

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GROUNDS FOR THE RESTORATION OF LAKE PEDDER

Helen Gee<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper examines, initially, the strength of the political, social and cultural expressions evoked by the flooding of Lake Pedder. The evolving environmental consciousness has strengthened the call for restoration. For reasons of wilderness value, ecological regeneration, tourism development or cultural iconicism, restoration is now an international imperative that challenges a conservative insular community to enter the age of healing.*

**Key Words: Australia, Tasmania, Lake Pedder, social, cultural, spiritual, values, restoration, Greens, Green Party**

In this paper I will examine the cultural significance of Lake Pedder and the degree to which the biophysical restoration will restore the wilderness, social and aesthetic values of the lake and the surrounding World Heritage Area. I will begin by recounting the historical context, but the focus is on contemporary values: attitudes towards, and expectations for a restored Lake Pedder.

Few areas of the world have aroused such sustained controversy as South-West Tasmania. In 1963 the Tasmanian Government acquired Federal funding to push an exploratory road right into the heart of one of the world's great temperate wilderness areas. Lake Pedder had been a National Park since 1955 and was incorporated in the 200,000 ha South-West National Park, gazetted in 1968. This was no impediment to the Gordon Stage 1 Hydro-electric scheme which created two vast impoundments in 1972, obliterating virtually one third of the South-West National Park.

The scientific significance of Lake Pedder has been well presented. However, the subtle and mysterious beauty of the place held an attraction which transcended the sum of its scientific values; it was regarded as the crown jewel of the South-West and a mecca, evoking awe and wonder akin to a spiritual response. Expressions of feeling are still, in Australian society, viewed with embarrassment or sometimes scorn, but the experience of Pedder was an emotional one, signalling a new empathy with the wild unspoilt places now increasingly under siege. The outcry to save the lake was persistent, reaching a peak in 1971, when, in one long weekend, nearly 2000 people walked in to the lake. There were

unprecedented rallies, public meetings and petitions as a new era of national and international environmentalism was born.

A direct reaction to the flooding was the formation of the world's first Green party, the United Tasmania Group (UTG), in March 1972. It espoused the new values that had been forged in the seven year battle for Pedder. The new ethic of the UTG contained the core philosophy of Green parties emerging around the world. Pedder is thus the great symbol of environmental consciousness and a powerful creative force. The long campaign to restore Pedder carries with it expectations and imperatives that transcend this little lake in South-West Tasmania. Richard Flanagan encapsulated the force of the campaign and articulated the metaphorical power of Pedder that can never be quashed by opponents of the restoration proposal:

"From the beginning Lake Pedder was much more than a shallow sheet of water with a sandy rind. To fight for Pedder unflooded was to fight for a vision of what Tasmania could be: free, unfettered, a celebration of intrinsic beauty. Pedder flooded was the symbol of what Tasmania was in reality: unfree, imprisoned, entombed in an inappropriate space and time. To fight for Pedder unchanged was then, paradoxically, to fight for change, to seek to alter the course of reality in Tasmania. The idea of Pedder as a metaphor for a free Tasmania was a consistent theme..." (Flanagan 1990, p. 196).

The authorities in the Tasmanian Government and the HEC always maintained, euphemistically, that the lake was not going to be destroyed; it was going to be enlarged. Therein lies the essence of

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<sup>1</sup> B.A. Dip. Ed.; Writer, conservationist and farmer, Buckland, Tasmania.

the great gulf of opinion and perception that still divides this island community and persists in the current debate. At the February 1995 hearings of the Federal Government Inquiry into the proposal to restore Lake Pedder, Mr Mark Ashton, Secretary of the ironically named "Save Lake Pedder Association", had this to say:

"Pedder in its present form one could argue is perhaps one of the great examples of how environment and economic development went hand in hand" (Ashton 1995).

Comments like this focus attention on a core dilemma, Fritjof Capra's *crisis of perception* (Capra 1983). The Pedder debacle may be interpreted as a supreme example of the logical outcome of our technological, progress oriented, transplanted culture that imposed itself on an alien landscape. We have altered so much of this country to fit the European concept of development. The flooding of Lake Pedder fostered a rejection of those values, expressed nowhere so poignantly as by 20 year old Chris Tebbutt who kept vigil, often alone, for 7 months while the waters rose around his camp on the dunes in late 1972. The following extract is from but one of many, many letters to newspaper editors that were never printed:

"Living at the lake, our long term struggle has become clear to me. We fight for the South-West to be set aside and saved for the diversity and richness it offers. We challenge not the HEC but the whole mechanism of supply and demand and the mentality that sustains it. We fight to retain the cycles of nature, health of body, openness of mind and eye...Pedder is more than most could ever have foreseen and embodies the idealism of youth. How can a young person give up the struggle to further life beyond the old confines?" (Tebbutt 1978).

