Den's ideas. I know she was very pleased to see it formed and to be on it.

As I began to get more involved with the Association, I was somewhat disappointed that so many NPA members seemed unable to be forthright in their support for conservation. The Environment sub-committee could only ever attract a small group, despite this, I have difficulty recalling all the regular and active members. Craig Allen was very active on Kosciuszko matters. Other regulars were Reg Alder and Neville Esau.

It was in 1985 that I really became involved in NPA activities. Early in the year, Den Robin and I prepared a document outlining ideas for the Plan of Management for Namadgi. In March 1985, I prepared a response to the Draft EIS on the Corin Forest Ski Facility. The first major project,

however, was engaging Debbie Quarmby [*former Director of the Environment Centre*] as a project officer to prepare a report compiling existing knowledge on the environmental, economic, and social aspects of the Eden woodchip operation. The reasoning for this was to provide a basis for an informed response to the forthcoming EIS. I found out that there were surplus funds in the Commonwealth Grants to Voluntary Conservation Organisation program and put a proposal to the (then) Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment. I was successful in gaining \$4 000 which was the amount I wanted. (I did the usual grant application process of putting in for a larger amount, allowing the Department to cut it back to the amount that I actually wanted).

The employment of project officers was part of the growing need for professionalism in the environmental movement. But the idea came as a shock to some of the long standing members and office bearers of the Association who, perhaps, felt threatened or feared loss of control. So I got a set-back in my enthusiasm for the Eden woodchip review document (for which I had a good chance of external funds, a skilled project officer, and a demonstrated need) when I put it to the committee. It was outside of Namadgi and the ACT. There was concern for 'loss of credibility' if the Association applied for funds beyond what was actually needed (apparently there was little experience in applying for grant funds). There were concerns for loss of control - what if the project officer writes things in the report which the Association does not agree with? I remember these as some of the matters raised. However, it was eventually agreed to go ahead with the project. The document produced by Debbie Quarmby, *Eden Woodchip - A Review* was widely acclaimed and went to a second printing.

This project was not without some drama. In 1987, Harris-Daishowa Australia took exception to a section of the document which suggested they were involved in 'transfer pricing' through their vertically integrated operation, and threatened legal action. I sought the advice of Roger Green (given his journalism background). He suggested that 'grovelling' was often successful and so a letter was sent to HDA apologising for the paragraph's slur on the company, but requesting they send information which would allow factual errors to be corrected. In the meantime a sheet was inserted in each report indicating their view. No more was heard from them after that. In the meantime we had taken the precaution of transferring all the remaining copies to the Conservation Council as 'sold' in case there was an attempt to stop their distribution from the NPA office.

In 1985 there were moves afoot to foster a much more tri-state approach to the management of the alpine national parks of Victoria, NSW and the ACT. While NSW had its problems, Victoria particularly remained of concern. So with the assistance of others, I set about organising a conference in December 1985 (the Association's Silver Jubilee Conference) which focused on the management of the alpine areas. As is always the case with such activities, I remember the time involved in planning and organising. However, it was a very successful conference and got television coverage. The cost was kept low with the catering team organised by Fiona Brand contributing to this. Recommendations of the conference are recorded in the March 1986 *NPA Bulletin*. Significantly, to coincide with the conference, the Victorian, New South Wales and Federal Environment Ministers, as well as the Minister for Territories issued a press release indicating agreement on the concept of co-operative management of the tri-state alpine zone. The conference proceedings were compiled into the publication *Australia's Alpine Areas: Management for Conservation* which I edited.

Both the Eden Woodchip report and the alpine conference did much to lift the profile of NPA.

5. Professional Environmentalism

By the mid 1980s, NPA was facing that transition which most environmental organisations found difficult. In the post-war period, the first task had been to get environmental concerns on to the political agenda. By the end of the 1970s much had been achieved - there was new environmental legislation deriving from the Whitlam period and the environmental movement had become a significant political force. The challenge for voluntary organisations was, having got



conservation on to the political agenda and having been successful in being accepted into the decision making process to varying degrees, to develop the professionalism needed to carry it through. The tasks were increasingly beyond the resources and operating style of the organisations. There was a need to participate in the activities of government (after all this was what had been sought) which meant attending meetings in working hours and preparing professionally presented and well researched material to use in lobbying or public campaigning. It was time to computerise records such as memberships, to have an office which could present a contact point, and to engage paid assistance in the form of project officers and/or executive assistants.

The other transition that NPA was facing was in its focus. For more than two decades the Association had been campaigning for the creation of a 'National Park for the National Capital'. This provided a central focus for the organisation. Now, even though there were still matters such as the extension of the Park to the northern Cotter, the completion of the management plan, and day to day management considerations, the Association had to begin reconsidering its focus. Part of this was the extent to which it got involved in matters outside the ACT. In part, a new focus simply evolved as good ideas came along, such as the track work in the Budawang.