The response was being penned in Buckingham Palace. Prince Philip was aware, even then, that history had been written at Lake Pedder:

"The Lake Pedder case marks the end of Australia's pioneering days and it ushers in a new phase of conscious concern by all sections of the community for the long-term future of the natural and human environment" (HRH Prince Philip 1972).

At the Tasmanian Wilderness - World Heritage Values Symposium held in 1990, Flanagan posed the question: "Where does the World Heritage Area begin?" (Flanagan 1993, p. 9). If for Flanagan "it is the backyard of Bob Brown's Liffey home", I contend that it begins at Pedder. Lake Pedder

meant much to us before we got carried away with defining wilderness and before we leaned on the power of international committees. It was with many regrets and only as a means to an end that all the jargon and terminology was taken on board after the lesson of Pedder. Awareness of the value and scarcity of remote and natural land in Australia has grown rapidly from that era when wilderness quality was so dramatically compromised. In 1979 Kirkpatrick stated that "the combination of full hydro-electric development and full forestry development would destroy 63.6% of the South-West wilderness resource" (Kirkpatrick 1979). That scale of destruction didn't eventuate because of the concerted efforts of the environment movement that grew in the wake of Pedder and persists today with a passion I believe to be unrivalled.

Pedder awakened a new generation of conservationists to the style and tactics of the American wilderness movement and was the catalyst for the formation of the Wilderness Society here in Tasmania in 1976. The Wilderness Society was formed out of the outrage that came from the destruction of Pedder and the lies, misinformation and biased reporting that led to that destruction. Many of the forces that were at work then are still well entrenched. Whereas facts, mostly economic and engineering, were available on the proposed hydro development, information on the wilderness values was disregarded as highly subjective and emotive. Wilderness resource analysis has vindicated the statement made so powerfully by Olegas Truchanas in 1971, shortly before his tragic death:

"Lake Pedder, to me, is the very heart of the South-West. When it is 'modified', as it is called, into a big inland sea, it will not be a more beautiful lake. It will be an artificial man-made pond in the middle of the natural wilderness area. It will affect, in my thinking, the entire atmosphere, the entire make-up of the South-West" (Truchanas 1971).

To Jim Thorsell, IUCN's senior advisor on natural heritage, the new lake is "an insult upon the land" (Thorsell 1995).

There was no environmental impact assessment carried out in 1971. However, by 1979, the young State Department of Environment requested objective information on the potential loss of the wilderness resource if the proposed HEC developments in the Franklin - Lower Gordon were to take place.

The method of wilderness analysis developed by Kirkpatrick and Haney in 1979 overcame the inadequacies of previous studies and provided a

good basis for distinguishing wilderness from other types of land use. They commenced by defining wilderness as "an area of land remote from access by mechanised vehicles and within which there is little or no consciousness of the environmental disturbances of western man" (Kirkpatrick & Haney 1980).

Will a restored Lake Pedder eventually satisfy this widely accepted definition? Future management prescriptions will determine the measurement of remoteness and naturalness. Extrapolating from the Kirkpatrick and Haney definition, if we are to regain all of the value of remoteness at Pedder, the lake must become once more a 48 hour walking time from the nearest point of mechanised access. For 50% recovery, an 8 hour walking time would suffice.

The visual, aural and mental components of primitiveness will relate to the removal of sites or infrastructure associated with the impoundment and the power scheme. The definition presupposes a staunch homocentricity in our view of wilderness that I think may no longer apply. For example, there is general acceptance, expressed within the Management Plan for the 1.38 million hectare Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, that hydro-electric installations no longer required should "either be removed...or allowed to decay" (DPWH 1992, p. 107).

Over the past 20 years, attitudes have evolved considerably from the anthropocentric towards the ecocentric and, as important as "wilderness" restoration is in this instance, is the fostering of a responsible attitude towards nature for which we are custodian. If, in the interests of common sense, the dams remain *in situ*, these artefacts will serve to remind us of the arrogance of a former generation who saw little intrinsic value in the non-human world.

A computer based wilderness quality database for Tasmania, based on the Lesslie wilderness continuum concept, places emphasis on measuring remoteness and naturalness; the maps are dramatic representations of what has been lost and help to explain the passion of the wilderness movement in this State:

"The most striking feature of the Tasmanian wilderness resource revealed by this survey is the predominance of high quality wilderness in the west and south-west of the State, together with the major impact that hydro-electric development has had within this region" (Lesslie *et al.* 1988).

The accompanying maps of Wilderness Quality and Bio-physical Naturalness (*see* Figures 1 & 2)

illustrate the assertion of Kirkpatrick's that "no single development in Tasmania has been responsible for such extensive wilderness loss" (Kirkpatrick & Haney 1980).

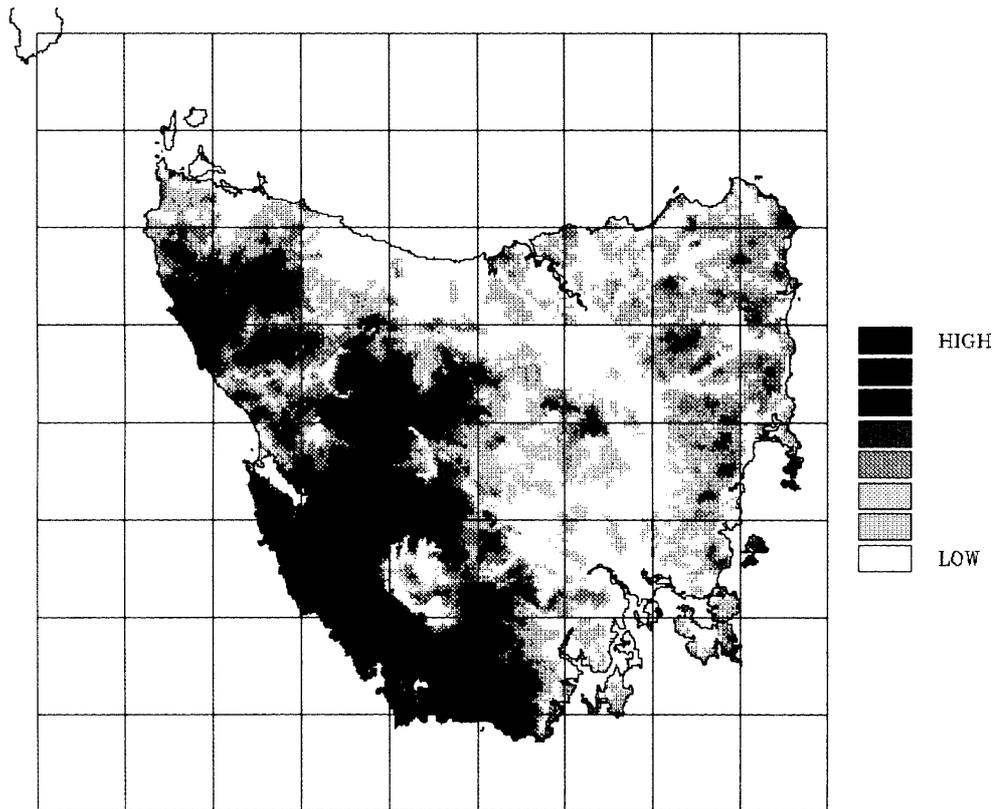
The extent to which it is desirable to reinstate the wilderness value of Lake Pedder must be weighed against the reality of the tourism imperative. Tourism is being used as a strong argument for the restoration case, and this implies there will be reasonable access, visitor centres and a high standard of track development and interpretation.

A report on the future management of the area proposed for restoration has been prepared for the Lake Pedder Study Group by Dr Geoff Mosley. Management processes, principles, objectives, strategies and options are presented. The planning options are related to the current zoning objectives and Mosley has recommended the area to the west of Lake Pedder be zoned 'Wilderness' and Lake Pedder and the area to the east remain zoned 'Recreation'. "This would provide in the long term the best balance between the transmission of the area's unique qualities to future generations and the needs of present generations" (Mosley 1995, p. 48). It is also recommended that a rehabilitation plan be produced and the Management Plan be amended. It should include a site plan for a wide range of visitor facilities. This 50 page document is a timely appraisal of management options and will enhance the current debate.