6. NPA President

In mid 1986, the administrative arrangements for Namadgi National Park came under review in the form of an enquiry by the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Environment and Conservation. In essence the enquiry question centred on whether, after self government, the park would be best placed under the control of the (then) Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service or an agency of the ACT government. ANPWS was, of course, interested in building up its land base.

It was a difficult question for the Association, given the unknowns, and it was unable to develop a position. There were those who considered the legislative basis for the park to be weak and looked to the ANPWS with its Commonwealth legislation. There was another view that it was an ACT park, that the ACT Parks and Conservation Service had the staff to do the job, a management plan was being completed, and management should be kept with the people of the ACT - able to influence their Territory government - not a potentially remote Commonwealth agency.

Understandably, I found members' views coloured by the long years of making no progress with agencies administering the Territory. I don't know if any of us at the time comprehended that self government would necessarily bring new legislation and that the old ordinances would be superseded. I remember Den Robin strongly supporting the park remaining with the ACT. I think members' views were also influenced by whether they supported or felt confident about self government, including their own sense of political efficacy. In the end, NPA's submission was indecisive - not supporting either direction but outlining the factors important for the future of Namadgi.

In August 1986 I became NPA president and held the position for 3 years. There was no vice-president for all of this time, however, there were a number of new (and younger) committee members. Julia Trainor was the new Secretary - she was very efficient, gave me lots of support and had a good sense of humour. Jan Gatenby was Treasurer for some of the time and also did an excellent job. I tried to focus the committee meetings more towards 'policies' and 'issues' rather than administrative detail and process.

From 1986 I also began taking a greater interest in the Australian National Parks Council. I enjoyed the interaction with other state representatives at meetings and especially the wit of Dick Johnson - always with the latest addition to the Victorian Alps saga.

I was very busy at the time with the Association and other conservation activities. Luckily my job allowed me a fair bit of flexibility. However, it was ironic that in 1986, I bought a second car (having ridden a bike to work before then) because of the demands of conservation activity on my time and the need to get to daytime meetings and other activities.



A number of tensions emerged between this new committee and some of the longstanding members and former committee members. The committee found it difficult to take a 'policy' stance on issues - partly because the Association did not really have any policies, and because of a view that the Committee should not take such stances when some members disagreed.

Some of the tension points were:

- (a) Cultural heritage (this was a growing focus of interest for some members)
- (b) Operation of NPA (appointment of an executive assistant/project officer)
- (c) Process (more direct professionally based links were now being made with offices of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and some NPA members were still suspicious or antagonistic towards that agency).

More generally, there appeared to be an ambivalence on the part of some members regarding conservation activities of the Association. For some its outdoor activities were probably the main reason for joining and there was a reluctance to be seen in terms of the media stereotypes of confrontationist 'greens'.

The Association had been increasingly involved in 'hands on' work in Namadgi. In 1987, Reg Alder and a team completed a walking track from Boboyan Road to Boboyan Trig and the rock formation beyond. The track was officially opened by John Langmore MHR on June 14 on a sunny winter's day. The project 'had its moments' especially in dealings between Reg and the Service. But it was a good project, a brochure was produced and the opening day exemplified the things that NPA did well. The track is one of the best short walks in the park and I have subsequently taken a number of visitors there.

Meanwhile, another report was on its way. In March and April 1987, Ian Fraser was employed as a project officer to prepare a document outlining the case for the reservation of the northern Cotter catchment. Ian tackled the task with his usual enthusiasm and I edited the work for him. I'm not sure if he's ever forgiven me for my comments about his (terrible) writing and expression. His report was published early in 1988.

The questions of the meaning of, and place of, cultural heritage in national parks blew up in 1988 in respect of Namadgi. This was after I wrote an article in the March 1988 *NPA Bulletin* on the 'Gudgenby Property and Grazing in National Parks'. In this article I aimed to give support to the Parks and Conservation Service in its expressed aim to terminate the Gudgenby grazing lease on 30 June 1989. In this article I went back to Australian national park philosophy, which essentially views grazing as an inappropriate use. I was also highly conscious of the struggle still going on in Victoria to get grazing out of the Alps, knowing that continuation of grazing in an enclave in Namadgi (even though the two situations were not exactly comparable) could be used in support of the Victorian case. My article was seen as highly inflammatory by Professor Mulvaney of the ACT Heritage Committee. I didn't realise at the time that I had bitten into apparently long standing bitterness over the failure of early wilderness campaigners in Tasmania to include the Aboriginal cultural values of South West Tasmania - apparently for fear this would dilute the 'wilderness' argument. (I have written elsewhere of the difficulties with the word 'wilderness' in the Australian context.)