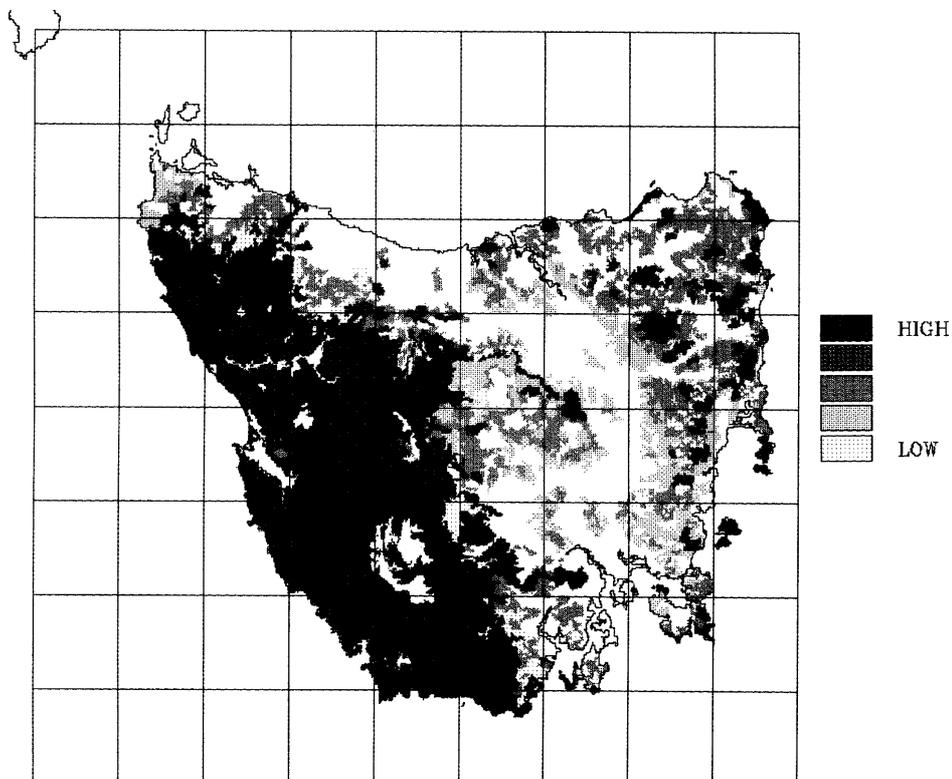
If there is some doubt about the socio-political climate for full retrieval of wilderness value, there is not the same doubt about the restoration of the aesthetic values which will parallel the restoration of the natural systems. Chris Cowles, a visual communicator, reassures us that "it is the aesthetic appreciation for this special place, expressed time and time again, that has made and continues to make Lake Pedder an icon for environmental action" (Cowles 1995).

Professor Andrew Brennan has addressed the criticism that the natural systems of the lake complex cannot be recreated:

"Some philosophers, as you may know, have tried to cast doubt on the idea of restoring nature. The historical particularity of each bioregion and each ecosystem, they argue, means that a restored nature will have no more worth than a fake painting; it will be a humanly produced artefact masquerading in place of the natural objects and systems which were once there. Such a view ignores the facts that living systems have capacities for regeneration, self production and renewal which are quite unique and cannot be compared with the



**Figure 1:** Wilderness quality in Tasmania. Map reproduced from Lesslie *et al.* (1988), showing the effect that hydro-electric impoundments in southwest Tasmania, including that which flooded Lake Pedder, have had on the extent of wilderness in western Tasmania. © Commonwealth of Australia 1988.



**Figure 2:** Biophysical naturalness in Tasmania. Map reproduced from Lesslie *et al.* (1988). Biophysical naturalness is one of the four indicators used by Lesslie *et al.* in assessing wilderness quality. © Commonwealth of Australia 1988.

features of artefacts" (Brennan 1994).

On 16 November, 1972, just as Lake Pedder was fully submerged, UNESCO adopted the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage which Australia ratified some two years later. The Convention came into force in 1975 and it was to be a further seven hard years before the Western Tasmanian Wilderness was inscribed on the World Heritage list. The Huon-Serpentine Impoundment was included in the area ostensibly for management purposes. In 1989 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) foreshadowed the eventual prospect of restoration, from the point of view of the World Heritage value of the natural lake, in its technical evaluation (IUCN 1989).

The World Conservation Body has twice called for the restoration; the latest call being a General Assembly resolution in 1994 at Buenos Aires. IUCN recognises that the flooding severely affected the integrity of the Tasmanian World Heritage site and that the restoration of this area would be a symbol to the world of a determination to redress some of the environmental mistakes of the past. Restoration of the lake is in line with the overall objective for management which is to "protect, conserve, present and where necessary, *rehabilitate* the natural and cultural heritage" (DPWH 1992, p. vii).

A great many people of international stature have joined IUCN in its call. Among them, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan:

"The tragic fate of Lake Pedder presents in microcosm the ravages on the ecology of our planet wreaked by profit motivated attitudes which ultimately prove both short sighted and short term" (Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan 1994).

Poet Allen Ginsberg said:

"We're caught in a whirlpool of hypertechnology 'wretching' the planet - any move we make to diminish the suffering of sentient nature is worthwhile - including the salvaging of Lake Pedder for living beings" (Ginsberg 1994).

HRH Prince Philip:

"I very much hope that the lake will survive far into the future as a testimony to those who changed the attitude of Australians to their natural heritage" (HRH Prince Philip 1994).

Gary Lawless for the Gulf of Maine Bioregional Congress:

"We must work with our hands and our hearts to restore these wonderful places" (Lawless 1994).

Values have changed through the last quarter century of intense focus on the environment. There have been many attempts to reduce the conflict, to balance perspectives, to achieve a consensus, to remove the sharp division between preservation and development, to compromise, and in so doing, to make us all feel more comfortable. But Pedder lies at the heart of a relentlessly evolving consciousness which for many is still just too revolutionary. It challenges the fabric of our western culture and the current campaign has had the predicted reactions from a conservative, insular community which, I hasten to add, clings to many fine traditions. We are revising our attitude that this country is ours to rape and transmogrify. It is a painful process, this battle of hearts and minds, for a society awakening to the beauty and vulnerability of its unique natural inheritance.

Recognition of the intrinsic value of the non-human world represents a fundamental shift in the terms of environmental debate and decision making: the onus shifts to the people who want to interfere with it to justify why they should be allowed to do so. Pedder precipitated the change in consciousness that subsequently changed or modified our world-view. Warwick Fox explores these *new philosophical directions* (Fox 1992) - intrinsic value theory and transpersonal or deep ecology - which are altering the nature of Western philosophy and will translate into moral *oughts* that will eventually be enshrined in law.

The restoration will be tangible evidence that we can take this giant step forward, that environmental repair *is* possible, that we don't have to free our advocacy for the planet of all subjectivity and that there is genuine hope for our children. Pedder has been described as "a place apart from all others" (Brown 1985, p. 16), because of the effect it has had on the spirit, and it is this dimension of the cultural value of restoration that I wish to discuss in concluding.

This is new territory for so many of us: the idea that the biophysical restoration will mirror some kind of spiritual rebirth that will signal a milestone in our evolution. I am talking about a spiritual renaissance which will echo the humanist Renaissance that began in the 1300s and which vitally influenced European culture to the present day, based as it is on the pursuit of material wealth and economic rationalism. Ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest sense. We are entering an age of healing; artists and visionaries have long foretold it. In his submission to the Australian Government's 1973 Committee of Enquiry into the

fate of Lake Pedder, Max Angus speaks to us now as surely as he then wrote:

"We must make no mistake. There is more to this than economics. Responsible people do not get upset as a rule about an issue from which they can never hope to gain a single cent. They have been deeply moved in a way they can only comprehend in terms of spiritual response, and know themselves to be in the presence of something beyond themselves. It is this that has provided them with the faith to continue to fight for the life of this lake" (Angus 1973).

There is a certain sense of destiny about the restoration that surpasses moral and ethical responsibilities. The Pedder 2000 campaign has captured the imagination of thinking people around the globe. It has a momentum way beyond the sum of physical inputs and therefore in no way detracts energy from the more urgent campaigns. Philosophically, at least, Pedder is a cultural icon. When it is reclaimed, for whatever reasons, it will be a sacred place, a temple of the new world view. The quantum leap forward to an age of healing demands that we first revisit the earlier traditions that sanctified landscapes and invested the land with spiritual powers.

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