However, I did not intend to retreat from my position. How could a credible National Parks Association support the continuation of grazing? Nor did I intend to follow the past NPA approach of sitting on the fence when a difficult issue arose. I was very disappointed to have respected and long standing NPA members write in to the next two *Bulletin* issues supporting the continuation of the grazing lease. Apparently to oppose grazing was 'environmental bigotry' and would lead to the Gudgenby area falling to wrack and ruin. To add insult to injury, the *Bulletin* editor, without reference to myself or the Committee, printed a long article from Professor Mulvaney in the June



edition. As Association president and author of the original article, I considered I had a right of reply (especially given that the original article did not criticise any individual). Once alerted to this, I stopped distribution, and prepared a reply as an insert.

To this day, as a strong supporter of national parks, I have not changed my view that one needs to have, and promote a clear philosophy for national parks. Most in our community do not have a proper understanding and this is one of the main reasons why the national parks are continually under threat. Politicians don't usually have an understanding and developers usually don't care. As recently as July 1995 in a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Committee on Tourism and ACT Promotion: Inquiry into Nature Based Tourism in the ACT, I began by outlining the purposes ('values') of national parks. It is very politically naive to suggest, as occurred in the Gudgenby grazing debate, that NPA should simply make up its own 'policy' for Namadgi, independent of, or regardless of, wider Australian national park philosophy and concepts.

In 1989 it was decided to review production of the *Bulletin* and a *Bulletin* policy was produced and adopted in February 1989. It was also decided to engage a professional *Bulletin* editor.

I had decided when I became president that I would not go beyond a three year term, so in September 1989 I stood down. In my last president's foreword in the *Bulletin* of September 1989, I referred briefly to some of the changes in the operation of the Association that had occurred in the last few years. In 1989, I became chairman of the Australian National Parks Council.

7. The 1990s

Late in 1990 I began preparing a report on the conservation of remnant woodland and native grassland in the ACT for the Association. When completed, this was launched in April at the foot of Mt Ainslie. The document helped get native grassland on to the conservation agenda in the ACT. Currently, as a member of the ACT Native Grassland Recovery Plan Steering Committee, it is pleasing to see the enormous improvement made in the last few years in the survey and protection of native grasslands.

One of the areas given attention in this report was Mulligan's Flat, an area of lowland grassland and woodland on the north east fringe of Gungahlin. In 1991-2 a campaign was put together to secure a larger reserve than originally planned. This campaign brought together the resources of seven organisations to produce a concise, attractive, lobbying document. I arranged for a day long visit to the site by ACT planners, staff of the ACT Wildlife Research Unit and representatives of the conservation bodies. The proposal was sympathetically received by the government and in 1994 the expanded Mulligan's Flat Reserve was added to the ACT reserve system.

In 1991 I was elected a Life Member of the Association. In the same year I went to a new job in environmental planning with the (then) National Capital Planning Authority.

8. Some concluding points

My years of highly active involvement with NPA and conservation activity generally in the ACT have been a key part of my life in Canberra. While for me NPA was less of a social club than for others, through the Association I have developed an interesting range of friendships and professional contacts.

I would have liked to have seen (and to see) the Association take a stronger and more prominent role in political campaigning in support of the parks and in other conservation matters. As noted earlier, the Association needs to maintain a consistent national park philosophy. I would not like to see the Association get too absorbed in cultural heritage matters in the parks. In my view the most pressing tasks are in nature conservation.

It is important to remember that despite past victories in having parks declared and professionally managed, they are constantly coming under new threats. Some threats are obvious, others insidious. One is the government administrative structure. Increasingly, parks services are man-



aged by 'generic' managers who have little or no knowledge of the operational requirements of the people below them. If these managers are prepared to learn, this may work well, but one suspects that most will be concerned more with operating in close harmony with their political masters.

The major push will be to make money out of the parks especially through ecotourism. Unfortunately, the tourism industry tends to treat the environment as a 'free good', feeding off it but putting little back, and looking always to upgrade facilities and infrastructure.

However, perhaps the greatest threat is the simple pressure of numbers. As Australia's population continues along its (probably) unsustainable growth pattern and urban areas expand, more will seek their escape and relaxation in the parks. The message that parks are not places where 'anything goes' will have to be conveyed over and over again. The National Parks Association of the ACT can have a continuing role in conveying the purpose and values of national parks and not compromising in the maintenance of these values; being a watchdog for inappropriate development and management proposals; and by setting an example through on-ground works and minimal impact activities which introduce people to the bush.

Kevin Frawley

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